



European Region Newsletter no 1. 2007

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

by Hans van Ewijk
President ICSW Europe

Social Change and Social Professions

About 700 social pedagogues, social workers and university people from 30 countries met at a challenging and inspiring conference in Parma on 15 -17 March 2007. I was one of them. The conference was organized by FESET (schools and universities for social education), EASSW (schools and universities for social work), IFSW (Federation of social workers) and two Italian associations. The main question of this 'Summit of Social Professionals' was how new management, changing populations and family structures affect the practice of social professionals. Four keynote speakers and about 200 presentations and debates in workshops created an impressive input. The conference in Parma could be characterized as an open meeting of confident social professionals endorsing a common identity of all kinds of social professionals. Social professionals are looking for new opportunities, are willing to cross boundaries and to cooperate within their domain and outside their domain. The overall quality of the presentations was quite good – half of them were based on research and many

presentations reflected on theories or practice contexts. The main outcomes of the conference can be found in this Newsletter. In two years ICSW-Europe will join in organising the next joint Conference in Dubrovnik (Croatia).

The launching of ENSACT

The feeling of belonging together, the urgency to stand for our social profession and to voice our expertise has also been demonstrated by the launch of ENSACT, the European Network for Social Action (www.ensact.eu) and was applauded by the audience. ICSW is one of the founding members, together with some of our partners of old – the International Federation of Social Workers and the European Association of Schools of Social Work and FESET, FICE and AIEJI (representing social pedagogues and social educators).

Legal status ICSW Europe

ICSW is and will always remain a global or worldwide organisation. Nevertheless, a need for a separate legal status was felt by several of ICSW's regions, mainly to guarantee access to regional NGO structures and regional funds. ICSW is currently preparing a change of structure that will allow regions to have a separate legal status while firmly remaining a part of the global ICSW family. Meanwhile ICSW Europe has taken temporary measures that will give us a legal status and allow us to remain an active member of the European Platform of Social NGOs until the constitutional changes at global level are finished. ICSW members in

Europe have been invited to become founding fathers of ICSW Europe.

Black Sea region

The Black Sea region is developing at full speed. The Black Sea NGO Network unites the efforts of NGOs active in the social field from 12 countries of the Region and is called to coordinate the activities of the organizations concerned in economic and social development with special focus on poverty reduction and sustainable development in the Region.

They have just opened their own website (<http://www.bsngon.com>) and are considering membership of ICSW. We hope that representatives from the Black Sea region will also be present at the next European Region Conference of ICSW in Vilnius in June. You will find more about the Conference in this Newsletter. Of course I hope to meet many of you there too!

Hans van Ewijk

European Spring Summit and Berlin Declaration The social agenda

On behalf of the European Social NGOs the Social Platform issued a three-point plan for a Social Europe as a source of inspiration for the European Spring Summit and the festivities around the 50th anniversary of the European Union. These are the main recommendations:

1. Use fully EU social competences to reach tangible results:
 - Stick to political commitments and translate them into concrete actions
 - Establish a social policy scoreboard to increase transparency in the implementation of existing EU social policy legislation and instruments

- Develop further social policy and fundamental rights legislation to respond to new social challenges

2. Ensure that economic and internal market objectives are not pursued at the cost of social objectives:

- An effective mainstreaming of social policy concerns in all relevant policy areas
- Give precedence to social objectives in case of conflict with competition or internal market policy measures

3. Build a people's Europe that promotes rights and solidarity:

- Adopt new EU strategic goals that respond to the concerns of people of all age
- Negotiate a new treaty that reinforces the social dimension and participatory democracy
- Build a European Union based on structured civil dialogue
- Build more solidarity within and outside Europe backed by adequate financial means.

The Social Platform, together with ETUC and EEB, also issued a joint declaration on the Lisbon strategy addressed to heads of state and government meeting for the Spring Summit. The three organisations welcomed the debate on the constitutional treaty and the upcoming Berlin declaration, bringing a new impulse to the European Project. Social rights and environmental protection are gaining ground as key priorities for actions. However, the revised Lisbon strategy still rings some bells of criticism on the European Union: opacity of processes, unclear political commitment, lack of accountability and a finance/internal market driven agenda.

Even though the European Spring Council in March seemed to focus primarily on environmental issues, there has been attention for other subjects – including social issues. The conclusions reconfirm the importance of the social dimension of Europe, by highlighting the continuing support for European integration by the Union's citizens and stressing that the common social objectives of member states should be better taken into account within the Lisbon Agenda.

Within the framework of social cohesion policies, particular attention will be devoted to the fight against poverty and social exclusion, especially child poverty. Furthermore the conclusions emphasise the importance of 'good work' and its underlying principles, naming for instance workers' rights and participation, equal opportunities, safety and health protection at work and a family-friendly organisation of work.

The Berlin Declaration has been received less positively by the social NGOs. It lacks a clear common strategy to tackle the challenges faced by the Union and fails to spell out a social dimension that would engage European citizens in the future of Europe. The final text misses indeed some key social issues. "For us the individual is paramount" says the declaration – but at the same time not a single reference is made to the millions of Europeans living in poverty, unemployed or affected by discrimination.

The full texts of the three-point plan and the joint declaration can be found on the Social Platform website (www.socialplatform.org)

Summit of Social Professionals in Parma

by Hans van Ewijk

The FESET conference in Parma on 15-17 March 2007 had a very interesting agenda that reflected what is going on in the world of the social workers, social pedagogues and academics in the field. The following three topics stood out in the discussions.

New management and social work

New management refers to privatization of social services and to new steering principles, based on evidence, effectiveness and quality. Behind it we find an expectation from policy makers, media and the public on what social policy should do. Not protection and universal risk sharing systems are debated but the need to redress disturbing behaviour, to mitigate

social tensions and to bring or force people back to the labour market or at least the education system. Opposite those public demands stand the basic values of the social profession, such as equality, social justice and trust. At the conference we looked for a balance and a bridge between those two orientations, respecting the social values but accepting to some extent the current public demands to redress behaviour and to smooth social tensions. The issue discussed most was the feeling that public demand tends more and more towards making problems and certain people invisible, like homeless, illegal people, offenders, and all kind of people disturbing the social order. Prisons and mental health institutions are expanding and refugees are renamed asylum seekers and sometimes 'illegals' to expel.

Social professionals feel it as their assignment to make visible what is happening with excluded people and what are defects in systems such as education, health, labour market and within the governing bodies. In this respect social professionals should stand for visibility of disadvantaged groups and they should advocate the interests and existence of disadvantaged groups.

The world of innovation and discontinuity

A second debate focused on innovation and programming strategies, which are mainly based on changing structures and practices top-down. It leads to a piecemeal approach of social problems where programmes and innovations are competing with each other and are mostly too drastic, too short and too short funded to improve the contexts people are living in. New management steering concepts are becoming more prescriptive as well. In particular social professionals from the UK are suffering from prescriptive steering concepts and they feel they are becoming instrumental to carrying out specified targets set within the governing bureaucracies.

At the conference the social professional was discussed as a sensitive professional, who intervenes in complex contexts, trying to understand what is going on, engaging with the people involved to come to a shared interpretation and plan of action. New management concepts however demand effect, output, results and evidence. It is the idea of the human being as a machine that can be fixed in a limited

time, instead of a concept of interrelationships that need support to be sustained. Social sustainability should be a core concept in social practice. Social sustainability is not based on the paradigm of cure but on care, on support, on creating networks that support people in being independent and related to each other.

The greatest risk of new management is discontinuity. In all its innovating, programming, outcome-based interventions new management is creating a social fabric that tears easily, because it lacks continuity, trust and sustainability. Research among youth workers taught that they feel insecure about their jobs. They have no idea if they will be in the same job next year, in the same neighbourhood, in the same centre, working for the same group. It depends on their managers and funders, on programmes and innovations.

Social professionals need to enter into a dialogue with policy makers much more. We have convincing arguments for a bottom up practice development and we need an open attitude towards management and policy makers. As a matter of fact, research carried out by my own department among managers, policy makers and social professionals showed that all three groups are criticizing new management steering concepts, felt as bureaucracy and as too distant from practice. I think and hope we can gradually move from this new management steering model to a more mandated steering model, based on sustainability and frontline based development. To achieve that, social professionals should be more political and policy oriented, able to engage in a real dialogue, standing up for their own quality and professionalism.

Demographic changes

A third debate turned around the changes in our population (more diversity) and in family structures (more diverse, more discontinuity). Concepts like individualism, diversity, community and integration were discussed. Those concepts are quite often rather vague or misunderstood. In our field we are still struggling with what the impact of diversity – as reality and perspective – on the social practice is and should be. The community is often mentioned and applauded, but what a community is and how to empower communities and which communities, is still fully being debated. Social professionals are strongly endorsing diversity but if diversity is increasing,

we need more and new integration strategies as well. You cannot keep a society together without binding powers and mechanisms. Many speakers and debaters pointed to mind setting and changing perspectives or to deconstructing and de-labelling as promising approaches, but how to understand and to apply those concepts, needs much more exchange and research.

Conferences

International Council on Social Welfare - European Region and Vilnius University European Region Conference on Equal Opportunities for Individuals, Groups and Nations

Thursday 14th June - Saturday 16th June 2007
Vilnius University, Universiteto 9/1, Vilnius, Lithuania

ICSW Europe and Vilnius University are pleased to announce an international conference to discuss **equal opportunities for individuals, groups and nations**. The conference aims to increase mutual understanding in Europe by sharing the experiences of countries with diverse histories and cultures. Early bird registration is available until **April 15th 2007**

Equal Opportunities

The policy of equal opportunities is not limited to abolition of discrimination. In addition, it means support for equal and full participation of all. Laws alone cannot grant equal opportunities, when adequate economic and social conditions are missing, and when people lack community support. The conference will cover a wide range of topics: from gender equality to migration, from solidarity of the society to the roles of NGOs, within three major strands: equal opportunities for individuals, for groups and for nations. These three strands will be further explored in plenary sessions and in workshop sessions during the conference.

For more information on the content, please visit the website:

http://www.fsf.vu.lt/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=853&Itemid=1273

General Assembly of the Social Platform

The Social Platform's General Assembly met on 27 March, among others to vote for the Platform's new management committee. It is interesting to note that Dirk Jarré, who has been active in ICSW for a long time, has now been elected as Vice-President as representative of EURAG. ICSW congratulates him on his election and trusts he will continue to be a valuable contribution to the work of the Platform.

The following members have been elected in the new management committee of the Social Platform:

- President: Fintan Farrell, EAPN
- Treasurer: Patricia Prendiville, ILGA
- Vice-Presidents: Claire Roumet, CECODHAS, and Dirk Jarré (EURAG)
- Members: Patrick Du Bucquois (Caritas EUropa), Markus Held (CEV) and Conny Reuter (SOLIDAR).

The Social Platform members also voted on the temporary status of ICSW. For the next three months ICSW will be an associate member of the Platform instead of a full Member. This decision follows the fact that ICSW Europe has not yet gained independent legal status as a European NGO. We are preparing the new statutes for ICSW Europe. The proposal to return ICSW to full membership if the statutes have been received by the Social Platform before 26 June was accepted with 28 votes and 1 abstention.

The annual theme for the work of the Social Platform in 2008 will focus on promotion of the civil dialogue in the EU Member and candidate States. This theme will be elaborated further in the next steering group meeting of the Platform. This is a theme that ICSW will be able to contribute to, both at European and at global level.

Policy statements

Our German member organisation *Deutscher Verein für private und öffentliche Fürsorge* has recently produced two position papers to address current European issues. These position papers deal with respectively the Berlin Declaration on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the European Union, and with the green paper of the European Commission on the adaptation of labour law to ensure flexibility and security for all.

The position papers are in German. They can be downloaded here and are also available on the European region page of the ICSW website:

<http://www.icsw.org/regions/regions-europe/>

a. [Contribution to the Berlin Declaration](#) (PDF, 27 Kb)

b. [Comment on the Green paper of the European Commission ? Adapting labour law to ensure flexibility and security for all?](#) (PDF, 31 Kb)

Towns, Housing and great Poverty

By Marie-Noelle Cottet-Plantavid

Several European countries have been confronted with problematic and unhealthy neighbourhoods, which are often the living quarters of vulnerable people living in difficult social circumstances and in great poverty.

The group of International NGOs of the Council of Europe wanted to focus on the question of these unhealthy neighbourhoods, following up a strong concern of the Council of Europe. Subgroups have been formed regarding the following issues: cities, poverty, health, North-South dialogue.

The idea is to develop a multidisciplinary approach of the subject and to put in place the necessary synergy between International NGOs that have undertaken work in the field of housing and its various components.

The first effort will be concentrated essentially on urban and architectural aspects, but the members present at the meeting insisted on including social factors and taking account of the expectations of residents. The International NGOs – of which ICSW is one – have been invited to share their approaches, their aims and their work, so that their experiences can be combined, after a diagnostic phase, to lead to concrete proposals for a variety of activities that take into account the housing context and the profiles of the residents.

Comments on this subject can be sent to the representative of ICSW in the Council of Europe INGO group, Marie-Noelle Cottet-Plantavid (mncp@laposte.net)

Publications

The New Social Europe

Poul Nyrop Rasmussen and Jacques Delors wrote a report on the New Social Europe project of the Party of European Socialists, in which they recommend a new common direction for the welfare societies of the European Union. The report offers ten principles for the future, a roadmap, a strategic framework for reviewing, rethinking and reforming the European Social Model in its many different versions with the purpose of ensuring the survival of the values of solidarity, inclusion and social justice for all.

Information: www.pes.org / info@pes.org

Challenge Europe 16

Europe@50: back to the future

The European Policy Centre has published an issue of Challenge Europe that focuses on the 50th birthday of the European Union. The issue looks back to the progress made over the past 50 years in the building of Europe. Leading politicians, academics and commentators wrote

a series of thought-provoking essays on the past, present and future of the Union, arrayed as answers to three questions: How did the EU get this far, how can the deadlock over the constitutional treaty be broken, and where is the EU going?

The publication can be found on the EPC website: www.epc.eu under "publications"
<http://www.epc.eu/en/pub.asp?TYP=TEWN&LV=187&see=y&t=&PG=TEWN/EN/detailpub&l=12&AI=554>

Colophon

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