

Małgorzata Zielińska

Faculty of Social Sciences
University of Gdańsk

m.zielinska@ug.edu.pl

SOCIAL PEDAGOGY, PLACE AND MIGRATION: THE CASE OF POLISH MIGRANTS IN REYKJAVIK

Recently, studying relations between people and places has gained more interest among social researchers (Edwards & Usher, 2007; Tuan, 2001; Mendel, 2006), establishing such pedagogical approaches as, for example, critical pedagogy of place (Greenwood, 2003). However, there is still little research about how the focus on place can be reconciled with increased international migration (Jayanandhan, 2009). Contrary to the multicultural approach, prevalent in researching migrants' relation with the native population, the framework of the pedagogy of place allows one to focus on migrants' relation with not only other people inhabiting the area, but also with other elements of places, such as nature, culture and myths and economy.

Using this perspective, I am looking at broadly understood social pedagogy, including adult education, socio-cultural animation and social work programs implemented in Reykjavik. One goal is to see if these programs can have a potential of influencing migrants' relation to the city. The other – to see if different conceptions about places in migrants' lives may influence the way social pedagogy works. In my research conducted in Reykjavik and neighbouring towns, I am looking at the life of Polish migrants – the biggest ethnic minority group in Iceland, constituting almost half of all foreigners in the country. The community is not only relatively big, but also diverse when it comes to class, age, gender and foreign language skills.

The paper will be based on qualitative research conducted in 2009 and 2010. The study included:

4. an ethnographic observation of migrants' life in Reykjavik,
5. interviews with representatives of public institutions, such as: labour unions, job centres, career counseling, the Red Cross, social services, an institution working with alcohol problems, and lifelong learning centres.
6. semi-structured and audio-recorded interviews with 34 adult migrants from Poland who had been living in Iceland for at least one year.

The results show that there were some socio-cultural animation programs in Reykjavik related to the integration of different society groups and to showing Icelandic history to migrants. Adult education institutions, however, as well as job centres' representatives focused mostly on migrants' learning of the Icelandic language, which was seen as the most important element of one's adaptation to the new place. Some social workers pointed also to misunderstandings and mutual distrust resulting from communication problems. Migrants, on the other hand, often felt that the language was too difficult to learn, but they were interested in many other elements of their new place of living, such as nature or new leisure activities and hobbies.

Apart from the language barrier, there were also misunderstandings related to how much help it was socially accepted to ask for, and what the role of various institutions was. What is more, most social work and educational institutions prepared migrants to be in one place – in Iceland, while for many of my respondents it was more important to gain competences that could be transferred to other places, if they choose to leave the country. None of my respondents had decided to stay in Iceland forever, but at the same time, most had not decided when they were going to leave either. Moreover, neither people, nor money were bound to any specific place, with some exceptions during the peak of the crisis. Some migrants even transferred the financial support they got from Icelandic social services, to their families elsewhere.

Finally, strong gender differences were found both in the way people bonded with places, and in the work of socio-pedagogical institutions in general. These differences were based both on migrants' traditional family structures, where men were supposed to sustain the family economically, and on the division of societal roles in Iceland. Most of the people who invited migrants to come to the country were men working for private companies, while those who worked with migrants later on – social workers, counselors and educators – were women. In times of the financial crisis and high unemployment, gender differences between social workers and social work beneficiaries became even stronger.

References:

Edwards, R., Usher, R. 2007: *Globalisation and Pedagogy: Space, Place and Identity* (2. ed.), London: Routledge

Gruenewald, D.A. 2003: The Best of Both Worlds: A Critical Pedagogy of Place. *Educational Researcher*, 32(4), 3-12

Jayanandhan, S.R. 2009: John Dewey and a Pedagogy of Place. *Philosophical Studies in Education*, 40, 104-112

Mendel, M. (Ed.) 2006: *Pedagogika miejsca [Pedagogy of place]*, Wrocław: Wydawnictwo Naukowe DSWE

Tuan, Y--Fu 2001: *Space and Place* (Reprint.), Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.