

# SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL CHANGE: CRITICAL POSTSTRUCTURAL PERSPECTIVE

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## GETTING INSPIRATION FOR MY RESEARCH...

“I read a book one day and my whole life was changed” (Orhan Pamuk)

The Annual of Social Work (2013). „Crisis in Social Work & Social Work in Crises” with Mladen Knežević, Prof.Dr. as theme issue editor.

- Miljenović, A. (2013). Economic crisis — A potential driver of the social work profession transformation?

## (NEGLECTED) CRITICAL SOCIAL WORK AS POSSIBLE RESPONSE TO:

- The growing social inequality and multiplying social problems (UNDP, 2016.; The World Bank, 2017.; Mullaly, 2007.);
- Managerialism, consumerism and the privatisation of social work (Newberry, 2014).

„Each human being is an entrepreneur managing their own life” (Stark, 2013.)

- Authoritarian, bureaucratic, controlling, punitive and generally oppressive institutional context of public social services (Iain Ferguson, Michael Lavalette, 2004).

## CHANGE-ORIENTED PROFESSION, BUT...

- ...its practice largely focuses on accommodation (Jani et al., 2011).
- Adaptable and uncritical of its own role in neoliberal changes and not fulfilling its political mandate (Lorenz (2005a, 2005b, Jones and Truell, 2012 ).
- Mainstream agencies that “view social work problems in a depoliticized way” (Baines, 2007).
- Collective approaches, which have almost disappeared from the social work agenda, are likely to be central to this. (Iain Ferguson, Michael Lavalette, 2004); Woodward & Bella, 2003).
- The proclaimed activist potential of the profession is subordinated and dominates a controlling function of social work (Aronson and Sammon, 2000; Dominelli, 2004 according to Chambers et al., 2015).

## CRITICAL (ACTIVIST) SOCIAL WORK: IN WHAT WAY IS PRESENT IN SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE IN CROATIA?

- The aim of the research is to investigate more closely the representation of the critical approach of the existing social work activities from the perspective of the practitioners of social work.
- The representation of the critical form in social work will be indirectly based on the data generated within the three-part operationalization of the concept of activism:
  - **the identity of the profession** (description of the characteristics of social work practice),
  - **power** (perceived professional influence)
  - and **necessary changes** (by determining necessary directions of professional development).



## THE FOLLOWING RESEARCH QUESTIONS:

- 1) How do social work practitioners describe the practice of social work?
- 2) How do social work practitioners describe the existing social impact of the social workers' profession?
- 3) What changes social work practitioners consider to be necessary for the development of the profession?

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE RESEARCH DRAFT: CRITICAL POSTSTRUCTURAL THEORY

- Values subjective experience,
- affirms differences and
- continuous reconstruction of reality (in accordance with the post-modernist influence),
- at the same time with placing what was mentioned above in a broader, macro-analysis of the structural inequalities (Ife, 1999.).

## CRITICAL (CRITICAL, POLITICAL, EMANCIPATED...) SOCIAL WORK:

- Generated from critical theory integrates different models of social work:
  - Marxist,
  - radical,
  - structural,
  - feminist,
  - anti-oppressive,
  - anti-repressive,
  - anti-colonial and
  - anti-discriminatory, and aims at fundamental changes within the society (Healy, 2000.)



## THE FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS OF CRITICAL SOCIAL WORK: **Power**, identity and change

- power is tied to the interpretivist approach of the concept of knowledge in constructing an understanding of social reality (Haralambos and Holborn, 2002; Stepney, 2006).
  - Knowledge about social phenomena produced through an inclusive and equitable process of interacting with users is favored, while respecting the complex interplay of structural and personal (Fook, 2002).
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- How would you describe a power you have as a social worker?
  - How does it manifest in working with your clients, community work? Can you give an example of this impact?

## THE FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS OF CRITICAL SOCIAL WORK: Power, **identity** and change

- has no fixed characteristic but is fragmented and conditioned by the contextual. Identity thus becomes a product of discourse and is valid in a specific context (Fairclough, 1992. prema Healy, 1999.);
- an important cohesive element, which, seeks to overcome the traditional dichotomies in social work: "individual and social", "control and care", "personal and political (Salas, Sen, and Segal (2010)
- What is it like to be a social worker in Croatia today?



## THE FUNDAMENTAL CONCEPTS OF CRITICAL SOCIAL WORK: Power, identity and **change**

- Achieving **change** is accomplished by empowering the facilitation aspect of social power through various forms of collaboration (Fook, 2002).
- Some of the possible modalities of action produced by critical theory may include the following activities:
- demonstrative (offering and promoting new perspectives and uncovering dominant oppressive ideologies),
- cooperative (creating alliances with stakeholders in society interested in social change in power relations),
- transformative (changing the normative frameworks and availability of social resources)
- and formative ones (empowering the activist potential of beneficiaries and professionals motivated for critical action) (Knežević, Miljenović & Branica, 2013; Miljenović, 2015).

## MICRO-RESISTANCE ACTIVITIES:

Faced with organizational-professional conflict, social workers conducted a series of open, but also covert, micro-resistance activities to help the beneficiaries.

- working contrary to organizational guidelines,
- seeking alternative and "creative" ways to help the beneficiary,
- overstating problems of the beneficiaries in order to gain easier access to certain assistance services,
- flexibility in interpreting legal provisions, providing access to certain services to those beneficiaries who would not otherwise satisfy the "entry" criteria,
- selective implementation of superiors' instructions (Makaros and Grodofsky, 2016; Greenslade, McAuliffe, & Chenoweth, 2015; Greenslade, 2013; Arson and Smith, 2010).

## QUESTIONS FOR PARTICIPANTS:

Social work, in its definition, emphasizes the pursuit of social change in society. Some social work theorists believe that such social change means a fundamental change in power in society, and that social work should act critically on the broader social level, pointing out injustices and structural inequalities.

- How do you interpret this social change to yourself?
- “In your opinion, what are the limiting factors which usually prevent the profession from acting as a changing factor in society?
- And what would be the facilitating factors? ”


## QUALITATIVE APPROACH:

- Qualitative approach in the research on the activist form of social work has also been used by authors Makaros and Grodofsky (2016), Ostrander (2016), Greenslade (2013), Smith (2011), Mendes (2007).
- Activism in general and social change in particular are empirically neglected and multifaceted concepts (Mendes, 2007).
- In order to explore more fully the meaning of the concept of social change (which is crucial for activist action) and to reflect on the possibilities of performing activist-oriented work of social work, the chosen epistemological position is social constructivism.



## **PARTICIPANTS: EXPERIENCED FRONT-LINE SOCIAL WORKERS:**

- 1) they participate in the area of social welfare, health, justice and civil society all over Croatia;**
- 2) they are recognized within the professional community for their continuous commitment and active engagement;**
- 3) they are involved in the work of professional organizations and / or have established cooperation with the academic community;**
- 4) they are able to critically discuss the research topic at the level of their own professional activity and of the overall professional performance of social work practice in Croatia;**

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- For the purpose of disseminating the network of research participants, the snowball sampling technique will be applied
  - Recruitment of participants in the initial sample will be based on the recommendation of Croatian Chamber of Social Workers (HKSR).