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# Global Multicultural Society: Reflection of TAMK's Internationalization | Nasrin Jahan Jinian and Outi Wallin

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TAMKjournal | This article presents the essence, experiences, and echoes of the summer school 2021 course on ‘Global and Multicultural Society’ organized by the Tampere University and the Tampere University of Applied Sciences (TAMK). The course highlights cooperation in building a sustainable world, developing solutions to tackle climate change, improving the well-being and sustainability of societies. The article aims to share experiences and highlight TAMK’s international strategies.

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## Introduction

Multiculturalism has become a very popular term during the past few decades and it is considered as one of the most important tools to ensure a better functioning society and sustainable development. It simply refers to situations in which people with ‘different’ habits, customs, traditions, languages and/or religions live alongside each other in the same social space, willing to maintain relevant aspects of their differences and to have it publicly recognized (Colombo 2014). Despite the limitations, the fundamental aims of multiculturalism or multicultural societies are (Colombo 2014, p.3):

- To promote more democratic inclusion, assuring real equal access and participation for all members of society without subordinating inclusion to assimilation into the majority group.
- To overcome previous offensive and undemocratic relations of domination and exclusion, recognizing the violence and exploitation by the members of the dominant group who impose their own rules and ideas by presenting them as ‘natural’ and ‘universal’;
- To assure adequate recognition of and respect for cultural difference, fighting stereotypes and prejudices that depict minority groups in negative ways and entrap minority group members in despised identities.
- To give relevance to ‘culture’, ‘cultural groups’ and ‘cultural rights’ (Levy 2000), not only to individual rights.

Keeping these very practical issues in mind, the Global and Multicultural Society course is a good opportunity to gain experience of multicultural societies around the globe. For example, this year we discussed the history of immigrants in Brazil, inter-racial colonization and tragic history concerning slavery of indigenous people and Afro-descendants in Brazil, racism against the Rohingya in Bangladesh, human rights violations in a technical intern training programme in Japan, a 30-year war due to racist ideas of both Sinhala and Tamil ethnic groups in Sri Lanka, mental health issues in rural and uneducated regions, consideration of women’s dowry as an inheritance in Pakistan, melting pot culture in America, situation of Sámi indigenous people in Finland, discrimination against Brazilian immigrants in Portugal, the rainbow nation ideology of South Africa, toxic colonization and environmental racism in Serbia, strong social class structure in India and flight of immigrants to Turkey.

## **The course**

Strongly growing internationality is an important part of Tampere University of Applied Sciences’ (TAMK) strategy. Our operational values commit us to work in a globally responsible way by doing things together and respecting diversity in our community. TAMK’s Bachelor’s Degree Programme in Social Services and Business Operations and Internationalisation unit jointly arranged a 5-credit Global and Multicultural Society course as a part of summer school. This year, the summer school was held on 2-13 August 2021.

The aims and objectives of the course include identification of the key concepts and theories of global multiculturalism and understanding of the role of the global and local in the society. Students can explore and promote equality and anti-racist activities in the society and structure theoretical aspects of equality and racism. They can promote honouring encounters, develop their expertise in multicultural work and analyse different theories and perspectives on well-being and health in the Finnish multicultural society.

To achieve the aims and objectives, the course deals with the theories and perspectives of multicultural issues globally and locally and perceives how they are connected in the society and what equality issues arise from the connections. Different ways to promote structural equality and develop appreciative encounters are examined during the course. The course introduces well-being and health in a multicultural society from the perspectives of research knowledge, professional knowledge and experiential knowledge.

This year, the course was implemented online, and its methods included participatory lectures, discussion in small group, group assignments, seminar presentations and essay writing/report writing. The total numbers of participants were 30. They came from 23 different countries. In addition to Finland, the participants were from Bangladesh, Brazil, China, Japan, France, Spain, Portugal, South Africa, Philippines, Indonesia, Pakistan, India, Germany, USA, Russia, Serbia, Turkey, Vietnam, and Italy. Although the course was conducted virtually due to the Covid-19, it also created the opportunity for the participants to join from their country regardless of whether it was midnight or early in the morning.

## Reflections

The course is a platform to increase knowledge of multicultural issues, such as culture, religion, racism, human trafficking, refugee centres, gender inequality, mental health, integration and inclusion. The course encourages participants to think about these issues and creates an atmosphere to raise their voice against racism and discrimination to build a multicultural society. The emphasis is on multiple historical perspectives, strengthening of intercultural consciousness and reduction of prejudice and all forms of discrimination as all members develop social skills and become aware of the state of the nation, planet and global dynamics (Pang 2001). Globalization has increased migration and made it increasingly relevant to understand multiculturalism as well as interaction and inclusion of people with different cultural backgrounds (Banerjee and Linstead 2001).

The course “Global Multicultural Society” reflects TAMK’s internationalization and widen the knowledge of multicultural issues.

The course created an atmosphere which identified the challenges of multicultural societies from different perspectives and in different settings of the world. The participants represented their home country, shared valuable and thought-provoking ideas and compared the situations and finally tried to find out possible solutions in small groups. Through seminar presentations and discussion, the participants opened their minds by adapting their knowledge of history, culture, and the origin of the problems in different societies from different perspectives.

## Student’s Feedback

[Student feedback](#) on the course shows that the course was a very effective platform in enriching students’ knowledge of multicultural issues. The participants achieved the learning objectives of the course very well with the support of the teaching and learning activities. The nature of the summer school also offered a great opportunity for participants to build an international identity. Some feedbacks from the participants are presented below:

*“Tampere Summer School is a great opportunity to study in a diverse learning environment on your home screen! (Due to the pandemic) I’ve gained friends from around the globe and expanded my knowledge not just from the academic perspectives; but also of real-world challenges, especially in social sciences courses I took part in. The Zoom classes were very interactive, which made me forget that we were online, as the discussions got me on the hook and were very engaging! (note that I am an introvert). I highly recommend Tampere Summer School!”* Participant from the Philippines

*“The course was well designed, covering a range of different topics and allowing everyone to find something interesting. Group discussions during the course were useful, allowing students to engage and meet each other online. The assignments were not too big”.*

Participant from Serbia

*“The term ‘accepting diversity’ was easy to say but I am not sure that everyone who said so can concretely bring it into reality in their daily life. The direct interaction with the course participants from diverse backgrounds, such as nationality, religion, gender, age and experience, strengthened my personal knowledge, competences and sensitivity”.* Participant from Indonesia

*“Waking up at 5am was worth the trouble! I never thought I could learn so much in so little time. Tampere Summer School allowed me to understand different places of the world, find similarities between my country and others, as well as become more critical of social and political discourses. This unique experience made me more conscious of what I want to pursue in my professional career and opened many doors to make new friends, who I hope to meet in person very soon! Thank you for this opportunity!”* Helen from Brazil

## Summing up

As a teacher, the student feedback inspired us to share our experiences with the academic community of TAMK and beyond. Teaching a multicultural group was an experience for us and we enjoyed designing the course and teaching together. We created an environment which made students share their thoughts, ideas and solutions to the challenges. The seminar presentations were like a virtual tour around the world and reflected things in the participants’ societies. In addition, we enjoyed reading the students’ deeply analysed essays on different issues. The experience ultimately revived our passion for teaching and gave us the confidence to continue teaching the course in the future.

Finally, the course “Global Multicultural Society’ is a great opportunity to strengthen TAMK’s international identity in the national and international academic community. Its growing number of students also reflects our popularity among international students. Undoubtedly it has colossal impacts in making a better functioning society and thus promote the notion of sustainable development. However, the success of such initiative needs collective planning and efforts.

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