

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE: CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES IN THEORY AND PRACTICE OF SOCIAL POLICY AND SOCIAL WORK

Skopje, 28-29 September 2007.

The period from 2002 until 2008 marks the 50th anniversary of social work education in the countries of former Yugoslavia¹. Celebrating its own half a century social work tradition, the Institute of Social Work and Social Policy at the Faculty of Philosophy in Skopje, in cooperation with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation, organized an international conference on 28-29 September 2007, with the topic »Contemporary Challenges in Theory and Practice of Social Policy and Social Work«. The conference gathered around 100 participants, including professors from all Schools of Social Work from ex-Yugoslav countries, distinguished scholars from the United States, United Kingdom, Sweden, Germany, Romania and Albania, as well as national representatives of the Ministries, Social Work Centres, research institutes, governmental and non-governmental organizations active in the social welfare field.

The conference aimed at providing a forum for addressing issues that were relevant for current theory and practice of social work, but also for broader social policy. The format of this event was organized as three plenary sessions and three parallel panels. Prior to those, a commemorative speech about the history and development of social work education in Macedonia was given by Prof. Divna Lakinska, whose reminiscent words about the first educators, courses and the very first experiences revived fond memories, especially among those in the au-

dience who were the representatives of the first generation of students and professors of social work in Macedonia.

The first plenary session provided a critical account of the dominant (global and European) theoretical and applicative frameworks in social policy and social work, and informed about consequent challenges that they produce. In his thought-provoking speech, Dr Paul Stubbs, from the Institute of Economics in Zagreb, openly argued against static social policy paradigms, such as path-dependent welfare regimes, linear-policy transfer, simplistic treatment of internal and external levels, as well as neo-Marxist structuralist functionalism. In contrast to that, he advocated a social policy seen as fluid, complex, multi-actor assemblage that as a process involves translation (transformation, negotiation and enactment) among uneven forces, spaces and scales. From this theoretical standpoint, he then situated current social policy construction/reconstruction in South East Europe, with an insight into three empirical case studies of Croatia, Bosnia and Kosovo. In a similar fashion, but focusing on social work approaches, Professor Lena Dominelli from Durham University in UK, spoke about challenging globalization and orthodoxies of neo-liberalism through developing new social work theories and models of practice. She supported social work actions that concentrate on: citizenship and human rights as interconnected global phenomena; locality-specific and globally sensitive social work approaches that require work across borders that does not result in either peoples or different educational models becoming replaceable, homogeneous units regardless of place or space; and involvement in strengthening the voice of social work locally, nationally and internationally, while focusing on inclusivity within an egalitarian framework.

¹ First School for Social Work in former Yugoslavia was formed in Croatia in 1952, followed by Slovenia in 1955, Serbia and Macedonia in 1957 and Bosnia in 1958.

The second plenary had a more regional focus, and concentrated the analysis on social policy and social work history, as well as on current tendencies in the post-Yugoslav countries. In this respect, Professor Vlado Puljiz from the Department of Social Work at the Faculty of Law in Zagreb gave a comprehensive overview of the pre-socialist and socialist legacies in social policies of these countries and outlined common effects produced by the transition and wars. In his concluding remarks, he emphasized that the current 'mixed' model of post-socialist welfare state is confronted with challenges arising from many factors, among which the socialist legacy, the developmental discontinuity initiated by the war and transition, economic decline, the welfare state crises and the role of international actors are among those most prominent. Prof. Darja Završek from the School of Social Work in Ljubljana spoke about professional social work and social work education in the Balkan countries. Although she acknowledged that professional social work achieved greater educational autonomy and independence than adjacent disciplines (psychology, pedagogy, sociology, psychiatry), she also warned that in some Eastern European countries, social workers are now faced with the threat of the de-professionalization, re-catholicization, and re-masculinization of their profession. She named a few occurrences, such as neo-liberalization of everyday life, the de-montage of state welfare services, the privatization of education, and the de-secularization of nation states as 'responsible' for 'deconstructing' the social work as a social science discipline into an agency for "helping the needy".

The final plenary involved a more heterogeneous focus, with presentations situated around commonalities between social policy and social work, the standards of social work, as well as different dimensions of

classifying welfare states. Prof. Sven Hort from the Södertörn University College tried to correlate the social sciences, social policy and social work according to their different origins, but also spoke about the perspectives and common paths in Europe in relation to these disciplines. Dr Julia Watkins from the Council of Social Work Education in USA introduced the topic of quality assurance in social work education. She gave a thorough description of the necessary competences for social work practice, as well as accreditation standards which, as she pointed out, should be designed to reflect the core professional values, ethics as well as the knowledge and educational structural existence. The final plenary speaker, Prof. John Hudson from the Department of Social Policy and Social Work at the University of York in UK, provided a detailed description of his research of productive and protective dimensions of social policy, based on the analysis of the OECD countries. His presentation exemplified the value of fuzzy set ideal type analysis as a helpful tool to capture the multidimensional character of welfare states.

The plenary presentations and discussions gave a necessary input to the subsequent parallel panel sessions. Social work panels incorporated the themes of: reforms in the social protection system, deinstitutionalization as well as the professionalization in the social work. Social policy panels raised the issues of social inclusion, activation and governance. The debates and discussions during the panels showed that the chosen topics were of high relevance for all represented countries, and the experience shared served as a valuable point for future consideration and cooperation.

The conference papers are published in two separate social policy/social work volumes, in the Macedonian and the English language. This has enabled a dissemination of the discussed conference issues to a lar-

ger international audience, with intention to serve as an important tool in assessing and designing social work and social policy models and methods in both theory and practice.

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KONFERENCIJA: KVALITETA ŽIVOTA U HRVATSKOJ: REGIONALNE NEJEDNAKOSTI

Zagreb, 8. studenog 2007.

Zajednička suradnje Europske fondacije za poboljšanje životnih i radnih uvjeta (Europska Fondacija) i Programa Ujedinjenih naroda za razvoj (UNDP) na osmišljavanju i provođenju istraživanja kvalitete života u Hrvatskoj rezultirala je konferencijom, na kojoj su predstavljana dva izvješća temeljena na rezultatima ankete koju je UNDP proveo u Hrvatskoj 2006. godine pomoću upitnika koji je razvila Europska fondacija.

U uvodnom dijelu, Branislav Mikulić, voditelj istraživanja pri Europskoj Fondaciji predstavio je koncept kvalitete života i EQLS (*European Quality of Life Survey*) istraživanje kao jedinstveni instrument za praćenje objektivnih i subjektivnih pokazatelja kvalitete života koji omogućava međunarodnu usporedbu. Kvaliteta života se mjeri kroz različita područja života, a najviše su zastupljene slijedeće teme: ekonomska situacija i stambeni uvjeti, zaposlenost i obrazovanje, obitelj i kućanstvo, život zajednice i socijalna participacija, zdravlje i zdravstvena skrb. Vrijednost ovog koncepta je u povezanosti objektivnih i subjektivnih pokazatelja kvalitete života kao i u povezanosti mikropristupa koji u središte stavlja pojedinca, njegove životne uvjete i njegovu subjektivnu procjenu vlastitog

života kao i društva u kojem živi, s objektivnim ekonomskim i socijalnim makropokazateljima koji pomažu da se istraživački nalazi koji se odnose na pojedince smjeste u širi kontekst.

Istraživanje je prvi put provedeno 2003. godine u 28 zemalja, u 15 »starih« članica EU, u 10 tada pristupajućih zemalja EU-10 i u tri tadašnje kandidatkinje – Bugarskoj, Rumunjskoj i Turskoj.

Razlog za pokretanje takvog paneuropskog istraživanja bila je potreba za smanjenjem situacije u budućoj proširenoj Europskoj uniji koja predstavlja vrlo raznoliku zajednicu zemalja, a trebala bi omogućiti ujednačene uvjete života za sve građane dok su trenutne razlike između ekonomski prosperitetnih starih članica i novih tranzicijskih zemalja vrlo velike.

Zamjenik stalnog predstavnika UNDP-a u Hrvatskoj, Alessandro Fracassetti naglasio je važnost usporedbe Hrvatske s članicama EU, jer je to zajednica kojoj se pripremamo pristupiti u vrlo skoroj budućnosti te je izuzetno važno da se u tom procesu njeguju i zadrže one pozitivne karakteristike kvalitete života s kojima su građani Hrvatske izrazito zadovoljni. Neki od njih su: očuvani okoliš, sigurnost, obiteljska podrška i optimistično gledanje na budućnost. Istovremeno, uvid u objektivne i subjektivne pokazatelje života građana Hrvatske snažan je poticaj za unaprjeđenje onih područja života u kojima Hrvatska zaostaje za prosjekom EU zemalja, a to je prije svega vrlo nisko zadovoljstvo vlastitim obrazovanjem i kvalitetom zaposlenja, kao i izrazito visoka percepcija napetosti između bogatih i siromašnih građana.

UNDP je istraživanje proveo u Hrvatskoj 2006. godine ne samo da bi omogućio međunarodnu usporedbu već se kroz korištenje velikog uzorka ispitanika (8500), reprezentativnog na županijskoj razini, željelo ispitati regionalne nejednakosti unutar zemlje. Nalazi su pokazali