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## Social pedagogues as migrants' companions in acculturation, integration and social inclusion

### KEYWORDS

social pedagogue, migrations, discourse, integration, inclusion

### ABSTRACT

Marta Pietrusińska, *Social pedagogues as migrants companions in socio-cultural adaptation, integration and inclusion*. Culture – Society – Education no. 2(18) 2020, Poznań 2020, pp. 263–274, Adam Mickiewicz University Press. ISSN 2300-0422. DOI 10.14746/kse.2020.18.10.2.

Increased migration to Poland and at the same time an increase in anti-immigrant attitudes cause that social pedagogues face a new challenge related to the integration and inclusion of migrants. In the article I focus on a transformation of social pedagogues roles due to the mentioned above social changes and new challenges – the discourse the introduces symbolic violence, learned helplessness and lack of agency of migrants, and the insufficient number of social pedagogues with intercultural and andragogical competence. Based on these difficulties faced by social pedagogues I describe what could be their role in the process of integration of migrants and the host society.

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### Trends and changes related to migration to Poland

In 2016, for the first time in decades, Poland has become a country with a positive net migration rate, which means that more people come to the country than leave it (Czakon-Tralski, Kłóska, 2018: 74–75). This is undoubtedly a social challenge that needs to be addressed, despite the fact that external migrations to Po-

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land are not a new phenomenon. Since the 1990s Polish migration strategy has been shaped by international policy, mainly the migration policy of the European Union (Łazor, 2016) thus in public narratives vision of open, inclusive society, where migrants are seen as enriching element has been created. However, year 2015 brought a significant discursive shift caused by a moral panic an outcome of so-called migration crisis (Kubicki et al., 2017) (e.g. mass influx of refugees and immigrants to Europe in 2015 and subsequent years); war in Ukraine; and significant political changes in Poland itself (Rajca, 2015). Apart from this, the so-called migration crisis was misused by growing propaganda that have used the migration policy as a tool for geopolitical negotiations and an internal political struggle. In consequence the discourse on migrants, especially refugees, became anti-migratory (Pietrusińska, 2018), and the state's migration policy was primarily focused on the contestation of EU policies (Adamczyk, 2017), ensuring security by closing borders, reducing a scale of immigration (Ziętek, 2017), and striving to assimilate migrants residing in Poland. As a result the rise of nationalism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, antisemitism (Kopiński, Hasen, 2016; Hall, Mikulska-Jolles, 2016; Pasamonik, 2017) in public discourse is noticeable. What is more, immigrants and refugees, as well as their integration, began to be seen through a prism of securitization – as for threat to the society (Leszkowicz-Baczyński, 2017; Ziętek, 2017; Pietrusińska, 2018).

Whereas Łodziński and Szonert indicate with some optimism that since 2015 the Polish migration policy: “has become more and more *socialized*, going to a regional and local level” (2016: 32). The government's actions provoked contestation not only by institutionalized entities (mainly local authorities and non-governmental organisations), but also ordinary citizens who began to actively engage in grassroots initiatives for migrants such as Refugees Welcome, Noise for Refugees, Chlebem i Solą and Inicjatywa Obywatelska WELCOME.

In response to the growing number of migrants, in 2019 the Polish government made attempt to create a new national migration and integration policy. The document regarding those issues had been prepared by the Zespół ds. Migracji (2019), but its gained very negative feedback from the academic community and non-governmental organizations that works in the area of migrations as well as from local governments. The draft paper was withdrawn and as a result in 2020 Poland has not have a national migration policy, and decisions in this area are made *ad hoc*, depending on the needs of the authorities. Many local governments were questioning the government's non-existing policy and has introduced their own denouements of migration and integration policies. An example may be the “Declaration on the cooperation between the cities of the Polish metropolitan union

in the field of migration” signed by the presidents of 12 Polish cities (Warszawa, Białystok, Gdańsk, Poznań, Kraków, Katowice, Lublin, Łódź, Szczecin, Wrocław, Rzeszów). In the Declaration presidents committed themselves, supported by the International Organization for Migration and the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), to co-operate with the „governmental administration, non-governmental organizations and religious associations in the development and implementation of Polish migration policy, based on a migration management of safe migration” (Declaration..., 2017: 1). As the effect of this action and similar activities on the local scale the emergence of a parallel migration and integration policy is visible. Not only is there a clear discrepancy between this policy at the central and local level, but also the importance of locality for the integration process is strengthened and emphasized. This approach change, forced by government's anti-migrants policy, has opened the space for social pedagogues, animators, educators to work with migrants in the spirit of civic democracy, empowerment, agency, respect and locality. According to this approach, local authorities take responsibility for the acculturation<sup>1</sup> of migrants, their socio-cultural adaptation<sup>2</sup>, integration<sup>3</sup> and social inclusion<sup>4</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Acculturation is “a one-way and linear process analogous to socialization, but concerning the absorption of a culture other than that in which an individual was brought up” (Grzymała-Kazłowska, 2008: 40). During this process, the individual gains or not new linguistic and cultural competences and normative orientations characteristic of the dominant group (Cieślukowska, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> In the term “socio-cultural adaptation”, the emphasis is primarily on the survival (biological, social and cultural) of an individual in the new society. Contrary to acculturation which desired effect is “correct” (functioning in accordance with the norms) functioning in the new society, adaptation consists rather in an effective adaptation to new conditions of the socio-cultural environment, but not necessarily in accordance with general norms. Socio-cultural adaptation aims to develop the most efficient way of coping with the new reality, while satisfying one's needs and maintaining mental balance (Pietrusińska, 2012).

<sup>3</sup> Integration is one of the acculturation strategies, resulting in both a positive evaluation of biculturalism, the transformation of an individual's identity by adding to the already existing normative structures new laws, principles and values characteristic to the host culture and the acquisition of competences related to bilingualism and biculturalism (Berry, 1997). Integration takes place on the basis of long-term, positive ethnic relationships and results, on individual level, in the emergence of a sense of cultural community with the members of the host society. Integration should not be confused with assimilation, which means completely accepting the culture of the dominant group as one's own while rejecting the entire culture of origin. The term assimilation is often used in anti-immigration, xenophobic and exclusion discourse (Gapich, 2016).

<sup>4</sup> Social inclusion is a process which ensures that those at risk of poverty and social exclusion gain the opportunities and resources necessary to participate fully in economic, social, political and cultural life and to enjoy a standard of living that is considered normal in the society in which they live. It ensures that they have greater participation in decision making which affects their lives and access to their fundamental rights (Commission of the European Communities, 2003: 9). While integration takes place on the individual level, inclusion is a collective process in which members of

## Challenges in front of social pedagogues working with migrants

According to official data of the Office for Foreigners in 2019, 368 085 adults and 39 909 minors have valid documents permitting their stay in Poland, and 1293 adults and 973 minors have applied for international protection ([migracje.gov.pl](http://migracje.gov.pl))<sup>5</sup>. Despite the fact that the number of children is almost ten times smaller than that of adults, most educational projects and activities that mainly involves the formal education system is dedicated to the first group. What is more, the topic of educational actions for adult migrants is not sufficiently described in the Polish literature concerning integration and inclusion of this group. This is a result of different approach of state authorities towards this matter. A change could be visible only from 2015 when Polish migration and integrations policy started to be shaped mainly by local authorities. Together with this shift the issue of migrating adults' integration and inclusion has emerged.

The changes in educational environments and, consequently, new working conditions for social pedagogues are primarily rooted in the pro-immigrant (and in fact pro-refugees) discourse, which is a response to anti-immigrant narratives that appeared in Poland after 2015. Pro-refugee narratives are constructed out of attitude of solidarity and compassion towards refugees (Kopiński, Hansen, 2016; Pietrusińska, 2018). Nevertheless, the refugee is presented here as a helpless person, surrendering to the fate, in a difficult (dramatic) life situation – a situation of war, which is described in such terms as: tragedy, escape, bombing, toil, insecurity, lack of autonomy, feeling of loss<sup>6</sup>. At the same time, this discursive figure of refugee force a moral obligation towards refugees to Westerners, who should support and protect vulnerable groups. Europeans appear there as a kind of saviors. They are more civilized and more competent, they know how to solve problems and they decide about the fate of the refugees who come to their countries. Hence, in this image the asymmetry of relations between refugees and the host society is clearly visible (Pietrusińska, 2020).

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two or more groups collaborate and negotiate values, norms and ways of their expression, at the end resulting in creation in the public forum a new quality.

<sup>5</sup> The number of foreigners reside in Poland is higher because the number of people provided by the Office does not include undocumented migrants, persons who have applied for extension of stay, but have already expired documents authorizing them to stay on Polish territory, persons residing on Polish territory on the basis of visas or migrants from other EU countries.

<sup>6</sup> This image of refugees has function in the Polish public discourse for years (Hadzińska-Wyrobek, 2011), however it was not so intense as it is nowadays.

Symbolic violence and asymmetry of relations are connected to each other (Farjoudon, Morales, 2012). For instance, this is clearly visible in position of refugees in humanitarianism (humanitarian regime) which is based on two principles – protection and assistance (Bouju, Ayimpam, 2015). These two standards, not only on discourse, but also in real humanitarian activities, introduce asynchronous relations between humanitarian agencies and forced migrants, in which the latter are completely dependent on the former. Moreover, these relations reveal symbolic violence, but also very real violence compared by Mark Duffield (2004) to Foucauldian biopolitics. As for migrants in general, they must adapt to the conditions of the new country, accept its rules, laws, customs, language, traditions – different perceptions of the world. People who work with migrants are a kind of gatekeepers, but also their guardians, as on their decision depends what and how people with migration experience will learn, and how their acculturation and socio-cultural adaptation will proceed. In such a relationship, migrants are rather passive recipients of the existing reality. What's more, it depends on the model of intergroup relations leading in the host society (multiculturalism, cultural melting pot, segregation, exclusion) whether the acculturation strategies of individual foreigners will be able to achieve a positive effect in the form of integration (Berry, 1997)<sup>7</sup>.

Symbolic violence is also visible when diverse integration and educational activities, meetings, workshops and festivities are organized mainly by NGOs. During this kind of events selected cultures are presented through national dishes, costumes, dances, music, and art are organize and promote by natives (eg. Wielokulturowe Street Party). Unfortunately “this type of activity is often referred to as *cepelia*” by migrants (Diouf, Średziński, 2012: 5). This kind of actions can mislead and can be understood as the kind of message that triggers stereotypical and neocolonial images about migrants, their countries of origin, and does not really integrate foreigners and native residents. Opposite, they strengthen the ontological distance between them, as the “Other” presented through stereotypes and simplifying discursive motives, becomes an “Alien”, or “foreign object to be tamed” (Walczak, 2006: 134).

Such discourse and actions as likewise based on the lack of empowerment and agency of foreigners. It can mainly results from migration itself, especially in the context of refugees. Acculturative stress – an emotional response to a change in the culture of residence connected to many stressors<sup>8</sup> (Berry, 1997: 30) – often causes

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<sup>7</sup> John Berry (1997) described four acculturation strategies – marginalization, separation, assimilation and integration.

<sup>8</sup> There are number of significant stressors that are likely to be pervasive, intense, and lifelong such as: cultural shock (new and different laws, values, traditions, ways of behavior, cuisine), language, financial issues, discrimination, alienation and isolation, homesick (Gebregergis, 2018).

learned helplessness and leaned dependency, depression, anxiety, lower self-esteem, identity problems and loss of autonomy (Boekestijn, 1988; Telzer, Vazquez, 2009; Gembala, 2010; Kubitsky, 2012; Gebregergis, 2018). All this take away migrants' agency. They become dependent on members of receiving society as well as members of previous migration waves, which makes them passive, obedient and not engaged.

Their voice, regarding also educational activities towards themselves and their diasporas, is rarely taken into account. Following Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1988) concept of the subaltern, which also includes migrants it has to stressed that pro-migrants institutions and organizations are silencing the them by forcing their "help" upon them. Putting aside the huge problem of unequal power structures, one of the problems is the lack of insight and understanding of what the problems really are and if there even is a will to be "saved" coming from the subalterns themselves. By speaking for the subaltern, animators, social workers, educators, social pedagogues ignore the question of audibility, representation and agency. In this way they consolidate their power, the power of dominant group and further muting the minorities. When migrants remain silent, those who work with them often behave (usually unconsciously) in a paternalistic way. That also implies that adult migrants often are treated and taught as they would be children. Moreover, until recently many organizations and institutions that helps foreigners considered migrants socio-cultural adaptation process as completed, if the foreigner could communicate in Polish and was be able to function in everyday reality. As a result, migrants were not prepared to fully and actively participate in society, i.e. to speak out in a public debate on the interests of their diaspora or to combat discrimination and exclusion.

## **Role of social pedagogues in the multicultural society**

In an article from 2012, Agnieszka Naumiuk described, in relation to social changes in Bauman's fluid modernity, new tasks that social pedagogues whom she described as animators of changes in the environment, face (Naumiuk, 2012). Although she postulated to continue to follow the voice of Helena Radlińska and "transform the present day with human strength in the name of ideals" (Naumiuk, 2012: 42), at the same time she presented ideas that extend the role of social pedagogues, which in year 2020 are one of the leading directions of work in this group. Referring to this catalog of social pedagogues' roles, I will try to show what difficulties they are exposed to in the context of work with migrants, and at the same time I will present my own proposals for overcoming these challenges.

One of Naumiuk's first postulates is to build a partnership approach in the relationship between individuals (e.g. migrants) and social pedagogues, the "watchman of subjectivity" (Naumiuk, 2012: 42) as she referred to them. The hegemony of pro-immigrant discourse objectifies migrants and deprives them of agency and decision-making (Pietrusińska, 2020). At the same time same discourse makes difficult for social pedagogues to liberate from their role as "all-knowing individuals who provide help and care", even though it provides much faster way to achieve the "correct" acculturation effect among the people they take care. However the discourse is oppressive towards migrants at the same time, it and build learned helplessness and relieves them from a responsibility for their acculturation and integration process, as well as in the later stages of inclusion.

A way out from this narrative clinch may be space for empowerment activities from the very first meeting, e.g. by allowing a person with a migration experience to choose the social educator they would like to work with. Such small emancipatory acts for which non-developed linguistic and cultural competences are needed, could be starting point for longterm process of building one's agency and decision-making competences.

Naumiuk also describes the social educator as "the watchman [...] of activity centered on managing one's own life" (Naumiuk, 2012: 42). According to this idea, social pedagogues should be the people who accompany migrants in their self-development from the beginning of acculturation until inclusion. The situation where the public discourse consolidates the asymmetry of both and imposes on social pedagogues the responsibility for "correct" guidance of people with migration experience through the acculturation process, it is difficult to achieve power-relation balance. In such relation, there is no space for the agency of migrants and for allowing them to make decisions about their own socio-cultural adaptation, integration or inclusion.

To escape from this "discursive trap" social pedagogues may tend to see themselves as guides rather than as the guardians. To present it in a metaphorical way one may say, that social pedagogues, like the guardians, know the aim of acculturation and inclusion, but rather than keep to one and only path to achieve it, as would guardians do, they let migrants to explore their individual way and only indicate possible challenges.

Another, important perspective for this article, is Naumiuk's postulate to connect three forms of work – with an individual, with a group and with the local community – in social pedagogues practices (Naumiuk, 2012). This is, *inter alia*, to facilitate and animate intercultural relations between migrants and members of the host society. The task of pedagogues is to bridge migrants and "hosts" by ex-

posing them on “strangeness” and “otherness”, as well as presenting them to each other. This should ultimately should lead to inclusion and the creation of a new quality in their social relations. According to this approach, not only migrants but also members of the host society learn from each other and through these contacts, they increase their intercultural competences and rebuild the communities in which they live. However, it is difficult to facilitate such contacts if one of the parties remains “mute” and “subordinated” – both due to the lack of faith in their own strength and possibilities on the part of migrants, as well as neocolonial and stereotypical ideas about them on the part of the dominant society.

Such actions are possible, for example, when there are spaces where migrants can feel ‘heard’, ‘respected’ and safe<sup>9</sup>. Multicultural Center (Centrum Wielokulturowe) in Warsaw or European Solidarity Center (Europejskie Centrum Solidarności) in Gdańsk are good examples of such places. Also Local Activity Centers (Miejsca Aktywności Lokalnej) provide space where migrants and automatons can meet on daily bases and integrate just by staying together. For instance in Multicultural Center migrants engage by sharing their knowledge and skills during an events and activities which they organize (e.g. English conversations with the Bom). By playing the role of “teachers”, hosts foreigners strengthen their language skills, but also expand their social capital. Because the active role of migrants that is crucial, social pedagogues and animators ought to be only co-creators and co-hosts of such places.

Another way break the “silence” may be to facilitation of conflicts conducted by social pedagogue. A conflict can have a significant and positive impact on social change if it is properly moderated, and the strengths of the groups participating in it are balanced by an external factor, which may be a social educator. As Kund Illeris (2006) claims learning is most effective in situations of external or internal conflict, also understood as cognitive dissonance. The individual must go beyond his/her current patterns of action and thinking. This process can take place in two ways: during a long-term adaptation or during shorter intensive activities. As a result of critical reflection, the learning process takes place, and thus changes occur within the learner’s self and in the surrounding environment. Conflict, as a critical situation, may, therefore, release the resources of subjectivity and agency that lie dormant in “mute” migrants and migrants.

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<sup>9</sup> During research about cultural participation in Warsaw of Ukrainian students, one of the interviewed person when asked about ideal cultural institution said: “It should be such place that non Polish nationalist couldn’t drop by”.



In her article, Naumiuk also writes about reflectivity as an important competence of social pedagogues. It allows a systematic self-assessment of one's actions, including, *inter alia*, systematic development and adaptation of professional competences to the needs of individuals and groups with whom one works (Szymczak, 2009). From my many years of experience in working with and for migrants, I have also know that only some practitioners working with adult immigrants and refugees have andragogical or intercultural competences. This is due to the fact that for many years adult migrants have rarely been the target group for inclusive activities, which resulted in the lack of demand for specialists with such competences.

Therefore, with the currently changing approach towards working with migrants (Pietrusińska, 2019), it is worth to acquire andragogical knowledge and intercultural competences (Bandach, 2018). While nowadays workshops or courses strengthening the knowledge, skills and attitudes related to multicultural and intercultural communication are much more common than activities strengthening the competences related to learning of adults, I would like to devote a this part of this article to them.

When discussing the andragogic ramification of migration, it is worth noting that adults learn differently than children and young people (Kazimierska et al., 2014) First of all, adults cannot be forced to learn – it must be their autonomous decision. Secondly, they usually quite clearly define the goals of their learning process and want to see the adequacy of acquired knowledge, skills or changing attitudes to their needs. Thirdly, adults also base their learning on their own experiences, knowledge and skills and refer to them during the education process. Therefore, when working with adult migrants, it is worth referring to andragogic sources. Strengthening entire communities (not just migrants themselves), could be achieved by using andragogic inspirations such as: transformative learning (Mezirow, 2003), learning through experience (Jarvis, 2006, 2009), situational learning (Lave, Wenger, 1991), service learning (Eyler, Giles, 1999), biographical learning (Alheit, 2009) based on the traditions of local community education (Johnson, 2003) and radical education (Brookfield, 2005) can support the empowerment of migrants<sup>10</sup>. At the same time, these approaches can also be successfully used by educators in building multicultural, coherent local communities based on democratic principles.

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<sup>10</sup> In this article I only mention this significant in my opinion andragogic concepts, however I develop this topic in my other article about adult migrant education and integration (Pietrusińska, 2019).

## Conclusion

Social pedagogues in Poland who work with migrants face diverse challenges due to mixture of increased migrants' flow (especially from Ukraine), anti-migrants policy on the governmental level and pro-migrant discourse that introduces inequalities, shape passive migrants with lack of agency and decision-making competences and pedagogues own insufficient multicultural and andragogic competences. All this create complex social context in which they have to redefine their own professional roles. They face multiple difficulties such as unbalanced power relation structure between them and people with migration experience and "mute, subordinate" migrants – both due to pro-migrant discourse stereotypical and neocolonial figures and themes; symbolic violence driven from humanitarian regime; and lack of opportunities to develop their andragogic and multicultural competences. However, it can be possible for them to overcome those challenges by aware reshaping their task and roles as social pedagogues and become "watchmen of subjectivity and of activity centered on managing one's own life" and guide to the integration and social inclusion rather than stay the guardian and protector of the acculturation process.

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