

Breaking the ICE

The Inter-COVID Edition of Social Work in Dubrovnik

School of Social Work Theory and Practice

Dubrovnik 6th–10th September 2021

Inter-university centre, Dubrovnik

After an intermission of 2020 we are resuming with social work events in Dubrovnik at the Inter-University Centre (IUC - <https://iuc.hr/>).

For this year, for these reasons, we will stage more of a conference rather than courses as we usually do.

The topics

The main topics for this gathering – transversing the usual topics - will be:

- Anti-colonial Perspectives in Social Work, Social Policy and Beyond
- Covid-19 epidemic, the rise of authoritarianism and Digital Rights
- Self-organisation beyond representative democracy.

Anti-colonial Perspectives in Social Work, Social Policy and Beyond

Convenors: Tanja Kleibl, Ronald Lutz, Gurnam Singh and Paul Stubbs

The history of social work and the modern Western university paradoxically represents both the high point and low point of human progress. Conceived in an epoch of immense human discovery, it is important to understand this period as characterised by white Western Imperialist and Colonial projects and the rise of capitalist accumulation. In combination, these processes, not confined to the geo-political points of origin, continue to have devastating impacts across the world, characterised by the exploitation, displacement, and destruction of human beings as well as natural ecosystems. Hegemonic colonial structures and practices created and reproduced global racialised hierarchies with the dominance of the Global North and the 'Othering' of knowledge forms and ways of life emerging from the Global South.

Struggles for decolonisation and anti-racism come from an ongoing refusal by the victims of capitalism and imperialism to accept defeat and to continue to struggle for life, liberty and dignity. In the current moment, especially following the brutal public execution of George Floyd in the US and the Black Lives Matter movement, especially amongst youth, we have witnessed a global response, incorporating gestures of solidarity, through the 'taking of the knee' through to direct action to remove statues and monuments celebrating various characters associated with Empire, slavery and colonial exploitation.

Decolonial perspectives are often neglected in the Global North. At the same time, activist intellectuals such as Freire, Fanon, and also Gandhi remain important sources for social work practice otherwise. Decolonialism refers both to a specific global conjuncture and to a broad range of theoretical analyses and political dispositions, borne out of the struggle of countries in the Global South to escape from colonial rule and from neo-colonial global power relations. In parallel, post-colonial thought critiques the Northern and Western-centrism of what passes for global knowledge, distrusting particularistic knowledge forms that pretend to a universal understanding and reach and, instead, seek to bring back pluriversal thinking.

Crucially, an anti-colonialist paradigm focuses on dismantling global structures of domination – in thought, language, action, suggesting that political and conceptual work is needed, constantly, to challenge the powerful legacies of the colonial past. This bias is as present in social work as it is in other disciplines and practices, eroding the memory and relevance of alternative traditions and practices. Alongside geo-political colonisation there were parallel processes of the colonisation of madness, childhood, sexuality, poverty, gender, disability and old age. In all of these examples, the dominant powers use the same, or similar, patterns of subordinating, even erasing, ‘The Other’, through disciplines of care and control that involve oppression and exploitation. Crucially, the planet, and its finite resources, are being colonised for profit through unfettered extractivist productivism. Social work’s emergence as a profession was deeply implicated in social Darwinism and eugenics, trends that have re-emerged in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Understanding global inequality as a phenomenon deriving from colonialism, imperialism and capitalism, this course seeks to address the prospects for a decolonial social work, a social work otherwise, a social work of the South and the ways these can and should be reflected in social work education, training and practice.

How can international documents (conventions, treaties etc.) be used to combat the colonialist paradigm? What kinds of alternative understandings of the relationship between people and nature exist and how can these be used as part of the anti-colonial struggle? What are some of the colonising and de-colonising effects of international efforts in social work? How can indigenous wisdom, local and hidden intelligence and skills, be preserved and built upon? How can patriarchal values be turned off and around, providing the openings for values of care, solidarity and kindness? Can minor subversions of social work contribute to major changes?

There will be mixed Online-Zoom events each evening Tuesday 7 September – Thursday 9 September as follows:

Tuesday 7 September 18:00 – 20:00 CET Anti-Colonial Social Work: the state of the art

Wednesday 8 September 19:00 – 21:00 CET Lessons from Counter-Hegemonic Worldmaking

Thursday 9 September 17:00 – 19:00 CET Anticolonial lessons from the farmers’ protests in India

In addition a keynote lecture will take place live (and be transmitted via Zoom) on Wednesday 8 September 9:00 – 11:00 by Gurnam Singh on “Intelligence, Coloniality and Social Work”

More details of the programme can be obtained from pstubbs@eizg.hr

Covid-19 epidemic and the rise of authoritarianism

The Covid-19 epidemic has entered our lives in 2020 and will likely determine the course of our life events in the years to come. The epidemic has highlighted some very early social phenomena that we cannot overlook in social work. The measures that countries have taken to stop the spread of the disease and protect citizens from it have unleashed a wave of inequality amongst people, poverty, abuse, and people's despair about how to survive in the new situation. Some countries have shown their hidden authoritarianism, some democracy, while some governments have successfully introduced authoritarian, strict regimes to control the population under the guise of the Covid-19 pandemic. Penalties have been introduced for non-compliance with what authorities have defined as measures to prevent the spread of infection, but health systems, already ineffective in some countries, are also on the verge of collapse.

Social work is a science and profession that always responds quickly and flexibly to social phenomena that trigger inequalities and violations of basic human rights among people.

This is also the case during an epidemic. The values and ethical principles of social work require caring for the most vulnerable, weak and needy members of society. Numerous questions and dilemmas arise during the Covid-19 pandemic and the rise of authoritarianism. Namely, how to meet political demands in practice while adhering to the fundamental mission and key values of social work, such as: respect for diversity, human rights, promoting social and economic justice, increasing social welfare and quality of life for all.

In some countries, the increasing authoritarianism of governments during the epidemic has completely marginalised all vulnerable groups (migrants detained in camps, the poor, older people without support, children and families exposed to violence) and put people in an even greater situation of danger. Are civil liberties diminishing, especially when we consider the possible expansion of the epidemic crisis? Will the pandemic leave a permanent rise in authoritarianism and weaken the rule of law? How has the position of social work changed in the new circumstances?

Digital Rights

In the early Internet culture until the 1990s, the Internet or cyberspace was discussed as a post-national anarchist space of freedom. The first laws rehabilitating the Internet provoked protest – as an example, the Internet's Declaration of Independence. State regulation of the Internet is undermined by anarchist guerrilla strategies of so-called hacktivists like Anonymous.

In the 1990s, the digital divide was also problematised. Marginalised groups might suffer from a knowledge gap because they are cut off from the Internet. This perspective seems to be burningly topical again, especially due to the experiences of the COVID crisis, in which socially vulnerable groups sometimes had no access to the internet. Against the background of these considerations, digital rights seem to be of utmost relevance.

On the basis that human rights apply (equally) online and offline, the term digital rights describes the human right that allows individuals to access, use, create and publish digital media. It also describes the right to access computers – or other electronic devices – and telecommunications networks. The term refers specifically to the protection and realisation of existing rights, such as the right to privacy, freedom of

expression, data protection and the right to education. In the context of new digital technologies, it refers to the Internet. Internet access is now recognised as a right by law in several countries. In this context, the 2009 decision of the Tribunal French Constitutional, which declared access to the Internet to be a fundamental human right, is of particular importance.

For social work, the discussion of digital rights results in a double task: On the one hand, digital rights help citizens to participate. The inclusive potential of digital media can be made accessible to marginalised groups through legally secured access. At the same time, a legally regulated neoliberal occupation of digital space must be prevented. If this does not happen, subversive freedom spaces of the internet would be closed in favour of a discursive pressure for normalisation.

Self-organisation beyond representative democracy

A working definition of social self-organisation is the coming together of people for common benefit or cause without hierarchical or predetermined order. Some examples are direct democracy, reciprocity/mutual aid, self-help, "ephemeral organisations" as occur after disasters, cooperatives, some types of social movements, and neighbourhood groups. Although self-organisation always begins as a bottom-up endeavour, it does not necessarily persist as such. Self-organised groups can be influenced in their development and goals by those who wish to control the power of the group, including leaders who have or develop anti-democratic and self-interested goals. All organisations are subject to entropic forces, including self-organisations. Self-organisation can be undermined when efforts to counteract entropy result in control.

Social work and social services face demands from numerous interest groups, which can put them in a difficult position with respect to self-organisation. Society and governments have given social work the task of controlling or solving many of the most difficult social and economic problems of a given time. Most often, this mandate involves solutions, approaches, and models determined by political processes, analysis by supposed experts who have not experienced the problems themselves, and the search for guaranteed outcomes through linear planning processes such as logic models/log frames and the mandated adoption of evidence-based interventions that do not allow for adaptation to local conditions (i.e., require "fidelity").

From the 1960s onwards, social self-(help) organisations began to develop in a number of countries, taking various forms and names, from self-help groups and service user organisations to self-advocacy initiatives and movements for the social rights of special interest groups, such as the disability rights movement, the LGBTIQ+ rights movement, the Mad Pride movement, etc. Recently, self-organising governance models such as sociocracy have increasingly come to the attention of social work. They are seen and tested to make social organisations more participatory. This track will explore examples of self-organisation in the populations and issues that social workers and others typically engage with.

Regular topics of the courses:

Social work theories and methods, Social work and Social Policy, Working with Children and Families, Children in Conflict with Law, Community Work, Old Age, Spirituality, Deinstitutionalisation.

Deinstitutionalisation satellite Monday 6 September and Friday 10 September

A thematic satellite event will be organised on transition from institutional to community-based care. The aim of the event will be to exchange current experiences in deinstitutionalisation. During the pandemic we have witnessed once again the destructive function of institutions. It was obvious that the spread of the virus is inescapable in institutions and that the lives of residents are more at stake compared to those living in the community. However, deinstitutionalisation is still not considered to be a preventive measure against COVID-19 and the pandemic, paradoxically, triggers refurbishing of institutions. The event will be an opportunity to discuss the deinstitutionalisation agenda in these inconvenient times.

The participants will convene for a social gathering 20:00 on Sunday 5 September at Sesame Inn, as usual. The work will start on Monday at 10:00 at the IUC and resume after the main conference on Friday at 9:00.

The format

The format of the conference will ensure a mix of plenary lectures and panels, parallel symposia and workshops and the conference assemblies. For those, who will not be able to travel there will be daily on-line sessions and some streaming of chosen events.

Each day will start with a plenary event – a lecture or a panel or a combination of both – to give the day a tone. Plenaries will be streamed.

The plenary sessions will be followed by parallel sessions – either composed of several presentations of papers or in a form of a workshop.

The on-line session will take place in the evening to allow participation in diverse time zones.

The programme of the parallel events will be constructed in an *Open bar* fashion on the Welcome assembly.

There will be pre—and post-conference events – organised by courses or other initiatives. One event has been announced by Deinstitutionalisation course. Others can be placed on the table still.

Diagram of timetable

The conference will start on Monday evening of 6th September with a welcome assembly and will take place intensely on following three days 7th to 9th September, with some optional events on Friday 10 September.

Time	Preparation Day Monday	Day 1 Tuesday Self-organisation	Day 2 Wednesday Anti-colonialist paradigm	Day 3 Thursday Covid-19, authoritarianism and digital rights	Post conference workshops Friday
9.00–11.00	Optional side events:	Opening - plenary	plenary	plenary	Optional side events:
11.00–11.30	Deinstitutionalisation	Break	Break	Break	Deinstitutionalisation workshop, other workshops, seminars, book launches, etc. possible
11.30–13.00	workshop, other workshops, seminars, book launches etc. possible	3–4 parallel sessions (based on courses or transversal topics)	3–4 parallel sessions (based on courses or transversal topics)	3–4 parallel sessions ¹ (based on courses or transversal topics)	Optional excursion.
13.00–14.00		Assembly	Assembly	Assembly	
17.00–21.00	/	On-line parallel sessions	On-line parallel sessions	On-line parallel sessions, followed by online general discussion (19.00)	
19:00	Welcome assembly				

Abstracts

Participants are invited to submit abstracts of their contributions to the parallel sessions be it on-line or in the venue. Posters can be exhibited in the halls of the venue or in the classrooms. These abstracts will be reviewed by the course directors and if in line with the planned workshops and accepted, the participants will be given the opportunity to present them in the proceedings.

For formal confirmation, send the abstract not later than September 1st.

Applications

You can find the application forms and abstract forms on the web page of IUC:

<https://iuc.hr/programme/1535>

Fee

Fee for IUC participants in the IUC building is 50 Euros while online participation fee is 25 Euros. More about can be found here: <https://iuc.hr/organize-iuc-programme>

¹ Around four papers presented in each slot.

COVID-19 restrictions

The maximum seating capacity of each meeting room has been established and must be respected. For all meetings, and all side-meetings, there must be a distance of 1.5 m between seats.

All participants must wear masks, including upon entering IUC premises.

Hand sanitizers will be available at the entrance of each meeting room.

In Croatia, host country restrictions must be respected. The organizers will maintain a list of detailed contact information for possible contact tracing.

Information

For further information, please, consult the web page:

<https://iuc.hr/programme/1535>

Or contact for the conference contents and organisation:

dialogueinpraxis@fsd.uni-lj.si

For accommodation, applications and technical information write to the IUC

iuc@iuc.hr

Conference organisers

Programme committee

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Organising committee:

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