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Connecting theory and practice



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Editorial

Dear readers,

We are introducing a new volume of Czech and Slovak Social Work Journal, which we could simply call “colourful”.

If you are looking for contributions that discuss new but also recurring topics in social work, research strategies, client groups, or innovative practices in social work education, then you have in your hands an issue of our journal that fulfils all the above.

In his contribution, Malcolm Payne brings up the topic of ecological or green social work. It draws attention to the need for a more comprehensive understanding linking the political and practical consequences of ecological changes. Although, according to the author, environmental social work and eco practice are at an early stage of their development, it is necessary that social work also responds to problems with the ecology of Earth's natural environment. The author stresses the need to clarify social work's theoretical position on eco practice, develop evidence of the impact of environmental issues on the lives of the people who use social workers' services, and develop the perspective that environmental issues are among the pressures that are having important effects on the lives of the people it tries to help. Transformative learning as one of the concepts of adult education is relatively well known. Anita Gulczynska in her article, entitled Components of the Context Fostering a Transformative Learning in the Course of Social Work Education, presents the use of this concept through an autobiographical reflection on the use of transformative learning in socially engaged qualitative research. Based on this example she defines possibilities of incorporating transformative learning into social work education including the supervision of social work students' individual research projects.

Authors Soňa Lovašová and Monika Pilarová describe Group Art Therapy as one of the forms of increasing the professional competences of social workers. The authors present their research, the aim of which was to find out how the communication, social, and individual competences of social workers who participated in group art therapy sessions change. In today's postmodern society, according to the authors, art is one of the most prestigious and persuasive tools for teaching and for changing behaviour.

Lukáš Válek, Vladimír Bureš, Olga Glumac, Mariusz Kwiatkowski, Dorota Bazun, Aram Vartikyan, Yevgine Vardanyan, Alla Strishna in their contribution reflect on people's co-productive grassroots community problem-solving in reaction to complications caused by COVID-19 and related restrictions by using a multidisciplinary view of community building and co-production in the unique situation of pandemics, when face masks were inaccessible and precious. The authors pay special attention to the community creation and potential of co-production from the bottom up when those who gather around the same goal share an intra-group identity.

Peter Patyi investigates the existence of Romaphobia as part of the concept of the group-focused enmity syndrome (GFE) in Slovak conditions. In his article he examines majority population attitudes towards the Roma minority in the Slovakia: classical stereotypes and prejudices, fear and system attitudes, and structural attitudes. The analysis outcomes indicate that societal attitudes towards the Roma ethnic group are hugely influenced by political preference with nationalistic contents. The author sees social work practice, system analyses, counselling, and community-oriented interventions as a way through, which can achieve the strengthening of the position of

the Roma in society and thus reduce the inter-ethnic tension between them.

The integration issue is examined in an article by Eva Dohnalová. Based on a multiple-explanatory case study she analyses the approaches of selected cities to the integration of foreigners both at the declarative and implementation levels, and at the same time to reflect on the approaches of the political and professional representatives of Czech cities towards this target group. According to the author, the competences and responsibilities in the integration policies of municipalities are not clearly defined. Their definition is thus left up to municipalities. This has an effect on financing as well, which is primarily still based on projects.

The following contribution focuses on the activities of the Department of Social Security

and Workforce Councils of the North Moravian Regional National Committee of Ostrava in connection with the activities of associations dedicated to social work. The authors Marie Špiláčková and Nikola Štenclová analyse these activities in the period of the 1950s and 1960s using the content analysis of archival, mostly primary documents. These findings are beneficial for understanding the perception of the role and contribution of these institutions at the time.

We hope that you find ideas in this summer volume of our journal that are inspiring and will benefit both your research and your teaching activities.

Miriam Slaná & Ondřej Botek
Editors of the issue

Critical Eco Practice: How Should It Develop in Social Work Practice Thinking?¹

Accepted for publication on 23rd May 2023.

Malcolm Payne

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Abstract

OBJECTIVES: This paper reviews the practice implications of texts proposing an eco or green social work. While these developments reject social work's historic emphasis on the social environment and ecological systems practice, eco practice theory has not achieved significant influence on social work practice and theory. **THEORETICAL BASE:** Practice objectives proposed in practice theory in textbook literature. **METHODS:** Analysis of trends in a textbook literature review. **OUTCOMES:** Although ecological sustainability concerns reflect important social issues with increasing impacts on political and social debate, they have not penetrated social work practice. This is because eco concerns are a global social issue requiring social work interaction policy constructions and fail to connect with social work agency and practitioner concerns. While these concerns overlap with critical practice theory, eco practice proposes a community grassroots practice which does not reflect local community concerns about poverty and the social environment of many social work clients. **SOCIAL WORK IMPLICATIONS:** The paper proposes the need for a more complex understanding linking the policy and practice implications of eco concerns, working to develop empirical evidence of the impacts of eco concerns on clients' lives and including respect for the future of the changing natural environment in social work's ethical and practice framework.

Keywords

eco practice, green practice, deep ecology, ecological systems practice, critical theory, social environment, sustainability, climate change, disasters

¹ This paper is based on a paper prepared for the *Social Work Days 2022* at Hradec Králové Univerzity, Czech Republic. The author is grateful for comments from members of the audience.

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INTRODUCTION

This paper aims to evaluate developments in social work to create and implement a practice concerned with social responses to problems with the ecology of Earth's natural environment. These developments are variously called ecocentric (Coates, Gray, 2019), ecological (McKinnon, Alston, 2016), ecosocial (Matthies, Närhi, Ward, 2001; Matthies, Närhi, 2017) or green (Dominelli, 2012) social work. Bringing these different terminologies together, accounts for these developments as theories of 'eco practice'.

Eco practice ideas have emerged in a response to rising political and public concern in the late 20th and early 21st century about environmental and, more specifically, climate change as a result of global warming. They are, therefore, an example of how ideas, practice and theory are built up to respond to important social issues, so that those issues begin to have their impact on social work. 'Environment' and related ideas, such as 'place', also have a long history in social work, so it is important to position such new developments within its intellectual traditions and trends. Despite a rise in attention and a spate of writings, how significant is eco practice? How far is it detached from or linked with other current theoretical concerns in social work, and in particular can it be considered a critical practice theory?

ECOLOGY AND ENVIRONMENT IN TRADITIONAL SOCIAL WORK

Most accounts of eco practice in the English-language literature make distinctions between current developments and historical usages of concepts of ecology and environment in 'traditional' social work (Payne, 2021b:224). There are two important previous usages:

- A historical focus on the social rather than the natural environment
- Ecological or ecosystems practice theories, influential American formulations of social work practice.

Social work's focus on the social environment

Early social work writing is exemplified by the works of Richmond (1922) and Addams (1910); these are wholly concerned with the social environment surrounding an individual client or a family, group, or community that a social worker is helping. They do not refer to the interaction of humanity with the natural world.

Richmond argued that social work dealt with the person and their social environment holistically. This subsequently developed as an accepted social work formula, so that Hamilton (1951:4) says, discussing 'basic assumptions and methods': "A social case is composed of internal and external, or environmental, factors." A successor, Hollis (1981:27), wrote: "Central to psychosocial casework is the notion, as Hamilton so often phrased it, of 'the person-in-his-situation [*sic*]', as a threefold configuration of the person, the situation and the interaction between them'. As ecological systems theory influenced American practice, this was referred to the 'person-in-environment'. The classic text on the Person-in-Environment system lists six environmental problem areas:

- The economic/basic needs system
- The education/training system
- The judicial/legal system
- The health, safety and social services system
- The voluntary association system
- The affectional support system (Wandrei, Karls, 1994)

This is a simple listing of the kinds of external social systems that might be problematic for individual or community clients of social workers, and which they might therefore need to interact with and understand. The focus of all these writings is entirely on the social environment.

Addams (1910), working for many years in a Chicago settlement, Hull House, was influenced by the ideas of the ecological school of urban sociology originating at that city's university, which saw



cultural, physical, and social factors interacting with each other to create changes and developments generating community relations in neighbourhoods. The Chicago approach saw empirical research into community interactions as an important basis for understanding those social interactions. Urban ecology at this time saw community and social development operating in the same way as individual human beings as biological entities developed from the interaction of many different factors to create balances between different social factors in people's lives. According to Närhi and Mathies (2001; 2016), Addams emphasised more strongly the impact of social factors affecting people's social development. This tradition of social work thinking focused on identification with a place, in this case a neighbourhood, an educational and personal development function, making organisations responsive to the people living in the locality, working on interactions between organisations, and influencing both the social and the built community environment (Brieland, 1990).

In this way, the settlement tradition strongly supported the idea of community work, which became an important practice element of critical practice theory, and a focus on place-based practice. This remains important to many conceptions of social work, renewed at various times during the history of social work. Examples are the use of community development as a strategy in economic and social development in European colonies and subsequent development policy, in grassroots action responding to race issues and other urban problems during the 1930s and 1970s, and the development of community social work in the UK, placing teams of social workers in specific localities (Popple, 2015). Place-based practice has also been significant in the development of ideas about residential provision for both children and adults, and residential care practice, including ideas about milieu therapy (Smith, Spitzmueller, 2016) and therapeutic communities (Pearce, Haigh, 2017) and plays a significant role in social pedagogy theory, an important source of alternative conceptions of social work practice deriving from European theoretical sources about working with people in the settings where their life situations arise (Hämäläinen, 2018).

Ecological systems practice

These early conceptions continued to influence social work through the impact of systems theory on American social work practice in the 1970s, especially a significant shift towards ecological systems theory in the 1980s, which became the dominant model of American social work practice (Närhi, Mathies, 2001; 2016; Payne, 2021a:242–249). This is represented in various texts, most notably the 'life model' of social work developed by Gitterman and Germain (2008). This approach focuses on adaptation of individuals, groups and communities to their social environment, and people's "fit" with their "habitat", finding a suitable "niche". Thus, the terminology of ecology translates into a renewed interpersonal practice the "traditional" social work (Payne, 2021b:224) of change for the individual or their interpersonal social networks, rather than broader social change. While apparently broadening practice concerns away from the purely psychological, therefore, systems ideas in social work, even in ecological social work, continue to represent an individualised, psychologised interpersonal practice, rather than one that seeks broader social change or concern for issues concerning human interaction with the natural environment.

An important American text exemplifies this trend (Thyer, Dulmus, Sowers, 2012). It presents psychological and social theories informing social work and has 'social environment' in the title. Climate change is not indexed, ecology only as a basis of ecological systems theory and extensive indexing of environment refers to the kinds of person-in-environment problem-areas discussed above. The chapter on ecosystems theory (Mattaini, Huffman-Gottschling, 2012:302) describes ecology as "...the science of adaptedness" focusing on "mutual adaptations between the organism and the environment". Practice is concerned with the transaction between people and their social environments, emphasising the importance of "niche" and "habitat" for social work. Even at this late date, climate change or other ecological issues are not covered.

It is not surprising that American social work writing emphasises these conceptions of ecology and environment, since the main sources of social science that the literature draws on are the works



of von Bertalanffy (1969) on general systems theory and Bronfenbrenner (1979) on children's and human development. The view of ecology in von Bertalanffy's main work sees it as describing how systems operate in human interaction and organisations. Bronfenbrenner's initial "ecological orientation" in the study of human development focuses on the developing person in a social environment and the interaction between the two: the traditional focus on person-in-environment social work. He describes the "ecology of human development" as involving the study of "...the progressive, mutual accommodation between an active, growing human being and the changing properties of the immediate settings in which the developing person lives, as this process is affected by relations between these setting, and by the larger contexts in which these settings are embedded (Bronfenbrenner, 1979:21)."

American systems theory is only a partial representation of the breadth of systems theory, and in particular a European approach is represented in the work of Luhmann (1995). This formulation of systems ideas in his main work is similar to the American usage in that it sees ecology as concerned with human action reflecting patterns of interaction with the surrounding environment. This includes culture and economy as important factors to incorporate in our understanding of human social interaction, but still focuses not on the natural but on the social environment. Nevertheless, Schirmer and Michailakis (2019) in their recent interpretation of his ideas for helping practitioners emphasise his concerns for the "economisation of non-economic spheres (p. 101)" such as care and social welfare, and "...self-inflicted ecological endangerment (p. 102)" from environmental pollution and misuse of natural resources. This commentary on its ideas suggests that Luhmann's systems theory may offer possibilities for analysis and exploration of wider ecological concerns as social issues that require social work to tackle.

SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE AND THE NATURAL ENVIRONMENT

An important factor in the impact of eco practice within social work is the wish within social work organisations to respond to global environmental concerns. Mary (2008) and Gray, Coates and Hetherington (2013a) identify these as difficulties in the management of:

- Pollution
- Climate change
- Toxic materials and waste arising particularly from industrial processes and military actions
- The destruction of natural resources because of human over-exploitation.
- The reduction in biodiversity leading to species extinction and loss.
- The increasing pace of disasters and traumatic events arising from such changes in nature and military and political conflicts

These writers identify an increasing sense of impending environmental disaster leading to the imposition of autocratic, militaristic, and populist political values inimical to democratic and participative social interventions and structures such as social work.

Social work literature on this topic has been slow to develop. Krings, Victor, Mathias, and Perron (2020) surveyed social work literature from 1991 to 2015 and found that, while it was growing, it was limited in the range of topics covered, emphasising natural disasters, pressures on natural resources and food insecurity and injustice. Many articles covered the USA, India, and China, understandably because of their large populations, but large areas of South America, Africa, the Pacific Islands and Europe were unconsidered. Bexell, Decker Sparks, Tejada and Rechkemmer (2019) identified only 71 papers on environmental sustainability in the period 2010 to 2015, less than 1% of the social work literature in that period. They concluded that this issue was not a strong feature of social work writing, despite the evidence that it was an increasingly significant source of social difficulties in many countries.

An important factor in the impact of such environmental concerns in social work was a shift in international social work organisations at the end of the 20th century. Previously concerned with



building links between social workers and their professional organisations in different countries, they made a policy shift towards focusing on global issues of concern (Askeland, Payne, 2017:26–28). This was allied to a reconceptualization of the role of international social work activity away from Healy's (2008:10) formulation of "internationally related domestic practice and advocacy, professional exchange, international practice and international policy development and advocacy". Instead, Akimoto's (2008) view of international social work focuses on "...dealing with problems caused between nations or across national boundaries or efforts beyond national boundaries...". This shift in thinking and social work international organisations' policies led to an emphasis on working on a shared Global Agenda (IASSW, ICSW, IFSW, 2012). There were attempts to connect with other international organisations' policies, represented in the Millennium Development Goals formulated by a UN conference in 2000 and including environmental sustainability. These were replaced in 2015 by the UN sustainable development goals, which explicitly included climate action and concern for life on water and life on land (United Nations, 2015).

Consequently, eco practice texts have an internationalist perspective, that is, they see eco practice and environmental issues as of global concern, requiring international cooperation. All of the eco practice texts discuss examples of practice in Africa and Asia, and Dominelli's (2012) work is a particularly striking example of consistent commitment to an internationalist global perspective, although her work also reflects the emphasis on disasters, noted by Krings et al. (2020). Internationalism is, however, often removed from the everyday concerns of individualistic interpersonal practice, which is typical of most social work, from the role of social work agencies in child care and safeguarding, and adult care services for groups such as learning and physically disabled, mentally ill and older people. This may be seen in many current textbooks. Table 1 contains a simple analysis of well-regarded general social work textbooks used in the UK published since 2015, by which time the main corpus of current writing on eco practice was available. The picture is mixed, but it does not demonstrate a significant emphasis on eco practice or environmental issues. Only one indexes climate change or environmental crisis, all continue with substantial coverage of ecological systems practice, relevant to traditional practice but not to current environmental thinking. Two contain chapters on eco practice by writers specialising in this field.

Table 1: Eco concepts in general social work texts

Text	Indexes climate change or environmental crisis	Covers eco systems practice	Material on eco practice
Fook (2016)	No	No	No
Deacon, McDonald (2017)	No	Chapter: pp 81-92	No
Lishman, Yuill, Brannen, Gibson (2018)	Yes	pp 194-195, 420, 439	No
Thompson, Stepney (2018)	No	pp 202-205, 232	Chapter: pp 202-214
Munford, O'Donoghue (2019)	Yes	pp 179-180	Chapter: pp 157-173
Payne, Reith-Hall (2019)	Yes	No	Chapter: pp 171-180
Teater (2020)	No	Chapter: pp 16-37	No
Payne (2021a)	No	pp 242-249	Chapter pp 428-448

Despite the internationalist perspective of eco practice texts and the coverage of African and Asian practice examples within them, social work writing from these continents does not pick up eco practice or environmental concerns as a priority, suggesting that the internationalist perspective is not yet indigenous to social work texts in these nations. A characteristic of Asian texts, in particular, is the significance of natural disasters, such as floods and tsunamis, as a focus for action. Recent African accounts of social work, for example, rarely have an extended emphasis on eco practice. Patel's (2015) well-established account of social development practice, for example,



concentrates on social work and social development among traditional social work client groups, and issues such as poverty reduction. An account of sustainable livelihoods focuses on developing economic, human, and social capital. She does not index climate change, although in describing the impact of globalisation creating environmental insecurity, she cites Dominelli's (2012) green social work and a South African paper on climate change (Lesolle, 2012). Her account of practice theories, however, includes a category of "environment-focused theory", which mentions deep ecology, and refers to various systems approaches, constructionism, transcultural and transpersonal theories, structural theories, the life model and indigenous theory. Another recent edited text from East Africa (Twikirize, Spitzer, 2019) contains no material on eco practice or theory. The emphasis is on culturally responsive, empowering, and indigenous developments at a community level, also increasing economic and social capital. An internationally edited text on 'postcolonial social work' (Kleibl, Noyoo, Bunk, Dittmann, Seepamore, 2020) with significant involvement from southern Africa does not index climate change or environmental issues and contains no chapters specifically about eco practice. Another similar text on social development in Africa (Gray, 2017:24) identifies environmental sustainability as an issue, drawing on the UN Millennium Development Goals, but there is no extended treatment of environmental issues or eco practice. A text edited from South Asia (Tan, Chan, Mehta, Androff, 2017) has a section on environmental crises and examples of practice relevant to eco practice, but no specific chapter. Desai's (2015) text on social development in Asia contains a chapter on environmental issues and sustainability. Santha's (2020) recent practice text also focuses on the systems theory ideas of adaptation and a grassroots community approach.

CONCEPTUALISATIONS OF ECO SOCIAL WORK

Three significant conceptualisations

Three important conceptualisations of eco social work offer different ways of thinking about its aims and practice; they are not separate, but they represent differing emphases among writers interested in eco practice. They are:

- Environmental justice, strongly associated with Dominelli's (2012) account of 'green social work', but characteristic of many of the eco practice texts, aiming for social justice in the process of addressing increasingly significant environmental crises and disasters
- Sustainability, present in most eco practice writing, but central to McKinnon and Alston's (2016) and Santha's (2020) focus on community and grassroots empowerment, resilience and social capital
- Transition, a significant contribution of Matthies, Närhi's (2017) emphasis on social transition through policy and practice interventions to change social perceptions and structures to incorporate concern for environmental sustainability. Also relevant are Coates and Gray's (2019) emphasis on "ecocentric" practice, transforming practice towards the seeing the natural environment as a source of change, resources and strengths and Santha's (2020) focus on adaptation.

Coates (2003; Gray, Coates, Hetherington, 2013b) draws on interest within early social work proponents of eco practice in the deep ecology of Naess (2008). This view argues that the interests of human populations should not have greater importance than the needs and survival of animal and plant populations. This is both a moral and practical position and goes further than scepticism about economic growth as the basis of economic and social development. Human beings have no inherent right to survival over animals and plants, and in practice biodiversity benefits both humans and the flora and fauna of the planet. Deep ecological social work, focusing on environmental justice by displacing humans from the central position in the relations between nature is associated particularly with Besthorn (2003; 2011; 2013) and van Wormer, Besthorn (2017:243–297). It is hard to imagine traditional social work practice models prioritising animals and the natural



environment equally with human beings, although Ife (2012:28-29) includes discussion of animal rights as relevant to consideration of human rights.

Another important aspect of eco practice is its connection with Indigenist theory may help to identify a social work approach that would balance social with natural environments more equally. This is a fairly recently developed critique of social work practice and theory applied in colonial or postcolonial societies (Hart, 2019). The aim is to engage with people who are oppressed by their community- and self-identification with the culture, language and spirituality of pre-colonial and pre-settler societies. Practice seeks to enable them to renew their understanding and use of their ancestral environments and traditional economic, knowledge, political and social practices and systems. Examples include use of community, family or tribal mechanisms for managing relationships. Maintaining philosophical and spiritual beliefs and practices and links with their traditional farming methods and natural environments are important elements of this practice that relate closely to eco practice that demonstrates an awareness of the issues raised by deep ecology (Besthorn, Hudson, 2017).

Ramsay and Boddy (2017) analysed the eco social work literature to identify practice concepts that emerged from it. These included:

- Being creative in applying existing practice skills to eco practice objectives
- Being open to different values and ways of doing things; this connects with Lysack's (2017) analysis of a potential eco practice ethics
- Incorporating the natural environment in practice
- Appreciating and valuing the instrumental and innate value of non-human life
- Adopting a renewed orientation to change that includes environmental issues
- Working across boundaries with other professions, communities, and individuals

Is eco practice a critical social work perspective?

Eco practice has been strongly linked to critical social work perspectives as an implementation of critical practice theory, alongside feminist and anti-oppressive practice. There are a number of reasons for seeing eco practice as a critical practice theory:

- Eco practice theory offers explicit criticism of ecological systems theory and seeks to disrupt it as a dominant practice theory because it favours individualised, psychologised practice focused on the social environment, rather than a broader social focus including the natural environment.
- Eco practice, like critical practice, questions current political and social priorities, for example through third sector representation at global climate change conferences which is often critical of institutionalised political objectives of national states and international organisations.
- Eco practice sees many global environmental concerns deriving from the failings of capitalist economic systems, particularly those associated with liberal economic thought and neoliberal economics and political philosophies. This connects both with critical practice and with concerns about colonial and postcolonial economic development policy in African and Asian countries. These ideas include a critique of damaging "structural adjustment policies" imposing pro-market economic policies and seeking to reduce state responsibility for social wellbeing (Noyoo, Kleibl, 2020). Social movements increasingly reflect at the least a scepticism about promoting economic growth as the answer to social needs in resource-poor countries. These sometimes extend to arguing for degrowth policies (Ben-Ami, 2010:24-29). Environmental degradation may easily be seen as the result of autocratic colonial and postcolonial economic exploitation. Social work implementing critical and structural practice theory thus seems directly relevant to eco practice.
- Nārhi and Matthies (2001:23-29) refer to a 1980s German movement that sought to link environmental discomfort with current economic and political thinking using social work



and other helping professions to control people through bureaucratisation, centralisation, and new technologies of surveillance. They cite German eco-critical theory, which sees social work as a form of ‘human ecology’ connecting people’s inner psychological life with biology, economics, culture, medicine, politics, and other systems of thought. This connects with the critique deriving from the Frankfurt School theorists such as Habermas and French philosophers such as Bourdieu and Foucault, who are important sources of current critical debate in social work (Garrett, 2018a; 2018b).

- Major texts on eco practice give many examples of grassroots practice based on people’s participation in local community organisations. Such models of practice are also an important part of practice in critical social work, which seeks to build capacity and experience among oppressed populations in using collective, cooperative and egalitarian social structures to tackle issues in their lives, rather than drawing on individualised help.
- The critical practice concern with anti-racism, anti-oppressive practice and increasingly with decolonisation makes an important connection with indigenous practice and theory also adapted in ways relevant to eco practice, particularly in African, Arctic, and Asian settings.

While eco practice writings make links with critical practice, however, environmental concerns and practice are a low priority in major critical theory writing. Table 2 contains analysis of significant texts in the critical practice tradition, published since 2015, when the main corpus of current writing on eco practice was available. Most texts offer no coverage of eco issues or practice; in one other case, this is minimal. Ecological systems theory is largely absent, in two cases being discussed to criticise it, so clearly critical practice has taken the position that it is not relevant to critical practice in the same way that eco practice writing rejects its relevance. Where there is substantial coverage of eco practice issues, it remains a small part of large books, in the example of Webb’s (2019) edited text, forty-five pages in more than six hundred, about 7.5%. The priority in all this writing is of critique of economic and political neoliberalism in the political and social systems within which social workers operate, of discrimination, inequality, and oppression together with practice responding to poverty, oppression, particularly of disabled people, minority ethnic groups and women and racism, neglecting the effects of global environmental stress leading to many of the practice issues discussed.

Table 2: Eco concepts in significant critical social work texts

Text	Indexes climate change or environmental crisis	Covers eco systems practice	Material on eco practice
Morgaine, Capous-Desyllas (2015)	Yes	Yes	pp. 114–116.
Fook (2016)	No	No	No
Thompson (2016)	No	No	No
Baines (2017)	No	No	No
Garrett (2018a)	No	No	No
Ferguson, Ioakimidis, Lavalette (2018)	Yes	No	Chapter: pp. 111–132
Mullaly, Dupré (2019)	Yes	Yes	No
Webb (2019)	Yes	No	pp. 149, 208–209, 442–443, 481, 523. Chapters: pp. 233–243, 267–277, 390–398

Recent books on social work ethics and philosophy also contain minimal coverage, and Liu and Flynn (2021) studied 64 social work codes of ethics, finding that the main focus of such codes



remained on the social environment rather than the built or natural environments. Lysack (2017), however, proposes ethical principles for a transitional approach to eco practice. These include:

- Basing economies on the value of the goods produced in the long-run,
- An ethos of restraint
- A sceptical perspective on growth as a development economic objective
- Acknowledging the limitations of humanity's development
- Identifying where the consequences where environmental limitations have been or might be breached
- A deep ecology approach of de-centring human needs in favour of the requirements of the wider environment
- The traditional approach of many indigenous groups of perceiving and following natural patterns of life
- Acknowledging the intrinsic worth of nature; humanity does not take precedence over it
- Taking a long-term rather than a short-term perspective on human social development,
- De-centring economic primacy

There is only passing mention in other texts that connect with perspectives on eco practice, for example Watts and Hodgson's (2019) text on social justice and social work, also described as critical. Extensive publication programmes of practice texts on work with children and families, older people and on anti-racist and anti-oppressive practice generally do not explore the consequences of environmental crises or eco practice with specific client groups, even though commentary and case examples in the eco practice literature identifies environmental issues affecting many of the same people.

In summary, writers on eco practice see their contributions as part of or allied with critical social work theory and practice. Editors and writers working within critical social work, while sometimes namechecking environmental issues or eco practice as examples of current economic and political issues, do not give eco practice priority as part of critical practice. In this, they are reflecting the wider priorities of social work literature more generally, and probably also the political priorities of many societies. The possibilities offered by eco practice to social work have not been incorporated into its main areas of thought and practice, ethical, moral political social and spiritual issues are present in the literature but not highlighted in the main areas of social work practice and policy in just the same way that they are sidelined in economic and political discourse in most societies.

Eco practice thinking

Much of the thinking about eco practice is set at a collective, community level concerned with policy influence, like critical practice. One of the weaknesses of this approach is the conservative nature of community action and activism, which is often about maintaining and protecting what people have. The long-term nature of environmental issues means that people often have other pressing priorities and need help to understand the connection with hidden eco issues, which seem to be too complex and distant for people to take on. Dominelli's (2012) account of green social work, for example, deals very little with children and families, people with healthcare needs and offending, which is the main focus of many social workers' daily work. Her helpful focus on people's understanding and exploring their position, however, stresses interdependencies between people in their social environment and how they can make changes in what's going on for them in concert with others around them. But this can only happen as they find ways of becoming conscious of how the environment affects them.

Boetto's (2016) practical account of eco practice actions in everyday social work can help to identify things that all practitioners could attempt, working through the main stages of social work. In engaging with clients, and in assessment, for example practitioners can be more responsive to and use the natural environment. Intervention techniques, however, are distant from the starting point



of the life experience of the people social workers help, from the concerns of the communities they live in and from much of other practice. Eco practice proposes, therefore, giving people time to think through how they are being affected by environmental issues, to think about possible changes and to get themselves ready to make those changes, step by step. Another respected approach is to think about impact assessments (Närhi, 2001; Raymaekers, 2016) to look at how environmental factors affect individuals and families you work with, or collectively in social settings clients are involved in, or in your teams covering the areas you work in. And what might mitigate and resolve damaging factors.

CONCLUSION: WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT ECO PRACTICE

Environmental social work and eco practice are at the early stage of their development. They are not a priority for social workers, for the general public and the people who use social work services and for the management and policymaking in social agencies. To bring together issues about eco practice, it is important to start a process of thinking about how we can develop a practice response to create change. First, social work thought needs to clarify its theoretical position on eco practice. The internationalist policy-influence character of the proponents of eco practice needs to be extended to inform concrete practical actions that can be undertaken in the agencies that exist, with their current policies. Eco practice seeks radical change in our societies, that links to the inequalities and oppressions that many social workers care about. But both social work thinking and wider economic, political and social systems currently fail to see that an eco response is a priority for survival. Autocratic, nationalistic, neglectful, populist economic and political policies oversimplify the complex and developing global and local response to environmental issues that we will need to achieve.

Second, social work services need to develop evidence of the impact of environmental issues on the lives of the people who use social workers' services. While the practical consequences of climate change on heating for disabled and older people are obvious, social work evidence of this is needed. Spiralling food and power costs arising from nationalistic wars and their impact on poverty for individuals and communities is clear, but social work evidence of the impact on people's lives and social services is needed. Environmentally sustainable responses to inadequacies and inequalities in criminal justice, health, housing, social care, and many other fields of social provision is politically and socially rejected; but social work evidence of the disastrous consequences is needed.

Third, social work needs to develop the perspective that environmental issues are among the pressures that are having important effects on the lives of the people it tries to help. There is a moral duty to respond to environmental issues, to care for the natural world as part of social priorities, and to move away from the teetering disasters that children and grandchildren of present generations will face if no action is taken. This thinking will help to identify an eco practice that recognises that any future social world will require a sustainable environment respectful of the natural world. There is no choice; humanity must make this change, and social work can contribute to it through our awareness and understanding developed from and applied through our eco practice.

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Components of the Context Fostering a Transformative Learning in the Course of Social Work Education. The Case of a Socially Engaged Research

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Abstract

OBJECTIVES: As transformative learning (TL) is today considered an important component of social work education and practice (e.g., Dempsey, Halton, Murphy, 2001), the article seeks the possibilities of TL incorporation in the social work curriculum. The author argues that individual projects of socially engaged qualitative research could be considered as one of them and reconstructs the components of this research that fostered a researcher's fundamental cognitive transformation. **THEORETICAL BASE:** The theoretical reference is the concept of Transformative Learning by Mezirow (Mezirow, 1978; 2000; 2009). **METHODS:** The reconstruction of socially engaged study properties fostering TL was induced by autobiographical reflection rooted in data from the field diary and notes of the research, in the course of which the crucial researcher's identity transformation had happened and was advanced. **OUTCOMES:** Components of a socially engaged research context fostering TL in a social work researcher were uncovered and described. **SOCIAL WORK IMPLICATIONS:** The traits of research context fostering TL reconstructed in the paper could be translated and incorporated into social work education contexts, including the methods of supervision of social work students' individual research (B.A, M.A) research projects.

Keywords

social work education, transformative learning (TL), socially engaged research, epistemological participation, critical reflection, empowerment, advocacy

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INTRODUCTION

Transformative learning is today considered as an important component of a social work education and practice (e.g., Dempsey, Halton, Murphy, 2001). It helps our profession representatives to enhance “citizenship, human rights, social justice and social change ideals” (Morley, 2008).

As an academic, I deeply identify with this statement, and in my academic work I include the elements of facilitating TL in the course of studies to social work. Considering that the definition of social work promoted by international bodies considers social justice, respect for human rights, and most of all respect for diversity², to be the value base of the profession, our enhancing interpretive flexibility and openness in students to accept new perspectives, often very different from our first-hand knowledge, and incorporate them into their personal systems of knowledge becomes one of the goals of social work education programs.

This article is the result of an autobiographical reflection on a TL process of a social work academic. Asking myself about my personal experience of a kind of “metamorphosis” in the course of academic education, I referred to the analysis of the process through which I have experienced it myself. Slightly more than two decades ago I graduated from the social pedagogy. At that time, the critical or emancipatory pedagogies were introduced me to through a lecture and suggested reading. Such a method did not result in instilling in me a clear memory of the assumptions of these approaches to social practice. This only happened during my doctoral research (qualitative study in a “disadvantaged neighbourhood” (DN)) (Snyder, Angus, Sutherland-Smith, 2002), which in retrospect I see as a time of dynamic and thorough biographical metamorphosis towards my identification with alternative conceptualizations of social problems and social interventions, which ever since have been expressed in defining my academic role³. My critical thinking in both my reflection on practice (temporary resident of the same neighbourhood volunteer youth worker) and my role as an academic in a university social work education program got started in the process of a socially engaged qualitative insight into the everyday life of a disinvested urban neighbourhood youth.

Given the widespread belief in the need for transformative, non-instrumental learning methods for social work, my attempt to understand the logic of changes that occurred in my interactions with the participants of this study, in the composition of my knowledge and in my ways of doing social work in the context of the socially engaged research, seems to be promising for the development of the discourse on TL and reflexivity in social work. The article aims to reconstruct the properties of the context of qualitative research conducted in a DN, in which I could see, after some time, a trigger of the researcher’s fundamental cognitive transformation. To achieve this goal, I made an autobiographical insight, as a result of which I uncovered and described the components of the research context, which triggered—and through which my TL—the socially engaged research.

This article may also be valuable for young researchers who with great commitment enter social contexts unknown to them and, in the course of the research conducted there, initiate their intense identity processes, which are subject to reflection only after some time. Naming and describing them can help researchers recognize their dilemmas, emotions, and decisions, and look at themselves from the outside already in the course of the research.

In the paper, I introduce key conceptual ideas that I draw on throughout its analytical part. Then I present the re(construction) of both socially engaged research traits and the logic of my process

² International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW) and International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) (2014).

³ I am thinking here about radical, critical, or anti-oppressive models of social work. I call them “alternative” as their common assumptions seem to be: emphasizing the causes of social problems in terms of the processes that are beyond the agency of service users, defining clients in terms of “marginality, groups of limited social participation in wider society”, re(defining) the addressee of social worker’s intervention, and form the individuals/groups/communities “problematic” to the society *per se*.



of transformative change in the course of such type of research. The biographically ordered line of the latter is analysed with reference to the Jack Mezirow concept of TL (Mezirow, 1978; 2000; 2009). Finally, I conclude with presentation of the components of an educational context possibly facilitating transformative identity reformulations of the social work students. In creating conditions for the incorporation of such research in the course of social work education, I see one of the ways to increase the transformative potential of social work education programs.

TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING IN SOCIAL WORK EDUCATION

The concept of TL by J. Mezirow (Mezirow, 1978; 2000; 2009), which is the result of his qualitative research into adult learning processes, has gained wide application beyond the area of andragogy, probably surprisingly for the author himself. Its uniqueness stems from the author's capture of an interesting coupling between learning processes and identity changes that occur when learning is linked to action.

He distinguished two types of learning. The first, instrumental/formative learning happens when knowledge of the acting subject increases in successive new situations and its new elements compose in the so-called "frame of reference". They are our assumptions about what it is like. They shape our expectations, ideas and feelings and constitute a worldview, personal knowledge (beliefs), which gets activated during our physical and/or mental activities (Mezirow, 2000; 2009)⁴. They are different, but not extremely, because their source is our socialization, partly individualized ("significant others"), partly shared, because it is burdened with culture, class, politics, etc.

The acting subject experiences the limits of his/her frames of reference in new situations that cannot be understood by them, and then the TL is triggered, leading to a change in the way of perceiving and interpreting reality. The *sin qua non* of its effectiveness is acting in a situational context that will enable the experience of a 'difference', a different worldview. Two types of contexts of human activity are indicated, which are conducive to TL:

- the context in which he establishes, repeats new interactions (e.g., entering the role of a worker)
- context of assimilation processes
- (e.g., emigration).

New situations require reference to the existing knowledge, and in the case of its insufficiency, they cause confusion, stimulate reflection, and become a driving force of reformulations of frames of reference. Based on his research, Mezirow captured, theorized, and presented the logic of this process in the following interrelated changes involving emotional, cognitive and motivational processes in the course of which we critically examine our prior interpretations and assumptions to form new meaning of the "why". This perspective transformation is achieved through the phases below:

- A disorienting dilemma
- A self-examination with feelings of guilt or shame
- A critical assessment of epistemic, sociocultural, or psychic assumptions
- Recognition that one's discontent and the process of transformation are shared and that others have negotiated a similar change
- Exploration of options for new roles, relationships, and actions
- Planning a course of action
- Acquisition of knowledge and skills for implementing one's plan
- Provision trying of new roles
- Building competence and self-confidence in new roles and relationships

⁴ Due to the purpose of the article, in its narrative, I present a synthetic approach to frames of reference. I omit, for example, a detailed insight into the notions essential for a thorough understanding of this concept: e.g., "habits of mind" or "points of view" (Mezirow, 2000).



There are well-documented ways of creating circumstances conducive to such structured processes of transformative changes in students within the walls of universities. Social work researchers and educators explored and proved many patterns of TL experiences incorporated into the social work curriculum. Williams, Metalsmith and Venable (2011) described the transformative potential of relationships with “transformative and culturally competent educators”. Others have captured the power of redefining “the taken-for-granted lived experiences” in programs enhancing critical reflection through discussing and re-interpreting the students’ practical experiences through the lens of critical theories (Lay, McGuire, 2010; Bay, Macfarlane, 2011). Mezirow’s closer positions, however, seem to be those described in the research literature, the starting point of which is the limitations of explanatory potential of their existing frames of reference in their attempts to understand events and processes they observe in new social contexts. The transformative potential of students’ cultural immersion programs aiming at the increase of “cultural humility” was proved and discussed (Zhu, Olcoń, Pulliam, Gilbert, 2022). The results reflecting the transformative changes in students in the short-term study abroad were uncovered and discussed (Glassburn, Reza, 2022). Hughes documented how the organization of a community placement undertaken by students could foster “transformative learning, autonomous thought, critical reflection, professional competence and evidence-based practice” (Hughes, 2013). The phenomenological perspective of social work students on their learning process following the implementation of community-based participatory research (CBPR) captured the transformative power of their engagement in data collection and participation in steering committees with the sense of co-creating a regional vision for the communities (Malka, Moshe-Grodofsky, 2021).

Little is known, however, about the transformative potential of individually led qualitative social work research in which a “becoming” researcher gets the privilege of both getting included in the world under his/her scrutiny and an agency that changes this world’s routines. And this is my story.

A SOCIALLY ENGAGED STUDY AS A SPACE FACILITATING A RESEARCHER’S IDENTITY TRANSFORMATION

Almost two decades ago I started a participant observation in a DN in (name of the city in one of the European countries- anonymization), whose actors were a group of young male residents (14–22 y.o.) of the DN. They were spending most of their day at the gate to the inner yard surrounded by city tenement blocks, which I interpreted as a serious risk to their socialization. At first, I was an observer recording interactional data, but with time I began to play an active role in their living environment, trying to foster some changes.

Such positionality in the world of research actors allowed me to get gradually immersed into their world and re(construct) a theory explaining the process of “social exclusion of the youth from socially non-homogeneous neighbourhoods”⁵. The reconstruction of the process of social exclusion from the actors’ perspective brought the essence of this process to the gradual limitation of agency of the actors in the contexts outside of the neighbourhood (wider society). The mechanism making this process dynamic would not be the individual “deficits” of the actors, but the social reaction to their “strangeness”, in time causing in young males self-exclusion as a means of self-defence of identity. It is thus a process of exchange between the excluding reactions towards the DN youth from the side of “society” experienced by the young residents in the neighbourhood (from the side of some neighbours, police, probation officers visiting their homes etc.), at school (teachers, school social advisors) and the self-excluding reactions of the young people, who paradoxically protect in this very way the integrity of their identity and subjectivity. The consequence of the actors’ perspective assumed by me in the engaged and interpretive research orientation, the subject of which turned out to be an interactively perceived process of social

⁵ The synthetic approach to this theory has been presented in English in: Gulczyńska (2016); Gulczyńska (2019).



inclusion/exclusion, is the **externally located sense of agency** in the process uncovered along the research. The actors do not seem to control their life scenarios and feel responsibility for their problems. The very categories that construct the theory are expressed in their language (not taken from the language of external theories) and have a blame-the-society character. The mechanism of the described process—stigmatizing and discriminating social reactions from the ‘privileged’ who have symbolic power—occurred to regulate their conduct in the neighbourhood, schools, in interactions with the police, probation officers, and many others.

My criticism and radicalism were not the results of “intellectual infection” by critical or radical social thinkers, but a natural stage of intellectual development resulting from a redefinition of identity in the process of this research. In several years of participant observation, I had the opportunity to experience the crisis of reliability of knowledge or trust in the institutions and forms of social work that find their legitimacy in it. Participation in the daily routine of the research actors, the lived experience, and above all, the theory which is the result of the research explaining the problems of youth from DNs in terms of structural constraints and the process of stigmatization, facilitated a kind of a transformation of my perspective on social problems, their explanations and ways fostering the social change.

The conceptual work, taken up by me after the research, aimed at the reconstruction of its course and its overall consequences for the researcher’s identity transformation. This analytical work allowed me to sketch the concept of **socially engaged research** as a type of qualitative research. This kind of research represents critically and radically-oriented qualitative research with a researcher participating in the world of the research actors. In the research literature, we find many categories that see in a researcher’s participation a distinctive trait against the background of other research paradigms in social science methodology, including the research in the field of social work, which shows the diversity of meanings ascribed to participation (cf. Granosik, Gulczyńska, Kostrzyńska, Littlechild, 2019). In socially engaged research a researcher reaches the privilege of **epistemological participation**. To reach this, he/she aims to adopt the perspective of the research actors; tries to uncover the internal, local rules of social activities that are so deeply ingrained in daily life that they are often invisible to the participants themselves. “If these processes are produced and reproduced by the participants and they give them meaning, value them and bind them together, it is only possible to see and explore them from their perspective” (Granosik, 2013). This type of research immanent component is the researcher’s identity metamorphosis. This process is realized in the course of communication with the actors, and his/her emerging disagreement with and engagement in the world of research actors when it is getting hard to keep the distance when he/she gets the chance to create the transformative space (of oneself and the actors). Through socially engaged activities during the study, a researcher is given the status of an honorary citizen in the world of the “others.” Expanding and enriching the space of the researcher’s social participation is a key part of such a research experience.

Since the TL of a researcher in the course of socially engaged research is a complex process, a detailed presentation of my social entanglements and the changes that happened within them along my socially engaged research course seems to be an act indispensable for defining the components of a research context favouring the researcher’s transformative learning.

COMPONENTS OF THE RESEARCH CONTEXT FOSTERING TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING

Pre-conceptualization of research design in terms of deficit-based approach

When I started developing my research design, I only had the opportunity to observe and probably enter the group of the DN males (teenagers) that misbehave in public space while hanging around the street or spending spare time at the gate linking the street with one of the neighbourhood courtyards. I’m a social pedagogue. The fundamental question posed by this subdiscipline’s representatives in their various explorations is “the question concerning the relationship that exists between



man and his/her environment. On the one hand, it is about understanding the ways the life environment impacts the development of the individual, and on the other about identifying human capacities of transforming the existing conditions" (Theiss, 1984:64). Socio-pedagogical research aims at enhancing theory- and research-driven social change. No doubt the primary value of disciplinary orientation expresses itself in a basic theoretical lens through which a researcher observes and interprets reality as well as defines the aims of his/her explorations. Typically for the research conceptualization phase, I started reviewing the Polish socio-pedagogically rooted research literature. Most researched-based descriptions of children or adolescents in the context of their local community were focused on the risks for their bio-socio-cultural development. Their narrations were constructed of deficit-based categories and focused mainly on the 'faults' and 'weaknesses' of their families as well as on the poor effects their peer local groups had on them⁶. That is why, I guess, I started my research with the hidden assumption that there existed many risks to the bio-socio-cultural development for the youth hanging around the neighbourhood streets and a gate. I felt the necessity to diagnose the deficits underlying that lifestyle for which I planned to seek in their families, in group processes responsible for their and bad local role models, which were all together responsible for their negative socialization. When I imagined the potential intervention into their world I was thinking in terms of the outreach, compensatory, deficit-based programs attractive enough to soak their spare time with educational content and of enhancing complex forms of support for their families. Replacing their daily group rituals in the street by new ones, offered by the staff of one of the local extra curriculum programs to limit their presence in their local community, was the rough idea about the possible change resulted from my relationships with them in the course of the research⁷.

Gradual immersion into the research participants' world

Parallel to the literature search and conceptualization of my study, I started a gradual "immersion" into research actors' reality. My presence in the world of respondents smoothly adopted different forms, from passive through interactive to active (Barker, 1980). According to E. Barker, the role of a "passive stranger" is characterized by the externality position of the researcher, who watches the subjects from a distance and learns about them without making interactions. Joining the group of actors and using their language so skilfully that one is even recognized as a participant in their world, is an inherent property of the role of an "interactive stranger", which evolves into the role of an "active stranger", when the researcher begins to intervene in the course of interaction and becomes the agent of change (ibid.).

My passive presence in the world of the actors (lasting several months) consisted of two sub-steps. The first one consisted of an outside, distanced observation of the youth group that I was interested in, performed through the window of my own home, or during other daily forms of activity in my neighbourhood (walking the dog, shopping, working on the car, etc.). The feature that distinguishes it from the next sub-step, i.e., passive presence was non-interacting with the research actors, and only making a systematic observation of their everyday forms of activity and listening to and learning their language.

In time, I was able to induce sporadic interactions, the subjects of which were the current events in the life of the neighbourhood, but they allowed only for situationally-focused conversations.

⁶ That was year 2000. Today, there are many updates in the literature focused on disadvantaged localities' effects on children and youth in Polish literature.

⁷ My initial overview of the situation seemed to reflect a typical perspective on the etiology of social problems – psychological or functionalism-based approaches that dominate in education in the field of social professions, which is emphasized in the works of supporters of critical (Szkudlarek, 2003) or radical (Payne, 1991; Fook, 1993; Dominelli, 1997) approaches to the understanding of the educational or/and social issues.



In this way, however, I gained a recognizable identity as a nice neighbour, which let me start a gradual deepening of the contacts to get to know some of the members of the group, and further develop access to the whole group, satisfactorily mastering their language, acquire a certain cultural proficiency, and thus become a researcher present interactively.

The interactive dimension of my presence in the field of research was soon rapidly enhanced with the active dimension. My spontaneous invitation to one of the boys to learn English together and regular meetings with him was a kind of breakthrough.

"Guests of the Jewish Community, adjacent to my and Dex's backyard, asked about the location of the nearby synagogue when they were passing me on the street. The ensuing conversation, conducted in English, interested Dex, a teenage boy whom I often saw in the neighbourhood, especially in the area of one of its gates.

D: - Wow! ... you are so fluent in English - he expressed delight.

AG: If you want to speak like that, come to me, I will teach you - I replied." (Research Diary)

Reacting so spontaneously to Dex's statement, I had no idea how serious and long-term the consequences would be. The above description illustrates the situationally and emotionally crystallized root cause of several years of my socially engaged study of his group, their families, other residents of the neighbourhood and people related to them and their place by their professional affiliation, representatives of several institutions who were important components of their life environment (non-neighbours).

The boy turned out to be not only eager to participate in the study, but he also helped me open interactions with his colleagues. In time, my participation in group activities let me uncover and understand their patterns of cultural practices and achieve some level of communicative competencies. The development of interactivity was parallel to the increase of my involvement in more personalized relationships with selected boys (and their families). Other participants of the group allowed me to accompany the group (in common spaces such as the gate, and the street) and were willing to take part in walking my dog (either individually with me or in a small group).

Spontaneously reached agency in situations of unequal treatment of the research participants

In time, I was getting into their groups, into their personal and family lives, into their relationships with the representatives of educational institutions and facilities of formal support and/ or control. This process was first of all dynamized by my accidental presence in the situations typically experienced by research actors along their daily routines to get advanced. The more situations I was participating in the more lost, confused, and angry I became. Hence, my passive presence spontaneously transferred into an active one. Of particular importance for the redefinition of the basic assumptions with which I entered the study were situations revealing the paradoxes of control and assistance addressed to the residents. The extract from my field diary exemplifies one of the breaking-through situations:

I find out (from one of the guys) that "my boys" were stopped by the unmarked police car in front of my city block while they were standing quietly near the shop (a block had its commercial part at a ground floor - A). I saw Yeti and Dex⁸ (boys from my group) in the car's back seat. One of the boys was unknown to me. Eo—the fourth one—was a member of my group too. He was standing in front of the car. I approached the car and ask what happened. Nothing bad, I realized through small talk. I introduce myself as a community youth worker. The lady policewoman told me that they (police-A) were checking them

⁸ My research actors chose the nick names for my publications.



(my boys) because they saw them standing in a group on the street. I explained that they were boys from my group, that I knew them and that they were “good kids”. Despite that they didn’t find anything bad, they contacted by radio a police station to “confirm their identity”.

“They are clean.”, I heard.

I felt a kind of a disagreement and anger. The conversation began. They asked me about the sense of standing in the street when young people constantly expose themselves to the attention of the police.

Policewoman: “Isn’t there a common room for the local youth or some other place so they don’t stand on this street”

Author: “There are only gates and streets around,” I explain. “There is no such place. These guys will always be street kids because they have no other place to hang out.”

Policewoman: “Can’t they stay in the backyard?”

Author: “No, because then the neighbours call the police because it’s too loud and you’ll be back here in a moment.”

“It’s a fact.” interjects the policeman. “These courtyards are like wells” (narrow spaces surrounded on all sides by multi-story walls of the blocks, which you enter through the gate -Author)

Policewoman: “Well, then I don’t know... At least make them go somewhere tonight, because we have the ‘Minors’ action and another police patrol will come here for sure.”

When the police car drives away, I ask the guys to go away.

Dex: “I’m supposed to stay at home? No way! They will come, record me once again and go away. What’s the problem?”

It was a time when I got to know them as intelligent, funny guys who deal with the constraints of their living environment. I also met their families led, in great part, by lone mothers struggling to keep their heads above water... However, when I visited a local school adviser to better understand the boys’ poor conduct at school, I heard only a narrative about doomed-failed students, multi-problem families, etc. I already knew then that their small apartments would not host even a few guests, especially a group of young people who are quite expressive. I also knew that there was no facility near their place of residence with an offer appropriate to their age and needs. At the moment, I had no other idea of a place for them.

This situation exemplifies one of many (with representatives of various institutions) that showed me more and more clearly how institutions in which I once saw guarantors of educational and social support for residents of DNs contradict their mission and purposes. I could not explain them in terms of the deficit-based, and family-centred knowledge with which I entered this world. Hence, I began to redefine the frame of reference. My new experience didn’t match the previous frames of reference. In this complex experience of the weakness of my knowledge and beliefs, today I notice the symptoms of a “disorienting dilemma” that triggered a sequence of further transformative changes in me.

- The first was negative feelings such as fear, anger, and feeling ignorant because you don’t have answers and advice in so many situations, which seem to reflect Mezirow’s “self-examination” (Mezirow, 2000; 2009). One of its components was my reflection on the reasons why I feel what I feel, why my beliefs in the institutions were so strong, etc. When I looked back in time to reflect on the reasons why my initial perspective was dominated by these traditional approaches to social work explanations and interventions, I found some answers in my past educational experiences as follows:
- the dominance of traditional psychology in the curriculum; The analysis of the basic curriculum of socio-educational studies at that time revealed different psychologies, amongst which those of normative nature dominated over interpretively-oriented ones.



- introduction of radical or critical theories during sociological and pedagogical classes by teachers, who tend to be critical or radical at the level of statements about social work, but neither in the role of empirical researchers nor social activists⁹;
- having all internships organized in traditional institutions (at schools, children's houses, and local extra-curriculum programs working under the supervision of the educational or social welfare departments, and in the offices of probation officers¹⁰.

Emotions and self-blaming caused tension, which was reinforced by the formal expectation put on me to decide about my research design. Both of these factors facilitated the “critical assessment” (Mezirow, 2000; 2009) of the assumptions with which I entered this study.

Research design limiting its pre-conceptualization and enhancing a researcher's epistemological participation

In this full of contradictions and tensions context I started looking for a methodology that promotes understanding the suspension of the ‘taken for granted’ as an asset, not a problem. I chose the grounded theory method (Charmaz, 2001). My research started with sensitive concepts¹¹. I commenced the research as an observer, equipped with the notions of a very broadly and generally outlined sense, to – with the change of my location – saturate them with categories, as well as verify, enrich or restrict their content and look for the relationship between them. The research was not burdened with theories *a priori* and so it allowed for the sharing of the epistemological perspective between the investigator and the investigated subjects and it served ‘not the accumulation of knowledge, but the progress in the understanding of the reality’ (Czyżewski, 1984:55). The task of the researcher is only to describe the process and understand it the way it is real to the actors, to reach the level of epistemological participation. The researcher and the actors not only co-participated in the process of knowledge creation in the course of the study, but also had a common symbolic space of meanings and senses of the perspective on the reality intersubjectively shared by the actors.

Looking for the legitimation of the emerging theory and its recognition by others

The qualitative research procedures resulted in the theory expressed in categories not easy to incorporate in the basic socio-pedagogical language. While accompanying the group in the natural contexts of their daily activities, I began to see the world through the eyes of those for whom the gate is biographically significant. With understanding their rules of internal communication and barriers to their social participation in- and outside of the neighbourhood in the natural course of events I saw their world through their lens in both a structural and a functional dimension.

The interactively-oriented theory directed the researcher, not towards the factors of early socialization in the family (health care issues, family atmosphere, poor conditions for learning at home, lack of parents' interest, family “pathologies”, etc.) or the influence of the high-risk local community. The etiology of the youth's social problems uncovered in my research puts its actors, not in the roles of the “perpetrators” but the “victims”, and the public institutions not as

⁹ I'm thinking here of the importance of the authenticity of an engaged academic for the transformative purposes of education. The more he/she speaks from his own experience the higher the chance of intellectually ‘infecting’ students with alternative approaches to social problems and challenging traditional approaches.

¹⁰ Polish law allows for the wards of POs to be not just juvenile delinquents and criminals: under the auspices of the Family Court, the judicial system allows POs to fill the role of family guardian. Family guardians supervise the care of children who are at risk of being removed to institutional or foster care (Article. 109 § 1 of the Family and Care Code; Gulczyńska, 2019).

¹¹ H. Blumer, highlighting the definitive concepts and the sensitizing concepts, attributes to the latter the role of a factor orienting researchers in the methodological proceedings in qualitative research (Blumer, 1954:150).



a supportive collective, struggling for equal chances, but as the efficient object of privileged power, blaming for social inadequacy those who are the products of unequal resources distribution and their treatment by the society *per se*.

Understanding the etiology of social issues in structural and interactional categories began to reorient my outlook on the social reality in general, and the situation of the youth from DN's particularly, placing me in the flow of radical social work or critical pedagogy which both spoke to me clearer and louder at this stage (more in Payne, 1991; Szkudlarek, 20003).

Over time, I began to present my findings to various institutional employees, openly undermining some of their typical interpretations, undermining certainty in their created deficit-based, "blaming victims" assessments, trying to "make them aware" of how their actions are felt by service users themselves and how they lead to counterproductive effects. These, as I see them in retrospect, sometimes too critical and radical observations and conclusions, were often understood by their addressees, but rarely caused the will to change, because "this is how it works", "you can't turn the river with a stick", "these are the procedures".

At the same time, I was looking for recognition of my critical knowledge by my academic colleagues with whom I discussed the theory emerging from the data. In these discussions, I obtained the credibility boost I needed for these unusual diagnoses of DN youth problems (not individual or family problems, but institutional and system-driven problems). Despite their lack of emotional involvement in the research, they experienced a similar sequence of changes from a 'disorienting dilemma' to a 'critical assessment' (Mezirow, 2000; 2009). In these sometimes long, inspiring conversations, for which I am very grateful to them, I see an analogy to another component of my TL-recognition of discontent of a learner in transformation by others who start sharing his/her new view of reality (*ibid.*). This observable cognitive frustration in others in the discourse with them made the new knowledge credible enough to encourage me to take actions that logically resulted from my cognitive transformation.

Strategic inclusion of empowerment and advocacy actions/projects in the further course of the research

There is no space in the article to re(construct) my ways of interventions into their relationships with institutions and other ways of my active presence in their lives in detail. All of them seemed to have common elements, which were: empowerment and advocacy (Payne, 1991; Fook, 1993). The research uncovered strikingly the necessity of redefining the young neighbourhood residents' perception by the representatives of these institutions. This would require the suspension of their "taken for granted" (categories of clients/students intersubjectively shared by professionals in their discourse and procedures) and the deconstruction of the pragmatically justified, efficient institutional procedures addressed to such youth. Empowerment of the perspective of the "expert by experience" was one of the aims of my entanglements with professionals whom I met during the research. To reach this aim, I entered the role of their spokesperson ("advocate"), someone who explains two different "rationalities", which are destined for each other. In my playing new roles (a curator of the exhibition of my boys' photos who gave their photovoice on "invisible neighbourhood", in

an art museum in (name of the city- anonymization), an advocate at their schools and with their frequent interactions with the police monitoring the neighbourhood, a sort of "legal advocate" of one of them to prevent his re-sending into the institution for juvenile delinquents, and many others).

I can recognize there the rules governing the order of TL sequences such as exploration of options for new roles and actions, provisional trying of new roles and planning a course of action (Mezirow, 2000; 2009). Last, but not least, I reintegrated into my academic role for me then a new perspective which I continue in conducting my research: critically oriented empirical and, mainly, participatory insights into the realities of structurally, economically, and culturally disadvantaged groups of citizens to empower their voice in scientific and professional discourses.



CONCLUSION

The article seeks one of the answers to the question about the possibilities of TL incorporation in the course of studies in the field of social work. It presents individual projects of qualitative research as one of them. Against the background of Mezirow's key concepts and those documented by the international researchers and educators as part of their education for social work, in which TL took place, the effects of a qualitative research that had been led by the Author more than 20 years ago were reconstructed.

The presentation of the specificity of this research, which I called a "socially engaged research", served to indicate the fundamental role of the researcher's epistemological participation in the world of the research participants and his/her attempts to act there, to have her/his agency in this world. This is in line with the assumptions recognized by Mezirow as extremely important conditions of TL—changes of frames of reference occur when learning is linked to action, when, in a collision with new situations, and worldviews, a critical assessment of assumptions occurs (be they epistemic, sociocultural, psychic) (Mezirow, 1978; 2000; 2009). In addition to that, the autobiographical insight into the course of this research allowed me to capture its constitutive elements, those that formed the process through which my TL took place.

Today, in the local scientific community, I am identified through the prism of different variants of qualitative research with a critical, often radical message, in which I increasingly boldly go beyond the interpretive paradigm to give the greatest possible power in research to their actors (PAR 5 – Participatory Action Research). However, given the time-consuming nature of the latter, most of the student research projects I supervise are classic, qualitative insights into various marginalized groups' realities with the elements of the students' active engagement, which helps to make the research a transformative space. Learning from my own experience and juxtaposing it with Mezirow's concept, as a supervisor of qualitative research projects conducive to students' metamorphosis, I try to organize a learning environment fostering their TL. Therefore, I structure them into a process in which I care for the following elements to be present:

selection as the "subject of research" of a phenomenon that is still poorly described in local literature or a phenomenon that in the literature describing it and widely available is explained mainly in terms of deficit-based approach; A significant factor for the development of epistemological participation in the conceptualization of the study is a careful choice of its subject. Hence, it would appear that the key aspect here is choosing a subject of the scrutiny, which is not well-described in the literature, so the only sure thing that might be planned at the beginning of the study was a "disorientation".

relatively **early and simultaneous entry of students into "someone else's world" / getting to know their interlocutors / entering a selected institution** (preferably before starting to think about research design). Such an experience favours the emergence of a "disorienting dilemma" (Mezirow, 2000; 2009). Since the transformation of frames of reference is an interactive process, and so it is formed at the level of the communication layer, one cannot reach it separately from the context of the interactions with the actors. I encourage students to give their presence there a possibly long-term character. In the socially engaged study, the image of the studied world varies processual, and this is how it becomes a dynamic backdrop for the TL of the researcher.

accompanying their 'placement' readings of literature on the qualitative methods of social research; I mean here the methods adequate to the student's relationship with representatives of the world under his/her supervision and then, **building subgroups of students** working with the use of the same methods.

group learning of qualitative data analysis and their interpretation fostering epistemological participation and then sharing in the group their observations and categories that are uneasy to incorporate into the basic socio-pedagogical language or their current first-hand knowledge.

As a rule, in the work of these small groups, we **learn about successively undertaken, first**



spontaneous, then planned activities. And then, **critical and radical literature** helps in understanding them, above all their purposefulness and the responsibility of the intervening person, which strengthens critical reflection and fosters more and more in-depth reflection on the relationship between the emerging theory grounded in data and the emotions of students and the actions taken by them in the course of the study. The researcher's TL helps simultaneously get the advanced understanding of the explored reality and attempt to transform it with respect to the theory that emerges in the course of the research.

They all seem to create a framework of the educational context serving TL, which in the current version is only outlined but will be saturated with new properties along with its subsequent applications.

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Group Art Therapy as a Tool of Increasing Professional Competences

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Abstract

OBJECTIVES: The article aims at introducing group art therapy as a form of improving professional competences of social workers, as well as a means of verification of the effectiveness the group-art-therapy programme on the improvement of professional competences. **THEORETICAL BASE:** The significance of social work competences concerning societal requirements is on the decline, nonetheless the importance of others increases, or results in the emergence of new competences. The development of the traditional competences is as essential as the development of those that are suitable for the process of addressing the unforeseen issues, as these enable one to successfully deal with the changes in the working environment. The theoretical framework of the article is based on the humanistic concept. **METHODS:** The quantitative design of the research using both mapping, quasi-experiment with the design of Post-test Only with an experimental and control groups and correlational research. **OUTCOMES:** A statistically significant difference in favour of group-art-therapy graduates was confirmed in all the competences. **SOCIAL WORK IMPLICATIONS:** Based on the results, it is possible to state that the techniques employed in the group-art-therapy meetings do enhance individual, communication, and social competences. The group-art-therapy meetings represent an opportunity for a safe working environment with a group and the development of the social workers' competences.

Keywords

group art therapy, competences, social work, quasi-experiment

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INTRODUCTION

Professionalisation of social work as a scholarly discipline currently requires continuous professional support and improvement of the professional competences of social work practitioners and their subsequent application. Social work is regarded as a profession based on the values of humanism, which support individuals in their interaction with their environment. Occupations, where staff members are in constant contact with people, require competences that enable them to communicate professional knowledge to others and to use it effectively. An effective method of personal development and social learning is group work in the form of training, programme, and action learning. When individual staff members learn responsibly at their own initiative and in cooperation with others, they improve their professional competence, which is reflected in the culture and success of the organisation in which they work. Stereotypes in thought processes and communication lead to inflexibility and the absence of new ideas. Art encourages creativity and motivates creative effort. The interconnectedness between creativity and rationality, the balance that the two can create, has an impact on the overall satisfaction and balance of life. It is in the social work milieu that a space is created for an experiential form of work that will bring about a more lasting change in social relationships and connections. Creativity is a part of our being, it stimulates self-realisation, and boosts self-esteem. The goal is not to create a work of art; the process of making and actively engaging in the process contributes to a change of perspective and socialisation. We see the potential of group art therapy activities aimed at improving the competences of social work practitioners and the positive motivational influence of the social community. The purpose of this research paper is to test the effectiveness of an art therapy group programme aiming to increase professional competences in assisting professions. The field of social work is specific in comparison to other professions in that it involves staff with different educational backgrounds and different professional orientations. In addition to social workers (in the position of a social worker and with adequate education), there are also people with secondary and higher education in the positions of assistants, therapists, special pedagogues, and others. For the reasons stated above, we use the term social worker as part of the terminological definition.

PROFESSIONALISM OF SOCIAL WORK

Social work is the result of the demands of social practice; it is a theoretical and applied scientific discipline with an emphasis on practice in the social sphere. It is a qualified assistance to a person who is in a difficult life situation. At the same time, social work is a discipline whose aim is to reveal, explain, and mitigate social problems that arise. As a practice, it relies on a framework of social solidarity, fulfilling individual human potential (Matoušek, 2003; Balogová, 2010) and places increasing demands on the expertise of social work practitioners.

The degree of professionalism in social work practice also stems from the initiative of social work practitioners and their willingness to expand their professional knowledge and competences throughout the time they practice this demanding profession. How is the performance of social work defined, what constitutes its scope, and what demands are associated with it is determined by the differences and purpose of social work. The purpose of defining the competences of social workers is to optimise their performance as well as to improve the design of their training (Weigel, 2002; Klingler, Gray, 2016).

In today's goal-oriented and results-oriented era, it is important to work with people as the most important organisational resource, and to uphold the importance of mutual communication and interaction. A long-term effort in all the assisting professions is in the improvement of recognition, of values in practice, and of the professionalism among social work practitioners and the public. At the same time, it is essential to provide educational opportunities, training, and information that meets the needs of the staff in the workforce (Akila, Nandagopal, 2015).



Modern social work theory is now more accessible and complex than ever before and provides the most complete coverage of social work theory from classical perspectives to the latest ideas devoted to powerful, story-based, and solution-focused approaches (Payne, 2015).

The professionalism and effectiveness of social work practitioners depend on the professional competence framework, which has undergone significant change since the late 1980s (Gabura, Mydlíková, 2012).

Professionalisation of workers in the practice of social work is understood as a process during which specific professional characteristics, personal qualities, competences, and knowledge necessary for qualified and professional performance of work with a specific target group or client are acquired. At the same time, it can also be seen as the final state, on the basis of which the worker is classified as a professional. Continuous improvement of the training system is seen as a basic requisite for professionalisation (Hudecová, 2009).

Professional competences

The fact that social work is professional work aimed at improving the social well-being of a client and at creating social conditions for achieving this goal determines the definition of workers' professional competences (Navrátil, 2001; Hudecová et al., 2010).

Occupations where workers work primarily with people require interpersonal and social competences such as effective communication, conflict management, and teamwork skills. In managerial positions, leadership competences such as the ability to motivate, lead and evaluate people are required. Professional knowledge alone is not enough. Workers need to know how to communicate their expertise to others and use it effectively (Klingler, Gray, 2016).

Competences are a dynamic phenomenon, which means that their development is closely related to the implementation of new technologies and the development of society (Mlčák, 2005). During the development of society, the importance of some competences gradually decreases and, on the contrary, the importance of others increases, or completely new competences emerge. It is important to maintain and develop competences that are useful for solving unforeseen problems, which will enable an individual to cope with changes at work, in personal and social life, or that can be used in most professions. The term competence was originally used in the context of vocational training to refer to the ability or aptitude to perform a particular task. After penetrating into the sphere of education, the term denotes a certain ability or potential to act effectively in a given context (Matoušek, 2003; Truhlářová, 2013).

Professional competences are characterised by certain core features (Tremblay et al., in Határ, 2006) which are contextualised, multidimensional, defined by a standard, and have the potential for action and development. In social work, competences reflect the whole personality of the worker with his/her subsystem, temperament, character, motivation, will, and self-concept. The knowledge, skills, abilities, competences, and values of the social worker are considered primary in the performance of social work. Grejtáková and Vorobel (2012) emphasise the need to use them for the benefit of the client, highlighting the need for acceptance, empathetic approach, assertive behaviour, and the ability to evaluate information in an unbiased way.

Professional competences include professional capabilities, understanding of the nature of social work, mastery of the norms of professional performance and high effectiveness (Davletkaliev et al., 2015). The definition of competences of social work practitioners (Hudecová et al., 2010), is based on the definitions of social work, its objective as well as professional activity. Social work addresses a wide range of social issues and touches on a variety of areas, encompassing not just risk management, implementation of laws, support and advocacy for clients, but also therapeutic intervention, community building, community education, and various other activities. Based on ethical values and norms in social work, Hudecová et al. (2010) describe competences in relation to the social worker's self-development, competences in relation to clients, competences in relation to co-workers and to the organisation, and competences in relation to the profession.



Belz and Siegrist (2001) describe the first core competence as the ability to communicate and cooperate, i.e., to communicate consciously and to contribute actively in a creative way in group processes. Communication competences include mastery of the norms of professional communication, the ability to communicate clear ideas, convey information, the ability to cooperate, readiness for changes in interpersonal relationships, and the ability to influence these processes, to organise and conduct dialogue, and the ability to awaken the society to interest and to focus this interest on addressing the needs of the client (Davletkaliev et al., 2015).

According to the authors Belz and Siegrist (2001), the second core competency is the ability to reflect and learn, the ability to further develop one's own learning process and to think in a contextual and systemic way. Davletkaliev et al. (2015) add analytical competences, which include analysis, synthesis, comparison, generalisation, specification, as well as professional thinking, independent client problem solving, the ability to analyse and generalise foreign, regional, and one's own social work experience.

Belz and Siegrist's (2001) third core competency is the ability to accept responsibility and, within an appropriate framework, co-responsibility. Social competence is an integrative, personal quality that manifests itself in adequate handling of professional and vocational training, social responsibility, the ability to take responsibility, cooperative decision making and participation in their implementation, tolerance, as well as the ability to anticipate, control and resolve conflict situations. Social competence is a complex system of knowledge, skills and competences that are necessary for the social sphere (Davletkaliev et al., 2015).

The ability to reason and evaluate, the ability to make substantive judgements and critically evaluate one's own, shared, and others' ways of working and outcomes, is the fourth core competence described by Belz and Siegrist (2001). Individual competences include awareness of one's own profession's job description, comprehensive professional self-awareness, acceptance of oneself as a professional, adequate self-assessment, internal vision of reasons for both success and failure, support of one's own past experience of professional activity, and the use of the results of one's own professional development for the benefit of clients (Davletkaliev et al., 2015).

The fifth key competence described by the authors (Belz, Siegrist, 2001) is autonomy and performance, i.e., the ability to independently plan, implement, and control the course of work and its results. Organisational competences include mobility, activity, planning competences, adequate evaluation of the results of activities, competences of controlling one's own behaviour and organising one's own work (Davletkaliev et al., 2015).

The sixth core competency described by Belz and Siegrist (2001) is described as problem-solving and creativity, i.e., the ability to recognise problems and solve them in a correspondingly creative way. Davletkaliev et al. (2015) identify motivational-personal competence, which includes the presence of stable professional motivation, readiness for study, self-study and self-development, creative self-realisation, the formation of personal qualities, thinking, the ability to set goals, plan and carry out personal development, the presence of spiritual and moral values, empathy, and respect for representatives of other cultures.



Table 1: Overview of competences of social workers by authors

Davletkaliev et al., 2015	Belz, Siegrist, 2001	Havrdová, 1999	Zastrow, 1995
Communication competences	Ability to communicate and cooperate	Ability to foster effective collaboration	Communicating with different types of clients, colleagues, and the public
Analytical competences	Ability to think and learn	Navigating and planning a course of action	Applying critical thinking skills in a work-related context
Social competences	Ability to accept responsibility	Supporting and assisting towards self-sufficiency	Working in accordance with the ethical principles of social work
Individual competences	Ability to reason and assess	Intervening and providing service	Applying knowledge when working with target groups of all levels
Organisational competences	Independence and productivity	Contributing to the work of the organisation	Working within the structure of an organisation and within a system of providers
Motivational and personal competences	Problem-solving and creativity	Developing professionally	Being able to use one's own personality in a professional manner

Source: Havrdová, 1999; Belz, Siegrist, 2001; Zastrow, 2010; Davletkaliev et al., 2015; amended by the authors

The competences described above are not isolated in the structure of competences but intertwine and complement each other. Knowledge can be considered as the basis of competence, and values, and attitudes are the superstructural part of competence, and they are continuously throughout life influenced by the personality of the individual, the social environment in which they are located, in which they live, and other factors that affect them (Hudecová et al., 2010).

The objectives of further education are fulfilled through knowledge, experience in the educational process, adequate self-understanding, and facilitation of self-development and individuality. Active and initiative participation in the educational process activates the personal potential in achieving personal, generational, and societal goals. It develops the professional aspect and the culture of personality on an interdisciplinary basis in the sense of integrating the knowledge of different scientific fields and their practical application (Navrátilová, 2013; Valchev, 2018).

IMPROVING COMPETENCES THROUGH GROUP ACTIVITIES

Based on the views of Belz and Siegrist (2001), who see human beings as social beings integrating into society through groups, group work is a suitable methodological tool for placing a group in comparable situations and solving problems in an atmosphere of mutual understanding and constructive communication.

Group social work is a method of social intervention that brings together a group of people who share a common interest or a common problem. It is a system of mutual aid. Individuals try to improve their social functioning within a group through group experiences so that they can deal with personal or group problems in the best way possible (Havráňková, 2003; Lovašová, 2016; Slaná, 2017).

The group creates an environment for the composition of individual and social needs; it is a space in which mutual interaction, joint activity facilitated by group dynamics, takes place (Hargašová et al., 2014). It is characterised (Salty, 2017) as a set of people who meet regularly and form a particular social unit. Interaction and interdependence occur among the members in pursuit of a common objective.

Professional group programmes have specific content, methods, and techniques. It is necessary to adapt the environment, to provide technology, time, administration, and the organisation of the



group. The group leader must have the personal qualities to carry out the role such as qualifications, experience, and personality. It has characteristics typical of group composition such as the number of members, leaders, but the training objective and focus are different. There are agreed training standards and guidelines, it contains activating procedures, uses innovative methods and positive elements (Kovačič, 2008). The effect of the training depends on the atmosphere in the group and on the expertise of the group leader. Positivism and synergy of solutions in the group are used in the program. An important feature is that the group members are responsible for what happens in the training as well as for the learning (Izdenczyová, 2009).

Group activities provide opportunities to acquire social skills such as communication, self-understanding, empathy, active listening, and group cooperation. Awareness of the emotions and reactions that members of the group experience and evoke in others leads to insights that lead to the correction of one's own behaviour and anticipation of consequences (Hermochová, 2005; Yalom, 2007; Kratochvíl, 2009). At the same time, they are helpful for the cognitive development and stimulation of cognitive processes in creative activities (Šrobárová, 2011; Kantor, 2016).

Effectiveness of developing key competences is achieved by mutual contact in a group, in group interaction of individuals, and joint activity. These methods of group activity encourage active learning and help to acquire key and professional competences (Truhlářová, 2013; Lovašová, 2016). The most significant aspect of the group is considered by Navrátil (2001) to be that within the group it is possible to experience help from the other, and that "I can help". Each group has its own dynamics, which we refer to as group processes. These include defining goals, standards, creating roles, mutual interaction and communication (Salty, 2017). Social work with a group allows the participants to actively change their situations, to respect what they can do for themselves and for others, to shape the service, it focuses on empowering the participants to identify their competences, and strengths through facilitated group dynamics.

Group art therapy as a tool for improving professional competences

Group art therapy has a social and integrative nature, because despite the diversity of the group, an atmosphere of acceptance, tolerance, and cooperation is created, everyone helps everyone else in their art activities, friendship and teamwork are formed, and collective relationships are strengthened. These factors cause individuals to engage in group activity without much difficulty and therefore the group form is more successful than the individual form. Group art therapy programme creates a space in which participants can create, experience, rediscover and adjust their own realities. Group art therapy programme serves as a means of communication that takes place through the language of colours, lines, shapes and imagery, it tells about reality, experience, relationships, desires, feelings and attitudes that are expressed in the process of creation (Guillaume, 2010).

The group form of art therapy is a natural communication medium. The advantages of group art therapy include democracy, a sense of responsibility and power. People with the same and similar themes can support each other and give each other stimulating feedback. Social learning takes place faster and more intensively and fulfils an economic effect such as helping more people in the same amount of time (Liebmann, 2005; Huptych, 2014).

The duration of sessions varies, usually determined by the focus of the therapist and the group make-up. Session duration is determined by the maximum time a person can sustain attention but should not exceed more than 90 minutes (Case, Dalley, 1995; Stiburek, 2010).

The art therapist-client encounter is embedded in the situation of the creation and perception of the artwork. The formation of art with therapeutically valuable meaning while reflecting on the art expression is one of the key moments of the therapeutic process. It is a theme, a stimulus, and a call to action. That is why we can call it a therapeutic motif, a thematic and performative whole, a nucleus for the art therapeutic negotiation and for the interaction between the client and the therapist. The therapeutic motif connects the client's past, their individual history, with their present and, through the art therapeutic situation, with the presence of the therapist and the



subsequent correction of behaviour and self-behaviour (Slavík, 2001; Malchiodi, 2005; Šicková-Fabrice, 2006; Štefančíková, 2016).

In art therapy work, there is a connection between the cognition of the world and the cognition of the self, developing creative potential that may be applied to domains other than art, such as creative problem solving (Botton, Armstrong, 2014). Self-awareness in the context of one's social environment may occur through art experience (Bednář, 2014). Feedback should always be present in group work, in the sense of providing constructive feedback from the participants in the group. The purpose is not to criticise, but to learn to find positive aspects in other people, their creative work and manifestations (Slavík, 2001). The group activity becomes a place of rehearsal, correction, and reinforcement of social competence. Learning is most creative when it occurs through play, in creating a space in which we may perceive the dynamics and pressures of work, to explore, understand and create new ways of working.

The use of art therapy in social work is a natural fit; social work practitioners can support the provision of positive change in a client with social problems through their interactive involvement. Law Act No 448/2008 Coll. on Social Services states that if a social service provider has the conditions for this, it may carry out music therapy, art therapy, hippotherapy, canistherapy, bibliotherapy, hydrotherapy, aromatherapy, and activity therapy for the purpose of improving the quality of the social service provided.

If we link the benefits of group work and art therapy, it is not just about including image making in the work; the art process influences and mediates everything that happens in the group, bringing new challenges that we do not have to confront in a verbal group (Sobolová, Williams, 2008).

Increasing professional competences in the group offers learning to cooperate and awareness of competences for cooperative interrelationships and roles, conflict resolution through compromise and consensus, and individual and social competences for ethical coping with stressful situations and self-assertion. Relationships among workers are transferred to relationships with clients. The creation and enhancement of professional competences fosters loyalty and organisational culture. When considering a modern conception of social work using art therapy as a tool for enhancing competence, social work could be characterised as a discipline that uses the methods of the helping disciplines to accomplish their mission.

Based on the above, we offer an overview of the competences of workers in the helping professions that art therapy is able to influence in Table 1.

Table 2: The potential of group art therapy as a tool for enhancing professional competences

Competences of workers in the helping professions
Communication competences
Mastering professional communication standards
Ability to communicate clear ideas
Convey information
Ability to work together
Readiness for change in interpersonal relationships
Ability to influence these processes through communication
Organising and conducting dialogue
Ability to arouse the society's interest
Focusing this interest on addressing the client's needs
Competences of workers in the helping professions
Social competences
Ability to take responsibility



Social responsibility
Professional and vocational training
Cooperative implementation of decisions
Participation in the implementation of decisions
Tolerance
Ability to anticipate conflict situations
Ability to control conflict situations
Ability to resolve conflict situations
Competences of workers in the helping professions
Individual competences
Comprehensive professional self-confidence
Acceptance of oneself as a professional
Adequate self-assessment
An inner vision of the reasons for success and failure, accepting myself as I am
Support of one's own past experience of professional activity
Using the results of one's own professional development for the benefit of clients

Source: Liebman, 2005; Šicková-Fabrics, 2016; Davletkaliev et al., 2015; modified by the authors

RESEARCH

It was the objective of the research to verify in the selected professional competences the change in the rate of their occurrence due to the influence of active participation in group art therapy sessions.

Considering the state of the issue under study, the research objective was selected as follows:

- Determining the level of each competence
- Verifying the change in the level of professional competences after attending group art therapy sessions

In selecting the professional competences, we drew on the theoretical framework of Davletkaliev et al. (2015), which uses group art therapy theory. We have chosen communication competences, social competences, and individual competences.

Research method

The research design was quantitative with a division into two research fields using mapping, causal-comparative research in the form of a Quasi-experiment with Post-test Only design (Reichardt, 2009) with experimental and control groups, and correlational research. The chosen design was proposed to verify the effectiveness of the chosen group art therapy on the level of professional competence in the target group, which had intrinsic motivation to participate in art therapy sessions.

The research was conducted in the form of a questionnaire survey. The questionnaire battery was made up of several parts—questionnaire—to accomplish the objectives defined:

- Positive Self-Relationship Questionnaire by Ocisková, Praško, Kupka (2019) with scores for subscales and total scores; the subscales measured by the questionnaire include Authenticity and Assertiveness, Fulfilled Experiencing, Self-Acceptance, and Self-Confidence
- ISK questionnaire - Inventory of Social Competences by Kanning (Letovancová, 2019), which measures 4 secondary scales and 17 primary scales
- Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (Spreng et al., 2009)
- The authors' questionnaire mapping communication competences
- Sociodemographic data on the respondents



The complete versions of the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire, the ISK Social Competence Inventory, the Positive Self-Relationship Inventory, and the UWES Well-being at Work Questionnaire were used in accordance with their sources. The ISK - Social Competency Inventory was purchased for research purposes.

Individual competences

The Positive Self-Relationship Questionnaire by Ocisková, Praško, and Kupka (2019). The subscales that the questionnaire measures include Authenticity and Assertiveness, Fulfilled Experiencing, Self-Acceptance, and Self-Confidence. Responses are scored on a 10-point scale, with verbal descriptions of frequency of occurrence, 0 - not completely valid, 10 - completely valid. Items are grouped into four scales:

Authenticity and Assertiveness subscale focuses on the ability and willingness to be who I am.

Fulfilled Experiencing is a subscale that refers to the extent to which one experiences one's life in its variability.

Self-acceptance describes the level at which an individual accepts himself or herself.

Self-confidence represents a set of beliefs about a person's ability to cope with challenges and to accomplish meaningful objectives.

The total score is the sum of all the items. Each subscale scores from 0 to 40, so the total scale score falls between 0 and 160. The higher the total score, the more positive the relationship the individual shows.

Scores were calculated for each scale of the questionnaire separately, as these values entered into the statistical processing of the results. The possibility of using the scales separately is provided by the internal consistency of these scales. Cronbach's coefficient alpha for the overall questionnaire was 0.940; for the Self-confidence subscale, 0.834; for the Authenticity and Assertiveness subscale, 0.700; for the Self-Acceptance subscale, 0.704; for the Accomplished Experiencing subscale, 0.910.

Social competences

The Inventory of Social Competences - ISK questionnaire by Uwe Peter Kanning (Kanning, in Letovančová, 2019), measures 4 secondary scales.

Table 3: Description of the secondary scales and scales of the ISK questionnaire

1) Social Orientation Scales - SO (secondary scale)	a. Pro-sociality (PS) - 7 items
	b. Perspective Taking (PP) - 6 items
	c. Plurality of Values (PH) - 7 items
	d. Willingness to Compromise (OKo) - 6 items
	e. Listening (PO) - 6 items
2) Offensiveness Scales - OF (secondary scale)	a. Ability to Assert Oneself (SchP) - 7 items
	b. Willingness to Conflict (OKf) - 5 items
	c. Extraversion (EX) - 6 items
	d. Decisiveness (RO) - 6 items
	a. Self-Control (SK) - 6 items
	b. Emotional Stability (ES) - 6 items
	c. Behavioural Flexibility (FS) - 6 items
	d. Internality (IN) - 9 items
3) Self-control Scales -	a. Self-Presentation (SP) - 7 items
	b. Direct Attention to Oneself (PPS) - 6 items
	c. Indirect Attention to Oneself (NPS) - 6 items
	d. Perception of Others (VD) - 6 items



Questionnaire responses are based on self-reports, capturing the assessee's usual behaviour as perceived and evaluated, not maximal performance. Responses are on a scale of 1–4. Individual scores are calculated as the sum of the responses for each scale using the template and then summed as the score for the secondary scales.

Scores were calculated for each scale of the questionnaire separately as these values entered into the statistical processing of the results. Cronbach's coefficient alpha scores were 0.90 for the Social Orientation scale; 0.87 for the Offensiveness scale; 0.87 for the Self-Control Alpha scale; and 0.87 for the Reflexivity Alpha scale.

Communication competences

The Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (TEQ) (Spreng et al., 2009) presents empathy as primarily an emotional process. Across three studies, the TEQ (Spreng et al., 2009) demonstrated strong convergent validity, correlating positively with behavioural measures of social decoding, self-report measures of empathy, and negatively with measures of autistic symptomatology. In addition, it showed good internal consistency and high test-retest reliability. The TEQ is a brief, reliable, and valid instrument for assessing empathy.

Empathy is an important component of social cognition that contributes to the ability to understand and respond adaptively to the emotions of others, to succeed in emotional communication, and to promote prosocial behaviour. The instrument presents 16 multiple-choice questions on a 5-point Likert scale with frequency descriptions: 0 never, 1 rarely, 2 sometimes, 3 often, 4 always. The total score is the result of summation, the higher the score, the higher the level of empathy attained. The total score is worked with. Within the sample studied, Cronbach's alpha coefficient reached 0.89. The author's Communication Competence Questionnaire consists of 15 items with the possibility of answering on a scale of: not at all valid – 1 to completely valid – 4. The answer expresses the validity of the statement to oneself in the field of communication, saturated by the statements: verifying the validity of what is said; expressing the Self attitude; reflecting on what is said; trying to understand and explaining what is heard; perceiving non-verbal communication as a source of validity of the statement; and respecting personal boundaries in communication. The questionnaire was designed to enhance the validation of communication competences. The score calculated for the whole questionnaire, the higher the total score attained, the higher the communication competence. Cronbach's alpha coefficient reached the level of 0.937. The questionnaire was included with the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire in the result to map communication competence.

Socio-demographic parameters

In this part of the questionnaire battery, data were collected from respondents, figuring in the research as independent variables: gender, age, and type of the provider.

Research sample

The research sample consisted of 128 social workers (106 females, 22 men). The selection of respondents was deliberate. 67 respondents constituted the experimental research group, and 61 respondents constituted the control group. The selection criterion was in the completion or non-completion of group art therapy.



Table 4: Composition of experimental and control groups in terms of gender, age, and type of the provider

Gender	Males	Females	
<i>Experimental group</i>	10	57	
<i>Control group</i>	12	49	
Age	Min	Max	Average
<i>Experimental group</i>	26	60	40.67
<i>Control group</i>	24	60	37.79
Provider	Public	Non-public	
<i>Experimental group</i>	25	42	
<i>Control group</i>	45	16	

Ninety participants attended the group art therapy activities, 67 respondents completed the programme via the zoom platform (online form) in a time span of 90 minutes per session, with a number of 12–20 participants per session. Respondents who completed all the topics of the programme were included in the research and approached online for questionnaire measurement. By participating in the zoom activities, they also confirmed their consent to be included in the research. The art therapy activities were led by the author (anonymised).

The questionnaires were processed in the SPSS 28.0 software. We performed normality testing of the data distribution by means of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test, which indicated the necessity of using non-parametric statistics and appropriate correlation coefficients.

INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

We present the results in two fields in this section of the paper. In the first part, we present the results in the findings that relate to measures of social, individual, and communication competences and apply to the entire research sample.

In the second part of the results, we present findings from a quasi-experimental design where we compare measures of competence based on the completion or non-completion of the group art therapy training.

Levels of professional competence

At this point, we will present the findings regarding the competence rates. The results refer to the whole research sample.

Individual competences

The Positive Self-Relationship Questionnaire, aimed at examining individual competences, averages between 6–8 on a 10-point scale, with 0 representing not at all valid, and 10 representing completely valid.

On the Confidence scale, the mean score was 7.21. On the Authenticity and Assertiveness scale, the mean score was 6.72. In the Self-Acceptance scale, the mean score was 6.99, and in the Fulfilled Experiencing scale, the mean scores were measured to be 7.35.

The values of the mean scores and thus the status of the individual competences in the whole sample of helping professionals indicate values higher than the midpoint of the scale, which we consider to be a qualitative indicator of the competence in question. The lowest mean scores were observed in the Authenticity and Assertiveness scale, which provides space for different interpretations of this fact. One can discuss the very concept of social work and the focus on helping others and thus the lower level of attention paid to one's own personality.



Communication competences

Communication competences were examined using two methodologies. One was the Toronto Empathy Questionnaire (scores were converted to a 4-point scale for comparison), which measured a mean of 2.18, with a possible maximum value of 4 representing the highest level of empathy. The other was the Communication Skills Questionnaire, being the authors' questionnaire, surprised with a relatively high mean score of 3.04, out of a possible maximum score of 4, indicating a good level of communication skills among the social workers. We would have expected a higher score for empathy, with a result relatively just above the mid-point being somewhat surprising.

Social competences

Social competences were measured by the ISK questionnaire, where the maximum score for an item was 4 points. The questionnaire is structured into 4 scales, which are further divided into subscales.

The Social Orientation scale produced mean scores of 2.37 to 3.08 on the subscales. Within this scale, the Willingness to Compromise scale was the lowest rated scale (2.37) and the Adoption of Perspective scale was the highest rated scale (3.08). For the Offensiveness scale, the mean values for the subscales ranged from 2.14 to 2.65. The lowest values measured are recorded for the Willingness to Conflict scale (2.14), and the highest rated scale is the Extraversion scale (2.65). For the Self-Control scale, the mean values of the subscales are very similar and range from 2.75 to 2.89. In the Reflexivity scale, the range of averages is also narrow, but it is possible to see a difference between the lowest value of 2.56 for the Self-Presentation subscale and the highest value of 2.81 for the Perception of Others subscale.

Results of the quasi-experiment

For the research (also because of the pandemic situation that affected the implementation of art therapy activities) we chose the form of a quasi-experiment with a Post-test Only design (Reichardt, 2009) with an experimental and a control group. We present the results for the three competences studied.

Individual competences

Table 5: Comparison of individual competence measures as a function of group art therapy

Individual competences		Experimental group	Control group	Z	p(α)
Positive Relationship to Oneself	Self-Confidence			-5.107	<0.001***
	Mean	32.13	25.20		
	Median	34.00	24.00		
	Authenticity and Assertiveness			-4.488	<0.001***
	Mean	29.55	23.98		
	Median	30.00	22.00		
	Self-Acceptance			-4.528	<0.001***
	Mean	30.63	25.13		
	Median	32.00	25.00		
	Fulfilled Experiencing			-4.324	<0.001***
	Mean	32.24	26.31		
	Median	34.00	27.00		

$p \leq 0.05$ * $p \leq 0.01$ ** $p \leq 0.001$ ***



A comparison of individual competences measured by the Positive Relationship to Oneself questionnaire shows a higher level of these competences in the experimental group that participated in art therapy activities. All the differences achieved statistical significance at the level of $<0.001^{***}$. In the Self-Confidence scale, the experimental group obtained a mean score of 32.13, which is higher than the control group with a mean score of 25.20. In the Authenticity and Assertiveness scale, the experimental group achieved a mean score of 29.55, compared to the control group who scored 23.98. In the Self-Acceptance scale, the experimental group scored higher with a mean score for the scale of 30.63, compared to the control group who scored a mean score of 25.13. The experimental group also scored higher on the Fulfilled Experiencing scale, at 32.24, and the control group scored lower on this scale, at 26.31. It can be assumed that through the art therapy activity itself, attention to one's own experiencing is encouraged and developed, and in the case of the group activity, the person is confronted with insight into one's own boundaries in the social environment. He or she needs to define him- or herself in relation to the group with acceptance of his or her particularities.

Communication competences

Table 6: Comparison of the level of communication competences depending on the group art therapy

Communication Competences		Experimental group	Control group	Z	p(α)
Toronto Empathy Questionnaire				-6.311	<0.001***
	Mean	48.48	38.28		
	Median	49.00	35.00		
Communication Competences Questionnaire				-6.661	<0.001***
	Mean	46.85	37.87		
	Median	47.00	38.00		

$p \leq 0.05^*$ $p \leq 0.01^{**}$ $p \leq 0.001^{***}$

When comparing the overall mean scores for the questionnaires measuring communication competence, a statistically significant difference was found. For both methodologies, a statistically significant difference was found at the level of $<0.001^{***}$. For the empathy measurement, the respondents from the experimental part of the sample achieved a mean score of 48.48, while for the respondents from the control part of the sample it was a value of 38.28. For the Communication Competence Questionnaire, the experimental group achieved a mean score of 46.85, while the control group achieved a mean score of 37.87. Based on these results, there is a clear difference between the groups in favour of the experimental group, which shows a higher level of communication competence. This finding may be interpreted in the context of group work in art therapy, where the emphasis is on the need to actively listen to others, reflect on their experience, perceive, and correctly interpret non-verbal communication, and respond appropriately verbally to it.

*Social competences*

Table 7: Comparison of social competence levels depending on the group art therapy

Social Competences		Experimental group	Control group	Z	p(α)
ISK	ISK1			-5.796	<0.001***
	Social Orientation				
	Mean	102.01	86.19		
	Median	104.00	82.00		
	ISK2			-4.083	<0.001***
	Offensiveness				
	Mean	62.87	55.79		
	Median	64.00	58.00		
	ISK3			-3.884	<0.001***
	Self-Control				
	Mean	80.19	71.16		
	Median	82.00	69.00		
	ISK4			-3.760	<0.001***
	Reflexivity				
	Mean	69.34	64.98		
	Median	71.00	65.00		

$p \leq 0.05$ * $p \leq 0.01$ ** $p \leq 0.001$ ***

Respondents from the experimental group demonstrated higher levels of social competences in all 4 domains examined by the ISK questionnaire. All the differences achieved statistical significance at the <0.001*** level. In the Social Orientation scale, the experimental group scored a mean score of 102.01, which is higher than with the control group with a mean score of 86.19. The experimental group also scored higher on the Offensiveness scale with a value of 67.87, compared to the control group which scored 55.79. In the Self-Control scale, respondents from the experimental portion of the sample achieved a mean score of 80.19 for this scale, while respondents from the control part of the sample obtained a mean score of 71.16. In the Reflexivity, the last scale measuring social competences, the experimental group achieved a mean score of 69.34, compared to the control group which scored lower, at 64.98.

Art therapy activities provide an opportunity for the development of skills needed in social contact, such as perception of group dynamics, awareness of the needs of others, as well as one's own, initiative to meet them, readiness for and adaptation to change and its management, self-presentation, and others. Based on the research results, we can assume that such activities directly increase the ability of social orientation, offensiveness, self-control, and reflexivity.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

In the results, the main assumption that there is a difference between the experimental and the control group in the rate of occurrence of professional competences was confirmed. This finding is related to research focused on experiential learning in counselling, where respondents improved their ability to perceive, interpret, and express their life feelings and attitudes within a group setting, and found these group processes to be enriching social competences (Shuler, Dupree, 2015). Equally so, these findings are consistent with Sejščová's (2016) findings where a humanistic approach combined with



elements of the psychoeducational process resulted in positive changes in emotional experiencing that enriched individual competences. Consistent with the research findings are the results of the educational research programme (Councill, 2015), where the positive effect of group art therapy on increasing individual and communication competences through the creation of personal space, emotional safety, and the creation of new coping strategies in the respondents were confirmed. The objective of the art therapy intervention in the 2021 research (Huss, Sarid, 2021) was to co-create awareness with social service providers and recipients of how to access and improve self-care needs and strengths and coping by allowing them to view stress and coping as part of a salutogenic continuum, thus promoting both individual and communication and social competences.

Is art relevant for social workers? The arts have been used in social work practice with individuals and communities since the beginning of the profession and are the subject of further exploration of how they fit into the mission of the profession. Supplementing the theoretical foundations of art therapy techniques in group learning activities would lead to the actual potential of art therapy in social work being fulfilled. With further research mapping the benefits and limitations of art therapeutic stimulation, there is space for collaboration between social work and the humanities, art therapy, and the arts in general.

Social work is an integrative profession that works with potential contradictions between social and psychological theories, emotions and cognition, and global and culturally specific perspectives. Thus, art can be a method of experiential training and supervision. Indeed, in our media-filled postmodern society, art is the most prestigious and persuasive tool for teaching and for changing behaviour. The use of art is an effective teaching tool because it allows for rapid, perceptive processing and gathering. The necessary enhancement of emotional experience, understanding of both one's own emotions and those of the surrounding social atmosphere through art therapy techniques facilitates broader opportunities for social work practitioners to foster different ways of knowing and understanding. We see art as a metaphor for social work knowledge, which encompasses different levels of information. From this perspective, the arts can help social workers to address these issues by enabling new, integrative perspectives.

Group art therapy sessions provide an opportunity for a safe arena to work with the group and develop individual uniqueness. These are a way of implementing the concept of lifelong learning. People have the right to their own dignity and development. His or her nature is inherently good, able to organise and evaluate his or her own feelings, thoughts, and behaviour. It is within his capacity to develop and shape one's positive qualities to attain constructive change and personal development and to live a fully satisfying life.

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Community Building and Co-production: The Face Mask Sewing Initiative at the of COVID-19¹

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Abstract

OBJECTIVES: This study reacts to people's co-productive grassroots community problem-solving in reaction to complications caused by COVID-19 and related restrictions.

THEORETICAL BASE: The authors pay special attention to the community creation and potential of co-production from the bottom to up when those who gathered around the same goal share an intra-group identity. **METHODS:** A multidisciplinary view of community building and co-production around the unique situation of pandemics. The article's core lies in the intersection of social policy, sociology, social economics, and knowledge sciences. The supportive research consists of a survey with 249 respondents, and the questionnaires were supported by ten semi-structured interviews, including views on actors of the Quadruple helix. **OUTCOMES:** The discussion

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outlines links to differences between co-production and co-creation, communities of practice, the disaster side of the issue, involved systems archetypes, and the emergent phenomenon of local communities gaining identity and encapsulating themselves from outside help. **SOCIAL WORK IMPLICATIONS:** A perspective to the multifaceted term of co-production. Understanding underlying processes within co-production, co-creation of social policies, and related community building is one of the key points to navigate how people self-organize and thus are less dependent on outside help of social services. A more resilient community is able to tend to many of its problems independently.

Keywords

co-production, co-creation, community building, COVID-19, face mask

INTRODUCTION

The spread of the COVID-19 disease transformed lives and behaviour globally. The COVID-19 pandemic struck the majority of countries in spring 2020 and the following year. As a result, public events were cancelled, and citizens were informed about crucial rules to keep the infection at bay: keep their distance, stay at home if possible, keep strict hygiene, and cover their faces. Often, masks to provide protection were in short supply and were not even available for the medical staff and other emergency services. Although a person can use alternative coverings to veil oneself, such as a scarf or any piece of cloth, face masks are more practical and offer greater protection. However, with the knowledge that a mask-wearing measure can work only if everyone follows it with no exceptions, and with the need to increase protection as much as possible, the citizens must choose either to rely on help from local and national authorities or to help themselves and try to co-produce a solution. Face masks became a staple of personal protection and even a symbol of the COVID-19 pandemic and continue to be used even more than a year after the infection started to spread. This article examines the very beginnings when face masks were inaccessible and precious. A number of grassroots movements started in response to the COVID-19 crisis. For example, liquor companies started to make disinfectants, engineering companies put together quick research and development initiatives to make breathing ventilators from available parts, and universities produced various protective elements. To provide face masks, citizens started a massive movement of sewing, producing, and distributing masks made mostly from various kinds of cloth. Information exchange processes, distribution of manufactured masks, and obtaining materials for production were coordinated in the network. Profiles were created on social media that allowed people to contact each other. The mask makers were also, to some extent, their consumers – prosumers (Ritzer, Jurgenson, 2010; Rayna, Struikova, 2021; Luczyn, 2022). This article aims to describe the latter of these initiatives—citizens creating face masks—and provide background and research on its motives and results. Mask sewing became a symbol of the fight against COVID-19 in several countries, and it probably helped recipients of masks in the same way it helped those who made them: by giving the feeling of usefulness in the fight against the infection (Bastecka et al., 2013). This article follows the emergent mask creation initiative (hereafter MCI) that occurred in the Czech Republic and puts it into perspective. Various approaches to the term co-production are mentioned, but the most important finding of research introduced in this article is the contrast of usually positive perception of co-production in literature and respondents who co-produced enclosing themselves to a community which refuses further help as the main thought is they already found it within; they co-produced it.

Co-production is quite heterogeneously (Verschuere et al., 2012) used term for many activities where citizens are involved in producing results that directly impact their environment (Brandsen et al., 2018). Co-production can be a perspective showing an attempt to deal with a crisis from the



bottom up, the consequence of which is a threat to health and life (Eijk et al., 2023). The broad understanding of the term is that it is a synergy between citizens' and governments' activities, which also includes a partnership between public service users and providers (Pestoff, 2012). This is a broad sense of understanding of co-production as a tool to include citizens in the decision-making process. Rather than offering services for citizens, they are included, and services are provided with them for them.

Some authors, such as Boviard, understand co-production as a long-term partnership and other civic activity features such as volunteering (Boviard, 2007). However, in this article, we would focus more on Alford's point of view, where co-producing citizens are also users of products of their activity (Alford, 2009). Acts of co-production can also be described as individual or collective, or both (Pestoff, 2012) depending on if it is an activity of a single person or a group effort of citizens, and in some cases, individuals and groups are operating simultaneously.

A quite different view on the co-production brought E. S. Cahn (Cahn, 2001; Ryan-Collins et al., 2008; Lasker et al., 2011; Granger, 2013; Boyle, 2014; Boyle, Bird, 2014; Papaoikonomou, Valor, 2016; Clement et al., 2017). In this understanding, co-production is considered to be a community-building tool through which social capital is created. After the occurrence of natural disasters, in a dangerous situation, some people are ready to behave pro-socially (Rodriguez et al., 2006). When a community starts to solve its own problems, we call it co-production (Ryan-Collins, Stephens, Coote, 2008; Naughton-Doe, 2015). The bottom line is that people naturally tend to gather around topics that ail them and develop joint solutions from the bottom-up rather than waiting for help from the top (Cahn, 2000; Glynos, Speed, 2013; Naughton-Doe, 2015; Clement et al., 2017).

In this sense, the term co-production is similar to the idea from knowledge management, and business spheres are known as Communities of Practice (Lesser, Storck, 2001; Bures, 2006; Valek, 2018) as they express the same concept of people clustering around a problem to solve it. According to Communities of Practice, when the vertical structure of leadership fails and superiors and management do not fulfil their role properly, employees will find their own way to overcome problems they encounter in their daily working life.

In this article, we focus on combining both individual and collective co-production (Pestoff, 2012), which sprouted from the grassroots of a COVID-19 crisis, and communities and individuals had a common goal at the moment, and the engine behind the MCI was to achieve something good for ourselves and others whilst others were doing the same (Brandsen, Helderman, 2012). For this article's purpose, the defining feature of co-production is, therefore, the bottom-up self-organization of citizens to solve an imminent problem.

The side of community practice can be justified because several theoretical approaches and models have been developed for analysing community practice, particularly community development and building processes. All those theoretical approaches and models are closely related to each other as they mainly focus on four major concepts i.e., development, organizing, planning, and change. Besides, the central theme of any community practice is empowerment and social justice. Conventional community practice mostly means community development movements for democratic participation or organizing of various vulnerable and ethnic groups. Nevertheless, there are differences between those models as well. Based on those differences, the community practice models have been developed (Ross, 1955).

As we can see, the approach towards co-production and community building is quite wide, but aside of that, we would like to introduce another theory that might explain the findings. When citizens gathered to co-coproduce and create the community—the MCI, the community found its identity. It started to behave as an in-group towards other out-groups (Bauman, 2001), refusing other help.

The study which follows is focused on a survey among people involved in MCI with a set of questions identifying the co-production and their perception of the community which arose. The main question driving this research is whether the initiative of mask sewing can be considered co-production and thus the creation of a community. This would mean that people



organized themselves without top-down support, guidance, and instructions from governments, municipalities, or even businesses. In other words, did they act spontaneously by themselves, or were they tasked or contracted?

METHOD AND LIMITATIONS

The implementation of the research project on the production of masks began suddenly and unusually just after the pandemic of COVID-19. Quite quickly, it became apparent that even medical staff ran out of masks, and the spontaneous process of producing them by ordinary people began. This bottom-up, collective process had been temporary and ended when the shortage of professional masks was filled. We decided to use triangulation of research methods and combine quantitative and qualitative research methods.

We asked how this transition process from individual spontaneous initiatives to a collective process of joint production and distribution of masks by ordinary people took place.

Initially, we assumed that the primary research tool would be in-depth interviews with people associated with the production of masks. However, we prepared a first and later second questionnaire to gain more knowledge about it. It can therefore be said that the research process was also more dynamic than usual and proceeded in such a way that we tried to react to changes on an ongoing basis. It is also visible that even though many pandemics and deadly events struck humanity in the past, and there was serious progress in the reaction to it, we still are not as responsive as we should be (Barria-Asenjo et al., 2021), and the reflection of the aftermath of COVID-19 can take well over two years (Cochoy et al., 2022).

The authors want to underline that this article's core is its theoretical contribution by underlining various notes and connections in the literature around community work and co-production. Two surveys were conducted to aid the reasoning behind the theoretical background introduced in this article. However, the samples did not have a representative character and were influenced by the availability of respondents. On the other hand, the questionnaire survey was conducted on a very vibrant Facebook group by the first lockdown that fitted all criteria for a bottom-up co-productive community of practice, and a reader might welcome some fundamental underpinnings.

Part of the data comes from qualitative semi-structured interviews, which allowed us to get more detailed information on the motivation and meaning given to this activity by mask manufacturers and distributors. In the interviews, some points about institutional cooperation are noted. Due to these reasons, we introduce an overview of how the research was done, and only core elements are underlined. Authors can provide more comprehensive summaries of interviews upon request.

Interviews background: As an emergent phenomenon (Valek, Bures, 2018) with its notion of social justice (Cahn, 2000), co-production can be blind and omit the context of a wider system that is trying to assist. It would only seek to solve a community problem without including all actors to co-create. To provide a view from different sides of the argument, the interviews involved not only creators of masks but also members of other institutions, who, as later findings show, tried to support and facilitate the process as well. There were ten semi-structured interviews conducted in total, coded and analysed. Seven respondents were individuals (regular people) from MCI, and three represented the rest of the three points of the Quadruple helix. One was a representative from a non-governmental organization (NGO) that was also involved in other NGOs, one was a representative from business, and one represented a governmental institution. The seven respondents from the group of MCI were selected to provide as diverse a group as possible. Therefore, there are representatives from various strata of society, including foreigners with long-term residence and various professions. This variety opens the way for international comparative studies in the future. NGOs, businesses, and governmental institutions were selected to balance perspectives on the co-production issue. Co-producing a solution would mean no significant involvement of institutions in the citizens' activity.



To promote the validity of this research, it is, therefore, necessary to also involve the point of view of these organizations. The set of questions for the interview was slightly different for the individuals than for the organizations. Interviews followed a template with nineteen questions. The first fourteen questions were open responses, the next four used a predefined scale, and a closing question allowed for final remarks the respondent might want to give. The questions started with confirmation of age and profession. The next three questions focused on changes in life-related to COVID-19 and the restrictive measures that it brought. These included questions about respondents' motivation to get involved in MCI and whether respondents knew or coordinated with other people involved. These questions also served as an introduction to the topic. The following two questions focused on co-production. They focused on understanding whether respondents received (provided) support and information from (to) other institutions or were limited to their own resources or those of other people involved in MCI. Then, interviewees were asked whether they were textile production professionals, their motivation for action, and finally, what sense they saw in the initiative. The last four open questions focus on cooperation, community, and improvement. These address if respondents feel that it would be better to unify efforts in the MCI or to work alone if it would be better to have some top-down coordination and unify on the national scale, and how the whole process could be improved. The last of the logical sets of questions employs a scale from 1 to 10 (where 10 is the highest mark). These four questions ask respondents to evaluate the overall involvement of citizens, government, and institutions (e.g., NGOs and businesses) in MCI. The interview template for the organizations followed the same structure and focused on if and how they participated in MCI, but it also added three more questions which focused on support the institutions felt they might have been able to provide to MCI. As mentioned, the interview concluded with questions for the last remarks, messages, and missing information.

Questionnaires background: The data collection process for questionnaires was done purely online with the help of Google Forms by taking advantage of a vibrant online community that appeared in the form of a Facebook group called “Cesko sije rousky” (CSR), or translated, “Czechia sews masks”. Rapid growth in the group's membership base, sharing of ideas, and solutions reacting to the governmental inability to cope with the topic all showed textbook signs of co-production. And social networks are very often breeding ground for co-production (Meijer, 2012). The questionnaire was composed of nineteen questions with an introduction explaining the aim of the research. Eleven of these questions were obligatory and focused on co-production. Their purpose was to uncover whether the MCI came from grassroots actions of the people or whether top-down processes initiated it. The rest of the questions were of no consequence to this research. Before sharing the questionnaire with potential respondents, a small group of individuals (5 people) from the target group (mask creators) provided feedback about the wording of introductory information to help ensure that it was easily understandable and its aims were clear. The data collection process followed the self-selection and snowball methods (Hartnoll et al., 1997). These methods were well suited to the research because the questionnaire was voluntary to answer (Coolican, 2018) and shared within a growing Facebook group of more than 30,000 members. Because of growing interest, data collection was prolonged to one month. Accordingly, the target group was extensive and involved anyone who participated in MCI in the Czech Republic and could speak the Czech language well enough to understand the questionnaire. Nevertheless, co-production itself works precisely based on this snowballing dynamic. Therefore, the authors believed it was useful for data collection to follow the same dynamic that the studied initiative rode. There were 249 respondents who filled out the questionnaire. Owing primarily to the sampling technique, 96.8% of respondents were female. This reflects mostly the composition of the Facebook group CSR. The majority of respondents belonged to the group of individuals (81.5%). Although most of the respondents were individuals, some of them were freelancers who decided to invest their time as well. All age groups were covered, while the age group between 31 and 49 represented 54.6% of all respondents.



RESULTS – QUESTIONNAIRE AND INTERVIEWS SUMMARY

Questionnaire Summary

All data presented in this section are collected and analyzed by the authors of this article.

Table 1: Question 1 (single answer question): What is your Gender?

Male	8	3.2%
Female	241	96.8%
Other (I wish not to specify)	0	

Table 2: Question 2 (multiple answer question): Am I a physical person, entrepreneur (freelancer), representative of a company, or NGO?

Physical person	203	81.5%
Entrepreneur (freelancer)	23	9.3%
Company	6	2.4%
NGO	1	0.4%
Pensioner	8	3.2%
Other	8	3.2%

Table 3: Question 3 (single answer question): Age

0-10	0		70-79	2	0.8%
11-18	2	0.8%	80-100	0	
19-30	44	17.6%	100+	0	
31-49	136	54.6 %			
50-69	65	26.1%			

Figure 1: Question 4 (multiple answer question): How did you contribute to mask creation?

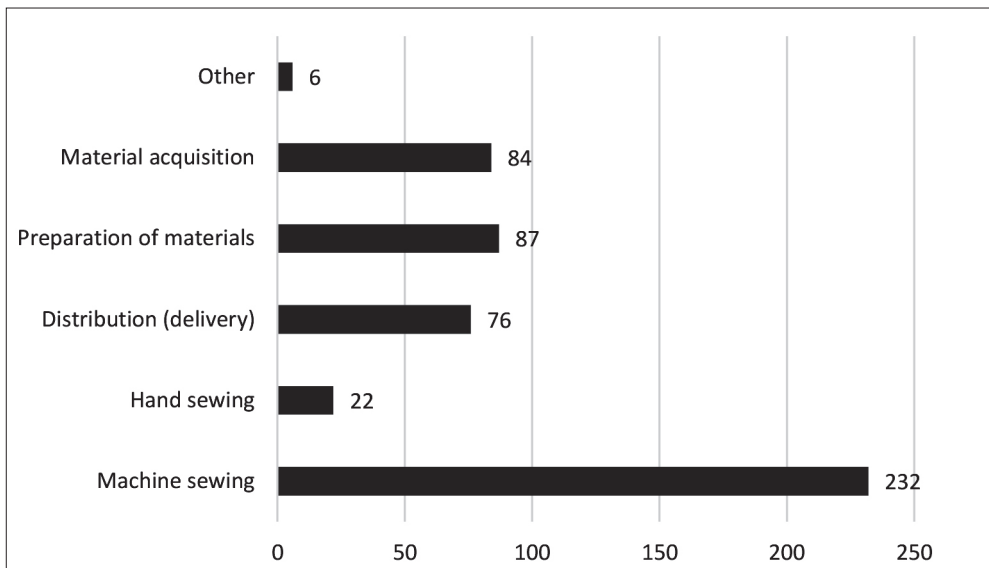




Table 4: Question 5 (multiple answer question): Did you give out masks freely or did you sell them?

Giving out for free	203	81.5%
Sell	2	0.8%
Give out for free to those in need and sell at the same time	37	14.9%
Variations	16	6.4%

Figure 2: Question 6 (multiple answer question): Who brought you to the mask creation activity?

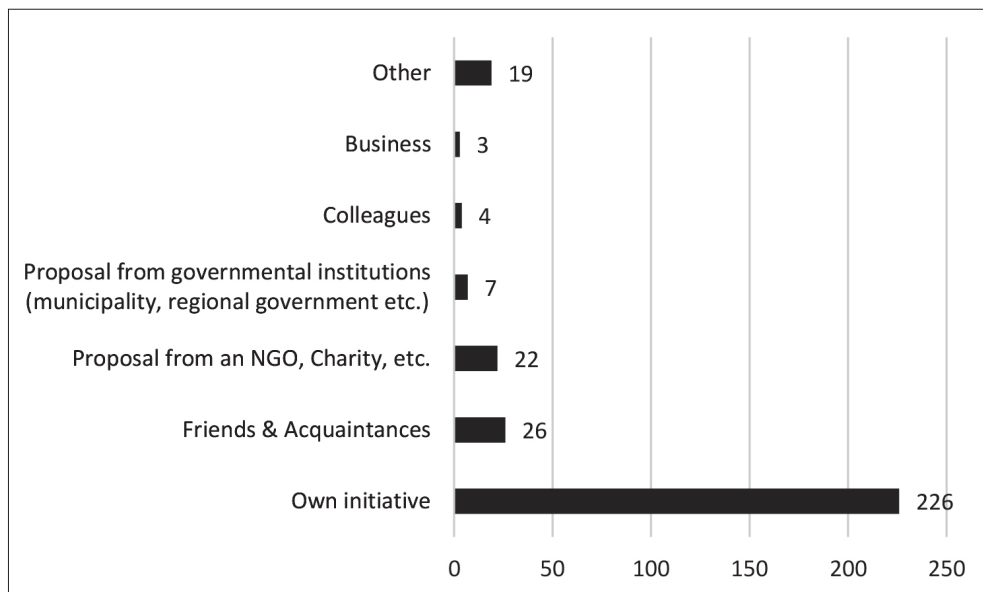


Table 5: Question 7 (multiple answer question): Did you receive some kind of information support from a...?

Business	2	0.8%
Citizen's initiative	29	11.6%
NGO	20	8%
Governmental institution	7	2.8%
I did not. I managed all by myself	204	81.9%

Table 6: Question 8 (multiple answer question): Did you receive some kind of material support from a...?

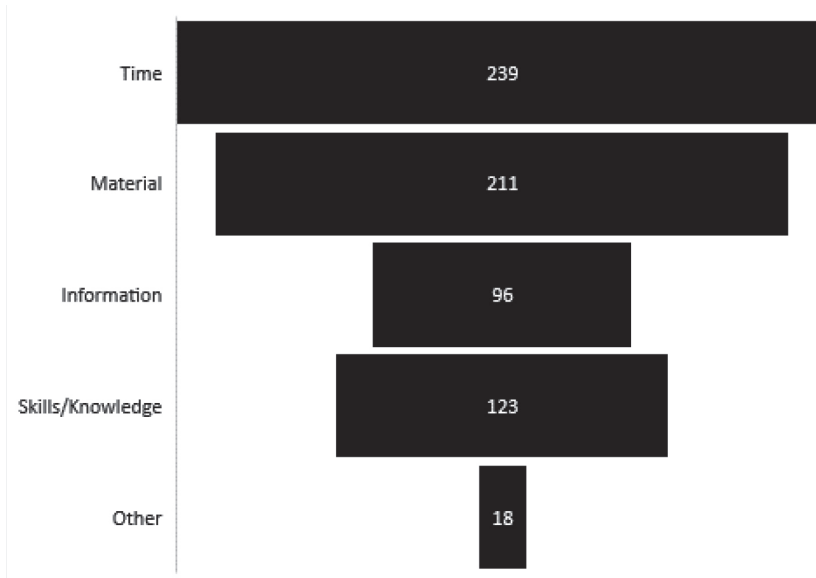
Business	11	4.4%
Citizen's initiative	38	15.3%
NGO	21	8.4%
Governmental institution	9	3.6%
I did not. I managed all by myself	185	74.3%



Table 7: Question 9 (multiple answer question): Did you receive some kind of financial support from a?...

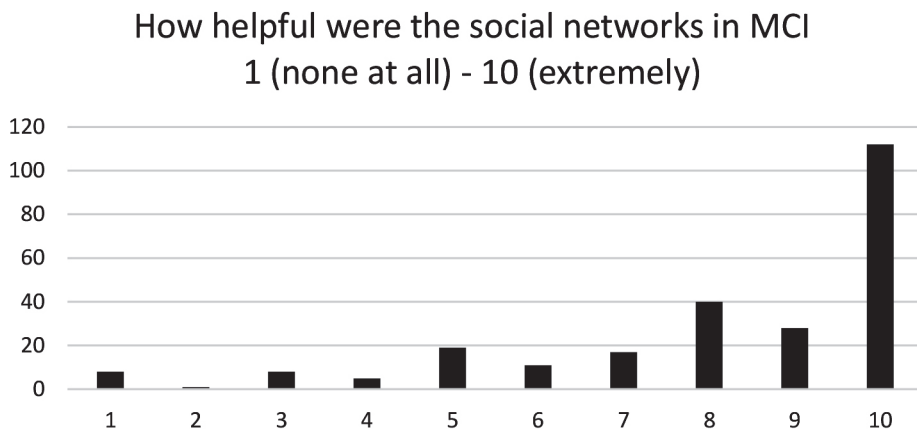
Business	2	0.8%
Citizen's initiative	6	2.4%
NGO	4	1.6%
Governmental institution	2	2%
I did not. I managed all by myself	237	95.2%

Figure 3: Question 10 (multiple answer question): What do you think was your own investment into MCI?



N=249, respondents could choose multiple answers.

Figure 4: Question 11 (single answer question on a scale 1-10): Did you find social networks helpful during the mask creation process?





Respondents mainly were machine sewing, but in parallel, they participated in the material acquisition, preparation of materials, and distribution. These three latter activities take about 30% of respondents. This would suggest that some people were engaged only in sewing and not in other activities.

The answers on the fifth question shows that most of the people gave out their masks for free. Although results here might be misrepresented as sale offers were quite common, those producing on sale probably had no motivation to participate in our survey as there was no revenue related to it. Some of the respondents preferred to sell and give for free to those in need. The field “variations” consist of respondents who described their activities more in-depth. For example, “gave for free, until I was broke and I needed money for new material,” “sold for the cost of material,” in exchange for material, or sewing just for the family.

The sixth question is an introduction to the purely co-production questions and the fact that the MCI was mostly a result of the respondents/creators’ motivation. Top-down institutions seem not as active as expected based on the literature (Eijk, Vlegel-Brouwer, Bussemaker, 2023; McMullin, 2023).

Three questions directed to co-production are about where the creators got their information, material, and financial support, all show the majority of self-organisation. The most significant is their own contribution to financial means, which means almost no funding from the outside. Such development also aligns with the literature, especially with Cochoy et. al. 2022 extensive analysis of 2088 narrative cases (Cochoy, Calvignac, Gaglio, Meyer, 2022), which suggests that individuals were mostly left alone in the co-productive self-production of face masks. The information was provided in a much more extensive range, and as it seems, so was the material contribution. Citizens’ initiatives (non-formalized groups) or NGOs were more active in this case. These results confirm the idea about co-production because the majority of respondents say that they had to organise themselves, and most supportive to them were citizen initiatives, which are non-formal groups of active citizens.

The last two questions in this part underline the investment of respondents and the usefulness of social networks in the whole mask creation process. From the figure above, we can see that for most of the respondents, social networks use was constructive and helpful.

Interviews Summary

Individuals who participated in interviews uncovered information about actual cooperation with other institutions than expected, especially NGOs. When we also include the point of view of organizations, we gain perspective, and we can confirm the involvement of governmental institutions and businesses. However, as we went deeper into their answers, we could also see that it was always the decision of individuals within a specific organization to start the movement to help others and to mitigate COVID-19 dangers and adverse effects, although their filtration effect is disputable and can start at 5-25%, with proper fabric density this can go as high as 80% (Ganesapillai et al., 2022). Efforts came from staff, volunteers, patrons, and clients. They were not tasked to do so by their superiors or management. Therefore, we can call this co-production. In the case of the NGO representative, we can say the phenomenon even reflects Communities of Practice (Lesser, Storck, 2001). Such information only confirms the involvement of other organizations and governmental bodies, but it also underlines citizens’ bottom-up initiative, therefore confirming assumptions about co-production, although not at its highest level of conscious new public governance (McMullin, 2023).

In questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, the most important issue is the discrepancy in questionnaire results deeming that there is almost no support from other institutions in contrast to interview results where respondents claim otherwise. This is also reflected in the evaluation of the perceived involvement of actors declared in the interviews. After deeper examination, it is clear this is not necessarily a conflict because even in organizations, the initiatives to provide protective



elements started from the grassroots and their employees. It is most apparent in the case of NGOs, but even governmental institutions were sometimes part of the process, though they were not those who initiated the movement. Specific examples are businesses that were willing to support the MCI and other relief operations during the COVID-19 crisis. Aside from the example mentioned above (restaurants providing free food and refreshments to members of Emergency services were a quite common phenomenon), a couple of responses from the questionnaire mentioned an outdoor clothing company that provided fabric to create masks for free. There were also notions of shop owners providing masks and gloves to their customers for free (which started mainly from the Vietnamese community and their convenience stores in the Czech Republic).

DISCUSSION

Co-production vs Co-creation

The example of MCI can also introduce a terminological difference between the terms co-production and co-creation. The co-production can be considered the last stage of the co-creation process, succeeding the codesign phase of ideation, problem redefinition, and prototyping of the solutions (Deserti et al., 2019). While co-production can be managed by only a few (depending on needs and defined co-production groups), co-creation is a more strategic term (Brandsen, Steen, Verschuere, 2018) that requires assessment and involvement of all relevant stakeholders in the stages of problem identification, envisioning of the alternatives, and implementation of the new solutions (Sanders, Stappers 2008; Kaufmann, Shams, 2016; Deserti et al., 2019), although authors such as Caitlin McMullin would argue that in the frame of the New Public Governance approach that could also be called co-production (McMullin, 2023). According to the understanding of co-production from various authors, the situation around MCI, the users are users of what they co-produced. According to Alford (Alford, 2009), the process is both individual and group (Pestoff, 2012), and the process of co-production leads to the creation of a community (Cahn, 2001).

The substantial majority of the respondents stated that it was their initiative and their support that made MCI happen. From the rest of the questionnaire, it is also apparent that people felt they had to help themselves due to the unpreparedness of the government to deal with the crisis and provide the necessary conditions to the citizens in a timely fashion. Some respondents claimed that after they satisfied their demand for masks, their environment also needed to do more for the community.

However, after the interviews, it was apparent that people were not always left on their own to co-produce everything. Furthermore, when we include businesses, NGOs, and governmental institutions interviewed, we see a different perspective on the problem. In interviews, we can notice how these institutions tried to assist, but this was not reflected much by the community of co-producers itself, at least not in a significant way.

This situation can be explained by two main reasons:

- The respondents in the interview stated that help from the top was unstructured and incoherent, hard to understand; therefore, the simplest way was to continue coordination from the bottom.
- The co-producer community then tended to overlook other possible ways to collaborate.

The authors believe the truth is somewhere in between. Furthermore, when the top-down structure is not ready to act promptly and address society's needs, and when the co-producing community finds its support within, the need for outside support subsidies, and the community is then quite resilient to incorporating new elements into their operation. Community creation is one of the main co-production results in all forms, even the Communities of Practice (Lesser, Storck, 2001; Lehaney et al., 2004; Valek, Bures, 2018). People were more open to influence as a general population, but by becoming a community, a shell was created. This shell protects the community



from changes from the outside. It creates a separate, soft subsystem of society (Checkland, 1999), and it is, therefore, resistant also to influences from the outside as the community tends to protect its interests (Abrutyn, 2016).

Conversely, to formulate these processes as co-creation, a more in-depth analysis of the context and redefinition of the problem would have been necessary (Deserti et al., 2019). The precondition for this would be an engagement of all relevant stakeholder groups and their direct contributions (i.e. prioritization and validation of the challenge, shared understanding of the local context and situated problem, aligning expertise and exchange among relevant stakeholders/actors, and prototyping and validation of the solution) (Glumac, 2018). This is usually a time-consuming and complex process that demands organization and systemization of the participatory, iterative activities (Glumac, 2016). This implies seeking opportunities and envisioning alternative solutions for the sustainable use of co-produced solutions and their long-term societal impacts. Therefore, this cannot be done in a closed ecosystem without influencing both existing institutional and organizational structures and the practices of dealing with occurring challenges (Deserti, Rizzo, 2014). In practice, these processes can be initiated by both top-down and bottom-up processes.

The community creation, its features and theoretical connections

“Us and them”: To add more reflection on the situation related to the group’s self-protective behaviour around MCI described above, we can use arguments from Bauman and May. When a group gains a feeling of unity and identifies itself as a group, an “in-group” develops and delineates itself from others, or “out-groups.” In this imaginary opposition, the “in-group” finds its identity (Bauman, 2001) and becomes a community. A symbolic boundary is created, one which encapsulates the community, and this boundary divides “us” from “others” (Southerton, 2002). Others are then in the position of a stranger—an outsider—whom the community would resist. However, it is not impossible that the community would open its boundaries and listen to the outsider because they might not bear a mark of any “out-groups” the community raised its boundaries against (Bauman, 2001). A bold thought might lead us to an argument that “top-down” institutions might also assume this “us” and “them” point of view.

Community practice theoretical perspectives and models: Community practice has always been under the close attention of scholars and practitioners. For instance, one of the famous scholars on community practice, Murray Ross outlined the following three models (Ross, 1955):

- Reform orientation
- Planning orientation
- Process orientation

Reform orientation is required for community development and enhancing changes in social protection and political processes of the community. Planning orientation distinguishes between ‘exploration with people’, which includes grassroots planning, and ‘technical study of social needs’, which envisages experts’ assistance in planning for the community; and lastly, ‘process orientation’, which focuses on community members taking the central role in organizing and development of the community or particular development processes within the community. After Murray Ross, Jack Rothman presented his version of the community practice models, that are now known as (Levy, 2004):

- Planning and policy
- Community capacity development
- Social advocacy

The planning and policy model considers the close cooperation of the community members with stakeholders in planning the policy changes in the community and making necessary prerequisites for the implementation of those policies (McMullin, 2023).



Community capacity development is related to the community resources' exploration and promotion of resources mobilization. Social advocacy, as Rothman mentioned, is directed towards intensive work on advocating for the changes and reforms that the community members define as necessary for the community's wellbeing. The three models are used in conjunction with each other because they do not work in isolation and, in fact, borrow heavily from each other in actual practice.

Marie Weil and Dorothy Gamble (Gamble, Weil, 2010) built on these models and orientations and presented their own version of the community practice models known as the 'Eight Model-Framework'. These models have been developed in the current context of community practice and are mutually reinforcing because they can be phased sequentially. The eight models are:

- Neighbourhood and Community Organizing
- Organizing Functional Communities
- Political and Social Action
- Community Social and Economic Development
- Social Planning
- Program Development and Community Liaison
- Coalitions
- Social Movements

The emergent mask creation initiative occurred in the Czech Republic (and similarly in neighbouring countries) can also be interpreted within community practice models. It closely relates to all models in less or more ways, as MCI has been developed and implemented based on:

- The cooperation between the community members
- Due to the grassroots activities
- Community members' internal mobilization
- Community members' ongoing activation and enlargement of the MCI influence sphere

MCI is related to the main part of the abovementioned models as it has had results on the community wellbeing, due to the facts that it has:

- Enhanced community interactions
- Developed models of communication within the community
- Promoted the behaviour and attitudes changes of the community members and stakeholders on the emergency situations
- Affected to the community policy and reactions
- Developed and tested relation and behaviour models that can implemented furtherly in common situations

Though, as we have justified, MCI is related to all main perspectives of community practice, but it directly refers to the process orientation model (Ross, 1955) due to the fact that community members and non-formal leaders initiated MCI and were active in implementation of the main plans of the initiation.

MCI can be viewed within the community capacity development and community building model (Levy, 2004), as it considers creation or enhancement of community relations and cooperation between the inhabitants. Besides, within the MCI they strengthened themselves, and on behalf of the local participants rather than outside contractors. Meanwhile, MCI is also an initiation for building functional community, as it enhanced community's functioning towards social problems solving and making the necessary assistance available in emergency situation.

Besides, MCI, as it is explained within the functional community model, provided an opportunity to the community members to come together as a collective to put pressure on public officials or authorities for the desired outcome. Practice has facilitated the community cohesion, participatory decision-making processes, and collective bargaining power in a community. Coming together to solve basic community-level problems has improved the community's reaction to the crisis situation and has helped build the community members' capacity to organize and lead.



Reshaping activity structures in communities: The pandemic situation has led to a reformulation of activity structures in communities. Some people who previously were minor or not socially inactive joined the sewing and distributing masks campaign, including socially disadvantaged groups. Those who were active before the pandemic did not necessarily find a place for themselves during the pandemic. There are cases of continuation of various types of aid activities by people who started their work for the community as part of groups producing and distributing masks. In such cases, joining one action became the basis for further actions for various groups in need.

Non-inclusive behaviour of the co-production phenomenon: As co-production tends to be a dynamic bottom-up activity, it can put a strong focus on a single task while omitting essential issues on the way. It tends to be helpful in the creation of an efficient task-related community but at the cost of broader systemic impact.

Disaster phase: As the crisis settles down into its disillusionment phase (Roberts, Ashley, 2008), it would be up to authorities to learn from it and try to involve a more co-productive approach in the future. For example, this could imply advancing with a set of measures and a participatory budget and inviting citizens to propose their ideas through designated collaborative formats such as co-creation labs, hackathons, or co-creation workshops, and letting the public choose the most suitable solutions, which then would be produced for wider audiences and distributed with both the governmental support and by volunteers. Such aid actions are also short-lived; in the case of the co-production of masks, collective actions disappeared along with the possibility of purchasing medical masks (Cochoy, Calvignac, Gaglio, Meyer, 2022).

The help that helps the helper: Fighting an invisible enemy such as a virus might make people feel powerless (Seeman, 1959), and, as Bastecka et al. (2013) underlines, self-help and mutual help are a common reaction to an emergent situation and helping help mostly those who help (Ilin, 2013). Nevertheless, the movement behind it facilitated much more than just a pure textile cover of breathing orifices. It co-produced bottom-up solutions in response to national and global crises, proving that the most efficient means of crisis problem-solving is to join forces. Having excellent top-down planning would help, but an active community that can act by itself is critical. Whether to sell or not sell masks was a big question and created much stir in the community of face mask creators. Some believed it to be their civic duty to provide it voluntarily for free, while others did not see a reason to not sell it for money, especially when it became a fashion accessory. In between were those who offered masks for free where needed and accepted money from others, sometimes for special orders, to have funds for covering material costs.

Systems archetypes: The situation summarized above in part about co-production could also be partly related to so-called Systems Archetypes, especially the one called Success to the Successful (Kim, Lannon, 1997). This archetype is known as a situation when one party or a body gains success, and it is supported afterwards because of the first success without consideration of other solutions that might be more beneficial, efficient, or suitable (Kim, 2000). Thus, co-production *per se* does not consider necessary iterations to make the solution more user-friendly and adaptive to different end-users.

Masks as a new currency of exchange: The production and distribution of masks were accompanied by the process of replacement, carried out by the principle of reciprocity described in the literature (Blau, 1960; Blau, 1986). The lack of availability of masks for some people and the ability of others to craft them contributed to the periodic exchange of resources. Usually, these actions were not based on profit but rather on the need to repay the recipients of masks. In this way, mask makers



sometimes received non-monetary resources such as materials for producing additional masks for other residents, small food donations, and an offer to help distribute the masks. Masks as a new currency of exchange: The lack of availability of masks for some people and the ability of others to craft them contributed to the periodic exchange of resources. Usually, these actions were not based on profit but rather on the need to repay the recipients of masks. Sometimes mask makers received non-monetary resources such as materials for mask production for other residents, small food donations, and an offer to help distribute masks. Sometimes they were offered support, such as helping to look after the children while they were busy sewing masks.

CONCLUSION

Face masks became an important symbol of the fight against infection by COVID-19 at the beginning of the year 2020. Even though we have no research on how they helped to slow down the spread of the infection itself, they helped to define a community that struggled to defend itself against this invisible enemy. The masks became an everyday accessory and tool, much like a toothbrush. Their importance is illustrated by the recent activity of the Museum of the Eastern Bohemia in Hradec Kralove, which started to gather masks as relics of the COVID-19 emergency, according to their Facebook page. It is this importance, but also the puzzling behaviour of people who suddenly organized themselves and provided masks for the whole country in a matter of days when the government failed in its protective role, which was the driving force for the authors to create this article. A strange resistance among this newly created MCI to the later involvement of outsiders also developed.

The questionnaire research and semi-structured interviews supported the original theoretical underpinnings and brought further context to various points of view on community building and self-organisation and pointed out that co-production took place in this context, with all its benefits and its flaws. Protective behaviour of the community (Abrutyn, 2016) and the known archetype, Success to Successful (Kim, Lannon, 1997; Kim, 2000), probably limited the involvement of other bodies in the MCI. Although, this might have been the impact of the MCI and local communities identifying themselves and encapsulating themselves also from some of the outside help (Southerton, 2002). Even though this initiative seemed to be unique for specific locations, it is evident that many countries are involved in this activity, and it would be exciting to conduct an international comparative study. The Czech example got the attention of Japanese publicists, who gave it as an example of problem-solving during the COVID-19 outbreak (Daisuke, 2020). We believe that this multidisciplinary article creates an intersection of social policy, sociology, social economics, and knowledge sciences and would be a source of inspiration for further ideas in the field of community development.

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Majority Population Attitudes towards the Roma Minority as a Specific Component of the Group-focused Enmity Syndrome in the Slovak Republic

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Abstract

OBJECTIVES: The study is dedicated to the analysis of societal attitudes towards the Roma minority in Slovakia, representing inter-ethnic conflict between the majority population and the 2nd biggest minority in Slovakia. **THEORETICAL BASE:** The model of study is based on the concept of Group-focused enmity syndrome by the “Bielefeld group” of researchers. **METHODS:** The research project was implemented through the quantitative sociological survey strategy. Empirical data were obtained through standardized interview technique applied to the group of 1,050 respondents. For data collection, we used standardized research tool developed by specialists from Université De Genève, focused on prediction and monitoring of the population’s hostile attitudes development within the EU. **OUTCOMES:** The survey outcomes demonstrated significantly adverse attitudes of the majority population towards the Roma ethnic population; mainly in structural conditions, first in the respondent groups according to political structure, indicating strong influence of political elite on the population attitude orientation, and the existence of group-focused enmity syndrome with Romaphobia as a specific component in the Slovak conditions. **SOCIAL WORK IMPLICATIONS:** The Slovak society perceives its relations to the Roma minority group on various levels. The finding could be beneficial for further investigation of the problem but mainly for intervention strategies dealing with real changes at the society attitudes.

Keywords

Roma ethnic groups, majority, Romaphobia, prejudices, attitudes, society

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INTRODUCTION

At the beginning of the new millennium, European efforts for improvement of the Roma ethnic group's position was represented by the political initiative called Roma Inclusion Decade (2005–2015), which included 12 European countries and was primarily oriented to restriction of discrimination and diminishing of differences between this minority group and the rest of the society. It was also focused on the primary areas of education, occupation, health, and habitation, committing the governments to take in account further issues – e.g., poverty and gender equality (Kushen, 2015). This initiative and its goals indicate the extent of the subject matter that affects many areas of the societal life in particular countries. Considering that EU has experienced the period associated mainly with the refugee crisis during the last years, many humanists–specialists dedicated their research work to this phenomenon. However, the Roma community research, their position within the society, and many other aspects associated with this ethnic group has remained an important area of research and practice of auxiliary professions mainly in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe.

The extensive nature of the problems associated with the Roma minority expresses vast areas to which European specialists pay attention. Health representations (Petek, 2006; Hijová et al., 2014; Roman et al., 2014; Rosicova et al., 2015; Šupínová et al., 2015; Marcu, 2016) is a frequent area, defining mainly problems associated with the lifestyle of the Roma ethnic groups, resulting from their specific cultural/social characteristics, approach to healthcare, or health specifics of this ethnic group. Another research worth mentioning is that of self-identity of the Roma communities (Csepeli, Simon, 2004; Kyuchukov, Hancock, 2010) and of political/civil representation of Roma ethnic groups in particular European regions (Bačlija, Haček, 2012; Benč et al., 2013). Considering social sciences, priority areas of interest include areas of inclusion and education (Liégeois, 2007; Njegovan, 2011; Roth, Moisa, 2011; Buțiu, 2014; Marushiakova, Popov, 2015; Montesino, Al Fakir, 2015; O'Nions, 2015), protection of rights of minority population groups, focused on discrimination, inequality and social exclusion of the Roma minority (Goldston, 2010; Janevic et al., 2012; Murray, 2012; Perišić, Vidojević, 2013; Delcour, Hustinx, 2015), and attitudes or relations between the majority and minority population (Ljubic et al., 2012; Fitzek, 2015; Fontanella et al., 2015; Kossowska et al., 2015; Loveland, Popescu, 2016). A new phenomenon emerged after Eastern European countries accession' in the Shengen area, represented by rather extensive migration of Roma ethnic groups within the EU countries (Gehring, 2013). Many studies elaborated mainly in countries affected by the Roma ethnic groups' presence confirmed the urgency of seeking solutions aimed at positive changes in all areas, but mainly in the inter-ethnic dialogue. This study deals with society attitudes towards Roma ethnic groups in relation to the structural conditions in which the majority population exists. Numerous studies (Stangor et al., 1991; Ekehammar et al., 2004; Bratt, 2005; Backstrom, Bjorklund, 2007) proved that prejudice to marginal society communities can be generalized and summarized in a single main model that incorporates mutually correlating prejudice forms. Zick et al., (2011) named the model a syndrome of group-focused enmity (GFE). Surveys conducted by them (Zick et al., 2008; 2011) confirmed the model validity. We reported similar results in our survey in the Slovak conditions. In relation to the Roma ethnic groups' position, it was proved that negative attitude of the majority population towards the Roma minority represents a specific component of misanthropy existing in the society in relation to marginalized groups, along with the attitude to the homeless, and such component represents a part of the group-focused enmity syndrome (Patyi, Levická, 2016). Therefore, we insist that majority population attitudes towards the Roma ethnic groups have been influenced by the syndrome rate, being in strong correlation with structural and social/political conditions in our country. In this meaning we present our survey outcomes in the following text.



ROMA ETHNIC GROUPS AND ROMAPHOBIA IN SLOVAKIA

From an historical point of view, the presence of the Roma ethnic groups in Slovakia represents a traditional aspect of ethnic heterogeneity in the region. The Roma ethnic groups represent an integral part of the Slovak society in any historical period. Describing this minority in the conditions of the Slovak Republic, mapping the Roma population in particular region has posed an empirical problem. This condition resulted from a few factors; amongst them terminological ambiguities of the Roma ethnic groups' definition in Slovakia can be stated as one of the major causes thereof, according to a few experts (Vaňo, 2002; Matlovičová et al., 2012). Pursuant to the Slovak Constitution, population race, ethnicity or social origin cannot be subject to any records in statistical analysis, which hinders unbiased research and data collection for purpose of further analyses. The term "nationality" has been used for this purpose during the census. However, this terminology error significantly distorts the actual situation during the census in the terms of population ethnicity. A total 105,738 citizens claimed the Roma nationality in the 2011 census (67,179 in the 2021 census) (The Slovak Statistical Office, 2011). Research conducted in the years after (Matlovičová et al., 2012; Mušíňka et al., 2013) indicated a rather huge difference compared to the official census, caused mainly by methodological discrepancies.² The estimated population of the Roma citizens in Slovakia significantly varies, currently within 320–500,000 people.

Long-term investigation of the Roma communities position in Slovakia (Vaňo, 2002; Vašečka, 2002; Koganová, Kopecký, 2005; Džambovič, 2007; Škobla et al., 2008; Vanková, 2009; Huttová et al., 2012; UNDP, 2012; Šprocha, 2014; Šuvada, 2015) indicates that it is a minority population group that is most endangered by poverty, social exclusion, discrimination in employment, education and healthcare, amongst all national or ethnic minorities in Slovakia. Examining these communities, the Roma population is mostly exposed to the combination of economic, cultural, political, symbolic, psychological, and spatial exclusion, and exclusion from reasonable habitation standard (Džambovič, Jurásková, 2002). Farkas (2007) named it "structural discrimination". For the above stated reasons determining specific behaviour of Roma citizens living in excluded locations and also in big cities, the majority society perceives this ethnic group as a "problematic population" (Timmer, 2013). This effect created ethnic tension resulting in open conflict.

Inter-ethnic tension between the majority society and Roma minority in Slovakia represents a traditional "in-group and out-group" conflict. Some authors in Slovakia (Hrabovský, 2012; Štefančík et al., 2013; Marushiakova, Popov, 2016) and other countries (Haupt, 2006; End, 2014) as well as a few European institutions (Council of Europe, 2011; Keen, 2015) name the anti-Roma attitudes in the society as "antigypsyism". However, we define anti-Roma attitudes in our study as Romaphobia, closer with its content to the terms as homophobia, islamophobia, etc. Romaphobia doesn't define pathological fear of a certain group but refers to negative emotions towards a group of citizens in the environment where it is identifiable e.g., with its ethnic origin, religion, or sexual orientation (Ljujic et al., 2012). Some surveys indicate that perception of the Roma otherness through stereotypes, thus in the terms of endangering and mistrust, could be a key to anti-Roma attitudes (Petrova, 2003). It was also demonstrated that the desire of society homogenization among the dominant community members could contribute to the endangering of marginal groups (Brearley, 2001; Woodcock, 2007). This status has been represented in the Slovak conditions through the effects of sentimental nationalism reflected in the political influence of the elite towards the majority society, and activation of the group-focused enmity syndrome, depending on the need for society mobilization³ (Patyi, Levická 2016). Minorities incapable of defending

² The studies mention Roma population totalling in 353,000, i.e., 6.5% of total Slovak population (Matlovičová et al., 2012), or 402,840 citizens respectively, i.e., 7.5% of total Slovak population (Mušíňka et al., 2013).

³ For example, in the Slovak Parliamentary election.



themselves against incorrect system decisions of the establishment, or populist political attacks by radical groups without support of the majority population, are often drawn in conflicts resulting in extremism in societal attitudes, when such situations are free of any problem rationalization with the focus on definite denomination of a particular culprit responsible for actual social problems in the society (Mudde, 2010; Bustikova, 2014). The Roma minority at the end of the 90s was such a group in Slovakia (Majchrák, 2003).

SURVEY METHOD AND CHARACTERISTICS

The research project was implemented through the quantitative sociological survey strategy. The survey was conducted with a representative group of the Slovak population within the age 18–65+, compiled on basis of quota selection and randomization in the last stage. The quota signs referred to: gender, age, education, habitation size, and self-governing region. The tool contained many other signs as well, for example occupation, monthly household income, religion, etc. Items related to political affinity in the direction of a classic right-left spectrum were of profound importance for our analysis, based on the sympathy expressed towards a particular political subject. Empirical data were obtained through standardized interview technique applied to the group of 1,500 respondents. For data collection, we used the standardized research tool (sociological questionnaire) developed by specialists from “Université De Genève” (Cattacin et al., 2006), focused on prediction and monitoring of the population’s hostile attitudes development within the EU. The tool is focused on measurement of development and changes of majority society attitudes towards the marginal groups, related to mobilization potential. From the primary point of view, it is not oriented to identification of a particular individual or a group representing risk but to measurement of the development of attitudes and the population inequality ideology response rate (Cattacin et al., 2006). We translated the questionnaire from the German version and adapted it to the Slovak survey conditions. The record block was rather extensive after processing, consisting of 96 items and a total of 191 variables. Data acquired through field collection were statistically processed through SW IBM SPSS Statistics v. 22.0.0. Statistical hypotheses, major differences among the variables were tested by *chi-square independence test* with the importance level 0.05. Standard statistical methods were used for dependence identification. We also used factor analysis. The main goal of the analysis is to prove the existence of Romaphobia as part of the concept of the group-focused enmity syndrome (GFE) in Slovak conditions in terms to the original results of the investigation of this syndrome (Zick et al. 2008; 2011). Based on the possibilities of the theoretical foundations of group-focused enmity syndrome, we therefore propose two hypotheses.

Hypothesis 1 expresses the assumption that there is a significant relationship between anti-Roma attitudes and individual GFE elements in the structure of the model.

Hypothesis 2 assumes that there is a significant relationship between the overall level of the GFE syndrome directed against the Roma minority and structural, social, and political conditions in the Slovak Republic.

ROMAPHOBIA IN SOCIETY ATTITUDES AS A SPECIFIC COMPONENT OF THE GROUP-FOCUSED ENMITY SYNDROME

We choose 11 items to investigate society attitudes towards Roma ethnic groups (P68.1 – 11), expressing various stereotypical statements resulting from Slovak history, which the respondents had opportunity to comment again on the scale from “fully agree” to “fully disagree”. Results of this hostile attitude dimension survey have raised questions about the further trend of societal adverse moods towards the Roma minority.



Table 1: Average values⁴ of answers to statements related to societal attitudes towards Roma citizens.

1 – fully agree | 2 – rather agree | 3 – rather disagree | 4 – fully disagree | 99 – don't know

Item/ Statement	Mean	Std. deviation
<i>P68.1</i> Roma citizens misuse the social system.	1.21	.46
<i>P68.2</i> Roma citizens are disadvantaged on the labour market.	2.69	.92
<i>P68.3</i> Roma citizens are responsible for my feeling of insecurity at streets.	1.79	.74
<i>P68.4</i> Offices should strive to improve the Roma citizens' situation.	2.68	.96
<i>P68.5</i> Roma citizens don't want to work.	1.48	.57
<i>P68.6</i> Departure of Roma citizens from Slovakia to other countries would reduce crime in Slovakia.	1.98	.84
<i>P68.7</i> Roma children should study at special schools.	2.24	.90
<i>P68.8</i> The number of Roma citizens in Slovakia causes problems.	1.52	.69
<i>P68.9</i> Roma citizens are not environmentally aware.	1.32	.47
<i>P68.10</i> Because of their behaviour, Roma citizens can be co-blamed for their discrimination.	1.62	.66
<i>P68.11</i> Variability of nationalities, religions, or cultures contributes to strong Slovakia.	2.85	.79

Cronbach's $\alpha = .79$

Attitude setting of the respondents towards Roma citizens in Slovakia can be identified in Table 1. The following section contains the analysis of items in relation to various variables in the terms of structural and social-political conditions in the Slovak Republic.

We can see enormously high figures in the percentage reached from answers to the 1st statement (P68.1). As many as 97.9% of respondents agree that the **Roma citizens misuse the social system**. Only 1.4% of respondents disagree with the statement and 0.7% were undecided. We observed significant differences of the respondents' answers according to their religious beliefs. Respondents of Eastern-orthodox and Roman-catholic religion mostly agree with the statement while the respondents of other Christian religions mostly disagree with the statement (Cramer $V=0.127$; $p<0.001$). Despite of rather unambiguous attitude of the society towards the statement, we identified significantly adverse correlation between the answers and education levels of the respondents. The opinion that the Roma community misuse the social system could partly be associated with the education degree achieved. We found out that the higher education was reported of the respondents, the lower rate of affirmative attitude was to the statement ($\rho=-0.135$; $p<0.001$).

Answers to the 2nd statement (P68.2) are more variable. An affirmative attitude was expressed by 45.2% of respondents while 52.9% of respondents believe that Roma citizens are not disadvantaged on the labour market. Thus, it seems that the majority society attitudes are ambiguous towards the

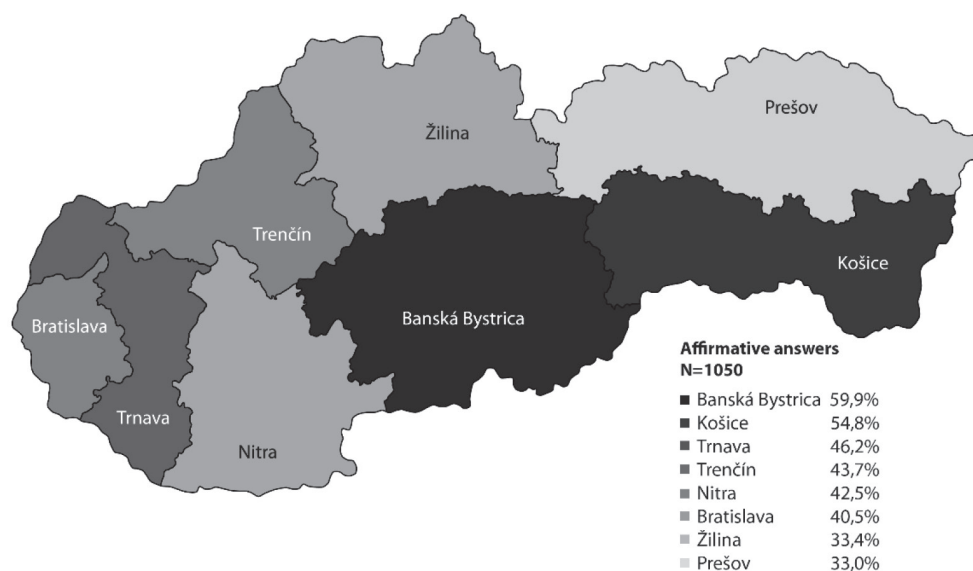
⁴ All responses "99 – don't know" were eliminated within the calculation of mean value of answers to statements.



job opportunities for the Roma minority population in Slovakia. Therefore, we decided to analyse the data in detail, but we observed significant differences in the answers of respondents with low coefficients, namely the groups divided according to self-governing region (Cramer $V=0.121$; $p=0.012$). In this group, citizens of Eastern Slovak regions expressed most of the adverse attitudes, political affinity (Cramer $V=0.111$; $p=0.034$), and political affiliation (Cramer $V=0.119$; $p=0.002$). No significant correlation between the statement evaluation and ordinal variables was confirmed. In case of item P68.3 we again reported a high rate of affirmative attitudes. A total of 79.9% of respondents expressed agreement with the statement that Roma citizens are responsible for the feeling of respondents' insecurity. 18.8% of respondents rather or fully disagree with the statement. We observed significant differences in the answers, with low correlation coefficient between the respondent groups according to political affinity (Cramer $V=0.106$; $p=0.041$) when most affirmative attitudes were expressed by the respondents on the left of the political spectrum and affiliation (Cramer $V=0.105$; $p=0.049$) as well as sympathizers of nationalistic subjects. Like statement P68.1, we observed significant but positive correlation with the respondents' education degree (because of statement with reverse values) ($\rho=0.125$; $p<0.001$).

A total of 42.8% of respondents affirmatively evaluated statement P68.4. 54.3% of respondents don't think that the offices should strive for improvement of the Roma living situation. We observed significant differences of respondents' answers based on a self-governing region. Respondents from the region Banská Bystrica mostly agreed with the statement, while respondents from the region Prešov mostly disagree with the statement (Cramer $V=-0.133$; $p=0.001$). We reported also significant differences between the unemployed respondents in this group, based on their current situation. Retired respondents mostly agreed with the statement while job seeking respondents agreed with it least (Cramer $V=-0.181$; $p=0.002$). We also observed statistically important differences in the answers of the group based on political affinity and affiliation, but with very low coefficient of correlation (Cramer $V=0.107$), and as well, we reported significant correlation with education degree reached ($\rho=-0.118$; $p=0.001$).

Figure 1: Affirmative answers to P68.4 – Offices should strive to improve the Roma citizens' situation – according to self-governing regions (in %)



P68.4; Cramer $V=-0.133$; $p=0.001$



Table 2: P68.4 – **Offices should strive to improve the Roma citizens' situation** – answers according to current situation of the unemployed (in %)

Variant	Unemployed person				N=1050
	Job seeker/ registered	In training process	Retiree	Other	
Fully agree	10.3	19.3	24.2	2.9	16.6
Rather agree	20.6	27.3	31.8	22.9	26.3
Rather disagree	36.8	19.3	16.7	14.3	21.9
Fully disagree	29.4	31.3	19.7	51.4	30.7
Don't know	2.9	2.7	7.6	8.6	4.4
N	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

P68.4; Cramer $V=0.181$; $p=0.002$

A total of 91% of respondents agreed with the statement on an unwillingness of the Roma population to join the working processes (P68.5). 7.6% of respondents of the survey disagree with the opinion. We observed significant differences in the answers according to religion. Respondents of unspecified religion mostly agree with the statement, and respondents of other Christian religions least agreed therewith. We again observed significant correlation of the answers and the respondents' education degree, however with low value of correlation coefficient ($\rho=0.097$).

A total of 69.3% of all respondents agree that Roma ethnic groups' departure from Slovakia would reduce the crime rate in the country (P68.6). 26.4% of respondents disagreed with it and 4.3% of them had no opinion. Differences in the answers are significant among respondents according to self-governing regions with most agreeing respondents being from the region Prešov, and least agreeing respondents from the region Košice (Cramer $V=0.129$; $p<0.001$). We also observed statistically important differences in the answers of the group based on political affinity and affiliation, but with very low correlation coefficient (Cramer $V=0.107$; $p=0.010$).

In case of statement P68.7, we saw most affirmative responses (56.7%). A total of 16.2% of respondents fully or rather disagree with assigning Roma children to special schools. Differences in the answers are significant among respondents according to self-governing regions, with most agreeing respondents being from the region Prešov, and least agreeing respondents from the region Banská Bystrica (Cramer $V=0.118$; $p=0.020$). We also observed statistically important differences in the answers of the group based on political affinity and affiliation. Most affirmative attitudes were observed at nationalist political parties' sympathizers, vs most disagreeing attitudes being from liberal parties' sympathizers.

Table 3: P68.7 – **Roma children should study at special schools** – answers based on political affinity and affiliation (in %)

Variant	Political affinity and affiliation						N=1050
	Nationalist right-oriented party	Liberals	Mid-to-right conservative	Mid-to-left social-democrats	None	Other	
Fully agree	60.5	23.8	14.7	29.1	27.8	38.5	27.4
Rather agree	18.6	19.0	32.2	32.5	29.3	38.5	29.3
Rather disagree	18.6	42.9	32.9	24.8	25.7	15.4	27.1
Fully disagree	2.3	11.9	14.0	8.5	13.3	7.7	12.0
Don't know	0.0	2.4	6.3	5.1	3.9	0.0	4.2
N	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

P68.7; Cramer $V=0.123$; $p<0.001$



The Slovak society mostly agrees that it is the size of Roma population that causes problems in our country, as confirmed by the answers to the statement P68.8 with affirmative attitude of most respondents (90.1%). An adverse attitude was expressed by 8.2% of all respondents. We also observed significant differences in the answers of the group based on political affinity, affiliation, family situation of respondents, and employment availability. Differences with weaker correlation coefficients were reported in the group of respondents according to political affinity and family situation (Cramer $V=0.108$; 0.105 ; 0.105). Affirmative attitudes in the group of employed respondents were more frequently seen in respondents working in the private sector than those working in the public sector (Cramer $V=0.141$; $p=0.043$). Related to the statement, we monitored significant adverse correlation in respondents' household income ($\rho=-0.174$; $p=0.001$). Increased household income was accompanied with an increasing affirmative standpoint of respondents.

Respondents' answers to statement P68.9 didn't significantly differ from the preceding. A total of 92.5% of respondents agree with the statement that Roma ethnic groups are not environmentally aware, vs 4.6% of respondents who don't share this opinion. A statistically significant difference was observed in the answers of respondents based on self-governing regions. Respondents from the regions Prešov and Trenčín mostly agreed with the statement, while respondents from the region Banská Bystrica mostly disagreed with it (Cramer $V=0.132$; $p=0.001$). Like the preceding items (68.1, 3, 4, 5 and 6), significant dependence was observed based on education degree reached (Spearman $\rho=0.116$; $p=0.001$). Thus, it seems that respondents' education degree plays an important role in the evaluation of statements. A total of 87.4% of respondents felt that Roma ethnic groups should be partly blamed for their own discrimination within society (P68.10), vs 9.7% of respondents that don't share this opinion and 2.9% undecided. In the answers to this question, we also reported significant differences in the group, based on political affinity (Cramer $V=0.143$; $p<0.001$). Most affirmative attitudes were expressed by nationalistic subjects' sympathizers vs fewest of the attitudes expressed by the liberal platform sympathizers. We reported statistically important differences in the answers of the group based on education ($\rho=0.166$; $p=0.001$). The lower the education degree reached; the more respondents agree with the statement. Household income aspect plays also important role; increasing willingness to agree with the offered opinion is higher at increasing income ($\rho=-0.128$; $p=0.001$).

A total of 25.8% responded affirmatively to statement P68.11, expressing conviction that a diversity of cultures and nations contributes to a strong Slovakia. 65% of respondents disagreed. We saw statistically important differences in the answers of the group based on self-governing regions. Most affirmative attitudes were expressed by the respondents in the region Košice, compared to mostly adversely responses in the region Trnava (Cramer $V=0.134$; $p=0.001$). We also observed statistically important correlation between the statement evaluation and the societal group to which respondents think they naturally belong ($\rho=0.160$; $p<0.01$). Increasing level of the societal group of the respondents brings higher trend towards agreement with the statement.

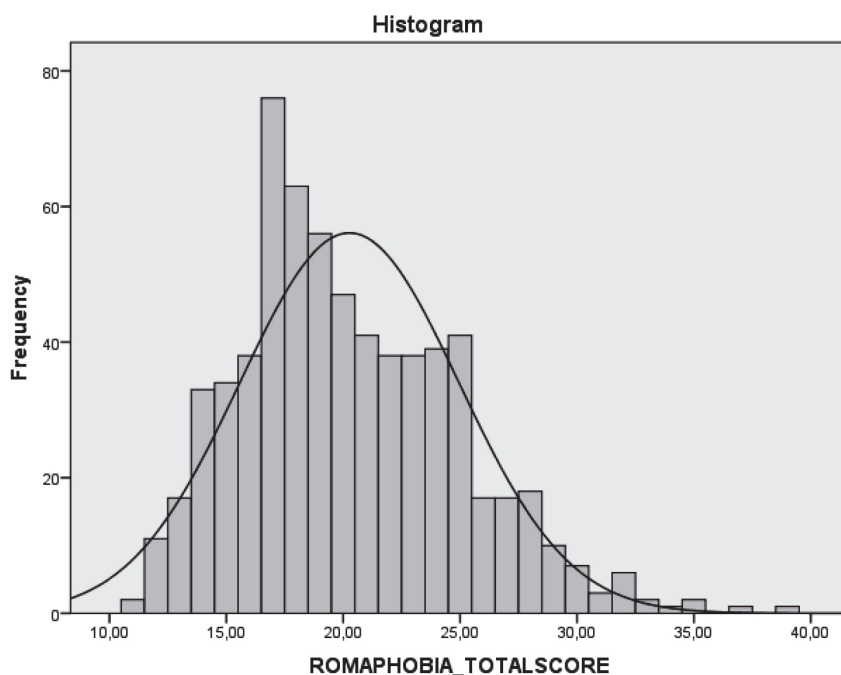
Analysis of components demonstrated rather unambiguous outcomes. Majority society in Slovakia shows generally adverse attitude towards the Roma community. To evaluate the total rate of Romaphobia in the societal attitudes, we calculated the joint score of all items/statements.⁵ We reached a score within 11-39, with the smallest value representing the strongest Romaphobia rate in the respondents' attitude and vice versa. Calculation of fundamental parameters showed values - $\bar{x}=20.26$ ($\tilde{x}=19$; $std(X)=4.68$). Thus, results in Figure 2 indicate a rather strong presence of anti-Roma societal attitudes. Interesting differences were reported in some groups of respondents. In the group divided according to occupation, the respondents in worker positions showed the highest Romaphobia rate (craftsmen, farmers, clerks) vs the lowest Romaphobia rate demonstrated by medium and higher management staff (Cramer $V=0.280$; $p=0.021$). In the group divided according to family status, the respondents living with their own children, and children living with

⁵ Reverse items P68.2 and P68.4 were re-coded.



parents in the same household showed the highest Romaphobia rate, while respondents living alone without kids in the household showed the lowest Romaphobia rate (Cramer $V=0.232$; $p=0.003$). As during the entire analysis, significant differences were expressed in the group based on political affinity that definitively point out the correlation between the respondents' political preferences and anti-Roma attitudes. Respondents preferring nationalistic political movements demonstrated the strongest anti-Roma attitudes, in contrast with sympathizers of liberal platforms (Cramer $V=0.236$; $p=0.001$). In relation to the ordinal variables, we reported significant correlation with education ($\rho=0.215$; $p=0.001$) and for the item investigating the likelihood of job loss within the next 5 years ($\rho=-0.200$; $p=0.001$). Respondents with decreasing education but also decreasing job loss likelihood in the proceeding 5 years showed the strongest anti-Roma attitudes.

Figure 2: Total score of statements expressing Romaphobia in Slovak society

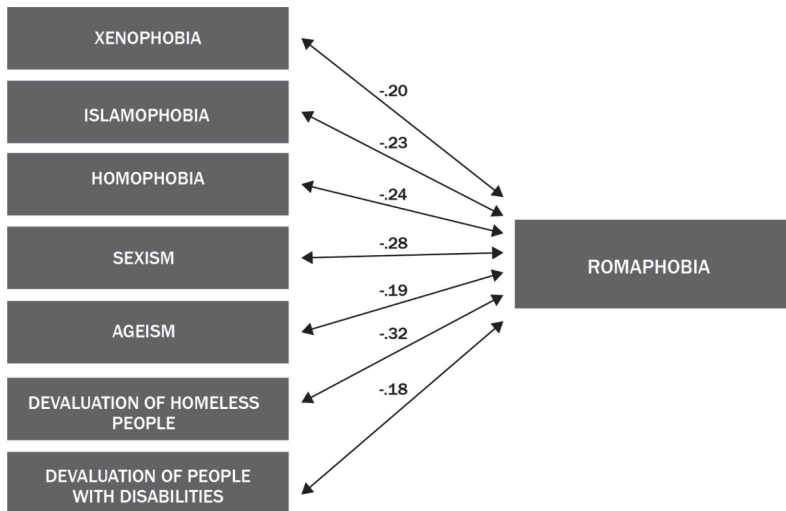


$$\bar{x}=20,26 \ (\tilde{X}=19; \text{std}(X)=4.68)$$

Based on the analysis of internal relations between types of prejudices, Zick et al. (2008) defined the group-focused enmity syndrome. In Zick et al. (2008; 2011) surveys, the syndrome contains components: anti-Semitism, homophobia, xenophobia, islamophobia, sexism, ageism, devaluation of the homeless, and health of disabled people. In our previous survey, (Patyi, Levická, 2016) we investigated the same components as confirmed by the results of Zick et al. (2008; 2011), but we didn't confirm any internal correlations between prejudices and anti-Semitism. However, we insist on another component of the syndrome existing in Slovakia, namely Romaphobia. Thus, we calculated mutual relations between Romaphobia and other syndrome components, showing significant correlation with all components (Figure 3). Therefore, we can confirm that anti-Roma attitudes in the terms of Romaphobia as described above could be perceived in the Slovak conditions as a part of the group-focused enmity syndrome.



Figure 3: Relation among components of the group-focused enmity syndrome and Romaphobia in Slovakia



Pearson's r ; All correlations is significant at the 0.01 level.

To ensure better understanding of Romaphobia components, we conducted another analysis of the aspects associated with respondents' attitudes to the Roma minority. We wanted to know if there is a difference in the respondents' perception of certain Roma subject matter areas. Variables were summed up and two levels of the respondents' attitudes towards the Roma minority were identified, using the factor analysis (**Bartlett's** test of sphericity; $p < 0.001$).

Table 4: Factor analysis of the attitudes towards the Roma minority (Rotated Component Matrix)

Item/ statement	Component		
	1	2	3
P68.1 Roma citizens misuse the social system.	.759		
P68.5 Roma citizens don't want to work.	.648		
P68.8 The number of Roma citizens in Slovakia causes problems.	.655		
P68.9 Roma citizens are not environmentally aware.	.685		
P68.10 Because of their behaviour, Roma citizens can be co-blamed for their discrimination.	.609		
P68.3 Roma citizens are responsible for my feeling of insecurity on streets.		.645	
P68.6 Departure of Roma citizens from Slovakia to other countries would reduce crime in Slovakia.		.655	
P68.7 Roma children should study at special schools.		.721	
P68.2 Roma citizens are disadvantaged on the labour market.			.694
P68.4 Offices should strive to improve the Roma citizens' situation.			.777
P68.11 Diversity of nationalities, religions, or cultures contributes to strong Slovakia.			.494

Extraction Method: principal Component Analysis. Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization.



It resulted from the factor analysis outcomes that the respondents' attitudes towards the Roma ethnic groups can be evaluated in three levels covering 56% variance:

1. **Classical stereotypes and prejudices:** the first factor are characterized by classical stereotypes associated with statements as, e.g., social system misuse, environmental pollution. This component is associated with traditional perception of the Roma minority by the Slovak society, expressed within the entire modern history of Slovakia since 1989.
2. **Fear and systemic attitudes:** another level of the respondents' attitudes towards the Roma minority specifies the opinions related to so called systemic solutions, e.g., inclusion of Roma children in special schools, or departure of Roma ethnic groups out of our country, which determine the factor of minority perception by the majority society as an independent component, together with the feeling of uncertainty.
3. **Structural attitudes:** the last factor is defined by structural conditions in relation to the Roma minority, which the society perceives separately from other components. It seems that solutions associated with employment, discrimination, and co-habitation represent a different category for the respondents expressing their attitudes to the Roma minority.

CONCLUSIONS

Outcomes of our study demonstrate the current attitude of the Slovak society towards the Roma minority. Findings can be interpreted on various levels. Based on various studies (Cattacin et al., 2006; Heitmeyer, Anhut, 2008; Zick et al., 2011), the presence of structural conditions in relation to the anti-Roma attitudes can be explained by the social disintegration concept that considers primary impairment of an individual integration process in the society a basis of such attitudes' occurrence, and subsequent mobilization of the society in the form of particular action. However, in case of relations between the Slovak majority population and Roma ethnic groups, it is a specific conflict type that doesn't disappear regardless the structural conditions in the country. The analysis outcomes indicate that the societal attitudes towards Roma ethnic groups are hugely influenced by political preference with nationalistic contents. Ljucic et al. (2012) demonstrated in the study that relations between nationalistic preferences and Romaphobia are partly interconnected with threatening loss of economic wealth and cultural values. Mihálik (2014) pointed out that traditional conservative political representation in Slovakia can actively respond to critical attitudes currently discussed by the society, and to offer radical changes towards resolving societal inequalities. We can partly talk about availability of citizen mobilization elite in the terms of William Kornhauser's concept (2008) of mass society. If we accept the results of our study and the fact that Romaphobia is a legitimate component of the group-focused enmity syndrome as described by Zick et al. (2008), then we can express the assumption that the syndrome activation through political representatives and their nationalism-based programs is capable of arousing anti-Romany attitudes in society, but in fact any hostile attitudes towards external groups, when the nature of such attitudes could depend on particular societal order.⁶ Contemporary democracy crisis as described by Pappas (2016) considers adverse prognosis of the situation improvement. Referring to our findings, the Roma population has been considered a minority in Slovakia from the majority point of view, and as such they endanger the majority inner homogeneity. Such perception has been largely supported by education level and current unfavourable economic conditions that the individuals from within the Slovak majority population face. Also, Matache (2014) pointed out that the Roma ethnic groups are still considered an inferior population group in Europe, which is unable to eliminate stereotypical perception and prejudices by the majority

⁶ For example, National Parliament election. Political subjects' campaigns in Slovakia have been typical with devaluation of marginal groups within entire modern history (Roma ethnic groups, Hungarian minority, homosexuals, refugees) and extreme nationalism and ethnocentrism always represent a fundamental sign of these campaigns.



population. Factor analysis conducted in our study confirmed that this status has been present also in the Slovak society. We should emphasize that adverse setting of majority population in relation to the Roma ethnic groups is rather strong but in no way homogenous. The Slovak society perceives its relations to this minority group on various levels. The finding could be beneficial for further investigation of the problem but mainly for intervention strategies dealing with real changes of societal attitudes. In these terms, there is a room for auxiliary professions in the current risk society⁷ that could reasonably perform and respond to continuous conflicts with innovative work methods applied in the field, taking in account regional specific factors.

One of the main possibilities of social work in terms of the goals of this study is an anti-oppressive approach when working with excluded communities. In this case, we are talking about the Roma population as a community whose needs are suppressed by the majority. Suppression of the needs of the excluded communities is in many cases expressed by the degree of the GFE present in the attitudes of the majority, but also by structural state discrimination. In this segment of minority problems, the formal, administrative, and methodological possibilities of social work in the anti-oppressive approach play a significant role. According to various studies carried out in two decades of the 21st century (Morisson Puckett, 2005; Frazer, Marlier, 2011; UNICEF, 2015; Ciaian, D'Artis, 2016; Kandylaki, Kallinikaki, 2018; Asimopoulos et al., 2019; Kahanec et al., 2020), the most important areas that determine the position of the Roma minority in society include primarily the access of this minority to social goods. These are represented by adequate access to education, health care, employment, and social services. It is social work that, with its practice, system analyses, counselling, and community-oriented interventions, can achieve the strengthening of the position of the Roma in society and thus reduce the inter-ethnic tension between them and the majority, as well as the level of oppression against them. Asimopoulos et al. (2019) in this context talk about trying to develop appropriate strategies to reduce the feeling of threat and the necessity to focus on multicultural, critical, and anti-oppressive interventions leading to the acceptance of diversity, anti-discrimination of Roma and reducing their social exclusion. A suitable tool for achieving these challenges also appears to be the constant reform of social protection systems and methods of supporting socially excluded citizens through state social assistance, which will reflect the changing economic and social conditions of life in society. These are challenges that belong to the area of interest of social work in terms of its global definition adopted by the International Federation of Social Workers in 2014. The results of this study can help to define specific regional aspects affecting efforts to improve the position of Roma in society and thus contribute to the optimization of interventions provided by social workers through national and international project activities.

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⁷ In the sense of the classical concept of Ulrich Beck.



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The Local Government's Approach to the Integration of Foreigners in the Czech Republic¹²

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Abstract

OBJECTIVES: The aim of this article is to analyse the readiness of local governments in the Czech Republic to implement their own integration policies. **THEORETICAL BASE:** The relevant theoretical concepts are based on migration studies and social policy. **METHODS:** This present survey is an explanatory multi-case study. The research set consists of five cities. The data was obtained through semi-structured interviews with political and professional representation of cities and experts from NGOs, secondary analysis of strategic and legislative documents. **OUTCOMES:** The integration policy of local governments is based on the principle of their individual voluntary commitment and is implemented only through time-limited projects. The binding definition of political and administrative responsibilities is a necessary condition to be set by the national government. **SOCIAL WORK IMPLICATIONS:** Social departments of local governments are the key institution dealing with the integration of foreigners in a municipality. Social work is therefore an essential profession that helps to design and implement a substantial part of the measures of municipal integration policies.

Keywords

integration, integration policy, municipalities, local dimension, foreigners

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INTRODUCTION

Foreigners have accounted for approximately 6% of the population in the Czech Republic. There is an increasing trend towards permanent settlement (MICR, 2022a). In 2022, the Czech Republic saw the largest number of refugees in its history due to the war in Ukraine. As of 30 December 2022, 432,805 refugees from Ukraine were granted temporary protection (MICR, 2023). This situation calls for a long-term integration strategy, which seems to be not sufficiently formulated, especially at the level of local governments (Dohnalová, 2021; Jelínková, Tollarová, 2022). However, the experience of EU countries with a long history of immigration confirms that local governments and their welfare departments play a crucial role in integration (Penninx, Garcés-Mascareñas, 2016).

The aim of the article is to analyse the approaches of selected cities to the integration of foreigners both at the declarative and implementation levels and at the same time to reflect the approaches of political and professional representation of cities towards this target group. The main research question is: **What importance do cities attach to the policy of integration of foreigners and how do they implement it?**

To answer the research question 1) the theoretical framing for analysing the role of municipalities in the integration policy will be introduced; 2) the existing legislative and systemic setting of local integration policy in the Czech Republic will be presented; 3) the results of a multi-case study showing the approaches of the five cities selected to the integration of foreigners will be presented; 4) major critical comments on the existing approaches of municipalities towards foreigners' integration will be formulated. In conclusion, the main challenges in the field of meeting the objectives of the local integration policy in the Czech Republic will be defined.

From a methodological point of view, this is an explanatory multi-case study. The research was conducted in 2021 and focused primarily on foreigners according to the Act No. 326/1999 Coll., on the Residence of Foreign Nationals in the Territory of the Czech Republic.⁴ In the theoretical part the term immigrant also has been used. This applies to all legal statuses that people of migrant origin can have.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND FRAMING THE LOCAL DIMENSION OF INTEGRATION AND INTEGRATION POLICIES

The research is based on the theoretical model of social integration dimensions according to Bosswick, Heckmann (2006) and Penninx, Garcés-Mascareñas (2016), the classification of local government policies according to Alexander (2007), and the summary of factors influencing the setting of local integration policies of countries with a long history of immigration according to Alexander (2007); Caponio, Borkert (2010); Fourot (2013); Flamant (2020).

Dimensions of social integration

The social integration of foreigners is a multidimensional process that Bosswick, Heckmann (2006) conceptualized into four dimensions. The presentation of these basic dimensions serves as a basis for operationalizing the research questions related to the assessment of the situation of foreigners in cities.

Structural integration means acquiring rights and gaining position and status in the key institutions within the host society: labour market, education system, housing, social security system. Cultural integration refers to the cognitive, behavioural, and attitudinal change of an individual. Interactive integration means the acceptance and integration of immigrants into primary relationships and

⁴ The research does not apply to applicants for international protection and persons granted asylum and subsidiary protection according to the Act No. 325/1999 Coll., on asylum. It also does not apply to persons granted temporary protection as it was conducted before the outbreak of war in Ukraine.



social networks of the host society. Identification integration represents integration into a new society at a subjective level; it is determined by feelings of belonging to and identification with the host society (Bosswick, Heckmann, 2006; Rákoczyová, Trbola, 2009).

Classification of policies towards migrants implemented at the municipal level

In creating a typology for the classification, Alexander (2007) based his classification on three traditional integration models: discriminatory, assimilationist, multicultural/pluralist, to which he added a fourth, the “no policy model”. For each of the local policy models, Alexander defined objectives and measures along the four main dimensions of integration as similarly set out by Bosswick, Heckmann (2006) and subsequently Penninx, Garcés-Mascreñas (2016).

The discriminatory model is based on the assumption of the existence of minimum integration needs of foreigners, who are understood as temporary guest workers whose aim is to obtain financial resources and return to their country of origin. Cities see their role as marginal and place responsibility in this area mainly on employers and the state. Assimilation policy focuses on individual integration of foreigners into the host society while suppressing the ethnic dimension. Both the needs and services provided are defined based on universal criteria that ignore ethnicity. The multicultural/pluralist integration policy is based on the assumption of permanent settlement of immigrants. It focuses primarily on the acceptance of immigrants’ differences, which are seen as a positive integration factor. The policy promotes sensitivity to cultural differences in the services provided (Alexander, 2007; Rákoczyová, Trbola, 2008; Penninx, Garcés-Mascreñas, 2016).

Factors influencing local government policy setting

Analyses of local integration policies in countries with a long history of immigration show that it is possible to identify common factors influencing the development and implementation of these policies at the local level.

Alexander (2007) lists three key factors. First is the nature of the immigrant population. The second important factor is what Alexander (2007:25–26), inspired by Michel Foucault, refers to as “the invisible structures of knowledge underlying visible political decisions”. The third factor is policies at the national level. In this respect, the greatest importance is attached to the conditions for granting permanent residence permit and the citizenship that local strategies must adapt to. Fourot (2013) in her study of Quebec identifies four elements influencing local integration policies: the relationship with the national and provincial governments, the political-administrative structure, the dynamics of civil society, and discourses of “integration.” It corresponds with Alexander’s “invisible structures of knowledge underlying visible political decisions”. It relates to the expectations or prejudices that policy makers and implementers may have towards immigrants, as well as the influence of past professional and personal experience that is not always reflected. Caponio, Borkert (2010), comparing urban policies in the Netherlands, Switzerland, Germany, Italy and Canada, consider four categories of actors to be crucial: elected political actors, municipal staff, civil society organisations, and experts.

Flamant (2020) in her study of municipal policies in France cites the following factors: cities’ relations with national government, political and administrative structure, the ability to seize opportunities offered by the EU, and the ability of civil society to influence the local agenda. The unifying element for all municipal integration policies is the introduction of political and administrative responsibility for dealing with the situation of immigrants.

INTEGRATION POLICY OF THE CZECH REPUBLIC AT THE LOCAL LEVEL

In the Czech Republic, the national integration policy is formulated through the Concept of Integration of Foreigners, which declares the importance of local government involvement from its inception (Dohnalová, 2021).



One of the objectives of the integration policy of the Czech Republic is to bring integration to the regional and local level. A crucial prerequisite for the inclusion of foreigners as well as conflict-free coexistence in society is the active operation of local government authorities” (Czech Government, 2016:10).

However, there are no legislative fundamentals for the work of state administration in the area of integration of foreigners in delegated competence. The main instrument for implementing the integration policy at the local level is the establishment of regional centres to support the integration of foreigners and subsidies for municipal projects supporting the integration of foreigners (Czech Government, 2022:13–14). However, there is not much interest in these projects, with only 22 municipalities in 2021, of which 11 were municipal districts of Prague and the Capital City of Prague (MICR, 2022a:199–203).

At the level of municipalities, it is possible to identify several agile actors involved in the implementation of the integration policy, however, the absence of a systematic approach to integration prevails (Consortium of NGO’s working with migrants, 2018:15; Pořízek, 2018:56–57). Only the two biggest cities, Prague and Brno, have their own integration concept. Few cities mention foreigners as a specific target group in their community social service plans or social inclusion strategic plans (Dohnalová, 2021).

Municipalities usually do not perceive foreigners as a permanent part of their population, but as temporary groups of residents or residents without special needs who may not be covered by any integration support. In addition, the municipality representatives have almost no experience of integration policies (Jelínková, Valenta, 2022).

METHODOLOGY

This research is inspired by the research conducted already in 2008 under the title Local Strategies for the Integration of Foreigners in the Czech Republic I (Rákoczyová, Trbala, 2008). It was a unique and complex qualitative research on the approach of local authorities to the integration of foreigners conducted in 25 cities in the Czech Republic. More recent studies focus mainly on the situation of foreigners in cities and marginally on the city’s approach to foreigners (e.g., Sýkora et al., 2015; Leontiyeva, Tollarová, Mikešová, 2017; Topinka, Janků, 2018).

Methodologically speaking, this is a multiple explanatory case study. For the choice of research units, the strategy of “information-oriented selection” was used (Chrastina, 2019:159).

The main criteria for the selection of municipalities were the size of the municipality, the proportion of foreigners in the municipality’s population equal to or exceeding the national average⁵, and the municipality’s own activity in the field of integration of foreigners.

The municipality size criterion was defined to include large regional cities of more than 100,000 inhabitants⁶, medium-sized city up to 100,000 inhabitants and small cities under 10,000 inhabitants. Jelínková, Čerychová (2021) point out that although most foreigners are heading to big cities, smaller cities are increasingly facing new challenges in the context of increasing migration. Smaller municipalities find themselves in a completely different situation than big cities, which are not only more open to foreigners, but also have different resources, knowledge, experience, and capacities to work with this target group.

⁵ The share of foreigners in the population of the Czech Republic in 2021 was appr. 6%. (MICR, 2022b).

⁶ The City of Prague, with the highest proportion of foreigners, was deliberately not selected. For Prague is governed by a specific Act No. 131/2000 Coll., on the Capital City of Prague as both a region and a municipality. At the same time the integration strategy of the municipality and some municipal districts has already been elaborated in other studies (e.g., Leontiyeva, Tollarová, Mikešová, 2017).



The last and the most important criterion was “the city’s own activity in the field of integration of foreigners”. Cities implementing Ministry of the Interior projects for municipalities to support the integration of foreigners for more than one year or having a special cooperation contract with an NGO were selected (MICR, 2022a). The selection was also determined by other criteria such as regional accessibility, availability of contacts to communication actors, and time capacity.

Characteristics of research units

Small town – a small town with a foreign population exceeding the national average.

Hořovice - a town with a population of 7,115, the number of foreigners 924, i.e., 13% of the town’s population (MICR, 2022b). Status: municipality with extended powers (type 3). Industrial zone Žebrák is located in the vicinity of Hořovice. The main category of foreigners are foreigners occupying low skill jobs in the industrial zone. In 2018, the municipality established cooperation with the NGO Centre for Integration of Foreigners to provide basic counselling services to foreigners in the town.

Havlíčkův Brod - a town with a population of 23,333, the number of foreigners is 1,289, i.e., 5.5% of the town’s population (MICR, 2022b). Status: municipality with extended powers (Type 3). The municipality has long previous experience with foreign workers, especially from Mongolia, working in local companies. Since 2015, it has been implementing integration projects of municipalities.

Brno - regional capital city with a population of 413,592, the number of foreigners 38,741, i.e., 9.4% of the city’s population (MICR, 2022b). Status: statutory cities, municipality with extended powers (type 3). Brno is home of a very diverse group of foreigners that cannot be unified. However, it can be said that a significant group of migrants are high-skilled foreigners. Concurrently, Brno is the second city in the Czech Republic to have its own Strategy for the Integration of Foreigners 2020–2026, and Brno City Hall has employed a team of intercultural workers since 2018. Brno is exceptional in its emphasis on data-driven integration policy-making process. It has been cooperating for a long time with the research agency SocioFaktor, which has produced several analyses on the situation of foreigners in the city of Brno in 2018–2020 (cf. SocioFaktor, 2018; Topinka, Janků, 2018; SocioFaktor, 2019; SocioFaktor, 2020).

Plzeň (Pilsen) - regional capital city with a population of 176,769, the number of foreigners 21,203, i.e., 12% of the city’s population (MICR, 2022b). Status: statutory cities, municipality with extended powers (type 3). In Plzeň, foreigners from non-EU countries predominate and work in low skill positions in industrial zones around Plzeň, especially the Bory industrial zone. The Municipality of Plzeň has had integration projects since 2017. Since 2017, the Department of Social Services of the Municipality of Plzeň also has created the Action Plan for Support and Cooperation with Foreigners in the City of Plzeň, which is updated every two years. The Municipality of Plzeň cooperates with the University of West Bohemia in Plzeň in mapping the needs of foreigners in the city (Váně, 2018).



Table 1: Characteristics of research units

Municipality	Population	Percentage of foreigners	Predominant category of foreigners	Integration activity
Small town	up to 5,000	more than 10%	intentionally omitted	Integration projects 2x
Hořovice	7,115	13 %	Foreigners in low-skilled professions, mainly from Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria	Cooperation with NGO since 2018
Havlíčkův Brod	23,333	5.5 %	Foreigners in low-skilled professions, esp. from Mongolia	Integration project since 2015
Brno	413,529	9.4 %	Heterogeneous group, significant group of highly skilled migrants (expats)	Integration project since 2017
Plzeň	176,763	12 %	Foreigners in low-skilled professions, mainly from Ukraine, Romania, Bulgaria, Moldova	Integration projects since 2017

Semi-structured interviews and secondary analysis of legislation, strategic and conceptual documents were used as data collection techniques. Thirty-five interviews were conducted with political representatives of cities, employees of municipal authorities, and other professionals.

As far as politicians are concerned, the respondents were mayors and then primarily those who have the agenda of foreigners in their mandate. Of the municipal/magistrate employees, the key respondents were from the Social Department. Other professionals who evaluate the municipality's position in the field of integration of foreigners from a more independent perspective were the heads of the Centre for Supporting the Integration of Foreigners and social workers from NGOs working with foreigners. Data were analysed using the thematic analysis method via MAXQDA software using theoretical concepts to create analytic categories (Hendl, 2005; Gilgun, 2019).

Main research question **What importance do municipalities attach to the policy on integration of foreigners and how do they implement it?** was divided into two research areas, within the research sub-questions were formulated (RSQs).

Research area 1: Approach of political representation and municipal employees towards integration of foreigners

RSQ 1: How do respondents evaluate the situation of foreigners in the city?

RSQ 2: What does the integration of foreigners in the city mean to the respondents?

Research area 2: Current setting of the city's integration policy - conceptual and institutional level

RSQ 1: How is the integration of foreigners conceptually and institutionally secured within the political structures of the city and the organisational structures of the municipal authority?

RSQ 2: Which types of integration policies are implemented by the city?

Ethical aspects of research

All respondents were asked to consent to the recording of the interview before it began. This informed consent is included in the recording and also in the transcript of the interview. In many cases, the respondents asked to remain anonymous, so the names, specific job positions, or political affiliations of the respondents are not mentioned. One respondent explicitly did not wish to mention the city where he/she works. For this reason, only the identification "Small town" without any specific information is provided.



Limitations of research

The limited breadth of the research scope causes the lack of reliability and the related impossible generalizability (Mareš, 2015). The findings can be applied only to the situation in five cities of the Czech Republic. However, the findings related to the systemic evaluation of integration policy can be considered nationally relevant. As the questions relate to the survey of respondents' evaluative opinions regarding the municipality's approach to the integration of foreigners, it is necessary to consider the limitations of the survey in this context. Some respondents openly refused to share their opinions, and the declared opinions of other respondents may differ from their actual one. Another significant limitation to the validity of the findings is that the research results can only be related to a given time period, specifically the year 2021, during which the data collection was carried out. However, this temporal contingency of research is a general phenomenon that must be taken into account.

RESULTS OF THE STUDY

Institutional arrangements and strategies for the integration of foreigners at the municipal level. In the first part, we present the results of the analysis of conceptual and strategic documents of selected cities and main institutional actors in the field of integration of foreigners.

The following were used as key evaluation categories to assess the institutional arrangements for the integration agenda: 1. the existence of specific bodies responsible for the integration of foreigners; 2. the existence of conceptual/programme documents dealing specifically with the topic of integration; 3. the implementation of projects aimed at the integration of foreigners.

The research has shown that the key institutional actor in municipal integration policy is the social departments of municipal authorities. The political representation had the integration of foreigners on its agenda only in the case of Brno, Plzeň, and the Small town. Brno is the only one of the surveyed cities to have a Strategy for the Integration of Foreigners in the City of Brno for the years 2020–2026 and a follow-up action plan. Plzeň and Hořovice have included foreigners as a target group in their action plans for the development of social services. Havlíčkův Brod and the Small town have no strategic or conceptual document on integration of foreigners.

The sustainability of activities in the field of integration, which are mostly implemented on a project basis, is quite fragile and conditioned by both the project and electoral cycle. The city of Brno appears to be an important inspiration in its ability to connect the interests of politicians and the municipality, which is framed by the pursuit of evidence-based policy.



Table 2: Institutional and strategic arrangements for integration in cities in 2021

Municipality	Political representation	Municipal/City Hall	Strategy/concept	Integration projects
Brno	Deputy for Social Welfare; Councillor for Culture and Chairman of the Foreigners Integration Advisory Body at the Statutory City of Brno	Department of Social Welfare: Counsellor for Foreigners, Coordinator of Intercultural Work; intercultural workers	Strategy for the Integration of Foreigners in Brno 2020–2026; Action Plan for Strategy for the Foreigners Integration 2021–2023; Community Plan of Social Services of the City of Brno for the period 2020–2022; Regional Innovation Strategy of the South Moravian Region 2021–2027	Ministry of the Interior projects of municipalities to support the integration of foreigners; ESF project: Increasing the intercultural permeability of public institutions in Brno (2017–2019); ESF project SKILL centre for foreigners in JMK - Brno project partner (2020–2023)
Plzeň (Pilsen)	Deputy Mayor for Culture, Heritage Protection and Social Affairs	Department of Social Services, position: Project Manager - Guarantor of the Section “Services for Foreigners”	Support Action Plan and cooperation in working with foreigners and national minorities in the City of Plzeň 2021–2022	Ministry of the Interior projects for municipalities to support the integration of foreigners
Small town	Commission of the Council for the Integration of Foreigners	Chairman of the Commission of the Council for the Integration of Foreigners; intercultural worker	x	Ministry of the Interior projects for municipalities to support the integration of foreigners
Havlíčkův Brod	x	Department of Social Affairs and Education, position: Social Probation Officer; Project Management Department, position: Project Management Officer	x	Ministry of the Interior projects for municipalities to support the integration of foreigners
Hořovice	x	Head of Social Department	Community plan of social services of the town of Hořovice and surrounding municipalities for the period 2020–2024	x

Integration measures implemented by cities and municipalities

Specific activities implemented by cities in the field of integration fall primarily within the cultural dimension of social integration. Their integration activities focus on financial support for CSOs, language courses for children and adults, and awareness-raising among foreigners. The large cities



of Brno and Plzeň also implement cultural programmes, such as the multicultural festival The World Begins in Plzeň, to promote the development of good relations between the majority and migrants.

Measures falling under the structural dimension of integration are implemented only in two cities - Brno and the Small town. This is the establishment of a position of intercultural workers directly at the municipal/city hall. Their role is to reduce socio-cultural barriers to the accessibility and availability of authorities and other public institutions for migrants through counselling and interpretation. Other key areas of support belonging to the structural dimension of integration, such as housing, the labour market and health care, are not supported by the cities. Respondents mostly pointed to the limited competences of local governments, including limited financial resources.

Personally, I think the real basis for these people to integrate in this way or the other is to have a place to live. But as the city fails to build any flats, and instead sells land to developers who do build flats but sell them at high prices, the foreigners can't afford them. So, it's a kind of vicious circle. As a social worker, I have de facto nothing to offer these foreigners. For them to want to stay here, to want to live here in a normal way, like average people, or eventually get citizenship, I have nothing to offer them. (Respondent 1B, Hořovice)

Since 2010, Brno has significantly co-financed the Brno-based Expat Centre, which focuses on supporting highly qualified migrants and their family members. Respondents evaluated this activity of the city rather negatively and pointed to the discriminatory and segregationist aspect of this measure.

Personally, I believe it's not a good idea to divide foreigners to VIP foreigners, who will live in clover here, and to poor Ukrainians and Romanians who are building houses here whom we will ignore. At the social welfare office, we are advocates of mainstreaming the integration, not only in terms of the availability of services, but also in terms of our effort to address the needs of all foreigners. (Respondent 2B, Brno)

The fact that integration activities are implemented on a project basis leads to a reduction in the effectiveness of outputs. Some products, e.g., information materials for foreigners, are created repeatedly every year and by each city separately. There is no effective cooperation between cities, rather they are competitors when applying for subsidies and grants.

Assessment of the situation of foreigners in municipalities

The way the respondents evaluate the social integration of foreigners was conceptualised through the four dimensions of social integration as defined by Bosswick, Heckmann (2006). The structural integration area consists mainly of labour market positions, access to education, housing, health care, and the level of civic and political participation of migrants. The cultural and interactive dimension is analysed through the category of integration discourse.

Labour market

Foreigners are generally perceived as economically active persons who do not apply for social benefits and are not registered as jobseekers in the labour office register. Respondents from Plzeň, Havlíčkův Brod, and Hořovice perceived the main group of foreigners in the city as foreigners performing low-skilled jobs in industrial zones. Their statements pointed to the disintegrating effects of low skill jobs, in a case of small city business activities oriented towards German-speaking clients were evaluated as disintegrative.

These Mongols didn't get out of (the city of) Brod at all. They would go on multi-shift jobs; off to work, then sleep, and then off to work again. They had nothing else to do. (Respondent 1B, Havlíčkův Brod)

Brno is the only city where respondents were not only concerned with low-skilled foreigners, but also pointed to the economic, social, and cultural benefits of highly skilled expats for the city.



In the long run, we try not to be an assembly plant but a brain plant. We have a technology park here. We have an international airport here and all these are factors that are friendly to foreign companies and migrants who would like to work here. (Respondent 1B, Brno)

Education

In the field of education of foreigners, respondents from all municipalities stressed the need to support the teaching of Czech as a second language from public resources. Plzeň, Havlíčkův Brod, and the Small town provide Czech language courses via their own integration projects. Other municipalities rely on the course offerings of integration centres. One of the frequently mentioned problems is the high number of foreign children in classrooms, with a different command of the Czech language.

We cooperate a lot with the school and the kindergarten, because the numbers are already quite high there, we have 25% Vietnamese in the kindergarten and around 20% in the school. Of course, we have already encountered problems, including the fact that some children arrive in the middle of their regular school attendance, for example in the fifth grade, and they don't speak Czech at all. Now, they're not quite conscious of the cultural milieu. On the other hand, teachers are not aware of certain things either, for example that Vietnamese children understand some things completely differently, or they are not allowed to say something to authorities, so they behave that way. (Respondent 1A, Small town)

Housing

Respondents from all cities testified that the housing policy of cities does not take into account the situation of foreigners in the city in any way. The topic of housing in commercial hostels, including illegal ones, and the approach of the local population reverberate most in the responses from Plzeň and Hořovice, where the biggest industrial zones are. The hostels are mainly occupied by foreigners without their families who take low skill jobs. They are usually located on the outskirts of the city, sometimes as part of industrial zones, out of reach of services and off the city centre.

Many foreigners live in illegal hostels. They have no declared residence and these more or less private entities are housing them, collecting some rent probably and not paying applicable fees or taxes. The main problem we have is that we automatically provide services to all these people as ordinary citizens (garbage collection, all the services that exist in the city), so we also provide services to these people, and they don't pay for it. And unfortunately, the person who rents them the space doesn't pay for it either. That's an illegal hostel. (Respondent 1A, Hořovice)

Health care

Respondents reflected the availability of health care for foreigners rather marginally. In the smaller towns of Havlíčkův Brod, Hořovice, Small town they pointed to insufficient capacity of doctors and significant language barriers.

Of course, it's a burden on those doctors. Because if a patient comes in and sits mute, it's not easy to examine him. (Respondent 2A, Havlíčkův Brod)

Civic and political participation

Most respondents from all cities reported that they did not know any foreigners who are engaged in civic society or politics. Some respondents associated the level of civic and political participation of migrants with the limited voting rights of foreigners in the Czech Republic.

Politically, to be honest, I don't think foreigners are very involved. For example, in the last election we had a Vietnamese woman in 25th place on the list of candidates, I think she had Czech citizenship, but otherwise, as far as I can remember, there hasn't been any foreigner in the council since 2004. But I think it's also because they have no chance of getting into regional government, they have no chance of getting into the chamber of deputies practically, unless they are regular citizens. (Respondent 1A, Plzeň)



Approaches of political and professional representation of cities to foreigners and integration

In the second part we will summarize the so called integration discourse of respondents, which is divided into three categories. The influence of life career on approach towards foreigners, as defined by Flamant (2020), mirrors the main types of life and professional experience that shape respondents' approach towards the possibilities and goals of integration policy and integration itself. Approach towards foreigners in a city demonstrate which foreigners and situations related to foreigners are perceived as relevant by the respondents. The third category of the concept of integration mirrors the understanding of priorities in the process of integrating migrants in a city.

Category 1: Impact of life career on approach towards foreigners

When evaluating the respondents' professional and life experience, three types of positions can be defined.

Type position 1: Interculturally sensitive expert

This position is presented by professionals with expertise in sociology, political science, migration, work experience involving foreigners in the Czech Republic or abroad, and interculturally sensitive and welcoming approach. In the course of their work, they were characterized by an engaged, inventive, and proactive approach to the topic of integrating foreigners in the city.

This position-type was predominantly presented by respondents from Brno both politicians and professional representation (ten respondents), one respondent from the Small town, and one from Havlíčkův Brod.

Personally speaking, I am very keen on the topic of integrating foreigners, I practically live in that community. My wife is a Brazilian, coming from the so-called third country, I have been studying foreign languages for a long time, I worked for a foreign embassy. So, in terms of both business and integration, I am really engaged. I am the chair of the Committee on National Minorities, so I deal with minorities in Brno, and also the chair of the advisory body for the integration of foreigners at the Brno City Council. That's why this topic is very close to my heart. (Respondent 2A, Brno)

Type position 2: Interculturally sensitive layperson

Respondents in this category were characterized by a friendly approach towards foreigners, which was due to their personal experience of dealing with foreigners and their stay abroad. Integration policy was a new topic for them, which they have little experience of and no concrete idea how to implement it on behalf of the city.

This type of position was presented by respondents from Brno (two respondents), Plzeň (four respondents), Small town (four respondents), and Hořovice (two respondents).

Let me start by saying that I am not an expert on integration. Personally, I welcome the presence of foreigners in Brno because I think that, like Bratislava, this city needs to be cosmopolitan. For me, as an English teacher, any international contact with someone who speaks any language other than their mother tongue is enriching not only from the perspective of teaching a foreign language, but also from a sociological or social perspective. (Respondent 3A, Brno)

Type position 3: Layperson without ties to foreigners – a perspective from the table

This position defines respondents that have no ties to foreigners in both their professional and personal lives. Foreigners do not come to the office as clients; they meet them in public spaces in the city at the very most. For these respondents, integration policy means first and foremost ensuring the safety of the city citizens, in other words preventing foreigners from causing problems (noise, disturbances, etc.).



This type of position was mostly presented by respondents in Hořovice (three respondents, Plzeň (three respondents), Havlíčkův Brod (three respondents), Brno (two respondents).

I will speak for myself as an official. We don't provide the outreach, what we do is office work, so we get information about what kind of foreigners are here, what problems they have, what they need, what we should focus on within the project, we get it from NGOs...I don't have friends among foreigners... (Respondent 1B, Plzeň)

Category 2: Approach towards foreigners in the municipality

Respondents' answers to questions as to whom they consider to be foreigners and how they perceive their presence in the city can be divided according to the level of integration potential, i.e., the set of factors that influence the integration of foreigners into the society, into two groups as suggested by Rákoczyová, Trbola (2009). Respondents from all municipalities, except for Brno, perceive the presence of foreigners with a low level of integration potential as a priority and do not expect them to settle in the city. This includes foreigners of the "guest worker" type, Vietnamese entrepreneurs targeting Austrian clientele, and partly also high-skilled migrants.

They're very reserved, these Ukrainians. The Romanians too, I guess. There is a lot of alcohol among the Ukrainians, so the police intervene there quite often; if they are here alone, what are they supposed to do? They go to work, then buy some booze in Lidl and drink. Then we have a couple of families here, married couples who left their children back in Ukraine. And they send the money they earn to Ukraine, these are people who have been here for a long time, roughly 7-8 years, and they always just go back to Ukraine for a while. They don't need to bring their children here because they enjoy freedom here. (Respondent 1B, Hořovice)

Respondents from Brno described foreigners as a very heterogeneous group and pointed to the city's historical experience as a multicultural society before WWII. An open approach towards foreigners and the possibilities of integrating foreigners in the city prevailed.

We wanted to make it clear in our political program that Brno is now, by sheer coincidence of historical events, purely Czech as far as the main nationality is concerned, the others are minorities. Before, it was very balanced and we wanted to make it known that we are aware of this, that the roots of the city are German, Jewish, and Czech and it is necessary to look at it this way; Brno obviously has this diversity in its blood. When you walk around the city, you see that it was not made by "golden Czech hands". That's why we said that Brno should be open to people from all over the world, because it has always been, and it was a flourishing period in the history of the city. (Respondent 4A, Brno)

Category 3: Concept of integration

The concept of integration correlated very closely with the typing of respondents' life careers. Respondents presenting the interculturally sensitive expert position-type were familiar with theoretical concepts of social policies and used them in their answers to questions mapping their understanding of the concept of integration. Respondents belonging to the position-type of an interculturally sensitive layperson or a layperson with no ties to foreigners understood integration primarily as the adaptation of foreigners to the norms of the majority society.

In relation to cities, respondents from Brno overwhelmingly perceive integration as a two-way process where both migrants and the majority adapt.

What does integration mean to me? That we are all equal. Basically, foreigners are on our level. Full-fledged citizens who just don't have Czech nationality on their census sheets or birth certificates... It must be mentioned that if I want to live in Pakistan, I will have to adapt to their lifestyle. If you want to live here in Brno, fine, no problem, but be sure to adapt to our lifestyle. (Respondent 3A, Brno)



Classification of municipal policies on foreigners

In the last part of the study, we will focus on triangulation of data based on the analysis of respondents' interviews and the analysis of strategic and conceptual documents of cities. Based on the Alexander's (2007) classification of local policies, three types of local policies have been identified.

Only the city of Brno with its own Strategy of integration and the prevalence of interculturally sensitive experts has a pluralist model of policy towards foreigners. Plzeň, Havlíčkův Brod, and small city represent an assimilationist model of integration policy, where foreigners are represented in the respondents' statements by low-skilled migrants who are supposed to adapt to the majority. In the strategic management of the city, foreigners are only included in the action plans for social services as persons potentially at risk of social exclusion. In Hořovice, a discriminatory model of integration policy is applied. The focus is only on foreigners in industrial zones, whose presence is perceived by the respondents as temporary.

Table 3: Classification of policies on foreigners in the selected cities

Type of municipal policy	Integration discourse	Municipality approach towards labour migrants	Political objectives	Measures
Pluralistic - Brno	Prevalence of interculturally sensitive experts	The city needs foreigners, cultural heterogeneity is rather an enrichment.	<i>Brno is open, tolerant, developing, safe, cosmopolitan, and cohesive city⁷</i>	Action Plan for Integration Strategy 2021–2023; Intercultural staff at the City Hall, mainstreaming of integration policy
Assimilation – Plzeň	Prevalence of interculturally sensitive layperson	Foreigners will be permanently present; they need to adapt.	<i>Relieving tension in the coexistence of foreigners and other residents⁸</i>	Language courses for foreigners, information for foreigners about life in the city
Assimilation – Small town	Prevalence of interculturally sensitive layperson	Foreigners will be permanently present; they need to adapt.	<i>Preventing the problems of coexistence with foreigners⁹</i>	Focus on strengthening the awareness of both foreigners and the majority.
Assimilation - Havlíčkův Brod	Prevalence of layperson without ties to foreigners	Foreigners will be permanently present; they need to adapt.	<i>To help foreigners adapt to life in our society and at the same time prevent any negative impacts that may arise from uncontrolled migration.¹⁰</i>	Language courses for foreigners, translation of city documents into foreign languages
Discriminatory - Hořovice	Prevalence of layperson without ties to foreigners	Foreigners are just suffered rather than seen as fellow citizens.	<i>Reduce the risks of social exclusion among labour migrants¹¹</i>	Cooperation with the NGO Centre for Integration of Foreigners (counselling for foreigners)

⁷ The political vision defined in the Strategy for the Integration of Foreigners in Brno.

⁸ Goal defined in the Action Plan for Support and Cooperation with Foreigners and National Minorities in the City of Plzeň 2021–2022

⁹ Listed on the municipality's website. The municipality has no formulated strategic document.

¹⁰ The municipality has no strategic document on the integration of foreigners. This goal is stated in the project to support the integration of foreigners, which the municipality implemented in 2021.

¹¹ Community plan of social services of the town of Hořovice and surrounding municipalities for the period 2020–2024



DISCUSSION

In the discussion, the focus is set on the assessment of the readiness of the cities under study to implement their own integration policies in the context of the identified factors influencing the policy setting of local governments.

Nature of the foreigners' population

The share of foreigners in the total population of a city and the type of their residence status are crucial criteria that influence the level of integration activities of cities. Cities where the proportion of foreigners significantly exceeds the national average and at the same time the predominant category of foreigners are low-skilled migrants or Vietnamese entrepreneurs, for whom respondents do not perceive significant integration potential, implement a discriminatory type of integration policy, where the main goal is conflict prevention. Only Brno, where there is a high proportion of foreigners who are perceived as a heterogeneous group with significant integration potential, implements a pluralistic model of integration policy.

Discourse on integration

Among the respondents the prevailing opinion was that integration primarily means preventing problems with foreigners and helping them adapt to mainstream society. Only those respondents whose professional career was connected with education and work positions in the field of migration and integration, as defined by the national Concept of integration of foreigners, held the concept of integration as a process of mutual adjustment between migrants and the majority society. In general, it can be said that the expertise of political and professional representation is a very significant and change bringing factor regardless of city size and its capacity.

Policy settings

The formulation of national integration policy only in the form of an integration concept has long been criticised by some experts, as it causes tokenism of public administration and self-government in terms of responsibility for the integration policy (Pořízek, 2018; Dohnalová, 2021; Jelínková, Valenta, 2022). However, the voluntary principle of setting integration policies was assessed rather positively by the majority of respondents. They argued in particular that the obligation to implement integration policy for municipalities would have to be accompanied by a change in the legislative and financial autonomy of local governments in the Czech Republic, which is currently quite low (Kruntorádová, 2015). However, the integration policy of municipalities implemented through one-year projects of Ministry of Interior was considered to be clearly negative in terms of project administration rules.

Influence of civil society

NGOs working with migrants are only active in the large cities of Brno and Plzeň, but they primarily focus on solving practical problems of foreigners rather than on advocacy and lobbying activities. There are no significant, politically active migrant associations in any of these cities. An important actor in integration policy at the local level should be the regional integration centres, where only two centres have been established by non-governmental entities. The other centres fall under the Ministry of the Interior, and one centre was established by the South Moravian Region. However, this organisational structure does not contribute to linking the work of the Centres with municipal and regional governments (Consortium of NGO's working with migrants, 2018).

Influence of experts

The influence of experts on the activation of the city and the formulation of the integration strategy has been clearly demonstrated. The municipal integration strategy or advisory body for



the integration of foreigners was only created in cities where experts were directly employed by the municipality or where the municipality cooperated with research agencies to obtain valid data on the situation of foreigners. A significant impact of evidence-based policy efforts is to positively influence political representation, which would be less afraid of the topic of integration and more willing to push forward the change. The influence of experts on the activation of the city in the field of integration of foreigners has been demonstrated primarily in Brno, but also in small city.

The role of social departments in local government integration policy

A significant legislative shortcoming comes is the fact that the main legislative norm, Act No.128/2000 Coll., on Municipalities, defines a citizen of a municipality as a citizen of the Czech Republic and a foreigner from the EU countries only. Foreigners from non-EU countries are not considered citizens of the municipality and the municipality is not legally obliged to meet their needs. Act No. 108/2006 Coll., on Social Services, offers a different interpretation in relation to the provision of social services, but is not related to all municipalities. According to Section 92, the municipal authority of a municipality with extended competence is obliged to provide social services and carry out social work activities to all persons at risk of social exclusion, not only to the citizens of the municipality. In the context of this Act, this is not a self-governing activity, but an obligation of the state, which is performed by municipal authorities under delegated competence. This bias situation was reflected in the responses of many respondents from social departments in comments such as *“we have enough to do with our own citizens”*. The findings showed that social departments do not have sufficient staff or financial capacity to offer services to foreigners and can only deal with emergencies. The active cities secure resources through projects.

CONCLUSION

The arrival of war refugees from Ukraine in 2022 has clearly confirmed the importance of the role of local governments in integrating foreigners and refugees into Czech society. Local governments are the first recipients of them, and they face integration challenges every day. Nevertheless, the responsibility of municipal public administration authorities for the agenda of integration of foreigners and refugees is not clearly formulated. The implementation of the cities' own integration policy is based on the voluntary principle and is primarily financed from project funds. This format does not allow the guarantee of continuity and the formulation of long-term integration measures. Strengthening the effective role of cities in the integration of foreigners requires improving the coordination of integration policy by the national government, clearly defining the roles and responsibilities of municipalities, and promoting mainstreaming policies in the field of integration. In particular, it is desirable to strengthen the role and competences of the social departments of municipal authorities.

This is also linked to the need for greater involvement of foreigners in decision-making processes at the local level. Thus, it would be appropriate to amend the municipal system to extend the definition of “municipal citizen” at least to third-country nationals who are registered as permanent residents and to empower all foreigners with permanent residence to vote at the municipal level. It is also necessary to improve the availability and effectiveness of financial resources at the local level to support the integration of migrants. Other important recommendations include strengthening cooperation with civil society and employers and aligning social care services with the needs of migrants, who are often unaware of them (Consortium of NGO's working with migrants, 2018; European Commission, OECD, 2018). Finally, yet importantly, it is necessary to support the interconnection between research and policy-making process so that the implementation of integration policies is based on real facts about the situation of foreigners in cities and to strengthen the professional expertise of the political and professional representation of cities in the field of migration studies and intercultural coexistence. Research identifying their educational needs would be a stimulating follow-up to this paper.



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Czechoslovak Social Security Scheme in Connection with Association Activity in Ostrava in the 1950s and 1960s¹

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Abstract

OBJECTIVE: The aim of the paper is to analyse the activities of the Department of Social Security and Workforce Councils of the North Moravian Regional National Committee of Ostrava in the 1950s and 1960s in connection with “association” activities dedicated to social work. **THEORETICAL BASE:** In the monitored period, according to Act No. 55/1956 Coll., on social security, social security was defined in the form of social care and pension security. Association activity, which for almost the entire period of its activity was governed by Act No. 134/1867, Coll., on Right of Associations, with its activities and services covered the areas that fell under social care. **METHODS:** To determine the research objective, the method of historical research, and the technique of content analysis, especially of primary sources from the archives in Opava and Ostrava, were used. **OUTCOMES:** The result is the finding that social security was reformed, firmly structured, and the emphasis was placed on its continuous development through effective planning. The association activity irreplaceably complemented the social security system by helping to create the organizational structure and economic functioning of social care areas. **SOCIAL WORK IMPLICATIONS:** The aim deals with common features of professional activity that was applied in the performance of social care.

Keywords

historical research, social security, association activity, Czechoslovakia

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INTRODUCTION

The process of professionalization of Czech social work was started more than 100 years ago through activities such as the 1918 establishment of the Ministry of Social Welfare, and the opening of the first school for social workers in Prague. The establishment of a professional association is connected with the first school called the Organization of Women Graduates of the Higher School of Social Welfare in 1921 as a reaction to the lack of acceptance of the professional expertise of social workers and the simplification of the negotiating position with the authorities. This act is important to be mentioned, as it demonstrates an equally important role in the activities of associations in terms of the recognition of social work as a profession by experts and the general public. The most famous social association was the District Youth Care, which successfully ensured a wide range of activities in the field of child and youth care, despite the political, economic, and social obstacles it faced. Vohradníková (2009) emphasized that in terms of legislation, the state determined only the framework of social security, but not the focus on individual cases, which fell under the purview of voluntary social care. The general framework of social security was defined by legislation and the ministry with authorized authorities. In contrast, the functionality of the association fell into the area of individual work, where, according to Vaculík (2011), associations held the position of supplementary and auxiliary bodies. An important characteristic of an association's activity was the fact that participation in associations was a voluntary activity and also brought together volunteers in the social field. The performance of social work thus represented a combination of both concepts in state (public) and semi-official (association) institutions, in which it played a key role. This functional system thus ensured effective social care across a wide spectrum of the population. During the Second World War in Europe, there were also restrictions on the provision of social security, including the functioning of associations. After the end of the war, there was a gradual recovery, which was again suspended by the new socialist regime that was coming in, which had its own way of solving the social security of citizens, including the replacement of association activity.

Despite the fact that associations dealing with social work subsequently largely disappeared, the effort to help and the need to educate did not. However, despite these events, there has not yet been a comprehensive mapping of the development of social work. Authors dealing with the issue of social work in their works thus help to build their professional identity through the implementation of historical research and exploration, because deepening the knowledge of history leads to inspiration, provides lessons, and increases the prestige of social work (Vohradníková, 2009; Vaculík, 2011; Kodymová, 2014; Suda, 2014; Kodymová, Brnula; 2019).

Tomková (2009) highlights the need for a realistic description of the period of socialism, because it was at this time that significant milestones took place from the point of view of social security due to the need for a new post-war social order requiring a comprehensive integration of social security administration. Until the end of the first half of the 20th century, it was more about activities having a charitable character, while the turning point occurred in 1948, with the entry into force of Act No. 99/1948 Coll., on national insurance, which began the journey, the result of which was the status of social security to the position of a powerful instrument of state policy. Especially in Ostrava, in connection with the dynamic development of industry, social security had to be dealt with. With the onset of industrialisation, there was a sharp increase in population, which persisted in a moderate form until the Second World War. During the war, Ostrava was located between two enemy states. This situation had its economic and social effects on the population. The following period of socialism aimed to eliminate these impacts through newly set social security legislation, an emphasis on the active role of public authorities to ensure the well-being of citizens and the establishment of a legal standard of social security. The primary goal of the city of Ostrava and its inhabitants was to restart industrial production as quickly as possible, which was also reflected by the subsequent development of social security (Nečas, 1967; Adamčík, 1971;



Jířík, 1993). The next important part of Czech social work was the activity of volunteers within the framework of social work, who were involved in helping the needy. According to Myslivec (1971), the picture of social policy is not complete without voluntary organizations (previously referred to as associations), because in Ostrava they already had a wide field of activity and traditions in the period of the First Republic with a history dating back to the last century in connection with Act No. 134/1867 ř. z., on Rights of Organisations. However, the legislation of the 1950s interfered with the successful development of association activities, and associations had to be dissolved, transformed into organizations, or incorporated into another functioning organization (Myslivec et al., 1971). The most famous were the Dobromila charitable association, Labour self-help, Ludmila charitable association, Czech social assistance and others. This area also underwent significant reorganization, especially in the first half of the 1950s (Adamčík, Bartoň et al., 1971; Tomková, 2009; Brnula, 2013; Kodymová, 2014). Since this was the European post-war situation of the Second World War, the beginning of the second half of the 20th century demanded a significant reform of social security, whether for the purpose of creating new benefits, unifying all types of insurance, or adapting to newly created social needs. According to Kalenská et al., (1986), it was not possible to demand responsibility for the prevention and removal of the consequences of social risks entirely from individuals, but these competencies should be transferred to the state or designated organizations. In the 1950s, important laws regarding the reforms and reconstruction of the national insurance came into force, namely Act No. 102/1951 Coll., on the division of sickness and pension insurance or Acts No. 54/1956 Coll. and 55/1956 Coll., concerning the reconstruction of the national insurance. On the contrary, the 1960s rather dealt with the emerging issue of social security, which was discussed as one of the main topics of the pre-convention discussion of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (hereinafter referred to as “CPSU”) Central Committee. In 1964, Act No. 101/1964 Coll., on social security, which dealt with the provision of social care and pension security, came into force. With this law, the content concept of social security was narrowed, and we define it almost in its subsequent form today. The examined period thus aptly reflects the legislative milestones, changes, and development of social security in Czechoslovakia. The aim of the following text will be to describe and analyse the activities of the social security department and workforce of the councils of the North Moravian Regional National Committee of Ostrava in the period of the 1950s and 1960s in the Czechoslovak Republic in connection with association activity supplementing the functioning of the social security of the population. Historical research is chosen as the research method, while the written sources stored in the City Archives of Ostrava and the Regional Archives in Opava supplemented with secondary literature (Kalenská et al., 1986; Tröster et al., 2008) are the object of the research.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research strategy was chosen to determine the research objective, as its greatest positives include in-depth study, flexible character, and adaptability according to the context of circumstances. Historical research, which has its prominent place in social work, was chosen as the qualitative research approach. Its primary purpose is to bring individuals and entire groups to an understanding of the course of historical events. The author Berg (1998:199) aptly defines the use of historical research as the possibility *“to gain a broader understanding of human behaviour and thought than it would be possible if we remained trapped in the static isolation of our time”* (Berg, 1998; Fisher, Dybicz, 1999; Hendl, 2016). The limitations of the research result from the interpretative nature of historical research, the insufficient representation of available primary documents and the impossibility of triangulation. However, sufficient secondary sources were found for this research, which eliminated these limits as well (Špiláčková, 2014). Documents of a primary and secondary nature were the object. Primary documents in the form of archives dealing with social security of the 1950s and 1960s, such as the funds of the North Moravian Regional National



Committee of Ostrava, located in the Regional Archives in Opava or the City Archives of Ostrava, were subjected to analysis. Additional sources are comprised by secondary literature focusing on the researched topic of Czech provenance. The content analysis technique, which is often used in the study of history, was used for the analysis.

SOCIAL SECURITY AS A PILLAR OF THE SOCIALIST STATE

For the socialist state, social security represented a means not only of solving existing problems, but was also perceived as an opportunity to modernize society and a way to improve the standard of living of citizens. The author Matějček (1973:11–12) defined social security as *“a set of state measures by which the state or various social organizations under its leadership help needy citizens.”* According to the author, it is not possible to comprehensively define this term due to its comprehensiveness, but at least to get an idea of its broad spectrum, it is possible to determine the sections that represent social security: security for family members of the breadwinner, pension security, security for pensioners in illness, security for temporarily disabled persons to work or social security services (institutional care, care for persons with altered working ability, care for citizens with severe health problems, care for elderly citizens). In contrast, Kalenská et al. (1986:16) are of the opinion that social security can be succinctly and accurately defined as *“a set of institutions, facilities and measures, through and with the help of which the prevention, mitigation and elimination of the consequences of social events of citizens is carried out, using social means.”* It is important to note, however, that the author herself and the collective draw attention to a narrowly focused perception of social security from the point of view of practice, namely its definition only as pension security and services (Matějček, 1973; Kalenská et al., 1986).

Social security was a strong pillar of the socialist state. The law enforced the principle of full employment, from which social status, social benefits or the degree of involvement in social measures derive. According to Matějček (1973), the level of social security of a given state is determined by what social security benefits, in what amounts and under what conditions it provides, including the extent of subsequent provision of social services. Matějček (1973:27) divides the contemporary social security system into categories: *“preventive medical care, pension security, sickness insurance, welfare allowance, pensioner’s insurance in case of illness, maternity allowance, and social security services.”* According to the law, social security services included institutional social care, care for persons with altered work ability, supplementary care services, cultural services for pensioners, and extraordinary benefits for citizens with permanent severe health damage. Matějček (1973) also points out that the maternity allowance is not a social security benefit, but a pro-population benefit provided by the state.

Department of Social Affairs and Labour of the North Moravian Regional National Committee

According to Act No. 55/1956 Coll., on social security, social security was provided by relevant authorities, which included the State Social Security Office, the Slovak Social Security Office, and executive bodies of national committees. In June 1960, Government Regulation No. 71/1960 Coll. was issued, which greatly expanded the authority of individual levels of committees ensuring social security.

The Department of Social Security and Labour was in the position of the executive body of the state administration and was also the executive body of the North Moravian Regional National Committee (hereinafter referred to as “NM RNC”). The main tasks of the social security department included ensuring the functioning of social policy in accordance with established regulations (on pension security, on family and child care, on institutional care, on social security), care for elderly citizens, monitoring of social conditions, state social care in institutions, care for physically and mentally disabled youth or care for persons with altered work ability. On the other



hand, the labour force department was responsible for the implementation of a system of uniform regulation of employment, deployment of labour forces, and regulation of the development of employment within specified limits in accordance with the needs of the national economy. This section also emphasized the promotion of labour recruitment in the field of agriculture and mining due to resettlement of border areas (Opava Regional Archive, NM RNC, carton no. 1). In 1960, the newly valid regulation also established control measures, the aim of which was to increase social security control. In practice, it involved the establishment of assessment commissions at the social security commissions at all levels of the national committees. In the follow-up area of control and assistance with supervising the implementation of the set plan, they cooperated with the social security department of Company Committee of the Trade Union organization. Valuable cooperation, and other aspects, contributed to the high-quality functioning of the union, but the workers themselves also had their share. Since 1960, they had to comply with collective obligations, which contained a summary of principles and obligations regarding the content of work, organizational matters, and the public life of workers. They had to use their working time efficiently, which meant performing all administrative tasks on time, regularly checking assigned backlogs and resolving complaints immediately. Every Saturday, workers regularly checked the degree of fulfilment of weekly plans, including the number of pending complaints and appeals. In the event that the workers did not handle the files assigned to them due to the absence of missing details from other authorities, they had to notify these authorities immediately. In normal cases, the obligation was to handle each complaint within 30 days of delivery. As part of the collective obligations, the workers were obliged to regularly plan their work activities in accordance with the established half-year plan of the Department of Social Security, resulting in more detailed monthly and weekly plans. Emphasis was also placed not only on the continuous education of workers, especially in the area of newly published social security regulations, but also on improving personal skills in the organization, managing the agenda and the knowledge needed to provide information to citizens. This is followed by another of the collective obligations, namely to actively acquaint the public with newly applicable social security regulations, to be active according to one's possibilities in public life in the place of residence and to hold conversations with citizens, including answering their questions related to the professional focus of the given individual. All results of communication with the public were required to be regularly reported to the State Social Security Office. Workers should also not neglect frugality and compliance with work hygiene principles. Specifically, it was, for example, a saving of office material or following the ethical rules at the workplace (Opava Regional Archive, NM RNC, carton no. 1).

Activities of the Department of Social Security

The year 1960 was chosen to present the activities of the Department of Social Security due to the clearest spectrum of activities that this branch held. The remit of social security included pension management, pension security, security for sick pensioners, special spa care, complex care for the disabled, sickness insurance (self-employed persons, members of Unified Agricultural Cooperatives, employees) and management in the field of social security. On the other hand, the social care section included care for persons with altered work ability, care services, supplementary and social care, child allowances, allowances for TB patients, maintenance allowances and institutional social care. Overall, the field of investment construction of social facilities also belonged to the department. Specifically, during this five-year plan, twice as many financial resources were invested in the area of social security compared to the previous five-year plan (Act No. 156/1960 Coll., on the third five-year plan for the development of the national economy of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic).

From the above classification, the category of complex care for the disabled can be further developed as an example, since the development of disability had certain specificities in its development in the North Moravian Region. In the former Ostrava region, there was a typical concentration of



heavy industry, and agriculture was represented in a minority proportion, mainly in the border districts. Ostrava was characterized by hard work in demanding conditions, often in outdated establishments, great dustiness and difficult transport options to work. The inclusion of agricultural areas during the territorial reorganization did not contribute to the listed factors either, which was reflected in the social security statistics for the next few years. It was also a general fact that there was a lack of awareness of the responsibility of persons in the leading positions of agricultural plants in the event that damage to the health of a cooperative member was caused. Because the investigation of the assessment commissions showed that very little attention was paid to issues of occupational safety and hygiene. Another obstacle was the insufficient knowledge of the workers to perform their function, or performing it occasionally, as they had to devote themselves fully to their primary job. All the above-mentioned reasons and factors made it impossible for future social security planning to anticipate an increase in disability, especially due to accidents at the workplace. Specifically, in the statistics for 1960, it is recorded that the district assessment commissions issued 46,254 assessments at 2,802 meetings. For comparison, in 1959 these commissions issued 29,942 assessments in 2,050 sessions. The assumption of an increase in disability in the North Moravian Region can be confirmed from the statistics (Opava Regional Archive, NM RNC, carton no. 11). Due to the aforementioned territorial reorganization in Ostrava, preventing any further deterioration in the availability of social security services became a primary task. Despite setting this goal, it was not possible to maintain the level of availability in all districts at the previous level. However, the category of care for the disabled ranked among the most successful sections. The proof is that in 1960 the ratio of granted full pensions and partial disability pensions was 68.6%:31.4%. Compared to 1959, when the ratio was very similar, viz 68.1%:31.9%. From the statistics, it can be confirmed that the service availability standard of this area was maintained. The years 1958 and 1959 saw a general decline in invalidity. The turning point did not occur until 1960 for the reasons mentioned above (Opava Regional Archive, NM RNC, carton no. 11). The basic activities of the department, also following on from collective commitments, were the deepening of cooperation with other state bodies, with plants, Trade Union bodies and also across all levels of national committees. The union also cooperated, for example, with the Association of Czech Disabled People, helping them secure employment. In general, emphasis was placed on providing social security in a timely and operative manner (Opava Regional Archive, NM RNC, carton no. 11).

Five-year and annual plans of the social security department

In general, the five-year plan, was a plan for the development of the national economy, which was primarily intended to plan and further develop a socialist society. There was a total of eight five-year plans during the communist period, while in the 1950s and 1960s there was the first one (1949–1953), the second one (1956–1960), the third one (1961–1965) and part of the fourth five-year plan (1966–1970). The management and control of the plan itself was provided by the government. It also determined more individually focused tasks, including setting annual plans focused on individual areas. The government regularly communicated the results of the inspections to the National Assembly. The government also had the power to issue the necessary measures if they were to lead to the fulfilment of the five-year plan. An important body related to planning was the state planning commission, which determined individual tasks for official bodies of state administration, regional national committees and ministries. Subsequently, the Regional National Committee and the ministers in their respective fields continued to issue measures leading to the final fulfilment of the established annual and five-year plans (Act No. 165/1960 Coll. Act on the Third Five-Year Plan for the Development of the National Economy; Opava Regional Archive, NM RNC, carton. No. 13; Rákosník, Tomeš, 2012).

The first five-year plan partly covers the first half of the 1950s. Its primary objective in the field of social security was to fully ensure the development of the working capacity of the population with



the intention of an overall increase in the standard of living, including the development of social care, the construction of new social facilities and the improvement of existing ones. More detailed steps were, for example, placing more children in nurseries as part of caring for working women, providing more children with meals in school canteens, increasing the volume of laundering in cooperative laundries, and increasing capacity in youth homes and social institutions. From the point of view of national insurance, 9.5 billion CZK was reserved in 1948 compared to only 4.3 billion CZK, which was an increase of 121%. It was similar in the area of security for persons unable to work through no fault of their own, where 82% more funds were allocated than in 1948. Other points related to improvement in particular included an increase in institutional care for the elderly or physically disabled, improvement of transport to work, socio-political education and training, improving the equipment of social workplaces, etc. (Act No. 241/1948 Coll., Act on the first five-year economic development plan of the Czechoslovak Republic).

The second five-year plan (1956–1960) did not smoothly follow the end of the first five-year plan, as it was necessary to mitigate the economic and social consequences of the monetary reform of 1953, through the so-called annual consolidation plans of 1954 and 1955. Despite the fact that there was constant increase in the living standard of the population, the financial and investment costs of the state also increased. In an attempt to solve the emerging crisis, there was a radical change in the use of national income in favour of need. The new interventions brought positive results through the renewed rapid growth of the economy, which reduced social tension and the third five-year plan had a much more favourable situation at the beginning (Sirůček et al., 2007; Průcha et al., 2009).

The third five-year plan (1961–1965) could already build on more favourable conditions thanks to the annual consolidation plans, and as living standards continued to rise, the general goal of the third five-year plan was to achieve an increase in national income of more than 42%. From the point of view of social security, there have been significant changes in the field of employment, namely the reduction of the weekly working time to 42 hours/week, for workers in underground mines 40 hours/week. It was also planned in this five-year plan to increase the real income by at least one quarter by 1965. As part of housing security, the construction of 482,000 apartments was planned to solve the housing problem in Karlovy Vary, Ústí, Ostrava, and Prague. The emphasis was also placed on developing social security services and increasing the number of work places in social institutions (Act No. 165/1960 Coll., Act on the Third Five-Year Plan for the Development of the National Economy of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic).

The fourth five-year plan (1966–1970) extended only partially into the 1960s. Overall, this plan had a narrower elaboration compared to the previous ones and focused more on agricultural production, modernization of the structure of industry and the development of certain areas of the tertiary sphere. In the framework of social security, it preferred directly rewarding working people for real work results to meeting the needs of citizens from the resources of social needs funds. Another important point was the construction of at least 460,000 apartments and a focus on the quality of social care and security services. There is also an initiative in the field of improving the environment, especially the cleanliness of water and air, especially in industrial areas (Act No. 83/1966 Coll., Act on the Fourth Five-Year Plan for the Development of the National Economy of the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic).

Annual plans were created on the basis of five-year plans approved by the government. They were compiled according to the relevant departments, which had individually set limits of funds for their annual plans. Individual organizations drew up a draft of the annual plan in accordance with the already approved five-year plan and the measures assigned to them by the central authority. On the basis of these proposals, the central authorities created an annual plan according to sectoral focus, which was subsequently submitted to the government for approval. If the government confirmed the annual plan, the central office also confirmed their plan proposals to the subordinate organizations, or notified them of the changes that had to be made for the final result. The tasks



making up the annual plans were divided into individual quarters for the sake of clarity (Opava Regional Archive, NM RNC, carton no. 13).

Social Security Commission

The Social Security Commission also underwent many reforms during the 1950s and 1960s. However, the supporting basis for them was Act No. 55/1956 Coll., on social security, which established them as expert bodies cooperating with the executive bodies of district and regional national committees dealing with social security. The remit of these review commissions included the resolution of opinions and proposals relating to decisions on benefits/services that were derived from work ability or health status, for example the management of pension benefits, employment of persons with altered work ability, provision of appropriate medical aids, etc. by a superior authority, which organizationally defined the assessment commission, was primarily the state social security office in cooperation with the Central Council of Trade Unions and the Ministry of Justice and Health (Act No. 55/1956 Coll., on social security).

In 1960, a new government regulation No. 151/1960 Coll., on the organization and powers of social security assessment commissions, entered into force, which regulated their scope and activities more specifically. It expanded the powers and responsibilities of the national committees, as it enabled the establishment of assessment commissions in the role of narrow commissions at the social security commissions. The scope of their activities was to decide on the provision of social security benefits/services, including other tasks previously performed by social security assessment commissions. The competence of these commissions was divided into district and regional. District assessment commissions issued decisions on, for example, disability, material security, the provision of spa care, the obligation of plants to accept a person with a changed work ability, and submitted statements, for example on measures to prevent disability, reduction of earnings in connection with work-related accidents, provision of sick leave, etc. In contrast, regional assessment commissions made decisions within their own authority on the appeal of decisions of district assessment commissions and submitted comments regarding health issues of social security (Government Regulation No. 151/1960 Coll., on the organization and powers of social security assessment commissions).

A significant change occurred with the issuance of Government Regulation No. 84/1962 Coll., on the organization and scope of narrowed benefit commissions and narrowed social welfare commissions. The purpose of the deregulation was a constant effort to bring workers closer to the opportunity to participate in decision-making processes, therefore this regulation expanded the authority of regional and municipal national committees, thus enabling them to establish narrowed benefit and narrowed social welfare commissions for the direct participation of workers in their decision-making. These commissions were established by the national committees under the social security commissions. Specifically, the competence of the **benefit commissions** at the District National Committees included decision-making in matters of health insurance, pension insurance, proposing decisions to the State Institute of Social Security in cases of wrongly obtained benefits or excess. It was also their duty to cooperate with the Finance Commission of the District National Committee. On the other hand, the **social care commission** dealt with decision-making in matters of institutional social care and supplementary care. The Regional National Committee could additionally grant a specific authorization in which it could entrust the benefit commission with the authority to decide on appeals against the decisions issued by the benefit commissions of the District National Committees in the first authority. Also, the social welfare commission could acquire the authority to make a decision on the appeal issued by the social welfare commission of the District National Committee in the first authority (Government Regulation No. 84/1962 Coll., on the organization and powers of narrowed benefit commissions and narrowed social welfare commissions).

The most concise way of presenting the activities of the narrowed commissions is the subsequent presentation of real examples from practice in individual cases. The outcome of the proceedings



always depended on the resolution of the majority of the commission members present. If there was an equal representation of votes, the chairman of the commission was the deciding vote. If even the chairman had doubts about the decision, he had the power to order a review through the Social Security Commission before it was issued. Within three days of the resolution at the latest, a written decision on the outcome of the proceedings was sent out (Government Decree No. 84/1962 Coll., on the organization and powers of narrow benefit commissions and narrowed social welfare commissions).

For example, the benefit committee discussed a case of sickness insurance, when Mrs. S. applied for the award of a disability pension, while the benefit was rejected by the benefit committee of the District National Committee, due to the fact that Mrs. S. was not classified as disabled according to the regulation. Mrs. S. appealed on the grounds that she was unable to perform any gainful occupation due to health reasons and thus had nothing to pay for her living needs. Subsequently, her appeal was discussed by the social security benefit commission of the North Moravian Regional National Committee, which approved the proposal with the result that Mrs. S. was awarded a social pension in the amount of 100 CZK per month for the period that will be fulfilled according to the statutory conditions for receiving a disability pension (Opava Regional Archive, NM RNC, carton. no. 65).

The social care commission dealt with different cases than the benefit commission, for example the case of TB allowances for Mrs. B., who applied for an extraordinary allowance to cover the costs associated with TB treatment, specifically with starting sanatorium treatment. Mrs. B. received a pension of 470 CZK per month and her husband a pension of 955 CZK per month. The Social Welfare Committee rejected the proposal due to sufficient income. Mrs. B. appealed on the grounds that her husband's mother also lives in the household with them, whom she supports, and after paying for all the life needs (apartment, electricity, heating), she barely has enough left to live on. After discussing the case, the social welfare commission of the social security section of the North Moravian Regional National Committee in Ostrava decided not to accept the appeal due to the sufficient income of both spouses to support themselves and the spouse's mother (Opava Regional Archive, NM RNC, carton no. 65).

Association activity in the field of social security

In general, association activity was established on the basis of Act No. 134/1867 Coll., on Associations, which was followed almost unchanged until the abolition of activity. During the Second World War, there was a reduction in association activity, but after the end of the war it was fully restored and returned to the validity of the democratic rights and freedoms guaranteed by the 1920 Constitution. In 1948, the Communist Party took power, which led to a drastic reduction of almost all associational life. The state tried to control all association activity. The first step limiting association rights was the newly adopted constitution in May 1948, i.e., Act No. 150/1948 Coll., which permitted association activity on the condition that it was not allowed to endanger the people's democratic establishment or public peace and order. However, the Constitution gave the possibility of association of employees in trade unions, through which they gained the right to defend their common interests. The original association law from 1867 was still valid, but despite this, the structure of association authorities gradually began to emerge, which in practice resulted in the necessary authorization procedure for newly emerging associations. Since 1950, all matters related to association activities have been dealt with by departments of national committees (Constitutional Act No. 150/1948 Coll.; Veselá, 1995; Laštovka et al., 1998).

The turning point was the issuance of Act No. 68/1951 Coll., on voluntary organizations and assemblies, as the entry into force of this act annulled the validity of the original act from 1867 regulating association activities. Associations began to be called voluntary organizations from that moment on and defined only according to their tasks. The new association law was very brief, consisting of only thirteen paragraphs. Voluntary organizations were supposed to serve citizens in



particular to “*exercise their democratic rights and thus to consolidate the people’s democratic establishment and to support efforts to build socialism*” (§1 of Act No. 68/1951). The law also listed exemplary types of appropriate and desirable organizations, such as women’s organizations, united trade unions, youth organizations, cultural, scientific, and technical associations, etc. According to the law, associations that were established before October 1, 1951 had the option of being transformed into an *organization* or incorporated into already existing ones. The transformation could be carried out under the condition that the association activities were conducted in accordance with the interests of the working people. The financial management of the associations was greatly limited, as any steps beyond the scope of normal administration had to be approved by the Regional National Committees or the competent authority. Act No. 68/1951 was valid, except for a minor amendment in 1973, until 1990 (Act No. 68/1951 Coll., on voluntary organizations and assemblies). Throughout its existence, association activity contributed not only to the development and liberalization of society, but also played a significant role in social security. Voluntary members of associations thus helped create an organizational and economic base in various areas of social security.

A significant number of support and charitable associations were active in Ostrava, for example Ostrava Matrix in Moravian Ostrava, Society for the Support of Poor School Youth in Polish Ostrava, Student Social Welfare Centre in Ostrava, People’s Self-Help for Silesian Ostrava and Surroundings, Free Association for the Support of Invalids, Widows, Orphans and Elderly Working People in Moravska Ostrava, Czech Heart in Vitkovice, Charitable Women’s Association Dobromila, etc. Just from this small list, we can see that the associations had their scope spread widely across Ostrava and covered a wide range of target groups, from pensioners, children and youth, widows, workers, to citizens requiring help for health reasons. All the above-mentioned associations were active in the 1930s and 1940s, many even earlier. However, with the intervention of Act No. 68/1951 Coll., on voluntary organizations and assemblies, they had to voluntarily end their activities, transform their form into an organization, or integrate into another supporting or voluntary organization. For better understanding you can see in Table 1 the overview of the development of selected support and voluntary associations due to the introduction of different ways of dealing with the new legislative setting in the 1950s (Archive of the city of Ostrava, inventory: Ostrava Associations):

Table 1: The overview of the development of associations

Association name	Scope of action	Development in the 1950s
Charitable Association for Self-Help in Mariánské Hory	1906–1953	The association ceased to exist in 1953.
People’s Self-Help for Silesian Ostrava and Surroundings	1923–1953	The association was dissolved in 1953.
Christian-Social People’s Self-Help for Privoz and its Surroundings	1925–1941	In 1941, the association grew into one with the Christian Social People’s Self-Help in Silesian Ostrava.
Student Welfare Centre in Ostrava	1947–1952	The association ceased to exist in 1952 due to the reorganization of care for student youth.
Masaryk’s League against TBC	1922–1951	The association was incorporated into the Czechoslovak Red Cross in 1951.

Source: Archive of the city of Ostrava, inventory: Associations in Ostrava

In the areas where the complete liquidation of the association occurred, the given target groups felt it the most. An apt example is, for example, the care of physically and mentally disabled children.



The absence of associations in this sphere meant that the care and services provided by support and charity associations had to be replaced. The state apparatus, in cooperation with the social security system, began to massively expand institutional social care in the 1950s, and it was no exception to place disabled children in institutional social care without consent. A summary of the legislative steps taken regarding social security was manifested in 1962 through a critical assessment of social care (Government Resolution No. 565/1962). A small step towards change came much later, in the 1970s through Government Resolutions No. 3/1975 and No. 281/1977, which allowed for at least a partial connection of constitutional and non-constitutional social care for mentally disabled children and youth through the establishment of day and weekly stays (Government Resolution No. 565/1962, on measures to improve care for the disabled; Titzl, 2001).

CONCLUSIONS

The period of the 1950s and 1960s was mainly reformative and innovative from the point of view of social security. The Department of Social Security and Work Councils of the North Moravian Regional National Committee had a fixed structure made up of workers who fulfilled collective obligations. An interesting feature was the emphasis on the necessary connection between the private life of workers and the profession, the economy of work, the timely handling of administration and the need for continuous professional education. This is followed by the general activities of the social security department, which were divided according to the section of social security (pension management, sickness insurance, etc.) and social care (supplementary and social care, institutional social care, etc.). The union could not function sustainably without effective planning, which consisted of five-year and annual plans related to social security. It is precisely on these plans and their retrospective evaluation that a significant development tendency can be observed. From the beginning of the 1950s it was, first of all, in the spirit of laying the comprehensive foundations of social security, and at the end of the 1960s there was a functional structure that was able to respond to emerging problems and obstacles. An important component of social security was not only the union itself, but also the expert bodies belonging to it. These developed over the period under review, with the most significant change occurring in the 1960s, when narrowed benefit commissions and narrowed social welfare commissions were created alongside the social security commissions. Social security thus ensured the provision of public social care, alongside which private (voluntary) social care operated. It was much more efficient and easier for the state to solve certain situations with the help of voluntary workers. Also, the combination of public and private care helped to significantly eliminate poverty during the economic crisis. For this reason alone, it is essential to examine the second half of the 20th century, in which the forced abolition of private social care and the creation of similar alternative solutions practically took place (Vohradníková, 2009).

Thus, at the beginning of the second half of the 20th century, the state began to create a social security apparatus, which, however, was not focused on individual cases, but universally. According to Kodymová (2017), social development represented a gradual transition from individual care to collective care or from voluntary care to public care due to the influence of contemporary cultural and political trends, which also partially solved the absence of association activity. At first, the socialist leadership of the state tried to prove that the profession of social work was unnecessary due to the established class equality, but this changed in the 1960s, which, according to the authors Keller and Červeňáková (1961), are perceived as a stage of the return of social work back among the recognized helping professions, while the current studying of the history of social work only confirms its irreplaceability. Another source from the 1960s also claims that social work is a socially binding and necessary field (Keller, Červeňáková, 1961; Kodymová, 2017; Kodymová, Brnula, 2019).



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Eva Mydlíková (Ed.), Jaroslav Slaný,
Mariana Kováčová:
**Diagnostika syndromu týraného,
zneužívaného a zanedbávaného dítěte.**
Praha: Portál, 2021.

The more perspectives we take when looking at a topic, the better chance we have of getting closer to its essence. This multidisciplinary approach is characteristic of the scientific monograph on the diagnosis of CAN (Child Abuse and Neglect Syndrome). It is based on the work of three Slovak experts who draw on their long-standing practice and empirical knowledge: psychologist, supervisor and professor of social work Eva Mydlíková from the University of Trnava; special educator and director of a non-profit organisation focused on working with victims of violence Mariana Kováčová; and pediatrician and head of the Children's Clinic at the University Hospital in Trnava, who is also a university teacher. Its aim is to present various methods, techniques, and procedures through which individual symptoms of CAN syndrome can be assessed. As the authors state in the introduction, their ambition is "to provide a multidisciplinary perspective on the early detection of individual manifestations and symptoms of the syndrome as well as risk factors that promote its onset and development." (p. 12) In the context of the current era of uncertainty and fluid knowledge, the authors have chosen a very timely and necessary topic.

The appeal of the topic is evident in the Introduction, where a large number of empirical findings of foreign, Czech, and Slovak origin are presented. The authors discuss the legislative anchoring of the social and legal protection of children, indicate which authors have dealt with the topic, and talk about the incidence of the CAN syndrome (according to qualified estimates, 1-2% of the child population is affected by abuse). Although CAN syndrome has a numerical and textual designation in the International Classification of Diseases, it cannot be treated with medication. What these children need is prevention, as well as early diagnosis, setting up effective interventions and comprehensive implementation.

The first chapter, entitled "Pediatric Diagnosis of CAN Syndrome", opens with a somewhat surprisingly comprehensive discussion of the status of the child throughout history, with particular emphasis on the expression of aggression towards children. This is followed by an introduction to four diagnoses: physical abuse, sexual and psychological abuse, and other abuse syndromes. This last diagnosis may be the most unfamiliar to the reader; it includes Munchausen syndrome and Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy (By Proxy or Baron Scarecrow Syndrome). The authors also include a more recent form of CAN syndrome, cyberbullying. Given the increasing incidence of violence in the online space, it is unfortunate that this topic is not emphasized more. On the other hand, it is worth appreciating the summary of the topic, where a pediatric definition of CAN, prevention from a pediatric perspective, as well as various aspects of risk (children, adults, situations) are presented. The chapter concludes with dilemmas (such as abuse versus "fair" punishment of the child, the issue of removing a child from an abusive family, and last but not least, cross-cultural differences in perspectives on education and punishment, which are pertinent



in the context of immigrant waves). Although the chapter contains many medical terms, the reader does not get lost in the topic and instead gains valuable insights that can be used to help these children even when working outside a medical setting.

The following chapter is devoted to “Children’s drawing as a tool for diagnosing CAN syndrome”. The starting point is a quote by Picasso: “When children draw outside on the sidewalk or on the wall, I always remain standing. What is created under their hands is amazing. I often learn something.” (p. 41) It is clear that the authors have taken this quote to heart. As she states, “For children’s drawing is the most natural means of communicating with a child. Through drawing, the child reenacts his joys and worries; drawing allows him to recount his experience in a different, artistic and, above all, safer form.” (p. 42) The reader learns a number of theoretical and especially practical aspects related to this projective technique for understanding the child’s soul. The chapter presents the results of four years of research that focused on examining the relationship between the occurrence of warning signals in drawing and the form of violence experienced by the child. First, however, the ontogeny of children’s artistic expression is presented and summarized in a clear table. Then, for example, the meaning of colour in children’s drawings and warning signals in the drawings of abused children are discussed. Furthermore, specific diagnostic tools are introduced – drawing the human figure, the Body Image Test, and free drawing “draw me what you want!”. Each of the tests is accompanied by a detailed description, which is summarized in clear tables. These focus on the description of the features examined in the given type of drawing, and then these features are assigned to the different types of CAN syndrome. The numerous appendices are a major contribution to the chapter. The first is devoted to colorful examples of pictures of children, where the reader can test his or her diagnostic knowledge with concrete examples. The next appendix details the characters in the figure drawing. Two appendices are also devoted to the Body Image Test (a mock-up of a character and a test assessment tool). This chapter provides the reader with a detailed introduction to the mysteries of children’s drawing, but also leads the reader to know that this diagnosis must be approached with humility and a desire for further knowledge. As the authors point out, some children, despite the trauma they have experienced, are often able to suppress and hide the violence perpetrated against them. This can go on for many years.

The last chapter entitled “Social diagnostics of CAN syndrome” first briefly deals with the topic from the perspective of social and legal protection of children and presents the currently available diagnostic tools in the Czech and Slovak environment. This is followed by the main part – introduction of the basics and principles of the so-called rapid test for early diagnosis of CAN syndrome. This unique tool was constructed, validated, and standardized by experts from the University of Trnava on a sample of more than 300 children in Slovakia and more than 100 children in the Czech Republic. The test distinguishes four forms of abuse and maltreatment and consists of indicators – its symptoms and risk factors. These are presented in thirty pages and, according to the authors of the test, form a vademecum of knowledge about the CAN syndrome. At the end of the chapter, the authors state that the test will be freely available to professionals on the website of the University of Trnava, Department of Social Work, which is the intellectual property owner of the test. Let us add that the test is already available in a demo version. I personally use it in teaching social work students. I believe that it is the most comprehensive standardised tool for assessing the risk of child being well. It is no coincidence that the RAPID test is commonly used by UPSVAR in Slovakia. Hopefully, it will find its place in Czech OSPODs as well. It is a pity that the authors provide only a brief sample of the test (see Annex 7), which does not allow the reader to go into its depth and appreciate its qualities. These are indisputable.

The “final word” again turns to the multidisciplinary overlap of the topic. The authors aptly state that the diagnosis of social symptomatology of CAN syndrome is quite rare in the domestic and international context. This is despite the attention paid to child victims of violence by child welfare workers. They also point to the importance of prevention; their appeal to work with perpetrators is worth appreciating here, even if “people do not want to help those who are evil” (p. 114). Like the



Introduction, the Conclusion is appellative (“Where should a child run to if his home is a place where he never knows from where the blow will come?”, p. 115), and the authors again stress the importance of early and informed assessment of the symptoms of CAN syndrome as the basis for appropriate intervention and recovery for the child.

According to the authors, the book is intended for paediatricians, teachers, psychologists and social workers. When reading the book, one cannot help thinking that it will be used most by those who will learn to work with the RAPID test—social workers. It is difficult to assume that the RAPID test will be used by representatives of other professions. Nevertheless, the book is a very valuable contribution for helping professionals who are not indifferent to the fate of children who suffer from the cruelty of others. It is the interdisciplinary overlap that makes this work very valuable. This unique publication can be recommended to all helping professionals who seek an in-depth assessment and diagnosis of CAN syndrome in children. Should the authors consider further editions, additions such as a legislative perspective (e.g., the issue of reporting obligations to the perpetrator, the treatment of this type of aggression within the legal system) are suggested. Also of interest would be the use of the RAPID test with examples from social work practice, supplemented by the use and analysis of drawing.

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Exploring Student Perceptions on their Professional Practice: Strategies, Challenges, and Influential Factors

BACKGROUND OF THIS STUDY

Given the complexity and changing nature of social work practice with clients facing challenging life circumstances, professional actions in social work can hardly be standardised (Fook et al., 2000; Trevithick, 2008; Sommerfeld, 2014). The impossibility of standardisation becomes particularly obvious in everyday situations encountered in social work practice, which are characterised by uncertainty, unpredictability, and paradoxes (Howe, 2009; Staub-Bernasconi, 2018; Effinger, 2021). Social work professionals need to constantly navigate this ambiguity and uncertainty in order to carefully analyse and understand the multi-layered concerns and needs of each client (Bogo, 2018; Killick, Taylor, 2020), together with the ability to form professional hypothesis, make judgments and decisions even with incomplete information (Helm, 2011; Taylor, Whittaker, 2018). To respond to these demands, social workers need to incorporate and integrate a broad spectrum of factors in a collaborative working relationship with their clients (Trevithick, 2003; Parker, 2021). More specifically, this indicates that professional social work practice encompasses the synthesis of comprehensive scientific knowledge as well as wide-ranging competences, while incorporating the fundamental values of the profession (Bogo, 2018).

While these multifaceted situations and requirements arising in social work practice could be challenging for professionals, they may be particularly overwhelming for social work students. One of the main goals of social work education is to equip social work students for the complexities of professional practice. The impact of social work education on students' professional development, however, remains empirically inconclusive (Becker-Lenz et al., 2012; Ghanem et al., 2018; Miller et al., 2021; Ruttert, 2021). Little is known about how students are implementing their theoretically acquired knowledge into professional practice and how they are addressing the inherent complexity and unpredictability of social work practice.

AIM OF THIS STUDY

This study aims at bridging this gap by assessing professional practices, respectively the reflections and interpretations of social work students. Therefore, the overarching goal of this study is to achieve a thorough comprehension of students' strategies and their approaches in professional social work practice, covering these in both breadth and depth. In seeking to understand students' professional practice strategies, this research also attempts in providing suggestions for improving and enhancing professional development and as such, improving classroom quality.

RESEARCH DESIGN

In order to assess the students' professional practice with a high degree of authenticity, a realistic representation of social work practice was crucial. Consequently, a key point of the research design was to develop a simulated initial assessment (Killick, Taylor, 2020; Milner et al., 2020) with a trained actress, a so called standardised client (Logie et al., 2013; Bogo et al., 2014). By simulating

a one-to-one consultation, students were encouraged to step into the role of a social worker and engage professionally with an overburdened client. All participants have been provided with the following information during a concise briefing phase.

Information for participants:

You are a social worker in the general social service at the district social work in Munich. The district social work offers services in many social areas. It is a contact point for citizens with their concerns, challenges, and problems and offers advice and support in many areas of life.

Your client is Martha Palmeri, and she has asked for a consultation. Ms. Palmeri is a single mother of two children—a 13-year-old boy (Ben) who is in the 7th grade of secondary school and a 5-year-old girl (Ida) who is in a kindergarten nearby the family apartment until 2:30 pm. Since the separation from her partner, Ms. Palmeri is stressed in everyday family life, and she may need support in her new life situation.

In order to increase the degree of reality, the duration of the simulation was set at approximately 22 minutes. Building on the simulation experiences, we utilised a problem-centred interview approach (Witzel, Reiter, 2012). All interview questions were targeted at gathering the individual experiences of the students. The entire study including the data analysis used grounded theory methodology (Corbin, Strauss, 1990; 2015).

Some parameters about the sample: A total of 25 students of social work (B.A.) enrolled at four different universities of applied sciences in Germany participated in the study voluntarily. On average, the study duration was 5.48 (MD-semester=5, SD=1.12), and the study focused on the 5th-7th semester students with a small contrast group of 3rd semester (n=3). The standard length of study for a Bachelor's degree in social work in Germany is between 6 and 7 semesters. The average age was 24.12 years (SD=4.52).

A GLANCE AT THE PRELIMINARY RESULTS

Our first findings indicate the major challenges faced by students in carrying out the professional role as a social worker, in developing and sustaining a professional relationship with their client, as well as in engaging with the assessment process itself generally. We observed difficulties for students to reflect comprehensively on their actions, considering several elements of such an assessment process with a client (e.g., different factual and psychosocial aspects). Instead, some students may focus on single aspects of the overall simulation experience. Moreover, preliminary data analyses demonstrate that certain students utilise rather personal appearing criteria to reflect on their practice. It also became increasingly recognisable that students' previous personal and professional experiences might have an influence on their professional actions. As we continue to analyse the data, we are excited about the prospect of gaining a comprehensive understanding of students' perceptions, strategies, and challenges faced in the context of professional practice.

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1/2024 – ERIS Journal – Winter 2024 – Participation: A Path to Inclusion

The deadline to submit full papers from authors is July 31, 2023. Please send the full version of the manuscript to the administrator at journal@socialnipace.cz. You can also direct your questions and comments to the same place.

The deadline for submission of research notes and book reviews is October 30, 2023.

The publication date of the issue is February 29, 2024.

Annotation

In the wake of the Council of Europe's longstanding work on citizens' rights, user involvement is now clearly identified to improve access to social rights. In Europe, user involvement in social work is recognized as a right, but it takes different forms depending on the country and local context. Participation constitutes a new paradigm for social work – with an ideological basis but limited theoretical grounding – as well as a challenge.

At the same time, inclusion is an emerging socio-political concept in Europe. The lexical and conceptual field has evolved in the past few years, with a shift from the term integration to that of inclusion. First used in the field of disability, the inclusive dynamic has spread into numerous social work fields: poverty, aging, housing, etc.

How does participation contribute to inclusion? How does participation help move the lines of society? What are the adverse effects, challenges, successes, and positive impacts of an inclusive involvement approach?

This issue will explore these questions around three themes:

Theme 1: User Involvement in Europe: What Inclusive Methods? Articles may provide feedback from users' participation experiences, identify the obstacles and levers of this participation, as well as their links with political and local contexts. Articles may include a comparative approach between territories, regions, or countries.

Theme 2: Managing Participation and Inclusion. What is the role of the manager in promoting a participatory and inclusive approach for users? What is the benefit of service user involvement for organizations? How to manage innovation, experiments, trial, and error? How to manage the shift of the power balance induced by user participation? How to support teams of professionals and involve them in the reflection?

Theme 3: Theoretical Perspectives. The concepts of empowerment, activation, and participation are in full expansion. What are their origins, their meanings, their differences? Is participation real or merely symbolic? What are the expectations of the participants and what is their status? What are the norms regarding inclusion, how are they relative, and what logic of action supports normative principles?

The editors are looking forward to hearing from you and receiving your submissions.

Emmanuel Jovelin,

editor, Conservatoire National des Arts et Métiers, Paris, France

&

Laure Lienard,

editor, Université Catholique de Lille, France

Public Commitment to the Journal

The journal for theory, practice, and education in social work

The mission of the journal “Czech and Slovak Social Work“ is to:

- support the ability of Czech and Slovak societies to cope with life problems of people through social work,
- promote the quality of social work and professionalism of social work practice,
- contribute to the development of social work as a scientific discipline and to the improvement of the quality of education in social work,
- promote the interests of social service providers and users.

In the interest of achieving these objectives, the Journal will, across the community of social workers and with co-operating and helping workers from other disciplines, promote:

- attitudes which regard professionalism and humanity as equal criteria of social work quality;
- attitudes which place emphasis on linking theoretical justification of social work practice with its practical orientation on clients' problems and realistic possibilities;
- coherence among all who are committed to addressing clients' problems through social work;
- open, diversity-understanding, informed and relevant discussion within the community of social workers;
- social workers' willingness and interest in looking at themselves through the eyes of others.

Notice to Contributors

The journal *Sociální práce/Sociální práca/Czech and Slovak Social Work* is published four times in the Czech language and twice in the English language each year. The journal publishes the widest range of articles relevant to social work. The articles can discuss any aspect of practice, research, theory, or education. Our journal has the following structure:

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- News / Research notes

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