

## **The Importance of Social Pedagogy in Solving Youth Unemployment**

### **Abstract**

Youth is one of the riskiest groups at the labour market. Social pedagogy offers historical experience, a theoretical background as well as professional approach to solving youth unemployment. There is a wide range of social and pedagogical interventions into this multidisciplinary problem including preventive counseling, coordination of the school system and the labour market, and criticism and innovation of social changes that would bring help to unemployed youth.

**Key words:** *social pedagogy, youth, unemployment, employment policy, social work, professionalization, subculture, preventive counseling, school system, labour market*

### **Introduction**

Youth unemployment as a multidisciplinary phenomenon is nowadays the subject of attention of several scientific as well as practical disciplines. Social pedagogy, social work and andragogy offer the connection of theoretical and empirical reflections of this problem with the possibilities of practical interventions into its solving.

Employment policy, which is one of the most important areas of social policy as well as part of economic policy, presents a legislative, institutional and organizational framework for the problem of unemployment. We can define employment policy as a set of measures and tools that cooperate in creating conditions for dynamic equilibrium at the labour market and effective use of power. Nowadays employment policy is irreplaceable in all developed countries. Intentional orientation of employment policy includes mainly the development of infrastructure at

the labour market, the creation of new job opportunities, increasing the adaptability of the labour force and providing adequate life conditions for people who have become unemployed by means of public employment services.

Employment policy has undergone different phases in its development. At first (in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) passive employment policy was being developed mainly through providing different forms of support and unemployment benefits. After WWII passive policy changed into active policy mainly by means of measures strengthening the cultivation of human potential at the labour market. At the turn of the centuries (20<sup>th</sup>/21<sup>st</sup>) there was in Slovakia, as well as in other reforming countries, a period of the origination of the labour market that brought a constitution of a new employment policy. Through its accession into the EU (May 1<sup>st</sup>, 2004), Slovakia became part of the European economic area, which suggests the permanent objective optimization of public employment services.

Our paper deals with selected social and pedagogical aspects of youth unemployment in the context of the employment policy in the Slovak Republic.

## **1. History of social pedagogy and the problem of youth unemployment**

Social pedagogy came to existence in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the main aim to contribute to the solution of social and educational problems accompanying the social and economic development of society. One of these problems was youth unemployment. According to Schilling (1999, p. 53), social pedagogy has its roots in practical youth care. This could be seen in several practical social and educational activities with youth in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the area of current day Germany, Switzerland, England, etc. Social pedagogy developed in theoretical, practical and empirical directions.

**The practical direction of social pedagogy** (In: Hroncová-Emmerová, 2004, p. 25) was seen in its reaction to the social and political situation in Germany at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century when social pedagogy was supposed to help in the fight against “social danger” that included youth unemployment.

**The theoretical direction of social pedagogy** was at the beginning mainly developed by German representatives of social pedagogy. One of its main representatives was P. Natorp (In: Hroncová-Emmerová, 2004, p. 28), who points to the fact that social pedagogy at the time of its origin was supposed to contribute to the decrease of social tension in society at the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries.

**The empirical direction of social pedagogy** confirmed the oneness of man and nature by means of the scientific and research activities of its representatives (e.g.

P. Bergemann) who dealt with the impact of social conditions (e.g. family, work, school, etc.) on the education of young people.

Social pedagogy in Slovakia was developing under the influence of foreign practical experience, theoretical conceptions and empirical research. Its pioneers before 1989 were J. Čečetka, A. Jurovský, as well as the most important representative of social pedagogy in Slovakia, O. Baláž. O. Baláž (In: Hroncová-Staňová et al., 2007, p. 56) emphasized the research into bond of social environment and education in several areas; one of them was the problem of work.

After 1989 social pedagogy experienced a renaissance in Slovakia in new democratic conditions, mainly under the influence of the transformation of our society in the 1990s that placed emphasis on several social problems; youth unemployment ranked among the first of these.

## **2. The problem of youth unemployment within the context of characteristic features and the subject of social pedagogy**

In our efforts to define social pedagogy unambiguously we face the barrier of the ambiguous interpretation of social and educational reality conditioned by several factors. By means of abstraction of the problem of unemployment we can choose some of the characteristics of social pedagogy, which include implications of interventions into this social and educational problem.

According to Marburger (1979), social pedagogy is a theory of help in the socialization of existing social problems. Its aim is a change of an individual, broadening of their cognitive, emotional, and psychometric competence as well as the elimination of reasons causing these conflicts.

**Offensive social pedagogy** is also important in solving the problem of unemployment (Bakošová, 2006, p. 26). It is a theory of help in dealing with conflicts arising in the process of socialization. It is the third educational institution established for lifelong learning for all age groups. Its aim is the change of the individual in favour of their personal competence that is guaranteed by the constitution and other legal measures. The core of social pedagogy as the third educational institution is social help to the youth.

In determining the subject of social pedagogy we can emphasize several approaches (e.g. Ondrejkovič, 2000; Hroncová-Emmerová, 2004; Bakošová, 2006) that can serve as a background to the solution of youth unemployment and that perceive social pedagogy as a social answer to the needs of an industrial and postindustrial society with the aim of intervening into the process of socialization, especially of the young generation (Ondrejkovič-Poliaková, 1999, p. 36). Interven-

tions into the process of socialization from the perspective of social pedagogy, thus, not only encompass narrowly defined intentional educational activity; they also include an intervention into the social problems of a young person, including social and pathological phenomena.

Bakošová (In: Hroncová-Emmerová, 2004, pp. 41–42) suggested the possibility of including the problem of youth unemployment into the subject of social pedagogy. She perceives social pedagogy as social help that also includes the problem of social and pathological phenomena, the Romany issue, problems of socially and morally disturbed children and youth as well as other problems, among which we could name youth unemployment. In connection with this we must also emphasize the **preventive dimension of social pedagogy**, e.g. in relation to prevention of youth unemployment by means of relevant social and educational activities.

### **3. Professional competences of social pedagogues and the problem of youth unemployment**

Several authors (e.g. Kraus, Bakošová, Hroncová, Emmerová, Határ) deal with the problem of the profession of a social pedagogue. In his professional model of a social pedagogue Kraus (2000) states that professional competences of a social pedagogue include certain equipment of knowledge, certain range of practical social competences and certain professionally ethical identity. The problem in defining professional competences of a social pedagogue is most of all a wide range of their practical use. In the area of youth unemployment the most applicable knowledge is the information from social pedagogy, social work, law and management. As for the social skills needed in work with unemployed youth, a social pedagogue can use communicational skills, social diagnosing, experience with social documentation or methods of social and pedagogical prevention.

In his effort to classify the key professional competences of a social pedagogue working with children and youth, Határ (2007, p. 36) lists 12 competences. Those that can be used in solving youth unemployment are counseling competence, diagnostic competence, reeducation competence, resocializing competence, competence of social and educational prevention and intervention and communicational competence. The use of the stated competences in praxis depends on the kind of the social problem (in our case the problem of unemployment), on the age of clients (in our case 16–25 years old), on the institution where the pedagogue works (e.g. office of labour, social affairs and family), on the specialization of the social pedagogue, on material provision, etc. A social pedagogue should act as

a professional that facilitates the life of a young person and moderates social contrasts between him/her and the society to which the client belongs.

Emmerová (In: Hroncová-Emmerová, 2004) also deals with work opportunities of a social pedagogue. She states that the graduates of the study programme of social pedagogy gain professional and pedagogical competence in the field of providing social and pedagogical services also at offices of work, social affairs and family where they work with unemployed citizens.

The professionalization of social pedagogy in the Slovak Republic requires its legislative and institutional establishment most of all. We believe that one of the areas in which a social pedagogue as a professional can apply his/her professional competences is the field of social and educational work with young unemployed. Social pedagogy, social work and andragogy constitute specific scientific and professional potential for the reduction of social risks connected with solving (or unsolving) this social and pedagogical problem.

#### **4. Subculture of unemployed youth as a subject of attention of social pedagogy**

One of the social and pedagogical aspects of the problem of youth unemployment is a specific subculture created by part of this youth. Creating specific subcultures is one of the typical signs of constituting the social awareness of youth. For unemployed youth these cultural entities become their tool for creating their subjectively acceptable social and cultural space. The tendency to create specific subcultures of unemployed youth is determined by the changes in lifestyle that are related to their transfer from school to the labour market.

The risk factor of creating subcultures of unemployed youth is the potential origin of pathological social adaptation as a result of blocked aspirations related to their professional and social opportunities. Thus, the subculture of unemployed youth can obtain the character of a conflicting, resigning or even criminal subculture. Thus, the subcultures of unemployed youth oscillate between engaged social and political movements on the one hand and socially marginalized and anti-social groups on the other hand.

Macháček (1998) states that among long-term unemployed young people one of the groups that was identified was the group of supporters of the subculture of unemployment. It is interesting that these young people view work as an obstacle to their newly discovered way of life. This is an expression of the regressively alternative individualization of youth, which achieves a stable position by creating

a compact community. Social pedagogues as workers of offices of labour, social affairs and family are then limited in their efforts of arranging work and increasing employment of the members of this subculture.

The existence of the subculture of unemployment as well as other subcultures is important from the theoretical and applicable point of view. According to Ondrejkovič (1998, p. 214), a thorough knowledge of the youth subculture creates an opportunity for the qualified impact on the process of including youth into society and the process of socialization. This can be reflected in the implementation of specific social and educational activities. Social pedagogy, sociology, social work and andragogy can contribute to a deeper analysis of the culture of the whole society by knowing the youth subculture.

A typical feature of the unemployed subculture youth is its inner inconsistency. This causes the existence of several different subcultures of unemployed youth in social and educational praxis. For example, we observe fans of leisure time activities who spend their free time after finishing school and before finding a job doing fun activities. Other subcultures are, for example, people oriented towards household or children (Macháček, 1998, p. 12), people actively searching for a job, pseudo-employed people as well as isolated and humiliated people.

## **5. Possibilities of social pedagogy in solving youth unemployment**

Young unemployed people present one of the riskiest groups at the labour market in the Slovak Republic. The socially declassing consequences of unemployment that a young person who has not found his/her first regularly paid job yet must face are one of the greatest professional challenges that social and pedagogical sciences deal with. Table 1 shows the structure of unemployed youth in the Slovak Republic (graduates of high schools and universities) registered between 2003 and 2007. Within the context of the interdisciplinary connection of social pedagogy, social work and andragogy we see several possibilities of social and pedagogical interventions into solving the problem of youth unemployment.

A significant possibility of preventing youth unemployment is **preventive counseling**. It is part of the information and counseling services for registered applicants for jobs. Its basic aim is to help young people who finish their continuous preparation for work at elementary, secondary schools and at universities to orientate to the labour market. Preventive counseling is part of counseling in the choice of work. The social pedagogue as a preventive counselor can act in two professional roles:

**Table 1: The structure of job applicants – graduates registered in the Slovak Republic between 2003–2007**

Length of record	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
up to 3 months	12 377	6 497	3 482	5 279	5 357
over 3 to 6 months	3 192	2 885	1 921	2 080	1 878
over 6 to 9 months	3 521	2 838	5 604	5 346	3 743
over 9 to 12 months	4 686	3 164	1 363	1 137	774
over 12 to 15 months	2 250	1 336	367	143	181
over 15 to 18 months	196	86	151	79	88
over 18 to 21 months	461	229	231	614	507
over 21 to 24 months	973	582	486	187	155
over 24 months	5	0	1	1	0
<b>Total</b>	<b>27 661</b>	<b>17 617</b>	<b>13 606</b>	<b>14 866</b>	<b>12 683</b>

Source: Headquarters of labour, social affairs and family

- they can work at elementary schools where they can work with pupils in the last grades; they can help them to find schools suitable for the jobs they are interested in having in the future
- they can work as a professional counselor at an office of labour, social affairs and family; its aim is, for example, organizing information fairs for pupils of elementary schools or high school students in a particular region

An important phenomenon in the problem of the implementation at the labour market is the correspondence between the level of achieved education and the job the graduate obtains (Hronec, 2007, p. 9). Another possibility of using social pedagogues in solving youth unemployment is the application of social and educational aspects in the intersection of the school system and labour market. An insufficiently transparent school system causes the deepening of structural unemployment of graduates and the reduction of perspectives of finding a stable job. Thus, a lot of young people look for jobs abroad. The institutions which are the most active in solving this problem are the self-governing regional authorities which facilitate schools of primary and secondary education. Thus, a social pedagogue could also be helpful in connecting the school system with the labour market. This could be another perspective in the process of the professionalization of social pedagogy.

Unemployment is a natural phenomenon in a market economy. Thus, it is important to emphasize that young people as well as older people may have to face this problem repeatedly. Social pedagogy is a competent authority which helps to

balance the occurring risks and conflicts and which cooperates on changes and development of the whole society (Schilling, 1999). Such **critical orientation of social pedagogy** is applicable in solving youth unemployment; it acts as a critic as well as initiator of social changes in the employment policy, educational policy as well as newly establishing European youth policy.

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