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## **Social Pedagogy – socially engaged pedagogy Around social initiatives and movements**

On 17–18 September 2018, at the Adam Mickiewicz University in Poznań, another, sixth in the history Congress of Social Pedagogues took place, this time as a Social Pedagogy Team at the Committee of Pedagogical Sciences of the Polish Academy of Sciences, combined with the Association of Socially Involved Pedagogy. The meeting was hosted by the Department of Social Pedagogy of the Faculty of Educational Studies of Adam Mickiewicz University. The Congress was attended by 144 people, including 56 independent research workers representing various centers of social pedagogy in Poland. The theme of the Congress, developed by the members of the presidium of the Social Pedagogy Team, was the following slogan: „**Social Pedagogy – socially engaged pedagogy. Around social initiatives and movements**”. The congress was designed as an attempt to seek answers to the increasingly urgent social and educational challenges of the present day.

By no means it was a new and original task. The same or similar ideas appeared basically during all previous congresses. This was the case during the first Congress in 1937, when a group of Helena Radlińska's co-workers and students criticized social inequalities and clearly articulated the mission of social pedagogy in service of socially excluded individuals and groups. Subsequent Congresses in 1947 and 1957 articulated hopes resulting from political changes and mobilized the community of social pedagogues to work for the renewal of the life of the country. Especially third Congress, which

was held on November 23–24, 1981 went down to the history of social pedagogy. Three weeks before the introduction of martial law, a group of social pedagogues discussed the awakening and development of social forces in the nation. Later events confirmed the need to turn social pedagogy towards socio-political realities, as well as the need to recall the ideals of the Second Republic and the Disobedient Generation of the early twentieth century. After a longer break, social pedagogues met again in 2013. The motto of this fifth congress was Korczak's slogan: „The world cannot be left as it is”.

We also treated the 2018 congress as a sign of the times reflecting social changes. Almost 30 years after the socio-political coup, a new generation of educated and open to Europe and the world people has grown up, and at the same time distances, inequalities and social divisions increased. Various interest groups representing extreme political, social, cultural and religious positions have come to the fore. A new message appeared in public space, on the verge of manipulation, a new language characterized by falseness and aggression. Reality revealed the widespread presence of negative phenomena in social life, such as: hostility, anger, ignorance, breaking the rules and laws. They are based on easily manipulable social emotions rejecting knowledge and reflection on the social world. Andrzej Kojder connects this phenomenon with the axiological crisis (Kojder 2016). The political transformation has undermined old traditional values, and at the same time has failed to create new attractive alternative models for a dignified life.

In these new conditions, social pedagogy is once again faced with questions about the educational dimension of social change, a new social message, and new relations between the environment of science and practice. Behind it there are questions about the real, not facade, not appropriated by various forces, democracy, participation and community of social pedagogues, theoreticians and practitioners active in various fields and areas.

Social involvement is by no means a new task, it lies at the heart of social pedagogy. It is deeply rooted in the tradition of this discipline. In its previous development, the following ideas came to the fore: universal access to culture and education, support for the development of individuals, groups and social environments and the idea of social involvement. The foundation of these ideas was a „democratic norm”, according to which everyone has the unrestricted right to education, culture, aid and development. On the other hand, social involvement was combined with criticism of the existing conditions, a prospective view and action for the benefit of marginalized individuals and social groups. The thing that connected the above mentioned ideas-principles of action was the ethos of service to another human being.

The term „service” bridged the gap between two worlds: the world of ideas and the world of reality, area of pedagogical theory as well as social and educational practice.

In the new, today’s social conditions, these tasks do not disappear, they only gain a different dimension, a different meaning, they fit into a different framework, they activate different means of action. Today, social pedagogy is a science and practice belonging to the world of global, universal communication. At the same time, it is strongly rooted in the Polish social, political, cultural, economic and religious realities. It continues to combine research with social and educational activity, social and cultural support and an ethical mission of social service.

From the very beginning, social pedagogy has emphasized, and still emphasizes, its axiological and normative functions. It addresses universal values, underlines the dignity of a human being and their inalienable rights to freedom and self-determination. It emphasizes the subjectivity of human in democratic social order. It is moving towards the common good, solidarity between people. It emphasizes the subsidiary role of the state. This normative model showing the relationship between human, environment and society is the inalienable framework for the research, activities and education of social pedagogues.

The foundation of education of social pedagogues and the link between old and modern social pedagogy is a professional ethos, aimed at discovering positive forces, capitals, resources to improve the situation of individuals and socially marginalized groups. Building positive social change is an ethos order of social pedagogy, social pedagogues and social workers, repeated after the classics of social pedagogy. In the environment of science, it sometimes raises doubts, sometimes is treated as a relic of the past time, and even as a pedagogical utopia. There is no doubt, however, that this is an inalienable element of the identity of social pedagogy. It documents the fundamental values and principles of this discipline. In difficult social conditions, it becomes a compass which determines the direction of changes in social pedagogy.

For social pedagogues, the ethos of the discipline and profession is today a challenge that provokes new reading of the practical and social functions of this discipline. A contemporary model of socially engaged pedagogy appears, based not only on the traditions of this discipline, but also falling within a broad discourse on the new role of social sciences and humanities. The social sciences and the humanities are turning more and more towards mission and various grassroots initiatives (Elias 2003; Nussbaum 2008). For humanists, the production of knowledge is increasingly moving into social space, enters

the area of artistic practices that take into account co-existence, empathy and solidarity. The essence of these practices is reflection and reflectiveness combined with criticism. (Łebkowska 2017). This reflectiveness of social pedagogy can be interpreted from the perspective of the heuristic value of research and activity of social pedagogues aimed at reaching the essence of cognition, self-development, change of standards of thinking and acting. Reflectiveness is also transferred to the public (social) and individual sphere. It creates transformative changes of the researchers themselves, changes the science and the role it plays towards the individual and towards the system.

The discourse on reflectiveness and criticality is always close to the problems of power and knowledge, on the relationship between politics and education. Social educators consider this relationship as a permanent element accompanying education. It cannot be reduced to educational ideologies exposed and unmasked in pedagogy. In social pedagogy, a specific vent to understand and relieve tensions between pedagogy and politics is the reflectiveness and criticality of this discipline.

Zbyszko Melosik and Tomasz Szkudlarek, among others, presented this topic in pedagogy against the background of postmodernism and postmodernity, and later in relation to the dissonance between knowledge and power (Szkudlarek, Melosik 1998). The issue of criticism is present in many significant pedagogical publications. It is sometimes treated as a new trend in thinking or pedagogical awareness (Czerepaniak-Walczak 2006), as a perspective for the analysis of educational phenomena (Śliwerski 2001; Kwaśnica 2014; Nowak-Dziemianowicz 2014). It returns in papers by Bogusław Milerski and Maciej Karwowski, who combine the classic positions of Max Horkheimer and Jürgen Habermas, highlighting the political and emancipatory character of pedagogy with contemporary praxeological, hermeneutic and emancipatory rationality (Milerski, Karwowski 2016). Emancipatory rationality is directed towards empowerment, self-determination and individual freedom – as it is emphasized by the authors mentioned above (Milerski, Karwowski 2016, p. 151).

Social pedagogy remains closely related to politics understood not as political power (*politics*), but as an educational, civic filling of the public and social space (*polis*). It is a space of research and activities of social pedagogy. It is there that fundamental social and educational changes are taking place. On the one hand various civic activities, movements, social and educational movements appear. On the other hand, politics, capital, religious fundamentalism and extreme ideological groups make various attempts to appropriate or suppress pedagogy in this area of activity and to introduce their open or hidden programmes into the *polis* space.

In Poland, it was only a political breakthrough that rediscovered the problem of political pedagogy understood as its social involvement. It meant a return to anthropocentric social pedagogy and practicing it in the service of socially marked groups, in defense of universal values: social justice, equality, solidarity. In social pedagogy it combined the social mission and ethos of this discipline inscribed in its roots – with new social and educational challenges. Contemporary, committed social pedagogy not so much fights, does not distance itself from politics, but first of all develops and builds its own political space (*policy*) understood as „prudent care for the common good”. It is aimed at developing individual and collective subjectivity, at strengthening competence and agency, at activating individuals and groups, social animation, supporting the self-development of individuals and building new social movements, at rational and reflective creation of new institutions, new rules and educational practices in various areas of life. Involved social pedagogy is autonomous, open, subjective and rational, it enters the sphere of public life. It is sometimes called public pedagogy (Skrzypczak 2016). It is moving towards the contemporary definition of citizenship and participation.

The term „citizenship” has long been present in social pedagogy. It was applied by Helena Radlińska in relation to children, women and various socially rejected groups. After many years, in new social conditions, the term acquires a new meaning. It is treated most widely as a socio-political institution. It is connected with power, with the type of ideology, it shows citizenship as a condition of democracy. In such a perspective, it arouses interest of politicians and political scientists.

Social pedagogy does not abandon such a broad interpretation of citizenship brought by Thomas H. Marshall. It analyses citizenship on a social and educational level. It perceives it in three perspectives. Firstly, it refers to the rights and powers of the individual and the subsidiary duties of the state in this respect. Secondly, it draws attention to citizenship activity and civic involvement. From a pedagogical point of view, there is a third important element. It is citizenship understood as a sense of belonging to a community that gives the individual a specific identity.

Social pedagogues in their practice of research and action refers to the basic documents (Constitution, Declaration of Human Rights, Convention on the Rights of the Child, Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities). They understand and know the legal framework of actions for equal rights of women, seniors, ethnic minorities, sexual religions. They know sustainability agendas, etc. However, social pedagogy focuses not on legal provisions, but on social practice. It concerns the question of how citizens can and do exercise

their rights to development, to education, how they exercise their social rights and powers, which factors restrict and support these rights.

It is a social citizenship understood as a process of emergence of social practices concerning various groups of citizens: children, women, seniors, etc. These practices, assigned to specific groups and institutions, are often standardized by different procedures of pedagogical work. They reproduce certain behaviors and structures. Social citizenship leads to the emergence of social statuses of individuals and groups (Theiss 2018). It is a bilateral relationship, for example, children's rights enable a child to have a citizenship, while at the same time child citizenship means special rights and status a child is entitled to.

Citizenship of various social groups translates into their activity and involvement, most often visible in the area of operation of educational institutions and the local community. It is a very important area of interest for social pedagogy. Diagnoses in this area are most often connected with questions about the subject, type, form and place of civic presence. It can be assumed that social citizenship is a coherent, functional structure that contains rights and entitlements of a specific group; this group must know these rights, must be associated with them in terms of status, demand them, have knowledge to, and be able to, use them in action. In today's social sciences, this model of citizenship fits into various discourses, theories and positions concerning power, knowledge, violence, legitimacy, place.

A term that constitutes an extension and development of the term „citizenship” is „social participation”. In the broadest sense, it is a function of socialization, a relationship between the individual and society. Participation may be seen from a political perspective and may concern participation in elections and in the exercise of power. For a social pedagogue this is a social and educational issue indicating the activation of individuals and groups in activities undertaken in the public space. It involves the participation of citizens in agreeing on the needs of the local environment, in decision making and, above all, in the participation of citizens in various actions, activities, clubs, organizations and associations. Participation is an expression of democracy and its social measure. Today it is a priority problem of contemporary pedagogy, showing the civic status not only of the young generation, but also a different model of education.

Participation involves different forms and is implemented at various levels. Pedagogues, social workers, social politicians, defenders of the rights of children, women, people with disabilities and various socially marginalized groups unanimously argue that social participation is a way of building civil

society. This is a challenge that social pedagogy and community of social pedagogues have to face with redoubled strength. We ask to what extent social pedagogy can open up to everyday life, practicality, problems of rejected people, marked by otherness, difference, to what extent it can build *the Republic of Friends* in new conditions – both in academic space and open public space.

Congress of Social Pedagogues held under the motto *Social Pedagogy – socially engaged pedagogy. Around social initiatives and movements* it was not so much to determine, but rather to open the field for reflection on the role of various social initiatives and movements operating for the benefit of education, social support and social change. The pedagogues' attention was naturally focused on the problems of children, family and school. The field of interest included also – so important in today's reality – challenges for non-governmental organizations, neighbors' communities, churches and local communities. The voice of social pedagogues claiming the rights of women and young people from LGBT+ backgrounds was also very clear. The culmination of these discussions were questions about the formation of social pedagogues in conditions of change.

In the hospitable premises of the Adam Mickiewicz University, the congress became an open forum, an exchange of ideas between theoreticians and practitioners. It was a round table meeting at which a forward-looking programme of research and action on the new challenges that social pedagogy faces was slowly being developed, and a community of social pedagogues, theoreticians from practitioners representing various centers and institutions was being strengthened. The discussion included questions about definitions and redefinitions of problems faced by social pedagogy, questions about the theoretical and methodological framework for the analysis of these problems, about available means of action and good practices in selected areas.

These problems were taken up by the participants of the Congress as part of discussions, exchange of ideas, presentation of various positions and experiences carried out in nine thematic groups, the so-called sub-tables. They are listed further in the programme of the Congress. The subject matter of discussion and the search for answers to the questions posed is contained in the following reports published in the further part of this publication.

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