

Intercultural competence in international social work

- A literature review

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<p>Sammandrag:</p> <p>Interkulturell kompetens blir allt viktigare inom olika sammanhang, även inom socialt arbete. Detta examensarbete undersöker interkulturell kompetens och de olika imperativen för interkulturell kompetens, samt länkar dem till olika definitioner av internationellt socialt arbete. Hypotesen är att interkulturell kompetens är viktigt inom internationellt socialt arbete, och hypotesen testas genom att undersöka relevant litteratur inom området. Forskningsfrågorna är:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Varför behövs interkulturell kompetens? 2. Varför behövs interkulturell kompetens specifikt för människor som arbetar inom det sociala? 3. Varför behövs interkulturell kompetens inom internationellt socialt arbete? <p>Undersökningen gjordes som en systematisk litteraturstudie, med avsikt att utveckla och fördjupa den redan existerande kunskapen inom området, samt att skapa en plattform för fortsatta studier inom området. Analysen undersöker hur olika definitioner av internationellt socialt arbete relaterar till de olika imperativen för interkulturell kompetens, genom att olika författares resonemang kring varför interkulturell kompetens är viktigt kategoriserades i olika imperativ, som sedan kopplades till olika definitioner av internationellt socialt arbete. Resultaten visar att interkulturell kompetens är av stor betydelse inom socialt arbete i allmänhet, och inom internationellt socialt arbete specifikt, oberoende av vilken definition av internationellt socialt arbete som undersöktes.</p> <p>Som uppdragsgivare fungerade Project Sunshine, en ideell förening som arbetar med barn på sjukhus och deras familjer. Project Sunshine har en väldigt mångfaldig klientgrupp och arbetar både i USA och internationellt, så detta examensarbete kan stöda deras arbete.</p>	
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<p>Abstract:</p> <p>Intercultural competence is becoming increasingly important in various contexts, including the social work context. This thesis examines intercultural competence and the different imperatives for intercultural competence, connecting them to different approaches to international social work. The hypothesis is that intercultural competence is important in international social work, and the hypothesis will be tested by researching relevant literature. The research questions are:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Why is intercultural competence needed? 2. Why is intercultural competence needed specifically among people working in the social field? 3. Why is intercultural competence needed in international social work? <p>The research was conducted as a systematic literature review, with the intention to widen and deepen the already existing knowledge in the field, as well as create a springboard for further studies in the field. The analysis addresses how different approaches to international social work relate to the different imperatives for developing intercultural competence. This was done by categorizing various authors' reasoning as to why developing intercultural competence is important into different imperatives (both in general and for people working in the social field in specific), and then relating these to different approaches to international social work. Results show that intercultural competence is of great importance in social work in general, as well as in international social work in specific, regardless of which definition of international social work that was examined. This thesis was commissioned by Project Sunshine, a non-profit organization in USA that works with children in hospital and their families. Project Sunshine has a very diverse clientele, and they work both within the USA and internationally, so this thesis can support their work.</p>	
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1 INTRODUCTION

I have always surrounded myself with people of different origin and find the diversity to be enriching in more ways than one. You could say that I have always had a passion for helping people as well, and intercultural issues are close to my heart. I did my extended work placement period at a non-profit organization in New York called Project Sunshine. Project Sunshine works with children in hospital, and their families, providing them with free social-, educational- and recreational programs. Project Sunshine works both within the U.S. and internationally, and have a culturally and ethnically diverse clientele. During my time at Project Sunshine I got in contact with people from many different cultures and with various ethnic, socio-economic and social backgrounds, and I found this incredibly enriching. Working for Project Sunshine further reinforced my passion for intercultural work and served as inspiration in multiple ways, and for that I will always be grateful.

When I had decided that I wanted to do my thesis on intercultural competence in international social work, it occurred to me that Project Sunshine might benefit from the information I uncovered as well, so I got in contact with them and presented my idea and they were happy to commission my thesis. I believe that my thesis can benefit both individuals and organizations and I have great hopes that Project Sunshine will be able to benefit from my thesis as well. Given the fact that Project Sunshine's clientele is very diverse, I feel confident that my thesis will in fact be beneficial for the organization.

1.1 Background and choice of topic

Sometimes I see disparities in society that cause me to question our social system, while all the same being grateful that we have a social security system to rely on (even if it is far from perfect). Personally I don't 'understand' segregation or unequal treatment based on ethnicity or race – as I feel all humans are of equal worth, regardless of nationality, ethnicity, race, socio-economic status, gender etc. – but nonetheless I realize that these are actual issues in today's society. Like Stier (2004a) points out, social problems are often not analyzed or treated as social problems but as cultural problems (e.g. if a Finnish person commits an offence it is often thought to be due to a rough childhood or

drug abuse, whereas if the same offence is committed by a foreigner, people are often eager to say that it is because of the person's cultural heritage or ethnicity that the offence is committed – in other words people look to culture for an explanation instead of to the individual). This does not constitute intercultural competence and because of instances like these, intercultural awareness should be raised and intercultural competence developed. I feel that especially people working in the social field need to be interculturally competent, as our work entails working with people in delicate situations from all walks of life and of all kinds of backgrounds.

Therefore, I want to address the need for intercultural competence in international social work, as I feel developing of such can help bridge some of the gaps in our society, as well as create a higher level of professionalism among people working in the social field.

1.2 Aim, research questions and hypothesis

My aim is to look at the different imperatives for intercultural competence and connect them to different approaches to international social work. My hypothesis is that intercultural competence is important in international social work, and I want to see if relevant literature backs this up – and if so, on which grounds.

I want to describe what constitutes as intercultural competence (in short) and specifically address the need for developing intercultural competence in social work, and more specifically so, in international social work. I realize there are many forms of intercultural competence, and I cannot possibly address all types. Therefore, I have created a chapter that describes the outlook I will have on intercultural competence (see chapter 4.2.), not going into too much detail, but instead giving the reader a broader view of the concept.

My key questions are:

1. Why is intercultural competence needed?
2. Why is intercultural competence needed specifically among people working in the social field?

3. Why is intercultural competence needed in international social work?

1.3 Delimitation

I have chosen not to go into detail about different types of intercultural competence and how intercultural competence can be measured, as I feel this could constitute as a whole other survey. I have also chosen not to adopt a culture-specific perspective, as I feel this would be restrictive and make my thesis less possible to generalize. Instead I have chosen to adopt a 'broader' perspective, in hopes of creating material that can be used in a more versatile way.

2 CENTRAL CONCEPTS

2.1 Culture

According to Mays, de Leon Siantz and Viehweg (2002:140) "culture connotes an integrated pattern of human behavior that includes thoughts, communication, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions of a racial, ethnic, religious, or social nature".

Schein (1985:9) states that culture can be seen as "a pattern of basic assumptions – invented, discovered, or developed by a given group as it learns to cope with problems of external adaptation and internal integration – that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems". In other words, culture provides solutions to problems regarding group survival, and these solutions are obtained through collective experience (Schein 1985:9).

Swindler (1986, as cited in Friedman & Berthoin Antal 2005:74) however, is critical of prevailing theories that tie behavior "too deterministically to cultural values" and suggests that culture should rather be seen as offering a "repertoire of capacities from which varying strategies of action may be constructed", than as imposing a rigid set of norms for thinking and acting.

2.2 Intercultural

According to Asante and Gudykunst (1989, as cited in Yershova, DeJaeghere & Mestenhauser 2000:42) the term ‘intercultural’ refers to the interaction of people from differing cultures, whereas ‘cross-cultural’ is often used to describe a comparative study of multiple cultures.

2.3 Competence

Mays, de Leon Siantz and Viehweg (2002:140) state that competence implies “a capacity to function within the context of a culture’s integrated pattern of behavior as defined by a group”.

Spitzberg and Cupah (1984, as cited in Yershova, DeJaeghere & Mestenhauser 2000:43) define intercultural competence as an individual’s ability to communicate effectively and appropriately with people from different cultural backgrounds. Yershova, DeJaeghere and Mestenhauser (2000:43) cite Koester et al. and McCroskey, pointing out that although Spitzberg and Cupah’s view of intercultural competence is rather widely accepted, there are still ongoing debates around several issues, which are crucial to understanding intercultural competence. Examples of these issues are: whether intercultural competence resides within an individual, the social context, the culture, the interpersonal relationships, or some combinations of these possibilities; whether it is a matter of understanding or skills; and whether it is best understood from a culture-specific standpoint or by the identification of more universal concepts that are cross-culturally applicable (Yershova, DeJaeghere & Mestenhauser 2000:43).

2.4 International

Haug (2005:133) states that Webster’s Dictionary defines ‘international’ as “anything that affects or involves two or more nations” and that in the globalized world of the 21st century all social, economic and ecological justice issues are interconnected. Hence, decisions made at the global level have a direct impact on the local level (Haug 2005:133). Haug also (2005:133) quotes Martin Luther King Junior, stating that “injustice any-

where is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in a network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny”.

Nagy & Falk (2000:50) cite a Swedish book about the internationalization of university education in general (by Opper et al.) from 1981 in motivating why internationalization is necessary; stating that there are three different reasons, all related to survival. These reasons are: “first, the survival of the world, stressing global responsibility, especially towards poor and oppressed peoples; second, the survival of the nation, stressing the necessity to adapt to an increasingly interdependent world economy and labour market; and third, the survival of science, which cannot thrive and develop if limited by national borders” (Opper et al. 1981, as cited in Nagy & Falk 2000:50). Nagy and Falk (2000:50) apply this argument to social work, adding a fourth point of survival, namely the survival of the profession, as social work depends on knowledge and influences gained from other societies.

Healy (1995, as quoted in Nagy and Falk 2000:52) describes the term ‘international’ in the social work context as “a broad, umbrella term referring to any aspect of social work involving two or more nations”.

2.5 Social work

According to a joint definition, made by the International Association of Schools of Social Work and the International Federation of Social Workers in 2001, social work exists in various forms, all of which purpose is to enable people to develop their full potential, enrich their lives, and prevent dysfunction (IASSW 2009). According to this definition, social work addresses several, complex transactions between people and their environments, and is focused on problem solving and change (IASSW 2009). This definition stresses that social work promotes social change, problem solving in interpersonal relationships and empowerment and liberation of people, thus enhancing wellbeing (IASSW 2009). Furthermore, principles of human rights and social justice are fundamental to social work and the social work profession uses theories of human development and behavior and social systems to “analyse complex situations and to facilitate individual, organizational, social and cultural changes” (IASSW 2009).

3 LITERATURE OVERVIEW

3.1 Literature search

I conducted my literature search systematically by using databases such as Nelli, Helmet, Vaski, Sage, Ebsco, Arken, and Google Scholar to find articles that were relevant for my thesis. For more detailed information about my literature search, see chapter 5.

3.2 Previous research – foreign studies

A lot of the research on intercultural competence that has been published is usually concerning different approaches to intercultural competence and different models of development of such, or on various ways of measuring intercultural competence, and generally does not specifically study why intercultural competence is needed. There are not too many culture general studies on intercultural social work; instead the studies within the field of international social work tend to be linked to a specific culture. Other studies within the field of international social work explore the different approaches to international social work.

James Midgley conducted a literature review called “Issues in International Social Work: Resolving Critical Debates in the Profession” in 2001. In his study, Midgley (2001) reviews the theoretical construction of international social work, as well as addresses some critical issues in this context. Examples of issues Midgley (2001) addresses are the definition of international social work, the nature and impact of globalization on social work, and the meaning of values, internationalism and cultural diversity. Furthermore, Midgley (2001) addresses issues of social work education and the importance of both globalization and regionalism in social work. Midgley (2001) finds that social workers are now more frequently involved in international activities than ever before, but simultaneously they remain divided on several critical issues. Midgley (2001) explores these differences in opinion and proposes some ideas for accommodating and resolving differences.

Wei-Wen Chang's (2007) study "Cultural Competence of International Humanitarian workers" from 2007 explores nonprofit organizations' international workers' learning process in the context of cultural competence and displays an effort to systematically understand cultural competence. Chang (2007) uses a cultural competence attainment model to study 10 Taiwanese international humanitarian workers and explore how their expatriate experiences of local service influenced their cultural competence. Chang identified three levels of influence: the peripheral, the cognitive and the reflective level and suggests that more research that focuses on the process of acquiring cultural competence is needed.

Géza Nagy and Diane Falk conducted a study called "Dilemmas in international and cross cultural social work education" in 2000, where they address the impacts that ongoing global processes have on social work as a profession. In the study, literature on international and cross-cultural social work education is reviewed, and various models of incorporating international content into social work education are discussed. The study shows that there is a need for new approaches to bring international and cross-cultural content and perspectives into the mainstream of social work education, as well as a need for creating more specialized professional programs.

Piyush Sharma, Jackie L. Tam and Namwoon Kim conducted an exploratory qualitative study presented in the article "Demystifying Intercultural Service Encounters: Toward a Comprehensive Conceptual Framework" in 2009. This study shows that perceived cultural distance and intercultural competence influence interaction comfort, adequate and perceived service levels, and satisfaction. The study provides a conceptual framework for intercultural service encounters, which can be used by both customers and employees. The authors claim that the findings of the study have significant managerial implications for managing both customers' and employees' expectations and perceptions in intercultural encounters, which can help improve both parties' satisfaction with the service experience.

There are also several studies on the impacts international social work internships or placements have on intercultural competence, for instance David Engstrom and Loring

P. Jones' "A Broadened Horizon: The Value of International Social Work Internships" from 2001; Samantha Webhi's "Deconstructing Motivations: Challenging International Social Work Placements" from 2009; or Frank Tesoriero's "Personal Growth Toward Intercultural Competence Through an International Field Education Programme" from 2006.

3.3 Previous research – domestic studies

There have been some studies on intercultural competence in Finland, for the most part though, they have focused on intercultural competence in the context of teaching (mainly language teaching) or on what constitutes as intercultural competence and how it can be applied or measured, instead of specifically on why intercultural competences should be developed. Unfortunately, I was unable to find any Finnish studies that focused specifically on international social work.

One example of studies related to intercultural competence is Ph.D. Kaisu Korhonen's study "Developing Intercultural Competence as Part of Professional Qualifications. A training Experiment with Bachelor of Engineering Students" from 2002, in which Korhonen conducted a training experiment with 117 Bachelor of Engineering students at Kajaani Polytechnic in Finland. In this study Korhonen used a face-to-face tuition period as well as a self-study period with a multimedia- and web-based culture-general assimilator consisting of several critical incidents. Korhonen's study assesses the effectiveness of intercultural training, and aims to figure out what kind of communicators the students are and would like to be, whether or not they are motivated to develop their intercultural competence, and how they feel about intercultural competence as a part of their professional qualifications (Korhonen 2002).

Another study, which is more relevant for me as it links to social work, is Sari Hammar-Suutari's study "Kulttuurien välinen viranomaisyö" from 2006 (carried out in 2005), where Hammar-Suutari studied the diversification of the clientele in the Finnish public sector and the needs for intercultural competence that these changes create. Hammar-Suutari's (2006) research focuses on the development of civil servants' intercultural competence and the development of prerequisites of equality in customer service in

three work communities representing public social services. This study was conducted as a part of the Labor Policy Research Program (Työpoliittinen tutkimusohjelma). The focus also lies on describing a work development trial, which was conducted during the research, and the evaluation of the trial as one operation model in developing the public sector (Hammar-Suutari 2006). This trial period had positive results, as the participants' concept of equality expanded from 'equal service thinking' to 'equal opportunities thinking', and the intercultural competence of the civil servants as well as their professional self-confidence in intercultural encounters was strengthened (Hammar-Suutari 2006). The study also revealed a need to improve the civil servants' awareness of issues related to intercultural encounters and difference in general (Hammar-Suutari 2006). Also, according to Hammar-Suutari's study, changing public sector practices requires both the support of individual civil servants and support from the work communities, organization and the political level (Hammar-Suutari 2006).

Another study in the field of intercultural competence in social work is that of Kielo Brewis. She conducted the study "Stress in the Multi-ethnic Customer Contacts of the Finnish Civil Servants: Developing Critical Pragmatic Intercultural Professionals" in 2008. Brewis' (2008) research addresses the intercultural communication challenges of host culture adaptees in multi-ethnic customer contacts of two groups of Finnish civil servants. Previous research in the field of intercultural studies has mainly focused on studying the adjustment processes of the immigrant populations, whereas Brewis (2008) chooses to adopt a host culture focus. In the study, Brewis (2008) studies the way Finnish civil servants go about creating intercultural space in their multi-ethnic customer contacts from three different angles: as integrity issues, as cultural learning and as communication issues.

Brewis' (2008) research shows that the Finnish civil servants often undergo complex processes of change and adaptation when they develop understanding for intercultural communication and that a subjective experience of stress is an integral part of the Finnish civil servants' multi-ethnic customer contacts (especially in the beginning stages). Brewis' (2008) study shows that the adaptive stress can be used positively as well in the development of intercultural professionalism, by making the processes of gaining intercultural competence and cultural adaptation visible and thereby making the adaptees

aware of them. Brewis (2008) also suggests a model of training for critical pragmatic intercultural professionals.

4 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

4.1 International social work

There are several definitions of and approaches to international social work that appear in professional literature (Abram; Slosar & Walls 2005:161). Yip (2005:595) points out that the results from the international survey of social workers from different regions of the world conducted by Rowe et al. in 2000 show that definitions of social work in general differ greatly according to the cultural context. According to Midgley (2001:24) there is no standardized definition of the term ‘international social work’, nor is there a common agreement about what international social work entails. Healy and Thomas (2007:584) concur, pointing out that a 50-year review shows that international social work is a concept that is still evolving.

Healy (2001:7) defines international social work as “international action by the social work profession and its members”, further explaining that “international action has four dimensions: international related domestic practice, professional exchange, international practice, and international policy development and advocacy”. Barker’s *Social Work Dictionary* (1992, as cited in Johnson 2004:7) on the other hand defines international social work as “a loosely used term applied to (1) international organizations using social work methods or personnel, (2) social work cooperation between countries, and (3) the transfer of methods or knowledge about social work between countries”.

Many writers believe that the issue of definition needs to be resolved, so that the nature and scope of intercultural social work can be defined in concrete terms, as this will make it easier for social workers to become involved in the field (Midgley 2001:25).

4.1.1 International social work as social work in international organizations

According to Midgley (2001:24) the oldest definitions of international social work view it as a field of practice, emphasizing the importance of specific skills and knowledge that enable social workers to work in international agencies, such as the Red Cross or The United Nations. Gray and Fook (2004) tune in on this definition, stating that international social work can refer to several different things, one of which is social work activities which take place at a global or international level (like work with international level organizations) or activities involving international exchanges (Gray & Fook 2004:630-631).

4.1.2 International social work as social work in different parts of the world

Hokenstad et al. (1992, as cited in Abram; Slosar & Walls 2005:161) define international social work as professional social work practice in different parts of the world.

4.1.3 International social work as social work that focuses on issues of international concern

International social work can also refer to social work that focuses on issues of international concern (for instance refugees or ecological issues) and/or the way in which these are worked with on an international or domestic level (Gray & Fook 2004:630).

4.1.4 International social work as 'domestic' social work with a culturally diverse clientele

Another definition of international social work describes it as social work practice with immigrants or refugees (Midgley 2001:24-25). Sanders and Pederson's (1984, as cited in Nagy & Falk 2000:53) definition of international social work includes social work practice with immigrants, refugees or ethnic minorities in the social worker's own country. Here the focus lies on cultural diversity and encounters among cultural groups (Nagy & Falk 2000:53). This kind of social work practice generally occurs in multi-

cultural, multi-lingual or multi-racial environments, such as urban areas with large ethnic concentrations (Nagy & Falk 2000:53).

Sanders and Pedersen (1984, as cited in Midgley 2001:25) state that social work education should include more international content, to enhance domestic social workers' ability to properly understand the cultural backgrounds of immigrants and refugees, as well as be more sensitive to their needs.

Yip (2005:594) talks about 'cross-cultural' social work – which has been shaped by globalization, multi-culturalism, democracy and cultural diversity (Yip 2005:593) – as “social work practice in a cross-cultural context” or “international social work in which social work practice is transferred and transferable among (countries with) different cultures”. Furthermore, Yip (2005:594) states that experts say that in countries with non-Eurocentric cultural contexts, this means the indigenization of westernized social work practice, while in a multicultural country this means culturally sensitive social work practice with different ethnic groups.

4.1.5 International social work as a network of contacts and exchanges of professional knowledge

Yet another approach to international social work focuses less on practice and instead defines international social work as the contacts and exchanges that take place between social workers from different countries (Midgley 2001:25). Abram, Slosar and Walls (2005:174) support this approach, stating that knowledge of social work practice in other countries and cultures provides a basis for critical reflection, which in turn “expands and enriches our own practice...as informed participants in international policy debates and as advocates for just and innovative solutions to social problems”. Midgley (1992, as cited in Gilin & Young 2009:37) agrees, as he emphasizes the value of learning about innovative practices, which have been formulated in different societies. Midgley (1992, as cited in Gilin & Young 2009:37) also points out that by studying social problems in countries other than their own, social workers can learn how different countries identify and define needs, and this knowledge can increase their awareness of social problems in their own societies.

Nowadays there is an enhanced international engagement among social workers, as they are more frequently engaged in international collaboration, more interested in developments in other countries and travel more often to international meetings and conferences (Midgley 2001:22).

Some researchers form even broader definitions of international social work, defining international social work as “a global awareness that enhances the ability of social workers to transcend their preoccupation with the local and contextualize their role within a broad, global setting” (Midgley 2001:25). Human rights are universal, and human needs are relative, hence social workers must think and act locally as well as globally (Ife 2000, as cited in Yip 2005:595).

4.1.6 Critical reflections on international social work as a discourse

The social work profession has historically been committed to formulating a set of universal principles, and in the US the generic principles were formulated in the 1920's, as to provide a common base for different forms of social work (Midgley 2001:30). These generic principles include concepts such as individuation, self-determination, non-judgmentalism and confidentiality, and have exerted a strong influence on social work and social workers both in the US and around the world (Midgley 2001:30). These principles are still relevant today, as they have not been replaced by “more sophisticated explications of social work values” (Midgley 2001:30). However, their ideological derivation has received a fair amount of criticism, as some experts have pointed out that social work's values were “rooted in an individualistic culture derived from Western liberalism and, as such, were not universally shared” (Midgley 2001:30). For instance O'Brian, Turner, and Risler, Lowe, and Nackerud (all 2003, as cited in Bidgood, Holosko & Taylor 2003:404) state that the Bartlett definition of social work is, as a cultural artifact, “ethnocentric and lacks sensitivity to issues of race, culture, and diversity”. This comes forth in statements such as ‘this society’ and ‘democratic’ in the value statements of the definition being culturally narcissistic, as social work practice is not confined to only democratic societies, but is in fact practiced in many nondemocratic societies as well (Risler et al. 2003, as cited in Bidgood, Holosko & Taylor 2003:404).

Haug (2005:129) points out that “a comparative study in which members of only one gender (male), class (highly educated elite) and (so-called) race or ethnicity (European) are disproportionately represented, with their voices generalized to the rest of the total population, is not only unrepresentative but also invalid”. Haug (2005:129) states that this seems to be the case in the discourse of international social work. When examining the small body of published international social work materials, Haug (2005:129) found the voices of privileged male academics of European heritage to be disproportionately represented in naming and framing the international social work discourse.

Most of the international social work discourse has been constructed based on the dominant professional social work paradigm, which according to Haug (2005:129) “represents a globalized local tradition whose theories and methods have been presented as a unitary knowledge system, universally applicable and superior to all other pre-existing traditions of social care”. However, Western knowledge systems, ideologies, social care and development methods have time after time been proven to be not only inappropriate, but also inadequate for addressing the ecological, social, spiritual, economic or security crises we face globally today (Haug 2005:130). Fulchner and O’Brian (both 2003, as cited in Bidgood, Holosko & Taylor 2003:404) agree with this statement as they point out that many of the practice methods that dominate Western social work are “alien, unacceptable, and ineffective in other countries, particularly Third World countries”.

In addition, Fulchner (2003, as cited in Bidgood, Holosko & Taylor 2003:404) states that a working definition of social work needs to take into consideration that different cultural values, traditions, and assumptions in fact affect child development theories, mental health care, and the delivery of social services – and that these views may be incompatible with Western social work theories. Fulchner (2003, as cited in Bidgood, Holosko & Taylor 2003:404) motivates this with the reflection that “the ‘one-size-fits-all’ definitional approaches will not prove useful in the development of the social work profession in non-Western cultures in which the cultural aspect of help giving and help receiving need to be considered”.

Fook (2004:83) states that the very notion of intercultural or international social work is based on “assumptions about boundaries, differences, ways of differentiating and defining sets of experiences”. Fook (2004:84) also points out that critical reflection is needed in intercultural or international social work, as to examine the appropriateness of our assumptions so that we do not categorize based on subjective needs, since this may work against our stated values of social justice.

Yip (2005:603) states that some experts say that in international social work, westerners may sometimes label many Asian and African countries as “developing or underdeveloped” countries, in which the most important model in social practice should be social development. However, this sort of categorization can be misleading, as many of the “labeled” countries (for instance many Asian countries) have highly developed and prosperous economies and ways of life, as well as great diversity of subcultures and other enriching factors (Yip 2005:603).

Haug (2005:130) also argues that the globally interconnected crises we face today can be shown to have its roots in the imbalance caused by the global hegemony of white/Western systems, structures and ideologies. Haug (2005:130) then quotes Einstein in saying that “no problem can be solved by the same consciousness which created it”. Latouche (1993, as cited in Haug 2005:130) supports this stance, stating that it is becoming more clear that the answers, innovations and insights that are needed to solve the crises our world faces today will not come from those who are traditionally seen as experts, but from those on the margins. Haug (2005:130-131) argues that for this reason (more than for political correctness) it is fundamental for the international social work conversation to be transformed into becoming more inclusive, so that voices that were previously excluded can participate.

Haug (2005:129) also points out that due to the influence the United States has on political, economic, cultural and ideological issues internationally, the international social work discussion has been constructed largely around the American model of social work. Most social workers today engage in direct practice, working with individuals and their families, “treating the personal problems of their clients” (Midgley 2001:28). Many social work writers from the developing countries have criticized social work’s

concern with remediation, as they claim that the profession's individualized, therapeutic approach is not fit for addressing the problems of poverty, homelessness, unemployment and ill-health that characterize the global South (Midgley 2001:28). This kind of criticism has enhanced the need for social work to be more active in the role of development as well (Midgley 2001:28-29). Despite the fundamental importance of international issues, international social work is still according to Midgley (2001:24) "the purview of a small group of experts".

Regarding the Western social work patterns such as empowerment, advocacy and social development as some sort of magic spells to alleviate poverty and inequality might not always prove effective. Instead, it may be better for people in different cultural and sub-cultural contexts to evolve their own patterns of achieving "relatively humane or self-sufficient ways of life" (Yip 2005:603). Midgley (1990, as cited in Johnson 2004:11) states that international social work is a "two-way street", in the sense that those involved in international social work have much to learn from their international partners. Fook (2004:85) also suggests that the field of intercultural social work sensitizes us to the idea that situations are complex. Bidgood, Holosko and Taylor (2003:405) state that social work practitioners, researchers, policy makers, administrators, educators, as well as others would agree that if a new working definition of social work in general is to be constructed, it should reflect the different paradigms that the social work profession embraces today.

Fook (2004:83) suggests that social work at global levels, and across international and intercultural divides, is probably more important now than ever before in history. Although this reflects in an increased international engagement among social workers, social workers are sharply divided on many important international issues (Midgley 2001:22). According to Midgley (2001:22) there is disagreement about the nature of international social work and the profession's commitment to internationalizing social work practice and the curriculum. Although many social workers emphasize the positive benefits that enhanced economic, political, and cultural integration can bring, others have a more apprehensive stance (Midgley 2001:22). Furthermore, social workers have divided opinions on the question of the universality of social work values, and whether internationalism is a "desirable normative position for the profession to adopt as it seeks

to respond to the forces of globalization” (Midgley 2001:22). Although social workers have always needed sensitivity to the culture and customs of others around the world, they now need an international perspective more than ever, as well as an understanding for how different cultures are unique (Engstrom & Jones 2007:137). Midgley (2001:31) agrees, stating that there is today a greater consensus regarding the need to respect differences and develop indigenous forms of social work practice that address local, cultural, economic and social realities.

According to Midgley (2001:32) “the challenges of accommodating diversity within a wider internationally shared value system can only be met properly when the social work profession as a whole makes a commitment to discuss and understand the issues involved”. In order for this to be possible, more social workers need to be exposed to these issues and international social work needs to become a more integrated part of the social work profession’s discourse (Midgley 2001:32).

Midgley (2001:32) argues that “it is possible to recognize the centrality of ethnic and national identity in many people’s lives, and to respect these sentiments within a wider recognition of the role that international collaboration can play in promoting mutual understanding, tolerance and an appreciation of cultural difference”.

4.2 Intercultural competence

The initial attempts to study and conceptualize intercultural competence were motivated by the boom in student exchange and international development work after World War II, the Peace Corps movement in the 1960’s, and the expansion in international trade, to mention a few factors (Yershova, DeJaeghere & Mestenhauser 2000:43). Hence, the study of intercultural competence has its roots in solving practical concerns, such as helping individuals who work and study abroad to adjust cross-culturally (Yershova, DeJaeghere & Mestenhauser 2000:43). The definition of intercultural competence continues to evolve, so opinions and definitions written 10 or 15 years ago may not be considered valid anymore (Deardorff 2006:158). The concept of intercultural competence has interested scholars from various disciplines for the past 40 or 50 years, but it still remains a subject of heated debates and there is a multitude of terms, conceptualiza-

tions, perspectives and research approaches within the discourse (Yershova, DeJaeghere & Mestenhauser 2000:42).

Mays, de Leon Siantz and Viehweg (2002:139) state that various paths can lead to intercultural competence, and which one is the best depends on the particular needs and characteristics of the cultural group, the community, the service organization, the attitudes and philosophies of policy makers, as well as the political, economic, and social circumstances that shape the interactions in a given area, community or state. Becoming interculturally competent then, can be seen as a function of increasing sophistication in responding to cultural difference (Yershova, DeJaeghere & Mestenhauser 2000:45). Kim & Ruben (1988:306) state that scholars who view acquiring intercultural competence as a form of intercultural transformation define the term 'intercultural competence' as "the process of change in individuals beyond the cognitive, affective, and behavioral limits of their original culture".

Intercultural competence can refer to the knowledge and skills that an individual needs in order to be able to function and master an intercultural encounter (Stier 2004b:139). Martin (Council of Europe 2008:7) agrees with this definition, but also points out that there is no clear and commonly accepted definition. One could say an interculturally competent person is one who manages to avoid unnecessary conflicts and misunderstandings when encountering a person from another culture (Stier 2004b:139). Being interculturally competent then, means being able to function effectively in other cultural contexts than one's own (Council of Europe 2008:7).

Developing intercultural competence requires curiosity, humbleness to see things through other perspectives than the ones we find to be "more correct", and courage to appreciate our own culture and its values as well as other cultures and their values (Salo-Lee, Malmberg & Halinoja 1998:117). Salo-Lee, Malmberg and Halinoja (1998:117) also emphasize that developing intercultural competence takes a lot of dedication and learning.

Friedman and Bernthoin Antal (2005) make a distinction between cultural competence and intercultural competence; stating that cultural competence is basically the ability to

generate appropriate strategies of action unconsciously, whereas intercultural competence is the ability to consciously explore one's repertoire and actively construct an appropriate strategy (2005: 74-75). Thus, intercultural competence involves overcoming the boundaries set by an individual's culturally shaped repertoire and creating new responses, thereby expanding the options of potential interpretations and behaviors available not only in the interaction at hand, but for future interactions as well (Friedman & Berthoin Antal 2005:75).

According to a definition used by Lustig and Koester (2006:65) intercultural competence results in behaviors that are regarded as appropriate and fit the expectations and demands of the situation. In addition, these behaviors are effective in achieving desired personal outcomes (Lustig & Koester 2006:65). Salo-Lee, Malmberg and Halinoja (1998) are on the same tracks as they refer to an article by Viitala from 1989, stating that successful intercultural encounters are characterized by both parties experiencing the encounter as positive (Salo-Lee, Malmberg & Halinoja 1998:134).

According to Guirdham (2005:218) both interpersonal and intercultural factors play a major role in an intercultural context. Developing intercultural competence requires an ability to control the accepted behavioral patterns of our own culture and awareness of behavioral patterns that differ from these (Salo-Lee, Malmberg & Halinoja 1998:134). To develop intercultural competence, one has to be interested in interactional situations, flexible, confident and aware of one's own culture, as well as be aware of and respect other's commitment to their own culture (Salo-Lee, Malmberg & Halinoja 1998:124).

In addition, one should be able to handle stress and be empathetic (Salo-Lee, Malmberg & Halinoja 1998:124). Other skills needed for developing intercultural competence include increasing intercultural perceptiveness, unlearning and learning, accurately predicting others' behavior and responses, tolerating ambiguity, being non-judgmental, being mindful and developing positive expectations about intercultural encounters (Guirdham 2005:218). Furthermore, it helps if you are capable of understanding others and being understood, open-minded and have a positive outlook on new challenges (Salo-Lee, Malmberg & Halinoja 1998:124). Cultures aren't static; instead they're constantly evolving and cannot be captured in textbooks for social workers, as "instant solutions"

(Council of Europe 2008:9). Stier (2004a:4) has grasped this as well and emphasizes that intercultural competences should not be seen as fully developed or universal. Instead they remain flexible and must constantly be modified depending on the context, character of the task at hand, and background of the client (Stier 2004a:4).

Salo-Lee, Malmberg and Halinoja (1998:116) state that developing intercultural competence help us assess people's behavior more objectively. This requires knowledge – both about our own culture and about other cultures – as well as sensitivity in regard to identifying cultural characteristics (Salo-Lee, Malmberg & Halinoja 1998:116). Intercultural competence is improved by learning not to assume that everyone has the same values and attitudes, becoming more sensitive to differences in others' verbal and non-verbal communication, becoming more aware of social preconceptions and stereotypes that portray other groups (than our own) as “different” and by reducing the tendency to evaluate another's culture as inferior (Guirdham 2005:222). By being flexible in our own understanding of things, it is easier to distance ourselves from the misconception that our own culture is in any way superior to other cultures (Salo-Lee, Malmberg & Halinoja 1998:116-117).

4.2.1 Intercultural competence in the context of social work professionals

According to the Health Resources and Service Administration (2001, as cited in Mays, de Leon Siantz and Viehweg 2002:140) intercultural competence in the context of a system, agency or group of professionals facilitates the development of a common set of attitudes, behaviors, and policies that enable that system, agency or group of professionals to operate effectively in cross-cultural situations. The Council of Europe has a similar definition of intercultural competence in social services, as they state that intercultural competence in social services can be defined as the ability of social workers and institutions to provide effective services to culturally diverse populations (Council of Europe 2008:8). Martin (Council of Europe 2008:7) states that this means that the social worker needs to be aware of the social diversity, understand culture and have a knowledge base of different cultures.

Not only does intercultural competence entail honoring and respecting various beliefs, interpersonal styles, attitudes and behaviors, but it also involves reflecting those values in policy, administration, training and services provided (Mays, de Leon Siantz & Viehweg 2002:140). Fook (2004:84) claims that in order for a sound and critical social work practice to exist, it is vital to recognize where our deep-seated assumptions come from, as well as whether or not they fit our professional purposes. Fook (2004:85) suggests that professionals should contemplate why we feel categorization and differentiation is necessary and how much we really need categorization to do our work more sensitively and effectively.

4.2.2 Reverse mission as a form of intercultural competence in international social work

Abram, Slosar and Walls (2005:163) describe reverse mission as “instead of teaching, preaching and trying to convert people in or of another country or community, reverse mission emphasizes learning from indigenous people and their leaders, raising missionaries’ and sojourners’ levels of consciousness and advocating for changes in one’s home country that can have an impact on poverty and injustice in the world”. Thus, a reverse mission approach to international social work practice (and education) emphasizes learning from people in and of other countries and cultures, as well as confronting our own cultural biases and prejudices (Abram, Slosar & Walls 2005:174). According to Abram, Slosar and Walls (2005:174), this helps reduce the threat of professional imperialism, geocentric bias and elitist notions of service. As an example of elitist notions of service Abram, Slosar and Wall (2005:174) mention the assumptions of Western countries ‘giving’ knowledge or ‘helping’ those in ‘underdeveloped’ countries. A reverse mission value base, on the other hand, stresses human rights and integrates the values of people of diverse cultures to a higher degree (Abram, Slosar & Walls 2005:174).

According to Abrams, Slosar and Walls (2005:174) “reverse mission also helps remind those who advocate for international social work education and experiences that we are ultimately most effective when we think globally and act locally to foster social and economic justice throughout the world”.

5 METHOD AND MATERIAL

5.1 The literature review

Robinson and Reed (1998:58) define a literary review as “a systematic search of published work to find out what is already known about the intended research topic”. Hirsijärvi, Remes and Sajavaara (2007:17, 252-254) refer to a literary review as focusing on literature such as articles, research papers and other relevant publications that are relevant to your research. The purpose of a literature review is not only to identify and analyze information written about a topic, but also to gain insight and understanding into the problem at hand. Leedy (1989:66) points out that the more knowledgeable you are, the better you will be able to understand your problem.

When conducting a literature review, the following three issues should be kept in mind according to Bless and Higson-Smith (2000:20): the purpose of the review, the literature sources and the reviewing techniques. Bless and Higson-Smith (2000) listed different purposes of the review, stating that the purpose of a literary review of existing literature is one or a combination of different reasons, such as studying the different theories related to the topic at hand, taking an interdisciplinary perspective where possible, as to sharpen and deepen the theoretical framework of the research; or familiarizing the researcher with the latest developments in the area of research, as well as in related areas, as to widen and deepen the already existing knowledge (Bless & Higson-Smith 2000:20). Previous results are a starting point for new research.

Furthermore, other purposes of a literary review can be identifying gaps in knowledge – that is, determining what has already been done and what is yet to be studied or improved or discovering connections, contradictions or other relations between different research results by comparing different investigations (Bless & Higson-Smith 2000:20). Bless and Higson-Smith (2000:20) also state that identifying what must be considered in the research at hand, as well as what is irrelevant and studying the definitions used in previous works, as well as the characteristics of the populations investigated, with the

aim of adopting them for the new research, constitute as purposes of literary reviews (Bless & Higson-Smith 2000:20). As a final purpose, Bless and Higson-Smith (2000) mention studying the advantages and disadvantages of the research methods used by others, in order to adopt or improve on them in one's own research (Bless & Higson-Smith 2000:20).

5.2 Motivation behind the choice of method

What I hope to achieve with my literature review is to gain a better understanding of my topic, as well as survey the need for intercultural competence in international social work. I wish to widen and deepen the already existing knowledge in the field by doing my thesis as a literary review. This way my thesis can later be used as a springboard for further studies (by either myself or others) and possibly help determine what is yet to be studied or improved.

I feel that the literary review is the best method for me to use in my thesis, because the field in itself is rather new and there is a lot of information that has not reached the general public or even large groups of professionals to a sufficient extent. Therefore, I feel that doing a literary review can help contribute to spreading information about the necessity of intercultural competence and hopefully also promote developing of such. Turning to books and specialist articles seems like it is better suited for the purpose rather than e.g. interviewing people, especially since my interest lies in surveying the topic at a level that allows for generalization to a higher degree, and not in researching attitudes towards the topic in specific.

5.3 Data collection

I conducted my literature search systematically by using databases such as Nelli, Helmet, Vaski, Sage, Ebsco, Arken and Google Scholar to find articles that were relevant for my thesis. I used different combinations of search words such as 'intercultural', 'intercultural competence', 'intercult*', 'international', 'international*', 'international social work', 'social', 'ISW' (abbreviation used for International Social Work), 'ICC' (abbreviation used for both Intercultural Competence and Intercultural Communica-

tion), 'mångkulturellt', 'mångkultur*', 'mångkulturellt socialt arbete', 'socialarbete', 'socialt arbete', 'internationell*', 'internationellt', 'internationellt socialt arbete', 'interkultur*', 'interkulturell', 'interkulturell kompetens', 'monikulttuuri*', 'monikulttuurinen', 'monikulttuurinen sosiaalityö', 'sosiaalityö', 'kompetenssi', 'kulttuurinen herkyys', etc.

5.4 Selection

I received a lot of hits, so I went through them and made my selection based on:

a) relevance; whether or not the article contained information relevant for answering my research questions (which was determined by reading abstracts and matching key words, as well as sometimes reading whole articles or books)

b) year of publication; my criteria for selection was that the material should be published 1999 or later – thus making the material 10 years old at the most (I started working on my thesis in 2009). I have however included some material that is older, and the reason for this is that the material was either very central, or that it was used as a reference in another article or book that I was using and I looked up the primary source (which then happened to be older than the rest of my material) instead of using a secondary source (thus referring to material that would in fact be “newer”, but having a secondary source instead of a primary one). My motivation was that I felt that it was more important to go to primary sources whenever that was possible, than it was for me to keep strictly to my criteria for selection regarding year of publication.

c) trustworthiness; whether or not the article/paper/study/book was scholarly and whether or not it was written by a reliable author. I did however include some papers that weren't completely objective, because my intention was to find out more about the different views on intercultural competence in international social work and the discussion that occurs in this discourse, so obviously there had to be some room for opinions as well. Even so, I always made sure the author of these articles was trustworthy and had an appropriate education.

5.5 Ethical reflections in the context of ways of knowing, research methodology and culture

Hartman (1990, as cited in Ling 2004:337) states that, in relation to research and knowledge development, there are many ways of knowing and each of these ways are grounded in – and are an expression of – “certain ontological, epistemological, and value assumptions”. Also, according to Ling (2004:338) culture is expressed and reflected by our world-view, the way we interact and communicate with people around us, the way we engage with nature and our perception of human nature. In addition, culture is also expressed and reflected by our concepts of knowledge and our beliefs about what can and cannot be known (Ling 2004:338). Hence, research methodology is inextricably linked to culture (Ling 2004:338).

Hong et al. (2000, as cited in Friedman & Berthoin Antal 2005:73) claim that cultural knowledge can be seen as a contact lens that “totally affects individual perception, leaving little room for a second internalized culture within an individual’s psychology”. Failing to realize that the ways of knowing and research methodology are culture bound has serious repercussions, which can be shown by the fact that doing so has previously resulted in the marginalization and even exclusion of culturally diverse interpretations of reality and human experiences (Ling 2003:338).

Western research methodology is rooted in a way of knowing which is based on a scientific paradigm that sees knowledge as something coming from objective reality, from outside the self (Ling 2004:338). Ling (2004:338) cites Gowdy, Weick and Zimmerman (1994; 1991 and 1989), stating that detaching the self from the environment in order to observe and analyze reality objectively discovers this kind of knowledge. Ling (2004:338) points out that human knowledge, which is intuitive, sensory, tacitly knowing and knowing from doing, is devalued in this paradigm. Knowledge that does come from these sources is often disregarded as real knowledge (Sacco 1996; Saleeby 1994, as cited in Ling 2004:338).

I am aware of the fact that research methodology is linked to culture and have therefore tried to choose articles written by culturally diverse authors, instead of only qualifying

work done by the dominating group of authors in the field of international social work and intercultural competence.

5.6 Validity and reliability

Jacobsen (2007:268) defines a good research as one that fills the criteria of internal validity, external validity and reliability. Internal validity refers to whether the research actually captures what the researcher has aimed to capture, whereas external validity refers to the transferability of the research and whether the results that have been obtained can be generalized to other entities that were not studied in the research at hand (Jacobsen 2007:156, 166). Reliability then, refers to whether or not the research is reliable and whether the material that has been collected can be trusted (Jacobsen 2007:156).

Since my thesis is an applied systematic literature review, there was no direct data collection from individuals. I conducted my data collection through reliable databases (see 4.3.) and the articles and books I used are scientific works by professionals. The articles I chose to use were rather diverse, which I see as a strength, especially within my field of study. However, I would not claim that the results can be generalized, as this would require an even broader approach and possibly a combination of different methods.

According to Jacobsen (2007:274-275) the researcher can improve the validity of the research by comparing it to other researches that have been conducted on the same phenomenon in the same context – but using different ways of measuring. For me, however, this was however not an option, as I was unable to find any researches that addressed exactly the same things that I chose to study.

Jacobsen (2007:175) points out that the researcher can both be affected by and affect the research units. Since I did my thesis as a literature review my demeanor could not affect the research units, as they were not living creatures. However, I am aware of the fact that my own views and values might affect how I perceived the information in the articles. Also, I am aware of the fact that I have a very strong passion for intercultural issues and equality, and that this can affect the results.

In addition, Jacobsen (2007:175) stresses the importance of openness throughout the research process. If the researcher has been open about how the study has been conducted, it allows the reader to reflect and assess whether or not the results are reliable or not. I have tried to be as open as possible throughout the process of doing my thesis, and I believe this comes across as a higher degree of reliability.

I am content with the categorization I have done as well, but I do realize that by doing the categorization differently, other aspects might have surfaced, so I would not say that the results and conclusions I made are the only 'right' ones. Also, I realize that although I might have found connections between different things, it does not mean that these connections are 'absolute truths' that can be trusted fully. However, if the same 'opinions' surface several times in multiple references, the likelihood of these opinions being trustworthy is higher.

5.7 Analysis process and presentation of the main articles

I conducted my analysis as a content analysis, with the intention to address how different approaches to international social work relate to the different imperatives for developing intercultural competence. In other words, I have categorized various authors' reasoning as to why developing intercultural competence is important into different imperatives (both in general and for people working in the social field in specific), and will then relate these to different approaches to international social work.

Some of the categories (imperatives) were already 'named' in the literature (that is, that some authors had in fact categorized material into different groups of imperatives, calling them the same thing I have called them), whereas some of the categorizations were 'created' and/or named by me. For instance Lustig and Koester (2006) and Martin and Nakayama (2000) mention one or several of the following imperatives in their work (actually using these names for the categories): the technological imperative, the demographic imperative, the economic imperative, the peace imperative, the self-awareness imperative and the ethical imperative. I have named the remaining imperatives myself according to content and logical categorization. I have also, according to the same standards, categorized other authors' motivations for intercultural competence under the

categories I have listed in chapter 6.

In my analysis I also intend to take a brief look at how the different definitions of intercultural competence fit in with the different imperatives for intercultural competence and the different approaches to international social work.

I chose to adopt a wider view, so I did not want to rely all too heavily on just a few key references. Instead I chose to go through my data systematically and categorize it in a manner that allowed me to find aspects that different authors agreed on and that could therefore be seen as reliable information. I did however rely on certain references more than on others. I have created a figure with a short presentation of these references as follows:

Table 1a. Key references, part 1/4.

Author, title and year of publication	Type of reference	Short description	Keywords (if provided)
Abram, Faye Y.; Slosar, John A. & Walls, Rose. 2005. <i>Reverse mission: A model for international social work education and transformative intranational practice.</i>	Article in the journal International Social Work	The article presents a reverse-mission approach to international social work, which – instead of placing emphasis on teaching, preaching and converting – allows for learning, consciousness-raising and advocating for change in one's home country that can then impact injustice and poverty in the world. The article explores a reverse mission approach to international social work based on ecumenical efforts of global mission education and applying the results to an international social work context.	
Brewis, Kielo. 2008. <i>Stress in the Multi-ethnic Customer Contacts of the Finnish Civil Servants: Developing Critical Pragmatic Intercultural Professionals.</i>	Academic dissertation	Brewis' research addresses the intercultural communication challenges of host culture adaptees in multi-ethnic customer contacts of two groups of Finnish civil servants. Previous research in the field of intercultural studies has mainly focused on studying the adjustment processes of the immigrant populations, whereas Brewis chooses to adopt a host culture focus.	Host-culture communication; stress; culture shock; cultural adaptation process; intercultural competence; intercultural training; customer service.
Chang, Wei-Wen. 2007. <i>Cultural Competence of International Humanitarian Workers.</i>	Article in the journal Adult Education Quarterly	This research paper's aim is to study nonprofit organizations' international workers' learning process in the context of cultural competence. To attain this understanding, Chang used a cultural competence attainment model, enlisted 10 Taiwanese international humanitarian workers, and explored how their expatriate experiences of local service influenced their cultural competence. Chang made some interesting observations in his study, and also suggests more research that focuses on the process of acquiring cultural competence is needed.	Cultural competence; cross-cultural learning; multicultural education; expatriate workers; humanitarian assistance; non-profit organization.
Council of Europe. 2008. <i>Intercultural competences in social services.</i>	Report from the working meeting in Strasbourg 5-6 June 2008.	This is a report from the working meeting of the Council of Europe on 5-6 June 2008, to which the Council of Europe had invited researchers, professionals, social workers, representatives from non-governmental organizations, and policy-makers to discuss and contribute their ideas to form a conceptual model that can help reinforce intercultural competence in social work. The project as a whole is a joint initiative from the Council of Europe and the European Commission and the general idea is to work together on issues of diversity, to explore interactive processes between cultures and to share a European vision and understanding of diversity across the continent. The goal is to bring about institutional change as well as change in legislation, the media, hospitals, schools, cities and neighborhoods.	

Table 1b. Key references, part 2/4.

Author, title and year of publication	Type of reference	Short description	Keywords (if provided)
Fook, Jan. 2004. <i>Some Considerations on the Potential Contributions of Intercultural Social Work.</i>	Article in the journal Social Work & Society	This article is a short position paper on how the field of intercultural social work can be approached in order to gain new insights on how we practice social work at local and global levels.	
Friedman, Victor J. & Berthoin Antal, Ariane. 2005. <i>Negotiating Reality: A Theory Action Approach to Intercultural Competence.</i>	Article in the journal Management Learning.	In this article, the authors want to provide an alternative to the dominant stream of thought in international management literature, regarding intercultural encounters in the global business environment, which entail culturally complex people in culturally complex situations – and which often can be portrayed as a problem for a conflict. Hence, the dominant stream of thought in international management literature offers generalized models of cultural difference, which are meant as guides to adaptation and to be used for avoiding conflict.	Action science; cross-cultural conflict resolution; international management; learning.
Gore, Kevin. 2007. <i>Networking Cultural Knowledge – An inter-active and experiential strategy to apply inter-cultural communication in business.</i>	Book.	This book provides a general understanding of communication in intercultural contexts, by examining it from various cultural aspects. It also provides some insight into why intercultural competence is needed, what impact culture has, how intercultural competence can be developed and how it can be measured. The book was originally created based on the practical approach to the study of intercultural communication for use in business, but the content can be applied to other fields of practice as well.	
Gray, Mel & Fook, Jan. 2004. <i>The Quest for a Universal Social Work: Some Issues and Implications</i>	Article in the journal Social Work Education.	This paper aims to examine some of the debates and issues in the context of generalizing social work across the globe. The paper also suggests some directions for a flexible approach that allows for differences, while still providing accountability, responsiveness and connectivity. The authors address tensions around issues of Westernization, localization and indigenization in social work, as well as the political implications involved, and try to create some kind of clarity around the complexities of international social work.	Indigenization, International Social Work, Globalization, Multiculturalism.
Guirdham, Mauren. 2005. <i>Communicating across cultures at work.</i>	Book.	This book examines intercultural communication in the workplace, and provides practical suggestions on how to develop cultural awareness and communication skills, while being grounded in theories, current news reports and research material, as well as the author's own research.	

Table 1c. Key references, part 3/4.

Author, title and year of publication	Type of reference	Short description	Keywords (if provided)
Haug, Erica. 2005. <i>Critical reflections on the emerging discourse of international social work</i> .	Article in the journal International Social Work	Haug's article critically explores international social work as an emerging discourse, paying attention to voice and power relations, while addressing how remainders of colonialism and professional imperialism affect current paradigms for international social work exchanges.	
Lustig, Myron W. & Koster, Jolene. 2006. <i>Intercultural competence – interpersonal communication across cultures</i> .	Book.	This book focuses on both the practical and the theoretical in examining intercultural competence, the need for it, the characteristics of it, the developing of it and the potential of it. The content is based on relevant research and addresses ethical and social issues in intercultural communication. The book notes both domestic issues (in this case the U.S.) and global issues. Furthermore, different theories and the significance of cultural patterns are presented, and the book is interactive in a way, since there are examples and 'exercises' for the reader to contemplate.	
Martin, Judith N. & Nakayama, Thomas K. 2000. <i>Intercultural Communication in Context</i> .	Book.	This book addresses the questions and issues that have emerged in the intercultural communication context and aims to help the reader explore his/her own cultural perceptions and biases, in order to develop appreciation for and an increased sensitivity towards different cultures and peoples. The book addresses the need for intercultural competence, different approaches in intercultural communication, the nature of culture, history, intercultural communication processes, intercultural transitions, benefits and challenges of intercultural relationships, culture and conflict, and the outlook for intercultural communication, among other things.	
Midgley, James. 2001. <i>Issues in International Social Work: Resolving Critical Debates in the Profession</i> .	Article in Journal of Social Work.	This is a review of the theoretical construction of international social work, that addresses some critical issues in this context, such as the definition of international social work, the nature and impact of globalization on social work, and the meaning of values, internationalism and cultural diversity. Midgley also addresses social work education and the importance of both globalization and regionalism in social work. Furthermore, Midgley proposes some ideas for accommodating and resolving differences.	Cultural Diversity, Globalization, Internationalism, International Social Work
Nagy, Géza & Falk, Diane S. 2000. <i>Dilemmas in international and cross-cultural social work education</i> .	Article in the journal International Social Work	This article addresses the impacts that ongoing global processes have on social work as a profession. The authors review literature on international and cross-cultural social work education, and discuss various models of incorporating international content into social work education. The authors suggest that there is a need for creating more specialized professional programs in social work education, as well as a need for developing new approaches to bring international and cross-cultural content and perspectives into the mainstream of social work education.	

Table 1d. Key references, part 4/4.

Author, title and year of publication	Type of reference	Short description	Keywords (if provided)
Salo-Lee, L; Malmberg, R. & Halinoja, R. 1998. <i>Me ja Muut – Kulttuurien-väläinen viestintä.</i>	Book.	This book addresses the typical challenges in intercultural communication and the general concepts of intercultural communication.	
Sharma, Piyush; Tam, Jackie L. M. & Kim, Namwoon. 2009. <i>Demystifying Intercultural Service Encounters: Toward a Comprehensive Conceptual Framework.</i>	Article in Journal of Service Research.	This article presents an exploratory qualitative study on intercultural service encounters, addressing the impact of perceived cultural distance and intercultural competence on interaction comfort, perceived service levels and satisfaction among other things.	Adequate service level; interaction comfort; intercultural competence; inter-role congruence; perceived cultural distance; perceived service level; satisfaction.
Stier, Jonas. 2004a. <i>Intercultural Competencies as a Means to Manage Intercultural Interactions in Social Work.</i>	Article in Journal of Intercultural Communication.	This article discusses the need for intercultural competence for social workers and also addresses the paradoxes of social work in an intercultural context. Furthermore, several qualities of intercultural competences that are useful for social workers are addressed. Stier concludes that intercultural competence is a precondition for successful social work in the future.	
Ting-Toomey, Stella. 1999. <i>Communicating Across Cultures.</i>	Book.	This book presents a framework for understanding the impact of culture on communication and aims to help readers develop intercultural communication competence. The book relies on both theory and practice, as the material is based on theories and research material, while all the same examples from around the world are provided, thus illustrating the theory presented and enhancing developing of intercultural competence.	
Varnier, Iris & Beamer, Linda. 2005. <i>Intercultural Communication in the Global Workplace.</i>	Book.	This book aims to provide a useful framework for thinking and talking about the theoretical foundations of global diversity, as well as the practical implications of working in an intercultural context (both locally and globally). The authors address the issues of culture and communication, mainly in the context of international business (the content can be transferred to other fields of practice as well though). The book addresses how cultural values and practices impact communication, and examines how companies and individuals communicate, focusing on the underlying cultural reasons for behavior.	

6 THE NEED FOR INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

According to Friedman and Berthoin Antal (2005:70) there is no single discipline that “captures the cognitive and behavioral dimensions of culture’s impact on interactions, nor is there one body of theory that provides guidance for dealing more effectively with such interactions”. However, researchers agree that successful intercultural encounters require intercultural competences – communicative as well as others – but what are the different imperatives for us as professionals in the social field, and as individuals, to develop these competences? There are several different reasons why intercultural competences should be developed and practiced.

Dramatic global changes suggest that we need corresponding changes in the way we think about ourselves and about the world (Yershova, DeJaeghere & Mestenhauser 2000:39). As inhabitants of the post-millennium world, we live in a globalized society characterized by global flows of people, ideas, technology, capital, knowledge, media images and cultural impulses, as well as by an increased intensity and frequency of intercultural encounters (Lustig & Koester 2006:2; Stier 2004a:2; Stier 2004b:16). Intercultural competence has received more attention as global interaction and cultural diversity has become prominent (Chang 2007:187). Chang (2007:187) states that in today’s societies, how to treat people from different cultural backgrounds considerately and with equality has become a pivotal issue.

As Gore (2007:36) puts it: “a walk around any major city in the world today reveals many different languages, many distinctive foods, a wide variety of goods and a divergent range of people”. The world has changed dramatically from what it was even a generation ago and in today’s society intercultural encounters are ubiquitous; they occur in different contexts – such as within neighborhoods, across national borders, in face-to-face interactions, through mediated channels, in personal life and in business (Lustig & Koester 2006:2).

Cities around the world continue to expand, and with this expansion the diversity of cultures within them increases (Gore 2007:36). Hence, intercultural encounters are inevitable (Stier 2004b:13). Interaction with others necessarily involves intercultural encoun-

ters in virtually every facet of life (e.g. in arenas such as work, school, family and the community). Multiculturalism is no longer a prospect, but a defining trait of the societies we live in (Council of Europe, Farrell 2008:6). Yershova, DeJaeghere and Mestenhauser (204:42) agree, arguing that cultural diversity – with all its opportunities and challenges – is here to stay, so we ought to learn to make the most out of it. Hence, intercultural competence has become essential – one might even say that we no longer have a choice about whether to live and communicate interculturally; our only choice is whether we will learn to do it well (Lustig & Koester 2006:2). Stier (2004a:3) claims that the changes in our society have led to a situation where the public sector as a whole – and the labor, education, health and social care sectors in particular – are faced with challenges unmatched in history.

The complexity of human culture can be both fascinating and bewildering. For some people the differences are stimulating and create a want to know more, whereas for others the differences cause discomfort and create a want to pull away (Gore 2007:36). In spite of how we react, we have little choice in avoiding cultural differences nowadays. If we choose to neglect to understand and respect differences, the result is likely to be misunderstandings and conflict. However, if we make an effort to learn about others unlike ourselves, it offers us the opportunity to enrich our lives, both mentally and materially (Gore 2007:36). Furthermore, the ability to see things from another person's perspective and having empathy can help prevent conflict situations in intercultural contexts internationally, as well as within the own culture (Salo-Lee, Malmberg & Halinoja 1998:117).

In other words, the need for intercultural competence is growing (Lustig & Koester 2006:3). Due to global diversity trends and domestic diversity trends, as well as economic, technological, demographic and social justice concerns, intercultural competence is now more vital than ever (Lustig & Koester 2006:3; Ting-Toomey 1999:4). In addition, developing intercultural competence provides interpersonal learning opportunities (Ting-Toomey 1999:4). Brewis (2008:17) claims that the pressure for adequate intercultural competence is significantly strong in Finland, since intercultural competence is not only demanded by the legal and organizational framework, but also expected by the multi-ethnic clients and by the general public. In addition, perceived lack of such is

easily reported in the media, which adds extra pressure (Brewis 2008:17). Stier (2004a:4) points out that developing and refining one's individual intercultural competence is a long and necessary process, as it is a valuable aspect of the social worker-client relationship, as well as of the personal and professional development of the social worker. In other words, developing intercultural competencies can be beneficial both professionally and personally.

6.1 The technological imperative

In past centuries, social relationships were confined to the distance of an easy walk and advanced with each technological advance such as the railroad, the automobile, the telephone, the radio, the TV and the movies. These relationships have now multiplied exponentially, partly because of the Internet (Martin & Nakayama 2000:2). We now live in what could be called the global village, a term coined by media guru Marshall McLuhan in the 1960's (Lustig & Koester 2006:4; Martin & Nakayama 2000:2). McLuhan (as cited in Lustig & Koester 2006:4) originally used the term to describe the consequences of the mass media's ability to bring events from the far reaches of the globe into people's homes, thus shrinking the world (Lustig & Koester 2006:4).

Today, the term 'global village' is used to describe the web of interconnections that modern technologies have created. Nowadays communications media such as the Internet, communication satellites and telephones make it possible to establish virtually instantaneous links to people who are thousands of miles away (Lustig & Koester 2006:4). In this global village we can access information about events from even the most remote parts of the world, as well as be accessed in numerous ways, allowing us to be involved in many different relationships simultaneously – all without face-to-face contact (Martin & Nakayama 2000:2). In addition, modern information technology allows people throughout the world to participate in the events and lives of people in other places. Many world events are experienced almost instantaneously and are no longer separated from us in time and space; for instance, natural disasters, and tragedies caused by humans are viewed worldwide on local television stations; immigrants and expatriates maintain their cultural ties by participating in Internet groups; and families stay in touch across national borders over the Internet (Lustig & Koester 2006:5-6).

Not only do we come in contact with more people electronically these days, we also come on contact with more people physically. Modern transportation systems contribute to the creation of the global village, making our society more mobile than ever before, and this mobility changes the nature of society, as well as affects the individuals involved (Lustig & Koester 2006:4; Martin & Nakayama 2000:4). Movement of people from one country and culture to another has become commonplace, something that is reflected in the multicultural populations of major cities such as New York, Mexico City, London, Nairobi, Istanbul or Hong Kong (Lustig & Koester 2006:4).

Due to increased mobility, travelling and modern information technology the amount of intercultural encounters have multiplied exponentially (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005:335). These increased contacts – facilitated by recent technological developments – underscore the significant interdependencies that link countries together. (Lustig & Koester 2006:6)

The technological imperative has increased the urgency for intercultural competence and because of the widespread availability of technologies and long-distance transportation, intercultural competence is now as important as it has ever been (Lustig & Koester 2006:6). As Martin and Nakayama (2000:5) put it: “increasing technology and mobility means that we can no longer be culturally illiterate in this shrinking interdependent world”.

6.2 The demographic imperative

Both individual nations and the world as a whole are currently going through what is perhaps the largest and most extensive wave of cultural mixing in recorded history (Lustig & Koester 2006:6). According to Lustig and Koester (2006:7) recent data show that for instance in the United States over 47 million people – that is about one in six – speak a language other than English at home; and of children in urban public schools, one-third speak a first language other than English. Furthermore, Sharma, Tam and Kim (2009:227) state that according to data from the United Nations in 2006, about 200 million people live outside their countries of origin. According to studies in the US (e.g.

Sowers & Ellis 2001:247) many immigrants have adapted well to their new surroundings, but there are still those who are in need of services.

The United States is not alone in the worldwide transformation of nations into multicultural societies (Lustig & Koester 2006:8). Stier (2004a:3) predicts that in the coming two decades immigration of relatives and a changing demographic structure will lead to an increasingly multicultural society in Sweden. The trend is the same for Finland: the growing multiculturalism of the Finnish society leads to increasing demands for host culture members' intercultural competence in various areas of life, including the public sector (Brewis 2008:18). In the middle of the 1970's the number of foreigners residing in Finland was as low as 10 000, but by the end of 2007 the number had grown to 132 632 (while the total population of the country was 5,3 million), which is over ten times the amount 30 years ago (Brewis 2008:18). Although it is visible that there has been a steady growth in the number of foreigners residing in Finland, one still needs to keep in mind that the amount of foreigners living in Finland – both numerically and percentage-wise (less than 3 % of the population in Finland is a citizen of some other country) – is among the lowest in the European Union states (Brewis 2008:18).

Even if we never step foot outside our own nation's borders, it's inevitable that we will meet people from different cultures and of different ethnic backgrounds. Learning to understand cultural differences will serve as a major factor in building a more harmonious, multicultural community (Ting-Toomey 1999:5-6). Most twenty-first century workforces will be diverse; they will consist of people from many different national and ethnic backgrounds and be composed of women to almost the same degree as men and include more people with disabilities (Guirdham 2005:8). Ting-Toomey (1999:5) also sees this development, stating that immigrants, minority group members and females make up an ever-growing part of the work force in today's society. Martin and Nakayama (2000:5) see this development taking place as well, as they state that around the world the workforce is more ethnically and racially diverse – in part, simply because there are more minorities now than before, but also because of civil rights efforts that have provided more opportunities for minorities in businesses, as well as in industries. This is the case in Finland as well: recently the government immigration policy has taken more interest in work related immigration, due to the ageing population and as a

means to secure the wellbeing of the country for the future (Brewis 2008:19). Brewis (2008:19) states that immigration issues have multiplied and diversified in the Finnish context over the past decade and a half, which has led to challenges regarding cultural learning for both sides, but especially for those who work with the immigrant population.

Workplace diversity on the global level represents both opportunities and challenges to both individuals and organizations. Adler (as cited in Ting-Toomey 1999:4) states that global leaders (both on an individual level and on an organizational level) need to work on intercultural competencies and “must be able to create a transcultural vision that isn’t bound by one national definition and also be able to clearly communicate this vision to others and translate the vision into practice in the diverse workplace”.

According to Lustig and Koester (2006:8) there is an ever-increasing pattern of cross-border movements throughout Europe, Asia, North America, South America, and the Middle East, which creates a changing distribution of people across the globe. This demographic imperative calls for a heightened emphasis on intercultural competence (Lustig & Koester 2006:8). According to Martin and Nakayama (2000:6) the heterogeneity presents both opportunities and challenges. Martin and Nakayama (2000:6) argue that we cannot dismiss the tension among heterogeneous groups, nor ignore the fact that diversity can pose challenges, but at the same time we should also note the opportunities of a culturally diverse society. Diversity can expand our horizons of what is possible – linguistically, politically, socially – as many different lifestyles and ways of thinking are brought together (Martin & Nakayama 2000:6). Salo-Lee, Malmberg and Halinoja (1998:146) state that it has been detected that the psychological wellbeing of immigrants is better in the receiving countries that practice multicultural politics and where different cultures are accepted, than in societies where cultural minorities are pressured to subdue to the majority’s culture. Also, the immigrants’ adaptation is affected by the prevailing attitudes in the receiving country (Salo-Lee, Malmberg & Halinoja 1998:146).

6.3 The economic imperative

Recently, the need for cultural difference has become a major concern of general management, marketing and human resources (Guirdham 2005:7). Guirdham (2005:7) suggests that one reason for this is the increasing globalization of business; another is the demonstration by researchers that cultural differences within modern societies are profound and significantly affect how people behave.

The economic success, as well as the economic growth and stability of a country in the global arena, increasingly depends on global markets and on individual and collective abilities to communicate competently with people from other cultures (Lustig & Koester 2006:3; Martin & Nakayama 2000:11). To compete effectively with other nations, it is important to understand how business is conducted in other countries (Martin & Nakayama 2000:13). Ting-Toomey (1999:4) argues that successful business today depends on effective globalization, which – in part – depends on dealing with a diverse workforce. Corporations and organizations can also move people from one country to another, which leads to a situation where – in most nations – the workforce has representatives from cultures throughout the world (Lustig & Koester 2006:4).

The domestic diversity calls for intercultural competences as the workforce becomes more diverse (Martin & Nakayama 2000:14), so even if one works within the national boundaries, intercultural competence is imperative, as most workplaces reflect increasing cultural diversity with employees being recruited globally (Lustig & Koester 2006:4; Varner & Beamer 2005:2-3). Thus, it's no longer safe to assume that clients, customers, business partners, and co-workers will have similar cultural views about what is important and appropriate (Lustig & Koester 2006:4). As Martin and Nakayama (2000:14) state, the trend towards globalization increases the importance of intercultural competence. Since today's markets, labor and money are all global intercultural skills are important (Varner & Beamer 2005:13).

According to Martin and Nakayama (2000:15) understanding cultural differences is not only about working with diverse employees, but also about seeing new business markets, developing new products etc. Hence, diversity can be seen as a potentially power-

ful economic ‘bonus’ if organizations perceive it as an opportunity. In other words, businesses can capitalize on diversity (Martin & Nakayama 2000:15). Lustig and Koester (2006:4) claim that the economic imperative for intercultural competence is powerful, pervasive, and likely to increase over the coming years.

6.4 The peace imperative

Martin and Nakayama (2000:17) state that it would be naïve to assume that understanding the issues of intercultural communication alone could end war and intercultural conflict, but the fact that these problems still occur underscore the need for intercultural awareness and competences, and for people to learn more about other social and cultural groups than their own. Because ultimately people, not countries, negotiate and sign peace treaties (Martin & Nakayama 2000:17). The vision of interdependence among cultural groups throughout the world has led Robert Shuter to declare that “culture is the single most important global communication issue” that humans face (Holmes 1997, as cited in Lustig & Koester 2006:8).

Recent problems in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia, Central Asia, Chechnya, and in the Sudan – to only mention a few – are examples where cultures have clashed over the right to control resources and ideologies (Lustig & Koester 2006:9). Lustig and Koester (2006:9) point out that such animosities do not occur only in third world countries, but also in highly developed countries such as the United States. In the United States in the year 2002 alone, there were close to 4,000 hate crimes committed towards individuals because of their race, culture or religion (Lustig & Koester 2006:9).

Adler (2002, as cited in Friedman & Berthoin Antal 2005:72) argues that one reason that conflicts occur is that people from different countries hold different basic fundamental values and assumptions, which causes them to see, interpret, evaluate and act on things differently. People rarely consider how their cultural underpinnings affect their behavior and their expectations (Friedman & Berthoin Antal 2005:72). Friedman and Berthoin Antal (2005:72) use the cultural iceberg simile of culture in saying that “people rarely look beneath the surface of their own cultural iceberg, and they are even less likely to be able to see below the surface of another person’s cultural iceberg”.

Berthoin Antal (2002, as cited in Friedman & Berthoin Antal 2005:72) claims that misunderstandings and conflicts occur when people interpret and judge what they see above the surface (of another person) based on what they themselves have below the surface – that is, their own norms, values and assumptions. However, as Barna (1998:173) points out, the assumption of similarity – that is, when surface similarities (such as clothing or language) cover significant differences at the deeper levels – can also cause cultural misunderstandings.

Differences that we may find difficult to understand can trigger defense mechanisms (Salo-Lee, Malmberg & Halinoja 1998:119). Regardless of how peculiar a fragment of culture seems, when it is placed within the whole tapestry of the culture, it generally makes sense (Varner & Beamer 2005:6). Intercultural competences can promote successful negotiations (e.g. between diplomats or political leaders), which we depend upon for solving global problems. Intercultural competences also come in handy in avoiding unnecessary conflict (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005:335).

6.5 The self-awareness imperative

One of the most important – and also one of the least obvious – reasons for developing intercultural competence, is the awareness it brings to our own cultural identity and background (Marting & Nakayama 2000:18). Peter Adler, who is a noted psychologist, has said that the study of intercultural communication begins as a journey into another culture and reality, and ends as a journey into one's own culture (Martin & Nakayama 2000:18).

In today's society, direct contacts with people who are different from us in our neighborhoods, schools and workplaces are an inevitable part of life (Ting-Toomey 1999:7). At first the differences may cause stress or discomfort, but if we invest time and energy in learning to deal with our own feelings and in reducing the discomfort of others, it may pay off considerably in the long run (Ting-Toomey 1999:7-8).

Friedman and Berthoin Antal (2005:73) point out that individuals can be amazingly complex cultural composites who belong to several cultural entities simultaneously at a

single point in time or over the course of a lifetime, and each culture to which an individual belongs or has belonged influences the individual's perception of reality and behavioral norms. Making broad categorizations can have a negative influence on the interaction, so instead it is preferable to make multiple categories, thus differentiating more (Langer 1989: 154). This means not only viewing someone as for instance Finnish, Muslim or black, but also keeping in mind that this person is, for example, also a man, a father and a teacher. By doing so, incorrect presumptions can be avoided; such as thinking that someone's ethnic background is what is determining their behavior at a specific time, when it might in fact be their gender or class identity that is crucial (Gudykunst 2005: 299).

Living in an increasingly diverse world, we can take the opportunity to learn more about our own cultural background and identity and what makes us similar and different from the people we interact with (Martin & Nakayama 2000:18). According to Ting-Toomey (1999:8) encountering a person who is different from ourselves helps us question our own routines and ways of thinking and behaving. Ting-Toomey (1999:8) refers to this as how "our ability to communicate effectively with cultural strangers can help us uncover our own diversity and worthiness". Friedman and Berthoin Antal (2005:70) share Ting-Toomey's (1999) and Barnlund's (1988, as cited in Friedman & Berthoin Antal 2005:70) views that the more people differ, the more they have to teach each other and learn from each other. Thus, cultural misunderstandings and conflicts that can occur when cultures meet can serve as learning experiences, and defining these as 'problems to be avoided' inevitably leads to learning opportunities being avoided as well (Friedman & Berthoin Antal 2005:75).

6.6 The ethical imperative

Living in an intercultural world presents many challenging ethical issues, as ethics often arise from cultures' and communities' perspectives on what is good and bad behavior (Martin & Nakayama 2000:18-19). Culture is tightly linked to this, as cultural values tell us what is "good" and what "ought to be good". That is, ethical principles are often culture bound, and intercultural conflicts arise from various notions of what is ethical

behavior, like for instance: what happens when two ethical systems collide (Martin & Nakayama 2000:19)?

According to Martin and Nakayama (2000:21) the study of intercultural communication – which facilitates improving intercultural competence – should help us judge what is ethical and unethical behavior given variations in cultural priorities, as well as help us identify guidelines for ethical behavior in intercultural contexts where ethics otherwise might clash.

6.7 The legal and bureaucratic imperative – in a social context

Stier (2004a:2) states that in the last decade issues regarding policies of immigration, refugee reception, segregation, marginality, and cultural integration have received much attention. Stier (2004a:2) suggests that one possible explanation for this might be that these policies are closely connected to the ideological cornerstones on which the welfare state is built. Examples of these cornerstones are for instance extensive state initiated programs in the areas of labor, health, education, housing and social work.

A starting point for any human-oriented work, such as social work, is that people have similar basic needs irrespective of culture, ethnicity or social background (Stier 2004a:13). Still, the discourse of social work in culturally diverse environments is based on human differences (Stier 2004a:13). Stier sees some risks in this, as making distinctions and comparisons between “us” and “them” can lead to observed differences being devalued and suddenly seen as deficiencies, weaknesses or unattractive qualities among the individuals or groups that are perceived as “different” (Stier 2004a:13). Therefore, it is important for social workers to be aware of and open about the consequences of these kinds of divisions (Stier 2004:13).

Martin (Council of Europe 2008:8) points out that intercultural competences should be at the core of social care institutions, organizations and professionals, as intercultural competences can help promote and ensure human rights as well as social rights. Stier (2004a:2-3) claims that people (decision makers as well as ‘commoners’) in a democratic society generally tend to support ideas of diversity and the public sector has initiated

programs and developed policies and strategies on how to meet the challenges of a transition into a multicultural society. However, as Stier (2004a:3) points out, abstract ideological objectives are not easily transferred into everyday life organizational practices.

Stier (2004a:3) also claims that issues of cultural diversity get ‘pushed out’ of the mid-stream of public debates by increased workloads, cutbacks in public spending, shortage of skilled personnel, low wages, new competence requirements and a lack of political and managerial support. At the same time, social workers – along with other professionals – are confronted with, and forced to deal with, new challenges that a multicultural context brings about (Stier 2004a:3). Jézéquel (Council of Europe 2008:31) also points out that since our societies have evolved from managing exceptions to integrating diversity, shouldn’t the attention now be turned to transforming the institutions to keep up with the social development?

Stier (2004a:12) states that social work is surrounded by collective clichés, which put strain on the profession as well as on social work practices. An important aspect of the social worker’s intercultural competence is therefore to be aware of these clichés and of their effects on client-interaction (Stier 2004a:12). This kind of discourse awareness refers to the social worker’s knowledge of and approach to the often ‘invisible’ discourse on cultural diversity, interculturality and cultural differences (Stier 2004a:12). Stier (2004a:12) exemplifies by illustrating the discussion on cultural diversity and immigration in Sweden, saying that much of the political and media coverage on ‘migration-related’ problems seem to “draw from two sources”. The first source Stier (2004a:12) describes is the problem imperative, which refers to the automatic assumptions that the primary outcome of migration, cross-cultural interaction and cultural diversity is a variety of problems, such as unemployment, ethnic friction and identity crisis. The second source, which is linked to the first source, is an “uncritical pathologization of the entire and significant portion of the population that immigrants constitute” (Stier 2004a:12). This pathologization is based on an ethnocentric worldview and implies that the immigrants would be better off if they were Swedish instead (Stier 2004a:12).

In addition, social problems are often not analyzed or treated as social problems but as cultural problems when it comes to people of different decent (Stier 2004a:12). As a

part of social workers' intercultural competence it is important not to adopt this view, but instead keep in mind that social action and individual behavior is just that, social and individual, and result from a multidimensional combination of personality traits, social factors and cultural background (Stier 2004a:12). In other words, one should avoid making inadequate conclusions where cultural differences are used to explain something 'all-human' or something highly individual (Stier 2004a:13). The challenge for social workers, according to Stier (2004a:13), lies in seeing the diversity in society as a whole, and especially the diversity within this 'group' of people. Another big challenge for the social worker is to see and understand which needs and reaction patterns are universal, and which are culture-specific or individual and unique for the client (Stier 2004:13).

Stier (2004a:13) also points out that although the original basis for social work is aiding the needy, it's highly ethnocentric and stereotyping to uncritically pity people from other countries. Instead, it is very important to have a non-patronizing interactional style in encounters with clients (Stier 2004a:13). Stier (2004a:14) points out that if social workers develop their discourse awareness they can better support and help those of their clients who struggle due to negative labels that society has assigned to them, as well as those who are alienated or marginalized.

In 2001 the Finnish government endorsed an Action Plan for Preventing Racism and Ethnic Discrimination, which states that the authorities in various fields need to prevent racism and ethnic discrimination in their work (Brewis 2008:16). There is also another central guiding principle for work involving contact with ethnic Non-Finns, namely the Non-Discrimination Act (21/2004, as amended by Act No 50/2006), which applies to all services rendered as well, including those in the customer service sector (Brewis 2008:16). The purpose of the Act, in this context, is to ensure that "information is always given in a manner understandable to the customer, taking into consideration any special requirements arising from each customer's particular background, including culture" (Brewis 2008:16-17).

Brewis (2008:17) states that in compliance with legal requirements many Finnish government departments have forms and information leaflets available in the language of

the largest immigration groups in Finland. However, with the multi-ethnic clientele, professionals often have to explain matters face-to-face, as it often happens that the clients are not familiar with the Finnish bureaucracy and Finnish ways of handling administrative matters (Brewis 2008:17). Therefore, in professional settings such as multi-ethnic customer contacts, it is crucial that the professional has developed adequate intercultural competence (Brewis 2008:17).

Brewis (2008:17) claims that Finnish civil servants are shown to need a fair amount of intercultural competence to fulfill the legal requirements of equal treatment and non-discrimination for all clients, so that the multi-ethnic clientele receives equal opportunities for participation. This includes understanding that equal treatment does not always necessarily mean similar treatment (Brewis 2008:17). Instead, as Brewis (2008:17) points out, sometimes equality can be attained through special adaptive measures. Stier (2004a:12) quotes the Swedish Integration Board (Integrationsverket) in saying that welfare institutions tend to have a collectivized approach to immigrants. In other words, it is common to view immigrants as a homogenous group – for instance, in the public debate you come across expressions such as ‘social care and public programs for immigrants’, ‘immigrant questions’ and ‘immigrant problems’, all of which have the underlying implication that immigrants are ‘the same’ (Stier 2004a:12). These kinds of expressions (and views) overestimate the similarities and disregard the enormous variation within the ‘group’.

An institution can reinforce its ability to become more interculturally competent when it “values diversity, undertakes cultural self-assessment, is conscious of the dynamics of cultural interaction, institutionalizes cultural knowledge and adapts to diversity” (Council of Europe 2008:7). Developing intercultural competences is a valuable asset on every level – political, economic and social – and could contribute to fading out the non-transparency and obscurity of our institutions (Council of Europe 2008:6).

6.8 The social care imperative

Nagy and Falk (2000:57) use the term ‘global village’ (earlier mentioned in 6.1.) in describing the world we live in today, stating that there is an increasing interdependence

between the ‘villagers’, and that the ‘village’ has many problems and conflicts that require both goodwill and creativity to be solved. According to Nagy and Falk (2000:57) there is a professional group in the ‘village’ that has the specific qualifications needed to tackle these problems, namely the professional social workers. However, as Nagy and Falk (2000:57) point out, “in order to be able to handle the rapidly changing situation, with all of the complicated problems, the whole profession must be imbued with a broadened and enlightened vision, one that incorporates both a global consciousness and new types of knowledge and skills”.

Sowers and Ellis (2001:245) argue that as the diversity of the population (in the United States) increases, social workers must respond with flexibility and openness. According to Tesoriero (2006:126) engaging with difference becomes a critical feature of social work practice in any local site in a globalizing world where time and space are compressed. Several researchers claim that international experiences may help social work students and practitioners move away from cultural ethnocentrism – where the dominant culture and its values are seen as the single standard against which all other groups are measured and judged; and toward ethno-relativism – which is characterized by an empathetic ability to switch between cultural world views and the ability to respect cultural differences (Abram, Slosar & Walls 2005:173).

Hokenstad, Khinduka and Midgley (1992:187) argue that professionals in the social field need to recognize that ethnic heterogeneity is now the norm and not the exception. Therefore, as Nagy and Falk (2000:57) state, the minimum requirement is that social workers are prepared to work locally in an increasingly multi-cultural society.

According to Sowers and Ellis (2001:253) our knowledgebase lags years behind the rapidly changing nature of social work practice, for instance in the field of cultural competence. Stier (2004a:7) claims that the elements of culture make up a prism through which the social worker communicates, interprets and experiences the world. Stier (2004a:7) points out that the difficulty of belonging to a culture is that we can become trapped in our own culture and frame of mind, or in other words be “unable to observe the very eyes with which we are viewing the world”. Many experts agree that with the growing cultural diversity of Western societies comes the responsibility for social ser-

vice providers to better prepare themselves to interact with their clients (Wehbi 2009:48). Sizoo et al. (2005, as cited in Sharma; Tam & Kim 2009:232) claim that employees with a higher degree of intercultural competence score higher on service attentiveness, revenue contribution, interpersonal skills, job satisfaction, and social satisfaction. Furthermore, according to Yu, Weiler and Ham (2001, as cited in Sharma; Tam & Kim 2009:232), service employees' intercultural competence relates positively with customer satisfaction as well.

According to Sowers and Ellis (2001:246) there are three primary issues facing the social work profession today, one of which is increasing cultural diversity (and the two others being expanding technological advancement and managed care). Sowers and Ellis compare the primary issues to currents of the ocean, stating that currents do not steer a mariner's course, but still they must be considered when that course is charted. Similarly, the trends listed as primary issues do not necessarily decide the future of social work, but they still have to be considered as the future development of social work as a profession is being planned (Sowers & Ellis 2001:246).

According to Nagy and Falk (2000:49) social problems (such as poverty, uncontrolled population growth, drug traffic and abuse, human rights violations and environmental disasters) flow back and forth across national borders and it has become impossible to separate national economic forces from global economic forces. Furthermore, there is an increasing international cross-fertilization of social policy ideas and approaches, which in turn leads to an increasing interdependence (Nagy & Falk 2000:49). Nagy and Falk (2000:49) argue that these processes have a dramatic impact on the social work profession (and on the education needs of students preparing to work in the social field).

Myriam Jézéquel (Council of Europe 2008:28) states that working with migrant communities often uncovers a cultural clash between the social workers and their clients, since they both can have very different legal frameworks regarding issues related to education, children's rights and women's rights. Communication plays a big role in social work, as it allows expression of needs and depiction of life situations (Stier 2004a:5). Stier (2004a:5) concludes that it is therefore inevitable that differences in the client's and social worker's culture, personality, experiences, expectations, needs and

ambitions play a notable role in the mutual interaction and relationship. Furthermore, social workers are seldom familiar with other legal systems than that of their own culture, and can often be faced with the dilemma of balancing their own set of values and perceptions of what is “wrong” and “right” with those of the client (Council of Europe 2008:28). What social workers might see as a problem that needs to be fixed can by the other party be perceived as an invasion of privacy or an attack of one’s personal conviction (Council of Europe 2008:28). It is therefore important that the social worker can figure out a way to be helpful without being invasive; in other words develop a partnership that contributes to common solutions, which are co-constructed with all the parties involved and respectful of everyone’s values and identities (Council of Europe 2008:28-29).

Stier (2004a:7) points out that the linguistic (verbal and non-verbal) aspects of the client-social worker relationship are of utmost importance. Not all clients have the language competence necessary to fully understand written messages, verbal statements or non-verbal cues, and even though some clients may possess optimal language competence, ‘authoritative’ language or communicative nuances can cause trouble. It works the other way as well, as social workers sometimes have trouble understanding their clients’ “intentions, interpretations, linguistic peculiarities or definitions of the situation” (Stier 2004a:7). Jézéquel (Council of Europe 2008:29) points out that improving migrant access to services also requires institutions’ capacity to reach out to migrants.

The question of intercultural competence in social services is “a feature of the necessary progress of European societies towards a view of societal and institutional functioning which combines the different cultural manifestations of human behaviour” (Council of Europe 2008:4). The way in which our institutions approach cultural difference will determine the nature and operation of social services (Council of Europe 2008:4).

According to Engstrom and Jones (2007:136) social work educators agree that practitioners must be able to work within the context of other cultures, and that the profession as a whole has to be able to help the larger society to understand different cultures. Fook (2004:86) points out that by being willing to investigate the bases of our intercultural understandings, we might hope to build practices and approaches, which can respond to

new and changing contexts. Furthermore, we can hope to begin to develop our ideas about how social work might be more inclusive of various differences (Fook 2004:86).

7 THE PARADOXES OF SOCIAL WORK AND INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE IN SOCIAL WORK

Social work comprises a wide variety of domains, such as elderly care, care of people with disabilities, and support and assistance to children, youth, adults and families with special needs; and social workers often face incompatible expectations and apparent paradoxes in their work (Stier 2004a:4). Stier (2004a:4) explains this paradox by saying that on one hand, clients should be offered individual solutions to their specific problems in a way that's flexible and in sync with their needs and abilities, as well as meaningful to them, while on the other hand, Holgersson (2000, as quoted by Stier 2004a:4-5) states that social work needs to be "planned and carried out within transparent collective organizational and judicial frameworks, that is, according to laws, ordinances, regulations and political objectives that are applicable to all clients".

In addition, social workers continuously struggle with the conflict of simultaneously being both a fellow human and a public employee; and trying to find a balance between closeness and distance, client self-determination and intervention, social support and individual responsibility, flexibility and firmness of principles (Stier 2004a:5).

Mirka Necasova (Council of Europe 2008:19) has conducted a research project on how social workers manage crises in their work environment and came to similar conclusions as Stier (2004a), stating that social workers are expected to be flexible, responsive and caring; but at the same time they are bound by the detached and impersonal rules of organizational bureaucracy. In addition, social workers are faced with the dilemma of satisfying a high demand for services, while having limited resources (Council of Europe 2008:19).

Stier (2004a:13-14) states that besides profession-specific knowledge and skills, social workers need an elaborate understanding of human behavior and of the structural condi-

tions of society. Furthermore, social workers need to manage inter-client differences or disputes that may originate in cultural differences (both from the client's cultural background and from the social worker's own cultural background), which can cause misunderstandings or conflicts (Stier 2004a:5). Social work in a multicultural context creates a need for intercultural competencies, something that Stier (2004a:14) predicts to become further accentuated in the future.

Culture and emotions are closely intertwined, as culture provides individuals with a sense of identity, belonging and community, among other things (Stier 2004a:6). Stier (2004a:6) states that we as human beings are somewhat ethnocentric and prone to defend our own culture, even if we are unwilling to admit it. Therefore, if someone critiques our culture or way of life, it can feel like critique of us as persons and be perceived as "a threat to our identity, sense of security and psychological well-being" (Stier 2004a:6).

Stier (2004a:7) emphasizes that differences in the view of health and illness, abuse, authorities, taboos, moral and ethics and sex roles, can lead to a lot of misunderstandings and conflicts. In other words, miscommunication in client-social worker interaction can originate in cross-cultural variations, such as the ones listed above or differences in proxemics, eye contact, touching, gestures and expressing emotions (Stier 2004a:8). Therefore, "providing efficient social work in a respectful way in global and multicultural working environments is dependent on intercultural competence" (Stier 2004a:7).

8 RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

One could say that all imperatives for intercultural competence can more or less be applied to the different views on international social work, but for each approach to international social work there are imperatives, which are more central than others. Stier (2004b:139) states that intercultural competence can be seen as the knowledge and skills that an individual needs in order to be able to function and master an intercultural encounter. Given the variation in definitions of international social work, it is evident that the intercultural encounters can be of many different kinds as well, causing some imper-

atives to weigh more for a specific definition of international social work than others, while other imperatives might play a bigger role for another definition of international social work.

8.1 The need for intercultural competence in international social work in the context of international social work being defined as social work in international organizations

When defining international social work as social work in international organizations, such as the Red Cross or the United Nations, international social work entails social work activities, which take place at a global or international level or activities involving international exchanges. In international organizations contacts and relationships are of utmost importance, so the technological imperative for intercultural competence is relevant. Living in the 'global village', allows us to establish virtually instantaneous links to people who are thousands of miles away, and we can access information about events from even the most remote parts of the world, allowing us to be involved in many different relationships simultaneously, as well as allowing us to experience many world events almost instantaneously (Lustig & Koester 2006:4-6; Martin & Nakayama 2000:2). All of this is of importance for international social work in international organizations, as it allows for more effective outreach and better control over what is going on around the world, allowing them to reach out a lot faster than what would have been possible before.

The demographic imperative for intercultural competence is also of relevance in the context of defining international social work as social work in international organizations. The workforce in today's society is becoming increasingly ethnically and racially diverse (Guirdham 2005:8; Martin & Nakayama 2000:5; Ting-Toomey 1999:5), and this phenomenon on a global level presents both opportunities and challenges, to both individuals and organizations, international organizations included. The phenomenon also calls for intercultural competence in global leaders, in the shape of ability to create a transcultural vision that is not bound by one nation's definition, as well as ability to translate the vision into practice (Ting-Toomey 1999:4). In international organizations, this is relevant as well, as the work cannot be bound by only one nation's definitions,

and the transcultural vision that the organization has, has to be applicable in practical situations as well. Here the self-awareness imperative comes in play, as this imperative calls for being aware of one's own culture and how it affects one's behavior and thereby avoid incorrect presumptions or incorrect notions of our own culture being the 'only right one'. Another imperative that supports this is the ethical imperative, which – according to Martin and Nakayama (2000:21) stresses intercultural competence as a means to identify guidelines for ethical behavior in intercultural contexts where ethics may otherwise clash.

The perhaps most important imperative for intercultural competence in the context of international social work being defined as social work in international organizations, is the peace imperative. As Martin and Nakayama (2000:17) state, it would be naïve to assume that understanding the issues of intercultural communication alone could end war and intercultural conflict – which are issues that international organizations have to work with – but the fact that these problems still occur underscores the need for intercultural awareness and competence, and for people to learn more about other cultural groups than their own. Haug (2005:130) states that the globally interconnected crises we face today can be shown to have its roots in the imbalance caused by the global hegemony of white/Western systems, structures and ideologies. Haug (2005:130) then quotes Einstein in saying that “no problem can be solved by the same consciousness which created it”. Therefore, it is important that the voices that have previously been excluded, are now allowed to participate in the international social work conversation, as the answers, innovations and insights that are needed to solve the crises our world faces today will not come from those who have previously been seen as experts, but from those on the margins (Haug 2005:130-131). Also, since – in accordance with the peace imperative – intercultural competence can promote successful negotiations (e.g. between diplomats or political leaders) when conflicts have occurred, or even prevent unnecessary conflicts from occurring, intercultural competence in social work in international organizations is vital.

Another imperative that underscores the need for intercultural competence in international social work as social work in international organizations is the legal and bureaucratic imperative (in a social context). As a starting point for any human-oriented work,

such as social work, is that people have similar basic needs (Stier 2004a:13), intercultural competence in international social work in international organization is pivotal. Furthermore, the kind of discourse awareness that the legal and bureaucratic imperative calls for (Stier 2004a:12), is necessary in social work in international organizations as well. In addition, according to the legal and bureaucratic imperative, intercultural competence is a valuable asset on every level in society – political, economic, and social – and it could help contribute to fading out the non-transparency and obscurity of our institutions. This would be beneficial for social work at international organizations as well. Furthermore, the legal and bureaucratic imperative for intercultural competence, stresses that intercultural competence should be at the core of social care institutions, organizations and professionals, as it can help ensure human rights as well as social rights – something that is central for social work in international organizations.

The social care imperative for intercultural competence in international social work as social work in international organizations, can be illustrated by Nagy and Falk's (2000:57) description the world as a 'global village' that has many problems and conflicts and where increasing interdependencies between the villagers prevails. According to Nagy and Falk (2000:57) there is a professional group in the 'village' that has the specific qualifications needed to tackle these problems, namely the professional social workers. In social work in international organizations this comes forth in the efforts to mediate in conflicts and alleviate issues and crisis of global concern, as well as in promoting togetherness and open-mindedness.

8.2 The need for intercultural competence in international social work the context of international social work being defined as social work in different parts of the world

When international social work is defined as professional social work in different parts of the world, the technological imperative plays a significant role, as international social work as social work in different parts of the world calls for modern transportation systems and increased mobility in order to work effectively, and in order for different needs around the world to be answered as quickly as possible.

The demographic imperative for intercultural competence is also of relevance for international social work as social work in different parts of the world. It is not enough to learn about the culture of the specific country you will be working in, since – as Lustig and Koester (2006:6) state – both individual nations and the world as a whole is going through what is perhaps the most extensive wave of cultural mixing in recorded history, which shows in what Lustig and Koester (2006:8) describe as an ever-increasing pattern of cross-border movement throughout Europe, Asia, North America, South America and the Middle East.

When defining international social work as social work in different parts of the world, the self-awareness imperative is important, as it is important to understand one's own culture and the effects it has on oneself, in order to better be able to understand other people's culture and the effects it has on them (e.g. Ting-Toomey 1999:8). Several authors, like Ting-Toomey (1999), Friedman and Berthoin Antal (2005) and Barnlund (1988, as cited in Friedman & Berthoin Antal 2005), share the opinion that the more people differ, the more they have to teach each other and learn from each other, a mentality that comes in handy in social work in different parts of the world. The ethical imperative is also central, as – according to Martin and Nakayama (2000:21) - intercultural competence helps us judge what is ethical and unethical behavior given variations in cultural priorities, as well as helps us identify guidelines for ethical behavior in intercultural contexts where ethics may otherwise clash. Western definitions of social work and concepts included in these definitions aren't necessarily always valid, as social work is not confined to only democratic societies, but instead practiced in many nondemocratic societies as well (Risler et al. 2003, as cited in Bidgood, Holosko & Taylor 2003:404). Westerns knowledge systems, ideologies, social care and development methods, as well as many of the practice methods that dominate Western social work are not only inappropriate, but also inadequate and ineffective in other countries, especially Third World countries, and for addressing the global problems of an ecological, social, spiritual, security-related or economic nature (Haug 2005:130; Bidgood, Holosko & Taylor 2003:404). Therefore, the ethical imperative plays a significant role when doing international social work in a country other than your own, as it can promote avoiding unnecessary conflicts and misunderstandings caused by for instance misjudgments.

The legal and bureaucratic imperative comes into play in this context as well, considering that a starting point for any human-oriented work, like social work, is that people have similar basic needs irrespective of culture, ethnicity or cultural background (Stier 2004a:13). Furthermore, as Stier (2004a:13) points out, it is highly ethnocentric and stereotyping to uncritically pity people from other countries, so although the original basis for social work is helping the needy, there is no excuse for not having a non-patronizing interactional style in encounters with clients of diverse cultural backgrounds. This is also evident in social work in different parts of the world, although you may be there to help, there are different ways of going about this, and developing intercultural competence can help you find an appropriate way.

The social care imperative for intercultural competence in international social work as social work practice in different parts of the world, comes forth in that social workers often are faced with the dilemma of balancing their own set of values and culturally shaped perceptions of 'right' and 'wrong' against those of their clients, due to the fact that social workers are seldom thoroughly familiar with other legal systems than that of their own country (Council of Europe 2008:28). This can be the case in social work in different parts of the world as well, where the professionals own values and cultural patterns may not necessarily correspond to those of the local population. Here a reverse mission approach can be beneficial. Reverse mission as a form of intercultural competence in international social work stresses human rights and integrates the values of people of diverse cultures to a higher degree than some elitist notions of service, such as the assumptions of Western countries 'giving' knowledge or 'helping' those in 'underdeveloped' countries. Salo-Lee, Malmberg and Halinoja (1998:117) state that intercultural competence requires humbleness to see things through other perspectives than the ones we may consider 'more correct', and courage to appreciate our own culture and its values as well as other cultures and their values. This takes a lot of dedication and learning (Salo-Lee, Malmberg & Halioja 1998:117), but can definitely be beneficial in international social work in different parts of the world.

8.3 The need for intercultural competence in international social work in the context of international social work being defined as social work that focuses on issues of international concern

Some authors, like Gray and Fook (2004) state that international social work can also be defined as social work that focuses on issues of international concern, such as issues related to refugees or ecological issues, and/or the way in which these are worked with on an international or domestic level. When this definition of international social work is used, the demographic imperative for intercultural competence is somewhat important because of the extensive cultural mixing that is happening in our societies today, but an even more relevant imperative is the technological imperative for intercultural competence. The technological imperative is relevant in the sense that issues related to refugees and ecological issues, as well as other international issues, transcend national borders, a movement that is made easier by the technological advances and increased mobility that characterize the modern society today. As social problems – such as poverty, uncontrolled population growth, drug traffic and abuse, human rights violations and environmental disasters – also flow back and forth between national borders (Nagy & Falk 2000:49), the social care imperative for intercultural competence becomes relevant as well.

In this context, the economic imperative for intercultural competence is also of relevance. The economic imperative calls for intercultural competence, due to the increasing globalization of business, economic systems, markets, labor and money (Guirdham 2005:7; Ting-Toomey 1999:4; Varner & Beamer 2005:13). Since the national borders no longer work effectively as ‘barriers’ for flows of money, workforce, markets and economic systems, they have now become issues of international concern, thereby also affecting international social work in the context of social work that focuses on issues of international concern. Another imperative that is relevant for this definition of international social work is the peace imperative, as wars and conflicts do not affect only the parties involved, but have effects on a global level as well. We depend on intercultural competence for solving global problems and issues of international concern.

8.4 The need for intercultural competence in international social work in the context of international social work being defined as ‘domestic’ social work with a culturally diverse clientele

When international social work is defined as social work practice with immigrants, refugees or ethnic minorities in the social worker’s own country, the focus lies on cultural diversity and encounters among cultural groups (Nagy & Falk 2000:53). This kind of social work practice usually occurs in multi-ethnic, multi-lingual or multi-racial environments, such as urban areas with large ethnic concentrations (Nagy & Falk 2000:53) and experts who support this definition also claim that social work education should include more international content, as to enhance domestic social workers’ ability to properly understand the cultural backgrounds of immigrants and refugees and be more sensitive to their needs (Midgley 2001:25).

The technological imperative for intercultural competence is relevant for this definition of international social work in the sense that the technological advances and modern transportation systems have increased mobility and made movement of people from one country and culture to another commonplace, leading to an ever-increasing multiculturalism in major cities around the world, changing the nature of society and affecting the individuals involved (Lustig & Koester 2006:4, Martin & Nakayama 2000:4). This multiplies the amount of intercultural encounters and underscores the significant interdependencies linking countries (and cultures) together (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005:335; Lustig & Koester 2006:6).

One of the perhaps most prominent imperatives for intercultural competence in the context of international social work as ‘domestic’ social work with a culturally diverse clientele is the demographic imperative. According to data from the United Nations, about 200 million people live outside their countries of origin (Sharma, Tam & Kim 2009:227), and in the U.S. alone over 47 million people – that is one in six – speak a language other than English at home (Lustig & Koester 2006:7). In Finland, there has also been a movement towards a more multicultural society, as at the end of 2007 the number of non-Finns residing in Finland was 132 632, which is ten times the amount 30

years ago (Brewis 2008:18). Although many immigrants worldwide have adapted well, there are those in need of services (Sowers & Ellis 2001:247), and this is where intercultural competence in international social work as ‘domestic’ social work with a culturally diverse clientele comes in.

According to several authors (e.g. Ting-Toomey 1999:5-6), it is inevitable that we will meet people from different cultures and of different ethnic backgrounds even if we never set foot outside our own nation’s borders. This underscores the need for intercultural competence in international social work as ‘domestic’ social work with a culturally diverse clientele, as – according to Ting-Toomey (1999:5-6) – learning to understand cultural differences will serve as a major factor in building a more harmonious, multicultural community.

Also, the demographic imperative stresses the fact that the workforce will become more diverse (Guirdham 2005:8; Martin & Nakayama 2000:5; Ting-Toomey 1999:5), something which in turn affects the need for intercultural competence in international social work as ‘domestic’ social work with a culturally diverse clientele. Not only will the diversity of the clientele demand intercultural competence, but the diversity within the workforce both demands intercultural competence and promotes developing of such.

In Finland, the government immigration policy has taken more interest in work related immigration – due to the aging population and as a means to secure the well-being of the country for the future – and immigration issues have multiplied and diversified in the Finnish context over the past decade and a half, which in turn has led to challenges for cultural learning on both sides, but especially for those who work with the immigrant population (Brewis 2008:19). This in itself calls for intercultural competence in international social work as ‘domestic’ social work with a diverse clientele. In order to be able to not only receive immigrants, but also do so in an appropriate and respectful way, intercultural competence is vital among those working with ‘domestic’ social work with a diverse clientele in particular, as well as for ‘commoners’ in general. Supporting this statement is research that shows that the psychological wellbeing of immigrants is better in the receiving countries that practice multicultural politics, and where different cultures are accepted, than in societies where cultural minorities are pressured to subdue

to the majority's culture (Salo-Lee, Malmberg & Halinoja 1999:146). In addition, the immigrants' adaptation is affected by the prevailing attitudes in the receiving country (Salo-Lee, Malmberg & Halinoja 1999:146).

The demographic imperative calls for a heightened emphasis on intercultural competence (Lustig & Koester 2006:8), as the heterogeneity presents both opportunities and challenges (Martin & Nakayama 2000:6). There will be tension among heterogeneous groups, but at the same time a culturally diverse society presents a lot of opportunities (Martin & Nakayama 2000:6). Therefore, it is important for people working in the social field with a culturally diverse clientele to be able to see these opportunities and make the most of them. Here the importance of the ethical imperative comes forth as well, as according to this imperative – as stated by Martin and Nakayama (2000:21) – intercultural competence helps us judge what is ethical and unethical behavior given variations in cultural priorities, as well as helps us identify guidelines for ethical behavior in intercultural contexts where ethics may otherwise clash.

Another of the perhaps most relevant imperatives in the context of international social work being defined as 'domestic' social work with a culturally diverse clientele, is the social care imperative. According to this imperative, the minimum requirement is that social workers are prepared to work locally in an increasing multi-cultural society (Nagy & Falk 2000:57), as with the growing cultural diversity in Western societies, comes the responsibility for social service providers to better prepare themselves to interact with their clients (Wehbi 2009:48). The social care imperative also manifests itself in that social workers often face dilemmas when their own cultural patterns and value-systems clash with those of their clients, something that is bound to happen at some point when working with a culturally diverse clientele, and which requires intercultural competence to be handled appropriately. Also, the way in which our institutions approach cultural difference will determine the nature and operation of social services (Council of Europe 2008:4), making this a matter of great importance in 'domestic' social work with a culturally diverse clientele. The fact that the social work profession as a whole needs to be able to help the larger society understand different cultures (Engstrom & Jones 2007:136), further underscores the social care imperative for inter-

cultural competence in international social work as ‘domestic’ social work with a culturally diverse clientele.

When international social work is defined as ‘domestic’ social work with a culturally diverse clientele, the self-awareness imperative for intercultural competence is of importance, as being aware of one’s own culture and the effects it has on behavior and values helps the individual understand other cultures and the effects they have on others’ behavior and values. Friedman and Berthoin Antal (2005:75) state that intercultural competence involves overcoming the boundaries set by an individual’s culturally shaped repertoire and creating new responses, thereby expanding the options of potential interpretations and behaviors available in the interaction at hand, as well as for future interactions. Salo-Lee, Malmberg and Halinoja (1998:134) agree, stating that developing intercultural competence requires an ability to control the accepted behavioral patterns of our own culture and awareness of behavioral patterns that differ from these. Furthermore, developing intercultural competence requires knowledge about our own culture and about other cultures in general (Salo-Lee, Malmberg & Halinoja 1998:116). Also, realizing that individuals are complex cultural composites (Friedman & Berthoin Antal 2005:73), and avoiding making broad categorizations, helps avoid making incorrect presumptions (Gudykunst 2005:299; Langer 1989:154) – something that is necessary when working with people of various cultural backgrounds. Also, as – according to the self-awareness imperative – our ability to communicate effectively with people of different cultural backgrounds than ourselves can help us uncover our own diversity and worthiness (Ting-Toomey 1999:8), developing intercultural competence can serve as a supporting factor in professional growth for people in the social field working with a culturally diverse clientele.

The ethical imperative also plays a role in this contexts, as it stresses that intercultural competence helps us judge what is ethical and unethical behavior given variations in cultural priorities, as well as helps us identify guidelines for ethical behavior in intercultural contexts where ethics may otherwise clash (Martin & Nakayama 2000:21) – which of course is central when working, often with sensitive matters, with a culturally diverse clientele.

In the context of international social work as ‘domestic’ social work with a culturally diverse clientele, the legal and bureaucratic imperative is pivotal. This imperative stresses the importance of discourse awareness, which refers to the social worker’s knowledge and approach to the often ‘invisible’ discourse on cultural diversity, interculturality and cultural difference (Stier 2004a:12). Being aware of this and the effects the discourse and clichés can have on the client-interaction is of great importance when working with a culturally diverse clientele. Realizing that social problems are not always treated as social problems, but instead as cultural problems is also of importance, something that further supports the legal and bureaucratic imperative. At the same time, having a non-patronizing interactional style and avoiding uncritically pitying people from other countries – as mentioned in the legal and bureaucratic imperative – are also important factors in ‘domestic’ social work with a culturally diverse clientele. In Finland the legal and bureaucratic imperative for intercultural competence comes across as Finnish civil servants needing a fair amount of intercultural competence in order to fulfill the legal requirements of equal treatment and non-discrimination for all clients, so that the multi-ethnic clientele receives equal opportunities for participation.

8.5 The need for intercultural competence in international social work in the context of international social work being defined as a network of contacts and exchanges of professional knowledge

If international social work is defined as a network of contacts and exchanges of professional knowledge between social workers from different countries, knowledge of social work practice in other countries and cultures is seen as something that provides a basis for critical reflection, which expands and enriches the practice in the own country (Abram, Slosar & Walls 2005:174). Supporters of this definition also think that studying social problems in other countries can help social workers learn how different countries identify and define needs, which can increase their awareness of social problems in their own societies (Gilin & Young 2009:37).

The technological imperative for intercultural competence is relevant for this definition of international social work, as it emphasizes the increase in contacts and relationships, both electronically and face-to-face. Because of technical advances such as the railroad, the automobile, the telephone and the Internet (to mention a few), we now live a 'global village' with a complex web of interconnections, increasing interdependencies that link countries together (Lustig & Koester 2006:4,6; Martin & Nakayama 2000:2).

The definition of international social work as a network of contacts and exchanges of professional knowledge, calls for the social worker being able to think and act both locally and globally (Ife 2000, as cited in Yip 2005:595). This is something that corresponds to Martin and Nakayama's (2000:5) statement regarding the technological imperative for intercultural competence, namely that "increasing technology and mobility means that we can no longer be culturally illiterate in this shrinking interdependent world".

The technological imperative also stresses that our society is more mobile than ever, which corresponds to Midgley's (2001:22) statement that among social workers as well, there is an enhanced international engagement, as social workers are more frequently engaged in international collaboration, more interested in developments in other countries and travel more often to international meetings and conferences.

When international social work is defined as a network of contacts and exchanges of professional knowledge, the demographic imperative for intercultural competence inevitably comes to mind, as it stresses the diversification of the workforce. As this definition of international social work stresses that it is in fact *professional* knowledge and contacts that are being exchanged, it becomes clear that intercultural competence is needed in order to the exchanges to flow smoothly between professionals with different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. The social care imperative comes forth in the increasing cross-fertilization of social policy ideas and approaches, which leads to an increased interdependence (Nagy & Falk 2000:49). Furthermore, the self-awareness imperative also becomes relevant, in the sense that in order to properly be able to understand other cultures and the impact they have on other people's lives, values and behavior, one

needs to understand one's own culture and the impact it has on oneself, one's values and one's behavior.

9 CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

9.1 Critical reflections

I realize that I have sometimes referred to secondary sources, and I want to point out that I am aware of this and know that it is not the preferable way. However, in the cases that I have referred to a secondary source it has been because I was unable to obtain the primary source, and I still felt that the information was important to include, so therefore I have sometimes opted to refer to secondary sources.

I also realize that a different choice of selection criteria might have affected the results, as the study of intercultural competence is a rather new field, and had I chosen to include older literature than I did, the results might have differed somewhat. However, I am pleased with the selection criteria I had chosen, since I feel it was more appropriate for my study to use up to date literature and studies, as my intention was not to compare how views on the field have changed over time, but instead to focus on the present.

Also, I did consider the fact that a different choice of research method would have been possible and could have provided interesting insights. I am still pleased with my choice of research method though, as I feel it was appropriate for my study's aim and the research questions I had formed.

In addition, the fact that I was unable to find and research that focused on exactly what I was focusing on was both a challenge and an inspiration. It was a challenge in the sense that it made it impossible for me to see what other people had concluded on the same issues and to compare my research to theirs. At the same time it was inspirational as well, as it made me push even harder to get my research done, so that there now would be a study with this specific focus.

I was also aware of the fact that research methodology is linked to culture and therefore I tried to choose references with culturally diverse authors, instead of only qualifying work done by the dominating group of authors in the field on international social work and intercultural competence. I felt that the diversity of references was a strength, especially in my field of study. All the same, I am aware of the fact that the results cannot necessarily be generalized (at least not to a higher degree), as this would require an even broader approach and possibly a combination of different methods.

Furthermore, I also realize that doing the categorization differently, might have caused other aspects to surface (than the ones that did now), so although I am pleased with the categorization I did, I would not claim that the results and conclusions I have made are the only 'right' ones. I am also aware of the fact that although I might have found connections between different things, it does not mean that these connections are 'absolute truths' that can be trusted fully. However, if the same 'opinions' surface several times in multiple references, the likelihood of these opinions being trustworthy is higher.

Finally, I want to point out that I am very aware of the fact that my own views and values might have affected my study, as I have a very strong passion for intercultural issues and equality. I did however try to be as open as possible throughout the research process and I believe this improves reliability.

9.2 Result discussion

Doing my research and writing my thesis I had the hypothesis that intercultural competence is important in international social work, and to figure out whether or not this actually was the case (that is, if relevant literature backs it up – and if so, on which grounds). I formed some key questions to help me shed light on my problem. My key questions were:

1. Why is intercultural competence needed?
2. Why is intercultural competence needed specifically among people working in the social field?
3. Why is intercultural competence needed in international social work?

It turned out that my hypothesis was correct, as intercultural competence proved to be of importance in intercultural social work (and in social work in general), regardless of which definition of international social work that was examined (more on this in chapter 8).

Before discussing the results further, I want to point out that I agree with the results, as I find intercultural competence to be of key importance both professionally and personally.

9.2.1 Addressing why intercultural competence is needed in general

On a general level, intercultural competence is needed because both individual nations and the world as a whole are currently going through what is perhaps the largest and most extensive wave of cultural mixing in recorded history (Lustig & Koester 2006:6). Sharma, Tam and Kim (2009:227) state that according to data from the United Nations from 2006, about 200 million people live outside their countries of origin.

We now live in a globalized society characterized by global flows of people, ideas, technology, capital, knowledge, media images and cultural impulses, as well as by an increased intensity and frequency of intercultural encounters (Lustig & Koester 2006:2; Stier 2004b:16; Stier 2004a:2). Due to global diversity trends and domestic diversity trends, as well as economic, technological, demographic and social justice concerns, intercultural competence is now more vital than ever (Lustig & Koester 2006:3; Ting-Toomey 1999:4). As Martin and Nakayama (2000:14) state, the trend towards globalization increases the importance of intercultural competence. Since today's markets, labor and money are all global, intercultural skills are important (Varner & Beamer 2005:13). Most twenty-first century workforces will be diverse, which causes an increased demand for intercultural competence (Guirdham 2005:8; Martin & Nakayama 2000:5; Ting-Toomey 1999:5).

In today's society intercultural encounters are ubiquitous; they occur in different contexts such as within neighborhoods, across national borders, in face-to-face interactions, through mediated channels, in personal life and in business (Lustig & Koester 2006:2).

Interaction with others necessarily involves intercultural encounters in virtually every facet of life (e.g. in arenas such as work, school, family and the community). Multiculturalism is no longer a prospect, but a defining trait of the societies we live in (Council of Europe, Farrell 2008:6). Researchers agree that successful intercultural encounters require intercultural competences – communicative as well as others. Chang (2007:187) states that in nowadays, how to treat people from different cultural backgrounds considerately and with equality has become a pivotal issue – in other words, the need for intercultural competence is growing (Lustig & Koester 2006:3).

In addition, developing intercultural competence provides interpersonal learning opportunities (Ting-Toomey 1999:4). Learning to understand cultural differences will also serve as a major factor in building a more harmonious, multicultural community (Ting-Toomey 1999:5-6). Adler (2002, as cited in Friedman & Berthoin Antal 2005:72) argues that one reason that conflicts occur is that people from different countries hold different basic fundamental values and assumptions, which causes them to see, interpret, evaluate and act on things differently. People rarely consider how their cultural underpinnings affect their behavior and their expectations (Friedman & Berthoin Antal 2005:72). At first the perceived differences may cause stress or discomfort, but if we invest time and energy in learning to deal with our own feelings and in reducing the discomfort of others, it may considerably pay off in the long run (Ting-Toomey 1999:7-8). Living in an increasingly diverse world, we can take the opportunity to learn more about our own cultural background and identity and what makes us similar and different from the people we interact with (Martin & Nakayama 2000:18). Friedman and Berthoin Antal (2005:70) share Ting-Toomey's (1999) and Barnlund's (1988, as cited in Friedman & Berthoin Antal 2005:70) views that the more people differ, the more they have to teach each other and learn from each other. If we, however, choose to neglect to understand and respect differences, the result is likely to be misunderstandings and conflict. If we make an effort to learn about others unlike ourselves, it offers us the opportunity to enrich our lives, both mentally and materially (Gore 2007:36).

Furthermore, the ability to see things from another person's perspective and having empathy can help prevent conflict situations in intercultural contexts internationally as well as within the own culture (Salo-Lee, Malmberg & Halinoja 1998:117). According to

Martin & Nakayama (2000:21) the study of intercultural communication – which facilitates improving intercultural competence – should help us judge what is ethical and unethical behavior given variations in cultural priorities, as well as help us identify guidelines for ethical behavior in intercultural contexts where ethics otherwise might clash.

Technological advances, leading to increased mobility and increased contacts among other things, have exponentially multiplied the amount of relationships people have (Hofstede & Hofstede 2005:335; Martin & Nakayama 2000:2). Today, the term ‘global village’ is used to describe the web of interconnections that modern technologies have created, where communications media such as the Internet, communication satellites and telephones make it possible to establish virtually instantaneous links to people who are thousands of miles away (Lustig & Koester 2006:4). Not only do we come in contact with more people electronically these days, we also come in contact with more people physically. Modern transportation systems contribute to the creation of the global village, making our society more mobile than ever before, and this mobility changes the nature of society as well as affects the individuals involved, as movement of people from one country and culture to another has become commonplace (Lustig & Koester 2006:4; Martin & Nakayama 2000:4).

9.2.2 Addressing why intercultural competence is needed specifically among people working in the social field

Stier (2004a:3) claims that the changes in our society have led to a situation where the public sector as a whole – and the labor, education, health and social care sectors in particular – are faced with challenges unmatched in history. Intercultural competence in the context of social work professionals can be defined as the ability of social workers and institutions to provide effective services to culturally diverse populations (Council of Europe 2008:8). Sharma, Tam and Kim (2009:227) state that according to data from the United Nations from 2006, about 200 million people live outside their countries of origin – and according to studies in the US (e.g. Sowers & Ellis 2001:247) many immigrants have adapted well to their new surroundings, but there are still those who are in need of services. Jézéquel (Council of Europe 2008:29) points out that improving migrant access to services also requires institutions’ capacity to reach out to migrants. The

way in which our institutions approach cultural difference will determine the nature and operation of social services (Council of Europe 2008:4).

Sowers and Ellis (2001:245) argue that as the diversity of the population (in the United States) increases, social workers must respond with flexibility and openness. Many experts agree that with the growing cultural diversity of Western societies comes the responsibility for social service providers to better prepare themselves to interact with their clients (Wehbi 2009:48). Developing intercultural competences is a valuable asset on every level – political, economic and social – and could contribute to fading out the non-transparency and obscurity of our institutions (Council of Europe 2008:6).

In addition, social problems are often not analyzed or treated as social problems but as cultural problems when it comes to people of different descent (Stier 2004a:12). Developing intercultural competence can help the professional avoid making inadequate conclusions where cultural differences are used to explain something ‘all-human’ or something highly individual, and instead keep in mind that social action and individual behavior result from a multidimensional combination of personality traits, social factors and cultural background (Stier 2004a:12-13).

The growing multiculturalism of the Finnish society leads to increasing demands for host culture members’ intercultural competence in various areas of life, including the public sector (Brewis 2008:18). Brewis (2008:17) claims that the pressure for adequate intercultural competence in social services is significantly strong in Finland, since intercultural competencies are not only demanded by the legal and organizational framework, but also expected by the multi-ethnic clients and by the general public. Brewis (2008:17) states that in compliance with legal requirements many Finnish government departments have forms and information leaflets available in the language of the largest immigration groups in Finland. However, with the multi-ethnic clientele, professionals often have to explain matters face-to-face, as it often happens that the clients are not familiar with the Finnish bureaucracy and Finnish ways of handling administrative matters (Brewis 2008:17). Therefore, in professional settings such as multi-ethnic customer contacts, it is crucial that the professional has developed adequate intercultural competence (Brewis 2008:17).

Sizoo et al. (2005, as cited in Sharma; Tam & Kim 2009:232) claim that employees with a higher degree of intercultural competence score higher on service attentiveness, revenue contribution, interpersonal skills, job satisfaction, and social satisfaction. Furthermore, according to Yu, Weiler and Ham (2001, as cited in Sharma; Tam & Kim 2009:232), service employees' intercultural competence relates positively with customer satisfaction as well. Salo-Lee, Malmberg and Halinoja (1998:146) state that it has been detected that the psychological wellbeing of immigrants is better in the receiving countries that practice multicultural politics and where different cultures are accepted, than in societies where cultural minorities are pressured to subdue to the majority's culture. Also, the immigrants' adaptation is affected by the prevailing attitudes in the receiving country (Salo-Lee, Malmberg & Halinoja 1998:146).

Myriam Jézéquel (Council of Europe 2008:28) states that working with migrant communities often uncovers a cultural clash between the social workers and their clients, since they both can have very different legal frameworks. Stier (2004a:7) also emphasizes that differences in the view of health and illness, abuse, authorities, taboos, moral and ethics and sex roles, can lead to a lot of misunderstandings and conflicts. It is therefore important that the social worker can figure out a way to be helpful without being invasive; in other words develop a partnership that contributes to common solutions, which are co-constructed with all the parties involved and respectful of everyone's values and identities (Council of Europe 2008:28-29).

Social workers – along with other professionals – are confronted with, and forced to deal with, new challenges that a multicultural context brings about (Stier 2004a:3). Jézéquel (Council of Europe 2008:31) also points out that since our societies have evolved from managing exceptions to integrating diversity, shouldn't the attention now be turned to transforming the institutions to keep up with the social development? Martin (Council of Europe 2008:8) points out that intercultural competences should be at the core of social care institutions, organizations and professionals, as intercultural competences can help promote and ensure human rights as well as social rights. Stier (2004a:14) points out that if social workers develop their discourse awareness they can better support and help those of their clients who struggle due to negative labels that

society has assigned to them, as well as those who are alienated or marginalized. Stier (2004a:4) points out that developing and refining one's individual intercultural competence is a long and necessary process, as it is a valuable aspect of the social worker-client relationship, as well as of the personal and professional development of the social worker. In other words, developing intercultural competence can be beneficial both professionally and personally.

9.2.3 Addressing why intercultural competence is needed in international social work

Depending on how you define international social work, there are many different answers to the question of why intercultural competence is needed in international social work. Since I addressed the matter of how the need for intercultural competence comes forth in relation to the different definitions of international social work in detail in chapter 8, I have chosen to briefly address the matter here and direct the reader back to chapter 8 for more specific information, in order to avoid being repetitive.

In order to briefly illustrate the need for intercultural competence in international social work, I have created a table where the different definitions of international social work are linked to the different imperatives for intercultural competence that are relevant for that specific definition.

Table 2. The connection between different definitions of international social work and the relevant imperatives for intercultural competence

Definition of international social work	Relevant imperatives for intercultural competence
Social work in international organizations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The technological imperative The demographic imperative The peace imperative The ethical imperative The legal and bureaucratic imperative The social imperative.
Social work in different parts of the world	The technological imperative

	<p>The demographic imperative</p> <p>The self-awareness imperative</p> <p>The ethical imperative</p> <p>The legal and bureaucratic imperative</p> <p>The social care imperative.</p>
Social work that focuses on issues of international concern	<p>The technological imperative</p> <p>The demographic imperative</p> <p>The economic imperative</p> <p>The peace imperative</p> <p>The social care imperative</p>
'Domestic' social work with a culturally diverse clientele	<p>The technological imperative</p> <p>The demographic imperative</p> <p>The self-awareness imperative</p> <p>The ethical imperative</p> <p>The legal and bureaucratic imperative</p> <p>The social care imperative</p>
A network of contacts and exchanges of professional knowledge	<p>The technological imperative</p> <p>The demographic imperative</p> <p>The self-awareness imperative</p> <p>The social care imperative</p>

9.3 The thesis' contribution to the professional and to the field of social work practice

Social work practice in today's society inevitably entails intercultural encounters, and intercultural competence will become increasingly important for professionals working in the social field. I hope that my thesis can help spark other people's interest in the field of intercultural competence and intercultural communication studies, and that it can help promote the spreading of information about intercultural competence and its importance.

9.4 Conclusion and suggestions for further studies

Because of local and global diversity trends, intercultural encounters have become part of everyday life, making intercultural competences pivotal. Cultural diversity is here to stay – with all its opportunities and challenges. Like Lustig and Koester (2006:2) stated, we no longer have a choice about whether or not to live and communicate intercultural-ly; our only choice is whether we will learn to do it well. I for one am determined to do it well, and I feel like doing this research and writing my thesis has helped me along the way of reaching this goal. I do however realize that there still is a lot for me to learn, and I have discovered multiple new areas of interest while doing this study. However, since the time was limited and delimitation was needed, I could not possibly address all of it in this thesis, but will instead mention some of these interesting themes as suggestions for further studies.

First, I think it would be very interesting to see the results of a study that had the same research questions as my study, but that was conducted as a qualitative study, perhaps using interviews as a means to gather data. Second, I feel that doing a research on what constitutes as intercultural competence, both from a client perspective and a professional perspective, would be interesting. Third, a study on methods of developing intercultural competence would be interesting, as well as a study of the efficiency of the already existing methods. Fourth, I was very intrigued with Bennett's Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity and think studies related to this model would be very interesting. I also think that doing a work placement period abroad was very beneficial for me, so for instance studying how international work placement periods for social work students can help promote intercultural competence, using Bennett's model as the theoretical framework, would be something I would be interested in. Finally, I think that taking classes in intercultural communication and developing intercultural competence has been very beneficial for me, personally, as well as professionally, and I think all social work students would benefit from more international and cross-cultural content being introduced into the curriculum, so a study on attitudes towards this – from either a student, teacher, or policy maker perspective – would be interesting, as well as a study on the actual need for this (that is, studying the demands in society and whether or not the current curriculum is able to answer to these demands).

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