

Abstracts

Zsuzsa Ferge: What is happening to poverty? Deceptive „postmodernity“

Poverty and social exclusion are increasingly and justly becoming social concerns in the EU. Yet there are controversial quantitative findings that may suggest to some that the issue is not as serious as the EU thinks, that poverty may not be viewed as a painful, injuring and long-lasting life experience, and social exclusion a complex set of social ills.

As far as chronic poverty is concerned the results of panel studies are not always consistent. In some cases they show a relatively high rate of persistent poverty, in some others lasting poverty is contra-intuitively rare. In case of indicators of deprivation data show that many are deprived in one or another respect but the simultaneous presence of several factors of exclusion may be infrequent. The inconsistencies need to be analysed in more depth.

The paper analyses from two aspects the validity in Hungary of the hypotheses about postmodernity. It presents some phenomena that suggest that poverty may indeed seem volatile because e.g. windfall incomes help short escapes from poverty, and deprivation may be inconsistent because for instance the poor may use the throwaway assets of the more affluent. These, though, are fragile and reversible and ruffle only the surface. They did not (as yet) alter the underlying core processes of social exclusion. The second approach presents evidence to illustrate some of these deep-lying processes such as the increasing inequalities in education or mortality. In all likelihood the “great narratives” did not lose their relevance. With increasing inequalities and weakening social protection the reproduction of poverty seems to continue unaffected.

Péter Radó: Inequalities in primary and secondary education in Hungary

The paper offers a brief overview on the mechanisms that generate educational inequalities, their dynamics, the main conclusions can be drawn from the analysis of former education policy efforts and attempts to identify those areas of intervention that may reduce educational disparities. Inequalities in education are the results of a complex mechanism composed by pedagogical, organizational and systemic problems. All these problems cause a pressure for selection that is huge in international comparison. The governance of the Hungarian schooling system does not operate those instruments that have the potential to reduce this pressure, instead, it targets only its impacts. As a consequence, the negative impact of socio-economic status and ethnic affiliation on learning outcomes is huge, the impact of residential status, personal abilities and gender is smaller. The paper argues for a new approach in educational policy: instead of the traditional emphasis on disadvantaged student groups it calls for a – at least supplementary – policy that targets the under-performing schools and their development, that as, a policy that ensures professional accountability.

Mária Neményi: ...yes, there are Gypsies, indeed (Variations of Roma identity among Roma teenagers' parents)

As part of an extensive research project, our study examines the relation of the parents of Roma adolescents to their own Romaness through personal life histories. The analytic models defining different types of possible Roma identities that came out of the interviews combine individual experiences with reflections and evaluations, that is, sociological and psychological dimensions. Stereotypical majority opinions interiorized in self-perception led, in extreme cases, to self-hatred. The projection of negative images on others, thus shifting the threat on „other“ Gypsies –

those who are unable to accept the value system of the majority society – may be seen as a peculiar form of self-defense. The reactions of another group involved the denial of Roma traditions, even when this entailed conflicts in which one could not rely on the support neither of their own community, nor of the majority society that is unwilling to include those who wish to assimilate. A part of our interviewees, however, consciously decided to identify with traditions, promote Roma culture, re-learn the language, and participate in the fight of enforcing Roma interests.

Monica Kjorstad : Between professional ethics and bureaucratic rationality: the challenging ethical position of social workers who are faced with implementing a workfare policy

This article is based upon an empirical, qualitative study of social workers implementing the workfare policy in five municipal social welfare offices in Oslo, the capital of Norway. The concern of the study has been to investigate the conditions for the social workers' practice in this bureaucratic context where clients who apply for social and economic assistance will primarily be motivated to choose work rather than social insurance. Particular tasks and roles for social workers are defined in employment contracts and in job descriptions, but professional judgement and professional discretion are influenced by the individual appropriation of professional values and practices and how these are amalgamated to the individual's personal experiences in the practice of social work. The social worker can exercise authority in a very concrete and clear manner when implementing workfare. The law allows for considerable discretion, but internal rules and policies within municipalities can have a great impact upon the social worker and affect his/her practice. This implies that the normative and ethical values of the profession become imperative. The article focuses on the municipal social welfare offices as gate-keeping institutions and on the ethical position of the social workers in that context.

**Tamás Barcsi: From effectiveness to harmony
Can we reach the world of care and creation from the world of paradoxes?**

In my essay I critically analyze some basic notions and basic values of today's Western civilization. The fundamental goal of social analysis is to discover the problems of everyday and unquestioned processes. This might lead one to be confronted with problems and to find solutions on individual and social levels. The examined basic notions and values are development and effectiveness, information and knowledge, consumption and self-realization. The critical analysis of the Order of Liberty and Competition reveals certain "hiding-processes" and social-cultural paradoxes. I interpret our age as a crisis period, for example as the crisis of ecology, in which not even the Western culture can provide a life worthy of one's dignity. According to the positive scenario there might evolve a more harmonious culture based on respect due to the crisis. I present three alternative cultural basic notions or values: sustainable development and care, ecological attitude and respect, creation and the true self-realization. The most important question is whether there is a way from the world of effectiveness to the world of harmony?

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