

From 22nd till 24th January, the final Workshops and Seminars of interdiac Pilot Module “Social Inclusion, Participation and Diaconia” took place in Český Těšín. Even though this was the very last meeting of this module and the main focus was on integration of the knowledge and experience gained during the last five months, examination and evaluation, still there was space for new input dealing with empowerment and anti-oppressive approaches. The group of ten participants from five countries was led by lecturers from Great Britain, Latvia, Ukraine and Czech Republic. We were also very happy to welcome a pastor from Serbia, a husband of our regular participant. At the end of the weekend, the director outlined the plans for interdiac in the coming months and years.

The First Day

The first day has begun with welcome and practical information about the whole weekend programme. The participants and the lecturers have met again after two months, so it was very important to remind the process they went through from the last meeting. For this **personal orientation** the method of Islands of feelings was used. On the flipcharts, there were several islands drawn down. Each island was named by a feeling or emotion, such as stressed, excited, happy, bored, satisfied, tired, relaxed etc. There were also some islands without any name. The participants then marked their journey from the last workshops and seminars till this moment, they could also name the empty island to better fit their feelings. The journey of each participant was unique, but in the end, everyone felt some satisfaction with their own work, stress from the upcoming exam, happiness and sadness as knowing they will have to say good bye.

The **group building** is regarded extremely important, so it was again a part of the programme. This activity had two aims: to help the participants feel connected; and to outline the topic of new input – anti-oppression and empowerment. The participants were developing a story of an oppressed person, young lady with HIV. She was being connected to another people around her on a personal, group, community and structural level with a string. Thus a net was created which helped the participants to better understand, how the oppressed person feels and what might be wrong in the system of help.

As the practice placement is a part of this study module, enough space has been given for **sharing placement experiences**. These three questions were answered by the participants individually and then discussed in small groups: a) What were the most important parts of the “story” of your placement and what challenges and surprises did you face? b) What were the most important learning points for you, personally and professionally? c) How do you want to follow up the placement – learning to do what; doing what? It was very nice to see the great development of the participants, listen to their unique stories, to find out what they have learned and to help them finding a way how to follow up.

As it was already mentioned, the **examination** was one of the key moments of this meeting. The exam focused on three topics: social work methods, globalisation and diaconia. It was the Open book exam, so the participants could use any relevant study materials to answer the questions, but the stress was on integration of the knowledge and their practice experiences. After the exam, the participants could express their thoughts and feelings in the **open forum**. Most of them mentioned that this was the very first time they were doing this type of exam and they actually liked it more than the “normal” exams. Some of them would prefer oral examination, others to have the exam divided into more days and that they were tired after three hours of intense thinking and writing. In the end they all felt relieved and happy, even though some were concerned if their answers will be satisfying. We have to say that all the participants have done a great work and they all passed the exam.

The last part of the day usually belongs to the **evaluation**. This time the animal or colour evaluation was chosen. The participants described their feeling either with a colour or an animal or both and explained why they feel this way. The answers were very similar to the open forum, and the participants expressed happiness, tiredness and relief.

The Second Day

Almost whole second day was dedicated to very important, new input about **Empowerment and Anti-Oppressive approaches**. The empowerment has been introduced as a process by which persons, groups or communities become able to take control of their circumstances and achieve their goals; thereby they will be enabled to maximise the quality of their lives. Lecturers and participants discussed that empowerment can be also understood as a process

of emancipation or transformation, a process of 're-moralising' or controlling people or as an increasing participation or emphasising consumer driven social services. Some concepts associated with empowerment have been outlined and their use has been discussed. Participants then thought about two different approaches to practice: technical rationality, which may be dis-empowering, and reflective practice, which on the other hand may be very empowering. Enough time has been given to the participants to personally examine their own practice and think about what aspects of each approach they use and how does it work, and then to share it with the others. It was very nice to see that they were able to reflect on their practice and to think about the possible consequences of their work.

The second part about the empowerment focused on the steps to self empowerment, which is crucial for all helping professionals. It was expressed that we cannot work with people in an empowering way, if we are not empowered ourselves. To put this into practice, the learners were asked to draw their portrait on a sheet of paper and on the other side to write five words that describe them the best, and to define and write down their five strengths. During the sharing it came out that it was not that easy for everyone to name their qualities, so the importance of self empowerment was underlined. In the end the portraits have been posted on a wall and all the participants could positively comment on them and thus encourage their colleagues. The importance of assertiveness was also emphasized in a group exercise.

The closing session on empowerment concentrated on the empowerment process itself. Empowerment can be used on personal, group and community level. Empowering persons includes overcoming classical barriers, accompanying learnt behaviours and often involves self-help group work to overcome low self-esteem, inability to trust, feeling of ineffectuality, or lack of assertiveness. Empowering work with groups may be user led, which is integral to the social work organisation and sponsored wholly or partly by it; self help, which can be facilitated by a social or community worker but independent on the employing agency; or autonomous and organised by those facing a common issue. Empowering community development work aims to bring about social change, social innovation and justice by working with communities of place or interest to identify their needs, opportunities, rights and responsibilities; plan, organise and take action; and evaluate the effectiveness and impact of the action in ways which challenge oppression and tackle inequalities. To connect this new input with practice, the participants developed a toolbox of methods and

techniques that may be used in a real work, and than they worked in a groups on different cases. They performed a role play about their case and gained important feedback from their colleagues and lecturers.

In the last session of the day, which focused on **integrating study and experience** on a professional level, the participants thought about their understanding of what does it mean to be a social or community worker with a diaconal approach. The participants described how their perception and understanding of their **professional service model** had changed during the study module, and what are the characteristics of professionalism for them as diaconal social workers. They also thought about how this model is implemented in their concrete practice or how it can be implemented in future. Produced ideas will be used by interdiac in its further work and projects.

In the **evaluation** of the day, the learners were asked about a tool or knowledge they find very useful, about a situation or idea that made them happy and about any questions or inconveniences. They wrote their answers on a post-it and than share it with the others on a flipchart. As very useful and interesting they found the toolbox they has created; the empowerment concepts; importance of self empowerment and assertive communication. They felt very happy after the exercise with their portraits and comments from colleagues. The participants mentioned some questions about their practice and role plays, which inspired them for further self development.

In the evening, the learners, lecturers and other interdiac workers met again to spend some more time together. In the informal settings everyone received wishes, news and feedback from the group. It was also time to say good bye to some members of the group, who had to leave before the end.

The Third Day

It has become almost a tradition to begin Sunday with common Agape with worship and breakfast. This time it was the same and all the participants enjoyed it very much. In the first session of the day we had continued in **integrating study and experience**, this time on a personal level, **personal service model**. The learners focused on personal understanding of what service means for them as a part of life and how that had changed during the module.

They were thinking about what values and dispositions, which shape their everyday life, they had become aware during last five months and what did they learn about the influence they have on their understanding and practice of service. They were encouraged to consider the relation of their personal values and dispositions to their view of professional practice and their actual professional practice. They managed to distinguish personal and professional service model and to deeply reflect on their inner values, motivations and dispositions.

As these were the last workshops and seminars of the interdiac pilot module, special attention has been given to the **evaluation** of the whole module. It has been done in written form divided into five parts. First part focused on the content asked a) about evaluation of the content in areas of Diaconal social work (concepts and methods); Social analysis and situation analysis; Exclusion, globalisation, diversity and other social and political concepts; and Theology and ethics.; b) about the new knowledge and skills gained from the module; and c) about the knowledge and skills the learners would like the organisers to include. Second part was concentrating on the structure of the study module, on its division into so called Contact teachings and Practice placement, organisation of logistics, process, practice placement and tasks related to it, personal and technical support (e.g. Blackboard system). In the third section the learners expressed what was the impact of the module on their faith or spiritual life. Fourth part focused on each lecturer individually, the quality of his or her input, used methods and relationship towards the learners. The lecturers could receive mark out of five and comments. The goal of the last section was to receive the overall evaluation of the whole pilot study module "Social Inclusion, Participation and Diaconia". First of all the participants graded the worth of their participation on a scale from minus five to plus five and explained their grading. They were asked to find out the most beneficial gain and also the least significant aspect of this process. The last questions focused on their interest in participating similar modules in the future and on their recommendation to others. We were very happy to receive very positive feedback and evaluation with some interesting ideas for our further development. It was also nice to see once again, what the participants learned during the whole programme.

The last but one part of the day was a **Good bye** technique, in which all the participants were given a sheet of paper, on which they wrote Where they are going now, What are they going to do there, What are they looking forward and What are they fears. They also wrote What

did they pack for this journey and What they could not fit into their suitcase. After a short personal work, they shared it with a group in a non formal setting in a circle on a floor.

The final part of the programme belonged to the interdiac director, who shortly reminded the whole pilot module journey and outlined the **next steps for interdiac** beginning with Consultations on Social Exclusion in Central and Eastern Europe in March 2010, and continuing with Mobile workshops in Serbia and Georgia in 2010, and preparation of bachelor study programme for 2011.