

Barbara Smolińska-Theiss

The Maria Grzegorzewska University in Warsaw

Social Pedagogy in Poland from the Perspective of Successive Congresses

Pedagogika społeczna w Polsce z perspektywy zjazdów pedagogicznych

STRESZCZENIE: Artykuł przedstawia obraz pedagogiki społecznej wpisany w kontekst historyczny i polityczny. Zwraca uwagę na społeczną misję tej dyscypliny związaną z przekształcaniem środowiska i budowaniem zmiany społecznej. Ta formułowana przez Helenę Radlińską idea badania i działania oraz służby społecznej dominowała podczas kolejnych zjazdów pedagogów społecznych (1937, 1947, 1957, 1981, 2013). Za każdym razem była inaczej odczytywana, ale niezmiennie budziła nadzieje, mobilizowała do działania. Dzisiaj, jak bumerang, powraca i zyskuje znowu swoje wyjściowe, pierwotne oblicze.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: Pedagogika społeczna, społeczna misja pedagogiki, służba społeczna, badanie i działanie, nauka społecznie zaangażowana

ABSTRACT: The article presents a picture of social pedagogy inscribed in the historical and political context. It draws attention to the social mission of this discipline, associated with transformation of the environment and building social change. This idea of research, action and social service, formulated by Helena Radlińska, dominated the subsequent congresses of social pedagogues. (1937, 1947, 1957, 1981, 2013). Each time it was read in a different way, but it always aroused hope and mobilized people to act. Today, it returns like a boomerang, regaining its original face.

KEYWORDS: Social pedagogy, social mission of pedagogy, social service, action research, socially engaged science.

Science is a social creation – John Ziman argued more than half a century ago, stating that scientific work is what the community of scientists does, and science is what they mutually agree to (Ziman 1968, p. 41). Such a statement can be accepted as a result of the discussion between Karl Popper's *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* and the Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, between critical rationalism and its junior – the philosophy of science, according to which development is achieved through the adoption of successive paradigms. Without going into the details of this fundamental discussion, which went on especially in Western social sciences, Ziman's stance sounds original and innovative, but also iconoclastic. Ziman attaches particular importance to the role of science and the scientific community in the development of various academic fields. It is the scientific community that decides "who should be listened to, whose unanimous opinion must be taken into account" (Ziman 1968, p. 113), as the Author claims.

In Polish pedagogy there was almost no discussion about the philosophy of science, the positivist and antipositivist paradigms, about the social involvement of science and scientists. Questions about development, about the progress of science, about various ways leading to its progress or regress were accepted slowly and with difficulty (Elias 2003, p. 137). Today, this question is much clearer and takes on a different nature. It is not so much about the future, development prospects, ways of practicing social sciences, but it also provides tools for presenting the past. They can be treated as a heuristic matrix of recognizing, understanding and explaining the path that Polish social pedagogy has taken and continues to take.

The conviction of the non-cumulative development of science, idiomaticity, synergy, and emergence of contemporary pedagogy are becoming increasingly clear, common and even truistic (Kubinowski 2013).

In this process, the social methodological boundaries are crossed in various ways and various bifurcations, breakthroughs and passages occur. Against this background, one can ask the question of how social pedagogy in Poland changed, what subsequent pictures it built, to what extent it was in line with the history of Polish upheavals and changes. To what extent did it reflect the interests of various groups of scientific circles and people, and to what extent did it utilize its own and foreign theoretical and methodological resources?

The answer to this question will be limited only to signaling the breakthroughs and a very rough outline of the directions and images of changes. In this short version, it will be an indication of significant moments in the development of this discipline. They will refer both to political and

social changes determining the context of functioning of social pedagogy in Poland, as well as to important breakthrough events, which were subsequent social pedagogy congresses during which both the presentation and the accounts with this field took place (Theiss 2013).

The social mission of social pedagogy

Social pedagogy in Poland grew out of practice, it was rooted in the real social world and it was addressed to this world. Its purpose was to build a better tomorrow, improve the living conditions of a wide range of social groups, and above all of families from neglected working and rural environments. Social pedagogy transforms the environment by social forces into an ideal – wrote Helena Radlińska, the creator of this discipline, almost a hundred years ago (Radlińska 1935, p. 19).

Radlińska believed in the agency of science, she thought she could create a field that would build a better world. Like the generation of disobedient intellectuals of the turn of the century, she believed that the way to build and strengthen the Republic of Poland was primarily through school and education. This is why Radlińska's idea is read above all in the perspective of social changes. Some people tend to see it mainly as a theory of transforming the environment.

From the very beginning, Helena Radlińska's social pedagogy focused on raising and developing human competences in solving individual and social problems. Alphabetization, school, out-of-school and adult education were the way to deal with problems. They counteracted the marginalization of broad social groups and provided these groups with citizenship and the opportunity to participate in social life.

As a discipline emerging at the beginning of the 20th century, it started with the Enlightenment methodological models based on a formal analysis of the relationships between various measurable factors. However, Radlińska went beyond this pattern and stressed the social mission of social pedagogy, as well as the inalienable axiological and practical foundations.

The combination of empirical and normative functions opened up the possibility for pedagogy to unmask social reality, to show areas where the rights and dignity of the child, family and a wide range of social groups are violated. In this way, social pedagogy became an instrument of social warning or even accusation. It brought together scientific, cultural, religious and political elements. The shortcomings of the system, of the institution environments and of the groups of people were revealed.

Self-definition of social pedagogy, combination of empirical and practical functions with clear axiological foundations gave this field great strength, made it an important means of social and political influence, it also led to emancipation and independence of social pedagogy and social pedagogues. There is an impression that social pedagogy in this sense laid claim to be above or beside the social system. It was supposed to be the conscience of the system and the way to repair it. From today's perspective, we should look at it with distance and understanding for the naïve scientism or the lack of modesty of former researchers (Smolińska-Theiss 2006).

A summary of this first period of shaping the foundations of discipline and building the profession of a social worker around it was the First Congress of Social Pedagogues, which on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of Helena Radlińska's work took place on 31.01.–2.02.1937 in Warsaw, at her home university, i.e. the Free Polish University (pre-war, private university). It brought together a large number of students and graduates who were educated in various social professions and educational and social work in the environment. These included specialists in child and mother care, hygienists, community nurses involved in the health and care of infants, organizers of orphanages, kindergartens of community day care centers. There was also a large group of librarians, specialists in adult education, who conducted literacy courses among workers and villagers.

Pre-war social pedagogy in Poland was an important social and political centre of the educational movement, a centre of social and political thought. It went against academic conventions. As early as the 1930s, it was here that the model of socially engaged science and research such as *Handlungsforschung* emerged. A breakthrough moment for the Polish school of social pedagogy and for the former philosophical university pedagogy was Radlińska's research entitled *Social causes of school success and failure* (*Społeczne przyczyny powodzeń i niepowodzeń szkolnych*, H. Radlinska, 1937). They challenged the thesis prevailing at that time in pedagogy that the success of a student is determined by the intelligence quotient. Radlińska and her students have empirically proved in field research conducted among the urban and rural poor that the source of failure is poverty, unemployment, homelessness and lack of education. Today, these theses sound truistic, but at that time they were a breakthrough in the thinking, research and education of workers and social educators.

The second Social Pedagogical Congress was held on 25–26 May 1947 at the University of Łódź, where just after the war, academic staff from the burnt down city of Warsaw and the ruined Warsaw University gathered (Theiss

2013). The program of the convention was dominated by post-war challenges related mainly to the care of Polish, Jewish, Ukrainian, and German children who were orphaned, lost, or injured by the war. Social pedagogy was faced with the challenge of becoming involved in the great international work of saving children, young people and helping families. The main focus was on building a care and assistance system for the state, the municipalities and the social organizations. Among the members of the congress there was visible hope, commitment to the reconstruction of the state, social services and social pedagogy as a discipline and profession. On the other hand, the Jalta orders, the spectre of new totalitarianism flowing from the east, were more and more clearly felt. In 1952, by a decision of the state authorities, the only Social Pedagogical Chair was closed. Social pedagogy shared the fate of other “bourgeois, dangerous and unnecessary” fields.

In the difficult times of Stalinism, the reduced, increasingly Sovietized pedagogy was limited, narrowed down and almost entirely reduced to the problems of school teaching. Methodology and didactics came to the forefront.

Institutional pedagogy – between the family and the orphanage

The next Social Pedagogical Congress was held in April 1957. The deliberations were held in three sections: 1) adult education and culture, 2) child and youth care and 3) social assistance and social security. These three traditional areas were the pillars of research, which aimed to build the future of social pedagogy as an academic field in the new socio-political conditions. Very soon it turned out to be an illusion. They could not be developed within the framework of social pedagogy. The reactivated Chairs of Social Pedagogy at the University of Warsaw in 1957; at the University of Łódź in 1961 – started their activity in a very limited scope. Adult education slowly became independent and separated from social pedagogy. Social assistance and social security have entered the field of state policy and almost stopped looking for their academic references and interpretations.

Social pedagogy as a field and practice has lost its earlier roots. Helena Radlińska's output was found on the index. Social pedagogy in a very limited scope began, almost anew, to build itself up as an academic field focused on the care functions of two basic institutions – the school and the orphanage.

The basic thesis repeated by Ryszard Wroczyński, around which social pedagogy focused at that time, was the claim that a person is reared not only in school. This banal, obvious opinion was supposed to justify the reasons for the existence of social pedagogy in Poland. It built its subject of research at

first around extramural and extracurricular rearing. The history of this field dates back to the 1960s, when a large amount of research was carried out. In the 1960s on schooling in the community, under the direction of Prof. Ryszard Wroczyński. In addition, pioneering work on lifelong learning and leisure time was developed a little later. Masters of social pedagogy – prof. Aleksander Kamiński and prof. Ryszard Wroczyński supported environmental research, but focused themselves mainly on historical analyses of the educational movement of Polish positivism and the history of youth unions.

An important impulse for the development of social pedagogy, justifying its place and rank, was the great research carried out under the auspices of the Ministry of Education on the model of community school, which was to integrate the educational influence of family, school, children's and youth organizations, the Church, workplaces, etc., in its assumptions. It was a school which, on the one hand, expanded the childcare programme, offered additional activities and was to be open to the initiatives of parents and the local community. In fact, it combined care and education functions with indoctrination and control. The idea of a community school had its own high-profile promoters and propagators, who combined professorships with ministerial positions. They supported the research carried out by social educators and gave political legitimacy to the field and its people. In retrospect, it can be said today that this protective umbrella allowed the Polish social pedagogy to survive periods of tension and to moderately develop its research and human resources potential.

The second area, specific for social pedagogy in the times of the Polish People's Republic, was the so-called care and upbringing pedagogy. It focused on institutional upbringing and was based on the orphanage (children's home), an all-day care facility built largely on Soviet models. Care and upbringing pedagogy was a resilient and strong sub-discipline of social pedagogy. A lot of distortions and simplifications were growing around it. On the one hand, it confirmed the myth of a socialist welfare state caring for the child and the family. It argued for the creation of an institutional model of total childcare away from the family and local community.

Care and upbringing pedagogy was a very practical discipline, promoting simple organizational and regulatory solutions. It drew on the models of facility-based and collective upbringing, and contained elements transferred almost from military barracks (rules, rallies). It also tried to use much better solutions based on the work of the children's and youth team, on upbringing leading to self-governance, modeled on Korczak's initiatives of the peer arbitration. Slowly it started to present ideas related to family upbringing, building child

care on family models, looking for social and educational solutions supporting the child and the family in the living environment.

The question of social pedagogy in the times of the Polish People's Republic cannot be reduced to the subject of research. The problem is not only about what social pedagogy was occupied with, but also about how it was practiced. This initial question about the paradigm of social pedagogy is its most important feature and identification.

“Pedagogy at the service of a new upbringing must answer the question of who we want to raise, and then move on to collecting and systematizing knowledge about how this upbringing ideal should be put into practice” (Muszyński 1974, p. 42). Such a point of view, promoted by leading theorists of upbringing of the Polish People's Republic period reduced this field to the level of simple practice and methodology focused on the efficiency of teaching and upbringing without any clear axiological or even theoretical references.

Pedagogy of that period often made use of psychology. It adopted a behavioral model of action and explanation of educational phenomena numerous times. It was supported by a variety of statistical calculations that built a simplified, reductionist research workshop, based on positivist models of science practice. It gave a false impression of scientificity by hiding the apparent activities, hidden indoctrination programs and ideological “processing” of the pupil.

These problems were very clearly encountered at the 4th Social Pedagogues Congress, which took place on November 23–24, 1981. It was organized by the Chair of Social Pedagogy of the University of Warsaw (the author of this study was the co-organizer and secretary of the Congress). The convention was held in a special atmosphere of turbulent criticism of the then social and political order, building new visions of democratic and civil society. New content has been added to the programme, building on Radlińska's achievements. Attempts were made to redefine the tasks and subject of social pedagogy, and to return to the old ideas of social forces which had been abandoned and which were transforming the environment.

There have also been many social and political accents. Social pedagogues, who were largely involved in the *Solidarity* movement, took a firm stance on the changes taking place in the country. In the atmosphere of involvement, the consolidation of the social pedagogical community around the hopeful socio-political and educational aspirations grew. The congress was also attended by representatives of West German social pedagogy who supported Polish pedagogues.

The conclusions of the conference included i.a. the statements: “We are noticing [...] a collapse of the economic and socio-political system

in our country. [...] We are observing the decline of the promoted school-educational concepts [...]. Therefore, it is necessary to undertake new tasks [...] The conference obliges pedagogues to actively participate in the process of implementation of activities aimed at improving the current educational situation..." (Theiss 2013). Three weeks after the Congress, martial law was imposed in Poland. The materials from this historical meeting were published after three years (Pilch, Smolińska-Theiss 1984).

Heterogeneous pedagogy

In the new social and political conditions, after 1989, social pedagogy blended into the general discussion on the condition of Polish pedagogy that took place in the academic circles gathered at the subsequent National Pedagogical Congresses. The first such congress took place in 1993 in Rembertów near Warsaw. It was attended by several hundred pedagogues from various academic centres. The discussion was introduced by two voices. On the one hand Zbigniew Kwieciński asked questions about the paradigm of pedagogy, on the other hand Heliodor Muszyński reflected on the heritage and future of this field at the contact point of the two formations (Kwiatkowska 1994). In the following meetings, which were held in various academic centres every two years¹, the image of Polish pedagogy was slowly developing. Questions about its identity and changing paradigms were at the heart of these discussions.

Polish pedagogy underwent three stages in its development: orthodoxy, heterodoxy and heteronomy (Kwieciński 1994). The first of them, apparent in the 1960s, was characterized by monocentric functionalism, largely determined by political *raison d'être*. The dominant methodology was the reductionist positivist methodology of research conducted according to a single scheme

¹ The Second National Pedagogical Congress, entitled "Democracy and Education", was held in 1995 at the Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń; the third Congress titled "Pedagogy and education in the face of hopes and threats of the present" took place in 1998 at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań; the fourth Congress, entitled "Pedagogy and education in view of communities and differences in the uniting Europe" was held at the University of Olsztyn. The organizer of the fifth National Congress, entitled "Survival and development" was the Lower Silesian School of Higher Education TWP in Wrocław; the Sixth National Pedagogical Congress, entitled "Education, morality, the public sphere" was held at the Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in 2007; the seventh Congress, entitled "Reach for new life" was once again held at the UMK in Toruń; the eighth Congress, titled "Differences- education – inclusion" was organized in September 2013 by the University of Gdańsk.

of apparent objectification and rationalism. Outside the area of interest and research of orthodox pedagogy was the whole sphere of axiology and evaluation. The next period, located in the 1980s, was marked by a slow opening to newer trends, currents flowing especially from Western social sciences. Heterodoxy pedagogy allowed for competing interactive theories. It opened itself up to social and cultural entanglements, noticed clearer connections with philosophy, anthropology of upbringing or history of thoughts and ideas. Finally, the third stage of the currently visible heteronomy anticipates new challenges and solutions characteristic of postmodernism, postmodernity and global education. At this stage, a personalistic pedagogy is clearly formed that respects the subjectivity of the child, the parent, the teacher and each individual. The focus is on the activity and operation of various individual and collective social actors. Pedagogy not only looks for clear theoretical conceptualizations, but also inscribes its subject of research into the inalienable framework of time and place. Various theories come to the forefront: phenomenology, hermeneutics, critical theories, feminist theories, neo-institutionalism, constructivism. Pedagogy is gaining new social, theoretical, cultural and market impulses. What does it mean for social pedagogy?

In the new social and political conditions, it is becoming an important and vibrant field. Its strength lies not only in its timeliness, link to social change, flexibility and openness to new ideas and initiatives. Social pedagogy, after the socio-political coup in 1989, is gaining an important labor market, which is the reactivated social work. It develops as a sub-field, specialization and direction of study within social pedagogy.

The subject of social pedagogy research, which covers traditional issues related to the environmental conditions of development of children and youths, family and local institutions, is expanded and crystallized. The area of social and cultural activation, civil society, social participation, environmental education, localism and globalism is developing. Research into childhood, youth and femininity is becoming more and more visible. Research into the phenomena of social inequality, marginalization, exclusion and social cohesion is developing rapidly. Social pedagogy is entering a good stage of disciplinarization and professionalization. The academic monopoly of Helena Radlińska's school is coming to an end, and many chairs of social pedagogy are being established at various public and private universities. The number of doctorates and habilitation courses in social pedagogy is growing, and more and more textbooks and publications in this field are being published. A special journal called "Pedagogika Społeczna" is being established. Joint international research on social inclusion is underway. Social pedagogy

in Poland is developing in a solid way and creates a strong discipline and a vibrant academic environment.

At the same time, new and more visible unfavorable phenomena and challenges are emerging in this recognized development of social pedagogy. In 2002, social work was formally emancipated and became an independent field of study. The “divorce” with social work shuts off graduates of pedagogy from a very large labor market. Both social pedagogy and social work lose their common theoretical foundations and mutual impulses for development. Other disciplines – adult education, early school education – are entering the area of social pedagogy more and more clearly, while the subject of social pedagogy is becoming blurred and lost; it is becoming less attractive and its heuristic power is weakening. The young generation is increasingly turning to western, often American, research, drawing inspiration and academic models from there.

A very unfavorable phenomenon affecting pedagogy is the sharp drop in the number of students caused by demographic changes. Pedagogy in Poland was one of the most frequently chosen fields of study until recently. It was mainly girls, rather from lower social groups, who preferred it. Pedagogy was a discipline of social advancement. It played an important role in increasing schooling rates and in social change. The current stage of extensive pedagogical development is slowly coming to an end. A new model is emerging, or rather the need to articulate and define it more clearly.

In November 2013, the fifth Social Pedagogues Congress was held in Jachranka near Warsaw. Its message was the Janusz Korczak motto: “The world cannot to be left as it is”. It brought together more than 200 representatives of the older and younger generations involved in academic social pedagogy. The Congress was held under the banner of “Threat to man and the idea of social justice”. The idea of this congress was clearly characterized by Wiesław Theiss’s programme paper titled “Where do we come from, what do we bring. On the paths of development of social pedagogy”.

The extensive program of the Congress showed a very large body of work in social pedagogy. It was possible to notice that the period of discussion on the identity of social pedagogy, its theoretical framework, main ideas and concepts is slowly coming to an end. The speakers presented a wide range of innovative, original quantitative and qualitative research conducted in Poland and abroad. This was accompanied by satisfaction, but at the same time a sense of insufficiency, dispersion, helplessness, a lack of clearer reference points and a lack of support for social pedagogy was visible. Both the older and the younger generation of researchers declared the need to consolidate

more clearly, to look for areas of practical application. Questions arose about schooling, about the quality and content of interpersonal relations, about the power of culture, about its functions and shape in the future (Segiet 2014).

In conclusion, the requirement to refer both to the canon of social pedagogy, its axiological foundations, and to the social mission of this science was stressed. At the same time, attention was drawn to the need to move beyond these traditional approaches and turn to current social realities, articulated, diagnosed, analyzed in accordance with academic standards, but also submerged in social practice. In this way, as we can see years later, the burden of scientific discussions is shifting from the issues of identity of social pedagogy as an academic discipline back to its social purpose, with maintenance of academic standards, but also a sense of autonomy and the necessary criticism. Such changes were declared by the academic body, which stressed that social pedagogy, in accordance with its mission of social action, is on the side of values and human rights. However, it notes with concern a number of negative phenomena growing in Polish society.

The participants of the 5th Social Pedagogues Congress issued a resolution addressed to the highest authorities of the Republic of Poland expressing deep concern and social opposition to many unfavorable phenomena becoming more and more visible in social life. They stated that research and experiences of social pedagogues prove that Poland is “becoming:

- a state of profound differences in the material situation of its citizens, or even a regional leader in social inequality;
- a country of cultivated, consolidated enclaves of poverty;
- a country of inefficiency and arbitrariness of the state administrative apparatus and its agencies, e.g. the fiscal apparatus;
- a country of injustice and malfunctioning of the judicial system;
- a country of irresponsible development policy based on the orthodox ideology of neoliberalism, which results in services vital for citizens and for the state, and the infrastructure, being extremely neglected and inefficient;
- a state which is indifferent and powerless in the face of anti-worker labor law, in the face of pathologies of the powers that be and criminal practices committed even by public institutions;
- a country of inefficiently conducted social policy, characterized by rescue, and not a strategy for removing the sources of disability or danger” (Pilch, Sosnowski 2014).

Less than two years after the 5th Congress, social pedagogues met at a scientific conference organized by the Department of Social Pedagogy at

the University of Białystok. The topic of the meeting was the role of the pedagogue and pedagogy in animation of social life. Various theoretical and practical issues appeared on the conference agenda. Yet Korczak's idea of "the world cannot be left as it is" kept coming up again. For some, it meant a strong academic imperative to practice science that explored social and educational problems. For others, it posed new challenges to the pedagogical social service, undertaking research, activities and creating an environment of socially engaged pedagogy. History and pedagogy are in a vicious circle. The demons of the past, hidden by successive congresses, are uncovering a new face, gaining new legitimacy and are invited again to the academic dwelling.

Literature

- Elias N., (2003), *Zaangażowanie i neutralność*, PWN, Warszawa.
- Kubinowski S., (2013), *Rozwój badań jakościowych w pedagogice polskiej na przełomie XX i XXI wieku*, Wydawnictwo Makmad, Lublin.
- Kwiatkowska H. (ed.), (1994), *Ewolucja tożsamości pedagogiki*, Polskie Towarzystwo Pedagogiczne, Warszawa.
- Kwieciński Z., (1994), *Mimikra czy sternik? Dramat pedagogiki w sytuacji przesilenia formacyjnego*, [in:] *Ewolucja tożsamości pedagogiki*, ed. H. Kwiatkowska, Polskie Towarzystwo Pedagogiczne, Warszawa.
- Muszyński H., (1974), *Ideał i cele wychowania*, WSiP, Warszawa.
- Pilch T., Smolińska-Theiss B. (eds.), (1984), *Pedagogika społeczna – poszukiwania i rozstrzygnięcia*, Ossolineum, Wrocław.
- Pilch T., Sosnowski T., (2014), *Zespół Pedagogiki Społecznej pod patronatem Komitetu Nauk Pedagogicznych PAN – w sferze publicznej*, „Rocznik Pedagogiczny” nr 37.
- Radlińska H., (1935), *Stosunek wychowawcy do środowiska społecznego*, Nasza Księgarnia, Warszawa.
- Radlińska H. (ed.), (1937), *Społeczne przyczyny powodzeń i niepowodzeń szkolnych*, Nasza Księgarnia, Warszawa.
- Segiet K., (2014), *V Zjazd Pedagogów Społecznych. Pedagogika społeczna w służbie człowiekowi i wartościom XXI wieku. W poszukiwaniu nowych metod integracji i rozwoju społecznego*, „Rocznik Pedagogiczny”, nr 37.
- Smolińska-Theiss B., (2006), *Siła i bezsilność w pracy socjalnej*, „Pedagogika Społeczna”, nr 4.
- Theiss W., (2013) *O zjazdach pedagogów społecznych (1937–1981)*, [in:] *Zagrożenia człowieka i idei sprawiedliwości społecznej*, eds. T. Pilch, T. Sosnowski, Wydawnictwo Akademickie „Żak”, Warszawa.
- Ziman J., (1968), *Społeczeństwo nauki*, PIW, Warszawa.