

International Week at the Faculty of Applied Social Sciences, December 9 – 12, 2013



Starting December 9th, an „International Week“ took place at the Faculty of Applied Social Sciences entitled „Social (Work) Issues in an International Perspective“.

The aim was to bring together colleagues working in the field of social work from universities in European countries as well as Australia and to present different perspectives on the issues that have been arising for social work throughout the world due to ongoing social changes such as economic and cultural globalization, ever increasing migration processes as well as growing flows of refugees.

Virtually all societies, be they in the highly industrialized areas of the world, threshold countries or what are called underdeveloped countries, need to enable cohabitation of different people with a variety of biographical problems, life-style and with different cultural and social backgrounds.

In particular, social work professionals are called upon to reflect on these issues and, on a practical level, deal with those that are often marked as „others“ and whose „belonging“ is at issue.

Apart from discussing these problems, the International Week aimed at fostering collaborations and building partnerships between those who are dealing with these issues on a professional level in different countries with the larger aim of effecting a common focus and cooperation and to facilitate what we might call a concerted action for social protection of the groups in question.



Contributors came from Australia , Italy, Kosovo and Germany and were represented by:

Australia: *Prof. Dr. Donna Chung*, Curtin University, Perth, who talked about „Gendered violence and culture: what can we learn from the experiences of women refugees in their country of settlement?“ She argued that women’s social location will impact on their risk and experience as victims of violence and pointed out the cultural bias inherent in the fact that there is growing research on violence experienced in the countries of origin, but very little of violence in the countries of settlement calling for more attention being given to violence in „Western“ countries, such as forced prostitution.

Italy: *Prof. Dr. Paula Benevene*, Lumsa University, Rome, who, together with her doctoral student *Graziana Orefice*, talked about „Juvenile Gangs in Italy“ which, in the media, are generally labelled as „migrant“ gangs whereas empirical research shows that a) the problem of juvenile gangs is decreasing and b) they are by no means primarily composed of migrants. The presenters raised the question of the racism inherent in these media constructions and possibilities of combating it.

Kosovo: *Prof. Dr. Hasnije Ilazi and Dr. Vjollca Krasniqi*, University of Prishtina, Kosovo/a, who problematized the gendered social situation in a post-conflict country such as Kosovo/a, pointing out that women were confronted with conflicting demands such as adapting to the exigencies of a neoliberalized economy (and being included in the work force) with hardly any social security on the one hand and the persisting expectations that women assume care work in the family and act as „mothers of the nation“ plus the upheaval in gender relations that is caused by the importation of Western gender models including a rapid sexualization of women.

Germany: *Prof. Dr. Maria Rerrich*, University of Applied Sciences, Munich, also looked at the social problems arising in the countries of origins of migrants asking: „Who cares? Migration as a way of life and the consequences in a Romanian community“. This presentation dealt with another effect of spreading neoliberalism in Western Europe leading to the importation of careworkers for the ill and elderly and the lack of care resulting in the communities affected by the „care drain“.

and

Prof. Dr. Philip Anderson, Regensburg, who focussed on the issue of „Access to vocational training for young refugees in Germany“ and highlighted recent developments in German policies on unaccompanied minors as well as young refugees that have come together with their families. He outlined the comparative situation of young migrants with different residential status and called for a culturally and politically sensitive social work practice.



and the organizer and money-raiser of the event

Prof. Dr. Ruth Seifert, Regensburg, who again looked at the gendered social situation in post-conflict areas and the ultimately not always beneficial impact well-meaning helpers and social (work) organizations from other cultural backgrounds may have if they are not equipped with appropriate cultural, social and last not least political knowledge of the situation they are operating in.

Even though the four countries are affected in very different ways by migration and refugee issues, nevertheless, everywhere neoliberally informed policies and a resulting cut in social rights poses a big problem for social work professionals.

Further exchange, including arranging for internship possibilities and exchanges of students and staff of the universities represented at this meeting is planned.

