

**Report of the Conference on Social Pedagogy and Social Education:
„Bridging the traditions and innovations”,
22–24.02.2018, Puebla, Mexico**

The 1st World Conference „Social Pedagogy and Social Education: Bridging traditions and innovations” was held between February 22 and 24, 2018 at the Meritorious Autonomous University of Puebla (Universidad Autónoma de Puebla) in Mexico. The event was co-organized by Social Pedagogy Association and the Arizona State University, in cooperation with many other international organizations. The Social Pedagogy Unit at the Committee of Pedagogical Sciences of Polish Academy of Science was one of them.

The event brought together 244 participants from 24 countries: USA, Mexico, Brazil, Canada, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Dominican Republic, Spain, Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Spain, Finland, Germany, Poland, Sweden, United Kingdom, Israel, Japan, Pakistan, Uruguay, Sudan, and Australia. 23 participants took part in the event with the online presentations.

The main themes of the conference concerned social pedagogy, social education, development of local communities and social work.

The languages of the conference were Spanish and English, and the meetings were held in the form of traditional plenary and semi-plenary sessions and panels (fifty sessions) as well as thematic workshops (on the opening day of the conference). While the organizers provided the participants of plenary sessions with interpretations of both languages, panel sessions were held in either Spanish (106 presentations) or English (71 presentations). This decision, although it was certainly justified by financial considerations, unfortunately presented a barrier to the free use of the rich conference program and created a perceptible division into an “English-language conference” and a “Spanish-language conference”.

It is safe to say that the conference was an exceptional and unprecedented undertaking. The event in Puebla was the first meeting of scientists and

practitioners from all over the world, who share interest in social pedagogy treated both as a scientific discipline and as a theoretical perspective.

The first day of the conference was officially inaugurated by the organizers – Daniel Shugurensky and Dana Keller representing the Social Pedagogy Association and Karl Villaseñor representing the host of the meeting – the Meritorious Autonomous University of Puebla. The first part of the opening panel entitled *Social pedagogy and social education around the world* was hosted by Angela Janer (Spain), the author of the “world map” of social pedagogy illustrating interest in this discipline in various countries, and Eric Ribas (Brazil) – the creator of the comparative model of social pedagogy. In the second part of the panel, Lisbeth Eriksson (Sweden) and Xavier Ucar (Spain) commented and shared reflections on the status of social pedagogy, its relationship with social education and social work, the main inspirations of social pedagogy and the challenges it faces.

The speeches were delivered in over twenty thematic groups, in 50 panel sessions. Numerous and diverse speech topics can be divided into four distinctive sets of problems.

The first set concerned general findings related to social pedagogy, understood as both theoretical perspective and social and educational practice. As part of discussions on these issues, questions arose as to whether social pedagogy as a science characterized by its interdisciplinary nature should seek its own unique core. In the conclusions of discussions, the conference participants noticed the need for a “common denominator” for various activities undertaken in a wide socio-pedagogical area, but also postulated openness to phenomena and processes subject to socio-pedagogical interpretation. The sessions devoted to exploring the diverse area of international social pedagogy included presentations on socio-pedagogical traditions in individual countries, but also descriptions of individual institutions and initiatives with an educational and supportive profile that fit into the perspective of social pedagogy. The countries thus presented included Sweden, Poland (two presentations), China, Brazil, Spain, Japan and Uzbekistan. Among the issues raised by the authors, one can distinguish attempts to organize the relationship between social pedagogy, social education and social work, particularly important for professional identities of professionals active in this area. An extremely complicated picture emerges from the presented reports. The concepts of social pedagogy, social education and social work in different countries appear with varying strength and in different configurations, which may be associated with different social and political contexts, cultural diversity, or openness to the “flows” of ideas in a specific moment in history.

The second major thematic segment included significant social phenomena, such as social inequalities resulting from gender, age or ethnicity. They were discussed in various perspectives: of health, crime, stigmatization, technology, history and education.

Migration and refugees turned out to be important topics. They were discussed in different contexts of individual and group experiences of young people (including school experience), adults and the elderly, and considered in terms of socio-pedagogical interventions in this area.

The postcolonial and de-colonial perspectives prevailed in the presentations delivered by authors from both Americas. Postulates were formulated from the perspective of critical social pedagogy. In this context, speakers also identified the areas of exclusion resulting from the colonial heritage of Central and South America, ways to inspire and support various socio-pedagogical initiatives in local communities, and presented various programs and projects involving bi-cultural and/or bi-lingual pedagogues and social educators in the work and education in culturally diverse environments. Presented programs and projects included those building subjectivity, civic participation and empowerment in local communities, as well as strengthening democratic processes and promoting the concept of sustainable development. Numerous social programs and projects supporting the development of local communities and civic participation were often rooted in urgent ecological issues – water consumption/pollution, soil erosion. In this way, they linked the activities of individuals and local communities with their living space and natural resources.

In this area, conference participants were searching for a relationship between social pedagogy and ecological (environmental) pedagogy, and unconventional forms of work with local communities that experience exclusion (including cooperative games, participatory theater, circus, cooperative bank activities). The importance of social economy and social capital for social inclusion and development was emphasized.

The problem of new technologies in the context of social pedagogy was only briefly discussed at the conference. Several presentations concerned the emergence of virtual reality as a space of experience, while others reflected on the use of new technologies as a potential tool in the work of a social pedagogue.

The third thematic segment concerned childhood. Issues related to child and childhood were presented both in the context of social education and various prevention programs addressed to children from endangered environments, as well as in the perspective of school education and upbringing (early school education). Topics of early school education included such problems as

curricula, models of communication and relations in schools, as well as professional training of teachers. There were ideas for shaping and practicing early school education aimed at building social justice. The issues of conducting research with children were also discussed.

Another area within this thematic segment were pedagogical interventions in the context of children's rights. This included sessions devoted to deliberations on legal, ethical, psychological, cultural and social limitations of childcare institutionalization and legitimacy of such professional activities in different countries. The area of socio-pedagogical interventions was also considered more broadly – in the context of child and family, as well as entire social environment. Emphasis was placed on the importance of social and environmental diagnosis and proper selection of professional activities in view of recognized problems, including crime.

Somewhat broadening the theme of childhood were issues related to family as a living environment – the area that turned out to be the domain of Polish speakers. Family in the perspective of the social environment or educational environment turned out to be a relatively unknown and rarely addressed concept in the international area.

The last extensive thematic segment was the contemporary concept of university and various elements of university education and professional education. Discussed topics included issues related to the education of social pedagogues and social educators and their professional role (perceived, for example, as designing forms of work as part of non-formal and informal teaching, or serving as agents of social change). The importance of ethical values and dimension in the education of pedagogues was emphasized. The focus were also the possible forms of university education of social pedagogues. Participants postulated to create anti-discrimination paths and programs at universities. The importance of psycho-social education (aimed at emotional development and development of mindfulness) of social workers was emphasized. Participants promoted the method of research projects and social projects in the education of social pedagogues. It was postulated to build students' reflective attitudes and critical thinking as necessary tools to perceive the space of exclusion and symbolic violence.

During the closing session on the last day of the conference, editors and representatives of social pedagogy and social education associations presented their own writings and activities of their organizations. As a result, those social pedagogy journals were distinguished, in which it is possible to publish texts on social and pedagogical topics in English, German or Spanish. There are: the biannual scientific journal *Pedagogia Social. Revista Interuni-*

versitaria published since 1986 r. by the Asociación Iberoamericana de Pedagogía Social; the English *International Journal of Social Pedagogy*; the Finnish journal *Sosiaalipedagoginen aikakauskirja*, published since 2000; and the Polish quarterly *Pedagogika Społeczna*, published since 2001, under the patronage of The Social Pedagogy Unit at the Committee of Pedagogical Sciences of Polish Academy of Science.

The international conference in Puebla undoubtedly was an opportunity to encounter different visions of social pedagogy and various experiences of socio-pedagogical practice. The meeting in the hospitable walls of the University of Puebla allowed to establish direct relations between pedagogues-researchers and pedagogues-practitioners from around the world, and provided a space for exchanging experiences and cooperation. An important conclusion of Polish conference participants was the realization that the Polish socio-pedagogical tradition is little known, even in other European countries. Participation in the international network of researchers and practitioners of social pedagogy is associated with the necessity to share social and pedagogical literature with a wide audience. For that we have time for it until 2020, when the second international meeting is planned, this time in Cyprus.

Danuta Uryga, Marta Wiatr

The Maria Grzegorzewska University in Warsaw