

Preface

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The International Consortium for Social Development (ICSD), a network of practitioners, scholars and students in social work and social development professions, was founded by the Swedish Sociologist Harald Swedner in 1979. ICSD has a strong focus on peace, justice and social development. Its main vision is to create a community for research, practice and international discourses in the field of community work, social development and peace confronting the social challenges of our time: economic crisis, climate crisis and problems connected to migration.

The Economic crisis is heavily affecting the growing group of poor people all over Europe. The unemployment rate especially youth unemployment in several European countries is about 50%. Families are being thrown out of their houses and the increasing inequalities between the poor and the rich is evident in all countries with liberal economic ideologies. Inequality and social exclusion create social conflicts and are becoming more and more overwhelming. Social work and social economy gain new importance under these conditions.

The Climate crisis: The ecological challenges have grown both in the global climate changes, global warming and the chemical pollution and toxic substances in our food and close environment. Ecological questions are also social questions and there is a connection between social and ecological problem, or better: social and ecological justice. The economic crisis in Europe and the environmental crisis have the same roots, namely a focus on short-term gain at the expense of long-term sustainability. People living in poverty lack the means to cope with environmental changes, as they have

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less access to the material goods and education, livelihoods, health, safe housing, infrastructure, services etc.

Problems connected to migration: A growing islamophobia connected with ideas of Eurabia, sionism and antisemitism makes up a part of the same picture. Migration due to increased inequalities, the destruction of traditional livelihood and growing poverty creates tensions in places where people are not used to multiculturalism.

The question of peace: Building peace is closely linked to the way we treat oppressed and disadvantaged people of our societies. The link between social work, social development and peace should always be emphasized. Community development, social work and education are critical factors in peace building and terrorism prevention.

In autumn 2012 the European Branch of the International Consortium for Social Development (ICSD) met at the Free University of Bolzano, South Tyrol for an international conference about Democracy and Social Development. A broad understanding of participation, especially of disadvantaged persons and groups was the leading idea of this conference and it is the main focus of this volume with contributions of authors, most of them members of ICSD.

Work in the area of social development, community organizing, education and social economy involves breaking down external and internal barriers to participation in all sectors of society and build up the capacities of those who are excluded from decision processes and access to resources. Vandana Shiva (2006) defines participation as based on multidimensional and multifunctional expressions of creativity and productivity in humans and nature. In all societies, even those that require participation, groups like socioeconomic disadvantaged or handicapped people, children, migrants or elderly are systematically excluded from participation because of the combined effect of various barriers. In addition, marginalized groups often experience these barriers, perceived or real, such as being made to feel unwelcome, ignored,

discounted or being not understood and even endangered because they are present.

Reference

Shiva, V. (2006). *Earth Democracy: Justice, Sustainability and Peace*. London: Zed Books.

