

## The School for Social Work Theory and Practice - a contribution to a forum of international social work

In the present issue of this journal readers will find papers which were presented at the School for Social Work Theory and Practice at the Inter-University Centre (IUC) in Dubrovnik. In 2019 we will celebrate 30 years of social work courses at the school where teachers of social work, post-graduate students and social work practitioners as well as users meet annually to engage in the dialogue on social work praxis. As far as the subject matter is concerned, the publication is relevant in the international arena, since it offers quality contributions from social work and represents a forum for the exchange of international knowledge.

The international component of this issue may be seen in scientific papers as well as in other two contributions. Although the contributions refer to a particular local environment, the discussed subject matters are attempted to be introduced in the international context in a way that reveals how the locally designed themes may become global and common. They draw attention to the potential knowledge of a local environment in order to develop international social work and the common basis for the development of social work, regardless of the area in which the particular local knowledge was developed.

Eileen Oak, in the first scientific paper entitled *Western representations of childhood and the quest for a spiritual social work practice*, demonstrates the historical perspective of the construction of childhood in the sociological understanding of the earliest period of life. She takes on a critical attitude towards the central international document of the UN – The Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCORC), which determines children's rights and the way of meeting them on a declarative level. Social work is acquainted with the violation of children's rights, but the question is whether it takes enough measures to prevent them and, thus, bring them to an end. The author provides an answer by presenting the role and meaning of spiritual social work practice which enables a holistic model of understanding childhood, and at the same time provides children with autonomy and equal social involvement.

The model-based orientation is also offered by Simon Colnar, Vlado Dimovski and Barbara Grah, the authors of the paper entitled *Integrated social work management model in the Republic of Slovenia*. Their reflections stem from the complex questions that permeate recent social work and are the consequence of economic and social crises. Social workers are increasingly put in situations where they are powerless in providing social work or, rather, the social and political regulations force them to assume roles which are in contradiction to professional ethics, since they turn into supervisors and decision-makers

when it comes down to putting users' rights into practice. The authors present various situations in Slovenia and apply them in an international context, because such changes are comparable in numerous social policy systems throughout the world. If social work, management and organisation worked together, so knowledge and skills could be exchanged, an integrative model of the management of social work would be created, thus, successfully providing solutions to the described dilemma and enabling users to achieve greater quality of life in different situations and periods of life.

The last scientific paper by Jana Mali entitled *A case for a narrative approach to research into social work perspectives on dementia* deals with the final period of one's life. Dementia is a common disease in old age, however, social work reticently takes on the research of its social dimensions. Therefore, the contribution is relevant in terms of revealing particular themes which address social work in the context of the lives of people with dementia. The author describes them as three themes: (1) Recognising disease in a relative: beginning of disease; diagnosis; initial changes in the life of an individual with dementia, (2) Knowledge about dementia: general information and knowledge on dementia, (3) Changes within a family: changes in interpersonal relations; changes in everyday routine; organising formal help. She presents the narrative method of social work research and shows it as a method of social work with the relatives of people with dementia, which may also be useful in the international environment of social work.

The professional perspective is drawn by Faye Pouesi and Ksenija Napan. In their paper entitled *Weaving the strands of spirituality in recovery from violence*, they show a case of good practice in the area of help for women, victims of violence. They show how, through a community project, they managed to help women, victims of violence, who were adherents of the Maori people in New Zealand. They managed to develop holistic help which involved social work, counselling and community help, while all the factors were associated with spiritual social work. Without such an approach it would have been impossible to empower female users and help them find meaning in life, within the community to which they belong. Moreover, the ways of achieving this stemmed from the principles of spiritual and community social work.

In the Book review section, Timo Toikko presents a Finnish monograph from 2016: *Kansainvälinen sosiaalityö: käsitteitä, käytäntöjä ja kehityskulkuja Jäppinen* edited by Maija Jäppinen, Anna Metteri, Satu Ranta-Tyrkkö & Pirkko-Liisa Rauhala. The translation of the title into English is: *International social work: concepts, practices and development*. The monograph presents thoughts regarding the impact of international social work on social work in Finland and vice versa – the impact of global changes (such as migration) on social work. Similar questions in social work may be raised in any part of the world, therefore, international social work is surely becoming a more and more relevant area of social work.

You are kindly invited to an interesting reading of international contributions which will, hopefully, stimulate reflections on the theory and practice of social work in your local environments. At the School for Social Work Theory

and Practice at The Inter-University Centre (IUC) in Dubrovnik, we encourage international scientists, experts and post-graduate students to participate in order to develop the science and social work profession and exchange experience in scientific research and practice, as well as in new forms of international cooperation. The results of cooperation are promoted in the publication and we hope that this issue shall enlarge readership and, consequently, the participation in the courses of our school in Dubrovnik.

**Jana Mali**, December 2018