

Foreword of the publishers

We are offering a fourth yearly issue of STEPP for your kind attention. This issue is quite special. It contains texts related to two events important for social work and social welfare policy. These events were really important for the Vilnius University, but it would not be too ambitious to say that they were important for the whole Lithuania as well.

One of the events was an international conference “Equal Opportunities for Individuals, Groups and Nations” that took place at Vilnius university on 14th–16th June 2007.

Another one was small anniversaries. Fifteen years have passed after the studies of social work were started at Vilnius University, and ten years have passed after the Department of Social Work was founded at VU.

This issue of STEPP is dedicated to celebrate the above mentioned occasions.

The international conference was organized by VU Department of Social Work, together with the European Region branch of the International Council on Social Welfare (ICSW). This organization was founded in 1928 and currently represents national and local organizations from more than 50 countries. The main mission of ICSW is to support such forms of social and economical development that try to reduce poverty in the world. The organization tries to influence the world development by such means as publications, consultations at the international and local level, work of experts, and organization of conferences. ICSW noticed that social development is far from smooth in Central and Eastern Europe that became free of oppression, and for the first time suggested to organize a conference in this region.

The faculty of the Department of Social work at Vilnius University agreed to host the conference, wishing to contribute to the dispersion of the contemporary ideas of social welfare in Lithuania. Especially as the theme of the conference was extremely important. The year 2007 was announced the year of Equal Opportunities by European Commission. Our goal was to turn the attention of Lithuanian scientists, practitioners, and social professionals to this initiative, and to demonstrate the advantages of a society based on the principle of equal opportunities.

120 people took part at the conference. 60 of the participants came from 25 European countries, Israel and Canada. At the plenary sessions, 10 presentations were given. At the workshop sessions, there were another 26 presentations. Abstracts of the presentations and some whole presentations are published in the first half of this issue.

The conference was a good occasion in a proper way, not only with a fancy dinner, to commemorate the achievements of social work studies at Vilnius University. Soon after Lithuania regained independence in 1990, Vilnius university started to teach social workers. Many efforts were put into the development of social work programs; many practitioners of social policy, social work, and researchers from related social sciences were involved into teaching. Many good professionals were prepared, working currently in the maybe not so fertile field of social work, creating and modernizing social welfare policy of Lithuania. The Department of Social Work has not only gathered the best-known experts of social welfare in Lithuania, but also has already prepared a circle of young doctors of science. We believe that it is these people who relate their professional life with social work and the university, who will create a distinctive school of social work.

The second part of this issue is therefore related to the social work studies at Vilnius University. The reader will find here articles of experienced scientists (from VU and colleagues from other universities), as well as articles written by doctoral and other students. We wish you a kind, mind and soul-clearing time while reading.

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