

*State of art*

Struggle of the people for the better quality of life is inseparable from the struggle for the better communities. There is huge evidence how and why community can influence to wellbeing of the people's life and what is the meaning of the good, healthy, organized, developed and equitable community. According to the data of the European Anty Poverty Network (2014) „in spite of the overall wealth of the European Union, poverty in the EU is still at a relatively high level with 16,9% of the EU population, that is about 85 million people, at risk of relative income poverty and more than 124,2 million people or 24,8% of population at risk of poverty and social exclusion – whether being at risk of relative poverty, severally materially deprived or living in a household with low work intensity“. The global data about poverty show that despite overall achievement, progress on poverty reduction has been uneven. Some regions, such as Eastern Asia and South Eastern Asia, have met the target of halving the extreme poverty rate, whereas other regions, such as sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia, still lag behind (UN, 2013). In 2010, one third of the world's 1.2 billion extreme poor lived in India alone. China, despite much progress in poverty reduction, ranked second, and was home to about 13 per cent of the global extreme poor. Nigeria (9 per cent), Bangladesh (5 per cent) and the Democratic Republic of the Congo (5 per cent) followed. Nearly two thirds of the extreme poor lived in those five countries in 2010 (UN, 2013).

Beside dramatic data concerning the world poverty rate there are numerous problems that refer to the social disadvantages in communities throughout the world. Problems of the homeless people, older people and people with disabilities represent some of the most urgent among them. Health issues, violence, child labour, racism, unemployment, war terror are just some of the most visible global problems affecting many communities. Global unemployment is forecast to reach 212 million people by 2019, compared to currently 201 million, according to the International Labour Organisation (World Employment and Social Outlook – Trends 2015). War conflicts and environmental disasters created numbers of displaced and dehumanised people who suffers on all five continents and are deprived of the basic human rights. Globally, one in every 122 humans is now either a refugee, internally displaced, or seeking asylum. UNHCR's annual Global Trends Report: World at War (2015) said that worldwide displacement was at the highest level ever recorded. The number of people forcibly displaced at the end of 2014 had risen to a staggering 59.5 million compared to 51.2 million a year earlier and 37.5 million a decade ago. Global climate change and desertification have threatened the livelihoods of millions of people. During 2012, approximately 32.4 million people were displaced by environmental disasters, including those who were forced to relocate within their countries of origin and those who sought refuge through international migration (Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, 2013).

The challenges of the world today are complex and diverse and social work as profession, oriented toward everyday life of people cannot avoid the core reality of the socio-economic and political context of the current world. Social work as profession has always been dealing with the community as a geographical space, a geopolitical or civic entity, affirming social context, social justice and community development as well as social action, social change,

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social reform a key principles of social work in the community. According to the Global Definition of Social Work (2014) „social work is a practice-based profession and an academic discipline that promotes social change and development, social cohesion, and the empowerment and liberation of people. Principles of social justice, human rights, collective responsibility and respect for diversities are central to social work. Underpinned by theories of social work, social sciences, humanities and indigenous knowledge, social work engages people and structures to address life challenges and enhance wellbeing“. Social work is about social change, communities are the context of all social work practice, and community practice is recognized as a major means to carry forward the profession's long-standing ethical commitment to social justice (Netting, Kettner & McMurty, 2004). Community practice is grounded in values of democratic process, citizen participation, group determination, empowerment, multiculturalism, and leadership development. Democratic revitalization is a central purview of community practice and four major processes are important in this revitalization: development, organizing, planning and progressive change (Weil *et al.*, 2005).

### *Contradictions and challenges*

Current tendencies of the neo-liberalism in the economy push the national government to reduction of the investment in social sector and to acceptance the percentage of economic growth as exclusively indicator of social progress. Such tendencies are not only unacceptable for the social professionals but are also extremely dangerous for the wellbeing and quality of life of the people. Community practice is greatly needed to help communities, and nations deal with massive change and serious social issues including globalization, increased poverty, homophobia, feminist issues, increasing migration, and human rights concerns. Social work needs to provide effective answers and tools to these essential issues of human development and sustainability. Community practice approaches require multiple skills and social workers find themselves in front of the very complex tasks in finding of the new answers.

Community social workers have a strong tradition of criticism against problematic social structures, working for social justice, and the emancipation of the oppressed. But today a community work has become a victim of managerialism, professionalism, and tokenism. The bureaucratisation of social work has led it to become procedural and heavily geared towards social control rather than care, with little capacity to challenge inequality or engage with innovative ideas for practice (Das, O'Neill & Pinkerton, 2015). Managerialism in the provision of public services (targets, measurable outputs and cost effectiveness), neo-liberal policies (austerity), market policies (competitive, contract culture), and individual centred agenda shifted the focus on work with individuals rather than with communities (Wallace & Pease, 2011).

An individualistic philosophy argues that society has less responsibility for the problems people face and that people as citizens owe little to one another. This has the effect of weakening the social ties and social support that people rely upon in certain stages of lives (Parrott, 2014). The 'social' element of 'social work' is therefore subject to a concerted assault, which undermines the collective provision of services which individuals in general are unable to provide for themselves. The social policy is alienated away from ordinary people and the state has no longer the responsibility to protect citizens against social harms. As society is increasingly atomised, then the nature of social problems is seen as emanating from a lack of responsibility of individuals rather than the retreat of the social (Kwong Kam, 2014; Parrott, 2014).

The primary mission of social work profession is to enhance human wellbeing and help meet the basic human needs of all people, with particular attention to the needs and empowerment of people who are vulnerable, oppressed, and living in poverty. A historic and defining feature of social work is the profession's focus on individual wellbeing in a social context and the wellbeing of society (Dulmus, Bass, Bunch, 2005). Social work in large part has thus failed to engage with social work's role in challenging and alleviating disadvantage and has become skewed towards providing top-down paternalistic, individual-based services rather than community-oriented practices that call for social change (Das, O'Neill & Pinkerton, 2015). Social work in the community is no more a generator of emancipation, advocacy and development but rather become vehicles of public services, responding to commissioning and provision of services in the community (Das, O'Neill & Pinkerton, 2015).

For social work it is important to point out again challenging questions: how to explain and define social work's role in the community today? How to recognise a paradox of 'external profession' in the community? And even more prosaic - how to define a 'community' as a space to work there today? The most all-embracing definition of community is that it is mostly a place where people live their lives. But none the less community means different things to different people (Hardcastle, 2011). Today the community cannot be seen any more only as a geographical concept. More than with territorial borders people today are bonded by real or virtual networks, by beliefs and interests, practicing certain life style. The community can be understood as a system of values, norms, and moral codes which provoke a sense of identity within a bounded whole to its members (Cohen, 1985). To say other way, more than territory a community today is an "arena" in which people acquire their most fundamental and most substantial experience of social life outside the confines of the home.

The community as a social entity is often viewed positively, particularly when considering the social ties, shared values, relationships, participation, provision of resources and opportunities. But there are also descriptions of community as a slippery, intricate, ideological, and multifaceted summary concept covering a range of social phenomena (Hardcastle 2011). This intrinsic multidimensional nature of the "community" rises up numbers of questions. For social work the basic dilemma emerges from an old dichotomy of 'comunitarianism' versus 'individualism'. One of the most obvious tensions is related to the distinction of the individualistic vs. collective ethics. Community involvement is always 'personal' and 'interactive'. It always touches the bases of personal and community ethics and moral values. Communities and individuals may have their own ethical codes and framings that differ from or conflict with those of other individuals, groups, professionals and other possible 'public'. This is the ground for many possible conflicts and tensions. The other challenge for social work in the community arises from the elusive nature of networks among people and inadequate traditional conceptions of representation and decision-making. In some settings, such as multi-ethnic neighbourhoods or amongst stigmatised, marginalised or publicly excluded groups some models of community participation can therefore operate in ways that can embed discrimination and limit equality of engagement (Banks et al., 2003). Further complexity is added if the needs, wishes and interests are controversial and opinions and attitudes of people are divided within a 'community' (Banks *et al.*, 2013).

To enter a space contrasting in so many varieties as a community itself is a challenge for each profession not only for social workers. As much as the community context may bring the advantages of accessible and manageable space, direct contact with people, creation of new possibilities, choice, influence, involvement and spontaneity, it is at the same time an indicative area for bringing underlying conflicts on the surface: the challenge of understanding rights of people living in the communities and issues of who best represents

members of the community; creates problems for the potential conflict between individual and group interests; point out the question how to modify informed consent to take account of community development and participation (Quigley, 2006). It is not also to overlook that a community social work as a practice relay on social relationships that people have with one another. This fact set strong demands on emotional and intellectual energy of people involved. Tensions may emerge between the roles of academic and activist, outcomes may be unexpected and painful; those who are involved in a community work may be seen as 'troublemakers' (Durham Community Research Team, 2011). Community "[...] transformation can be a difficult pathway filled with anxiety, self-critique and heightened awareness". (Moore, 2004, p.155)

But one of the most crucial challenges for social work in the community lay in uncertainty of social workers' mandate to act in the community (legal vs. informal mandate) and ambivalent position of social work in the community on general (issue of power and control). All this questions indicate the most important ethical issue for social work: is social work used by power elites for the control and repression of masses or for the liberation (to gain independence) and self-actualisation of people in the community. There is a need to rethink again if social work still has the potentials for supporting masses of those who are dehumanised, excluded, and invisible? Is social work still sensitive for and recognition of values of justice and emancipation of oppressed or not? In fact, with the increasing focus on 'community' as the site for renewing democracy, improving policymaking, enhancing service delivery, real involvement and participation of people in the community we challenge our own professional standards and ethic as well.

### *Programme for the future*

Socio-economic and political changes are creating a new spaces in which social workers are working. The decline of traditional communities, the marginalisation of community work within social work practices, limitation for community engagement in crisis of resources, lost trust from service users and de-politicisation of social work are creating difficult arena for practising social work in the community. Furthermore, community sectors social workers are squeezed and trapped in the conflict of requirements to meet agendas of larger public sector politics, philanthropic morality, tendencies of atomisation of society and consumerist philosophy of privatised services. There is a strong feeling of 'community lost', of alienation, and powerlessness. Many social workers are looking with some new hope and expectations on the potentials of the 'community'. It is not just as a romantic nostalgia rising up this interest to re-engage community but much more the basic striving for survival as a human being. Being social worker does not mean being insensitive machine. Being professional does not mean being reticent and dispassionate. Just the opposite, social work has always being advocating for involvement, personal engagement, direct contact, dialogue, activation. Alternatively, we can observe the growth of interest in ethics, rising up the debates on community involvement and community regeneration, development of critical community practices, supporting innovative responses, and underlining of solidarity and resilience as guiding principles for community engagement.

As we already pointed out, social work as profession in the communities all over the world is facing with many questions and extremely complex problems. To be a social worker in a community means to be in the "open space", everything that affect the community influence on the reality of social work there. The relational nature of community practice means that networks and informal interactions goes beyond formal organisational structures (Banks et al., 2003) and social workers in the community have to go in a dialog with people

daily. They have to decide about the appropriateness of their involvement, analysing and understanding each specific context creatively use possible resources and endeavour for better conditions of life. It is impossible to frame the real life in a reliable facts and measurable categories; therefore the work in the community is always uncertain and unpredictable. In essence, social workers who are very skilled and knowledgeable will not be successful in community work unless they have a clear idea as to what the purpose of their intervention should be. The difficulty generally lies in conflicts between social worker's pursuit of pragmatic self-interest or in meeting ethical obligations - the dilemmas are between ethical behaviour on one hand and pragmatic consequences on the other hand (Hardcastle, 2011). Each situation of professional involvement has to be verified with the important ethical question: what our intervention can bring to the people' reality; is bringing better life for them or not, are facing less harm and more freedom, do they fill more safe and self-accomplished.

Today in the situation of alienation of capital, state and social policy away from ordinary people, in the world of conflicts and massive social differentiation and inequities each action that goes toward transformation of unjust society and unequal social structures is a political act. Automatically, social workers who support bottom up initiatives cannot avoid acting politically. By entering the community with the clear agenda of supporting community endeavours for self-determination is political act by default and goes toward attacking, ignoring, avoiding, or even transforming bureaucratic and technocratic organisational forms and fortified positions of privileged social groups. Recent policy trends have moved the principle of community involvement toward more clear agendas of social inclusion, neighbourhood renewal and different development programmes. But still, the role of community social worker is no less uncertain and it is merely a subject of conflicting interests, mainstream socio-economical politics and austerity tensions.

An important task for social work professionals is to find a way how to deal with a classical paradox of power and a conflict of interest. To accomplish this we have to set out an transparent analysis of power and empowerment, explores new ways of understanding active citizenship, develop a sensibility for spontaneity and unpredictability of life, and gaining solidarity among people by creating more solid base for trust and reciprocity as basic conditions for community development.

As it is known, equality of conditions is fundamental fact for building a cohesive society (Tocqueville, 1960). But still, the reality of social service users is to be excluded, to be sent in institutions, to be classified as more or less deserving, as more or less human because of their handicap. Still there are masses of people who are categorised as 'diverse', 'hard to reach' and 'easily ignored' by the rest of the population. There are numbers of people leaving their communities in fear for their life and numbers of people who are deprived of basic sources for life in their communities. Community has to become a place for all people, for all forms of life on earth. The values of collective and individual responsibility and respect for diversities, concerned influence over the future, and ownership of the common goods are those to make a community as a common space. For social work it means to connect doing social work and everyday life, recognise spontaneous rhythms of life, go into alliances with people, support alternatives and liberation initiatives, practice "green" social work, become aware of new concepts of communities and communitarian identity (self-reliant, self-sustaining, grass rooted, sublime, entrepreneurial) and recognise a reality of cross-bounded communities. The 'reality of life' in the community, the personal presence of 'real people' gives the impression that the revitalization of civic virtue is possible. That community can become a place for practicing democracy and to ensuring diverse groups unified around a common theme, emphasising consensus-building rather than division and difference.

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