

YOUNG RESEARCHERS PROGRAMME: GREAT OPPORTUNITY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE



Arta Uka presented interesting points about healthcare and corruption from the Kosovo viewpoint at Expert Breakfast in Bratislava on the topic of 'Kosovo & Serbia: Health Care and Corruption'.

Dear reader,

You are now reading a special issue of the Pontis Digest, dealing with capacities building of civil society in the Western Balkans. It is an overview of the activities of six devout and hardworking young people from Macedonia and Kosovo who connected their research with peers from Visegrad countries. It was thanks to the International Visegrad Fund that we were able to transfer Central European experience and strengthen regional cooperation by involving several organizations in joint efforts. Selected representatives of Balkan civil society organizations or indi-

vidual researchers from the Balkans carried out a one-month fellowship in Bratislava, Prague or Budapest. Broad and varied topics of individual research reflected the needs of the Western Balkans. As the countries vary in their international status, quality of relations with the European Union and the level of development of their economy and institutions, requirements for performance and involvement of civil society differ. Acknowledging the potential of young analysts and activists, focus was put on research contributing to data collection and raising awareness rather than on advocacy with concrete rec-

ommendations for respective governments.

We are pleased to note gender imbalance in Aleksandar Jovanoski from Macedonia, being the only male researcher who, during his one month stay at the Pontis Foundation (SK) dealt with the topic of Parliamentary Control of EU Funds. Drenusha Myha from Kosovo gained precious experience whilst working on her paper on Youth Unemployment at Demas (CZ). In this issue your interest will be piqued by Arta Uka's article on Corruption in the Health Services with whom the Health Policy Institute

(SK) shared their methodology on addressing this issue.

A non-traditional topic (Empowerment through birth) covered by Elena Anchevska from Macedonia hopes to spark an interest in a rather conservative society. The Hungarian organization NoiKép mediated narratives from Hungarian home-birthing mothers. They also created a welcoming working atmosphere for Albulena Shabani from Kosovo who dealt with Work Related Stress and Coping Mechanisms in Victim Service Provider Organizations. You can also read an article by Aleksandra Zhivkovikj on the fight of Czech Activists against Nazism. Aleksandra gained valuable experience during her training by Transition Online in the Czech Republic. Support

of education is one of the key activities of the grant and mobility programs of the International Visegrad Fund. Lenka Bučková provides information on the Visegrad Scholarship Program. A program which facilitates the academic mobility of scholars and researchers from more than 17 countries in the Central, Southeast Europe, and Eastern Partnership region.

At a public event in Skopje on 24 April 2014, attended by the Slovak Ambassador to Macedonia, most of the Macedonian fellows and some project partners, the idea of capacity building of young researchers from the Western Balkans in the Visegrad countries was largely supported. They stressed that for an ideal duration of fellowships, there should be some

flexibility and the ability to extend to 2 or even 3 months. All emphasized the added value of regional cooperation and networking, which they enjoyed during their stays in the Czech Republic, Hungary or Slovakia. University lectures or public meetings created an additional space for shedding more light on development in individual areas and were majorly appreciated by both fellows and the recipient audience. We wish you an enjoyable reading experience in the pages to follow. More papers can be found on <http://vbyoungresearchers.eu/> and on the project partners' websites. We look forward to hearing from you.

Andrea Cox
Pontis Foundation

SCHOLARSHIP OPPORTUNITIES FROM THE INTERNATIONAL VISEGRAD FUND

Support of education is one of the key activities of the grant and mobility programs of the International Visegrad Fund. The Visegrad Scholarship Program offers a unique opportunity in facilitating academic mobility by providing financial support to both individual scholars and researchers and the receiving institutions in more than 17 countries of Central, Southeast Europe, and the Eastern Partnership region.

The fund believes that it is of utmost importance to facilitate the mobility of students and researchers from the above mentioned regions to pursue their studies or research at any accredited public or private higher-education institution in the V4 region. Through this kind of support, the Visegrad Group countries declare their commitment in assisting the countries in their democratization and social-economic reforms. The fund is of the opinion that it is primarily the

individual scholars and researchers who have always been and will be the main catalyst of change in society. For this reason the scholarship program is designed to enable any individual citizen to apply.

Since 2003, the fund has offered scholarship funding at both Master's and Post-Master's levels within the V4 region. In 2004, the program widened its scope to facilitate academic exchanges within the V4 region and the countries of Central, Southeast Europe, and countries of the Eastern Partnership. To date, the fund has supported over 1,700 individual scholars for hundreds of academic semesters with a total worth exceeding €10 million. All the awarded students have been given access to education and quality universities in the region, but also the possibility to increase their professional and language skills.

The scholarship is designed to offer financial support not only to the scholars but also to the host institutions, who also become a beneficiary of the program. The hosts institutions, be it colleges, universities, art academies, or institutes of the science academies may make use this program to find and intensify ties with partner insti-



The Visegrad-Balkans Public Policy Young Researchers Programme gives a chance to young people from Western Balkans countries to spend a month in NGOs in the Czech Republic, Hungary and Slovakia.

tutions abroad and further contribute to the exchanges of people and ideas among individual countries and between the regions (universities can, for example, apply for funding within the fund's other grant vehicles).

The following are the key advantages of the Visegrad Scholarship Program to other funding instruments:

1. The scholarship program is not restricted to any academic field or language of tuition; although, most studies are conducted in social studies and humanities, and in English, options remain open.

2. There are no lists of affiliated host institutions—applicants can choose from any accredited public or private higher-education institution (college, university, art academy, or science academy);

3. The scholarships are open at Master's (1–4 semesters within MA or equivalent) or Post-Master's (up to 2 semesters within PhD or postdoc) levels enabling even independent scientific research.

4. Correspondingly, there is no age limit for applicants, nor is it obligatory to be affiliated with any insti-

tution when applying, offering thus support to graduate students or mid-career applicants.

The annual deadline for on-line applications is January 31 and is meant to cover the following academic year. The support comprises a stipend of €2,300/semester for the scholar and a €1,500/semester lump sum for each host institution. Extraordinary travel grants are also available to those scholars whose "mobility" would exceed 1,500km.

Lenka Bučková

International Visegrad Fund

INTERVIEW

Elena Anchevska: My fellowship was a life-changing learning experience for me

How did you feel about your internship in Hungary? In which organization were you and why? Was the internship useful for you?

I conducted my internship at the BirthHouse Association in Budapest. I was involved more specifically in the start up of their new "Nőkép – Female Image" project. The fellowship was an excellent opportunity to expand my knowledge in the field of home birth, to gain international working experience, and to meet extraordinary women. Women who are not confined by conventional societal norms and expectations but who have alternative life views, divergent from the mainstream, in terms of family arrangements, homeschooling, vaccination, homeopathic healing, and specific work/life arrangements.

After meeting the extraordinary women in the BirthHouse Association, I was inspired to focus specifically on home-birth, which was until then a completely new field for me. All in all, the internship in BirthHouse Association was for me an empowering and horizon-expanding experience.

What was your research about? Why did you choose this topic?

My research is about women choosing undisturbed, natural home births in Hungary. They are among a small percentage of women who have elected



Elena Anchevska and Albulena Shabani introduced their research papers at Central European University.

to bypass the dominant, medical hospitalized model of childbirth. These are women who have taken matters into their own hands to reclaim childbirth. Their motivation, their passion and determination are the subject of discussion in this paper.

My initial idea before beginning the internship in the BirthHouse Association was to do a comparative study on abortion access in Macedonia and

Hungary. Debates surrounding the politics of reproduction have been mostly centered on abortion access and care, whereas reproductive issues such as birth and birth choices have been traditionally marginalized in public discourse. A women's right to choose her own birth setting without being constrained by regulation has been relatively neglected, despite the fact that it is equally as important as abortion and contraception access and care.

What was the strategy or methodology for your research?

Based on ethnographic research and mainly in-depth interviews, my report focuses on the narratives and practices of women activists in the alternative birth movement, namely women who opted for a non-dominant birthing model. In addition, it considers health attendants (home birth midwives) and labor coaches (doulas) who provide assistance for these women during birth. More specifically, natural, undisturbed home birth is discussed in relation to how the normative medical hegemony is challenged through the midwifery model of maternity care and home birth. The process of medicalization controlled by medical experts who have been assigned the role of authority through the involvement of technological intervention in clinical settings renders pregnancy and birth as inherently pathological processes in need of bodily surveillance. This takes control away from women and puts it in the hands of doctors. Nevertheless, women are not simply passive recipients of care, portrayed as powerless victims. More recent feminist studies describe women as active participants as they strive to achieve a desired health outcome, pointing out that

women may resist the medicalization of their pregnancies and childbirth experiences.

What were the most interesting findings in your research?

The narratives of the women interviewed, reveal that the possibility to choose one's birth setting and process of care is at the very core of their reproductive self-determination. Nevertheless, most of the women interviewed experienced physical and emotional violations of their bodily autonomy and reproductive self-determination during previous encounters with medical establishment during pregnancy, labor and childbirth. This greatly influenced their decision to opt for an alternative, non-dominant birthing model.

The women whose stories are discussed in my paper are agents of change in not having succumbed to medical hegemony. They have utilized the knowledge and resources in their possession to reject institutions they find intolerable on several levels. They actively refute the all-pervasive notion that high-tech hospitalized birth is the best and the safest. They pose a challenge to the dominant patterns, hence giving women more power and control over birth.

Driven by their desire to influence and determine the birth themselves, they sought for greater intimacy in their home context in comparison to a hospital setting. All of the women interviewed reported increased privacy, comfort, familial and spiritual connection in a relaxed and peaceful environment. The combination of these factors increased their feelings of safety and trust in their bodies' inherent ability to give birth without interference, trust in the ones included in the birthing process and in the birthing process itself. This resulted in a greater sense of empowerment and agency for fully participating in the decision-making process surrounding the birthing setting and all aspects of care.

Was it beneficial for you to participate in a such a programme as the Young Researchers' Program? Why?

The following aspects of participation in the Young Researchers' Program and the internship in Nokep have been particularly useful for me:

- Access to activists, doulas, midwives and the possibility to gain a unique insight both into their birthing stories and their involvement in the alternative birth movement.
- Trip to Miskolc and the visit to the mother's center. It was inspiring to see a group of women who initially gathered informally on the basis of their mothering experiences, and how they have formally organized themselves, and the impact they have had on women in their community.
- Participation in the First Women's Congress
- Insight into Nokep's work and how they operate. It was useful for me to see work-life balance applied in practice.

It has been a life-changing learning experience for me and I am grateful for having the chance to experience it.

Simona Gembická
Pontis Foundation



Elena Anchevska and Albulena Shabani at Holdam Association, Miskolc.

THE GAP BETWEEN PATIENT NEEDS AND THE AVAILABILITY OF QUALITY PUBLIC SYSTEM RESOURCES IN HEALTH CARE IS INCREASING

Corruption is a topic of rising concern for the international development agenda and is recognized as one of the biggest hindrances to the world's efforts in reaching the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).¹

Corruption, according to Transparency International, weakens health systems, has a direct negative impact on the quality of health services, jeopardizes the health of entire communities, wastes limited resources and wears away public trust. Corruption in the health sector can be a matter of life and death. This is especially true for the poor who cannot afford to pay bribes or to use private health care (TI, 2006).

Informal payments, as a form of corruption, present a big problem for the well-functioning of health systems for many reasons. First, they may have catastrophic effects on low income families by pushing them further into poverty. Second, these payments are made directly to health care workers and therefore do not contribute to improving health care infrastructure, increasing medical supplies or other necessities. Third, these payments are not recorded; hence, taxes are not collected, which would be used to improve public services such as the health system itself. Fourth, informal payments seriously harm equality in health care delivery. Patients who are not able to pay informally usually receive less care and attention than those who are able to pay.

The health sector is particularly vulnerable to corruption, as people buy care even if it costs them their long-term livelihood (Owen, 2006; Ensor and Witter, 2001). In order to design policies that would reduce informal payments, and in this way improve equity in health care, evidence is necessary. Such information could encourage policy-makers to look for solutions to the problem of informal



Arta Uka went to speak to a group of third year students at the Economic University in Bratislava, Faculty of International Relations about Kosovo integration process into the EU.

patient payments. This is particularly relevant to countries where informal patient payments are condoned by the government mainly because they are filling gaps caused by insufficient health care budgets.

The health system in Kosovo, like elsewhere in Eastern Europe, was mainly based on the model of the central government being the purchaser as well as the provider of health care services. Kosovo is the only country in the region that has not introduced a new national health care financing system and has not started to implement health system models that other countries in the region have introduced (be it the Beveridge system or the National Health Insurance Fund). All these circumstances create a very difficult environment for implementing effective health policies and reforming its national health care financing system.

Informal payments that occur at the point of delivery of health services,

add to all the problems described above, and it is considered to be one of the key problems that is affecting performance in the health sector. The practice of paying for "free" health care presents policymakers in Kosovo with a substantial challenge. The outcome of current reforms in the Kosovo health sector are often contrary to the stated objectives. These gaps between stated objectives and results show a lack of, and need for firmer evidence based health sector policies.

The phenomenon of corruption in Kosovo, similar to a number of south-east European countries, remains an intense question. The increasing "gap" between patient needs and the availability of quality public system resources is a problem that calls for urgent and reasonable solutions. In order to design policies that would reduce informal payments, and in this way improve equity in health care, evidence is necessary. Such informa-

¹ Taken from the UN Secretary general's message on the International Anti-Corruption Day, 9 December 2009



tion would encourage policy-makers to look for solutions to the problem of informal patient payments. This is particularly relevant to countries where informal patient payments are condoned by the government mainly because they are filling gaps caused by insufficient health care budgets.

The practice of paying for free health care informally, presents policymakers in Kosovo with a substantial challenge. The outcome of current

reforms in The Kosovo health sector is often contrary to the stated objectives. These gaps between stated objectives and results show a lack of, and need for firmer evidence based health sector policies. Consequently there is a need for research that would provide analysed evidence on the specifics of informal payments in the Kosovo health sector.

There is a need to identify which parts of medical services are affected

by poor quality and which groups of the population are most affected in terms of equity due to corruption. An analysis of the current anti-corruption measures and policies which contribute to the implementation of effective health policies should be tackled from an institutional-building perspective. This takes place in the difficult social context under which Kosovo citizens are currently living (high poverty, high unemployment, lack of good governance, widespread corruption etc.).

The new government that will be created after the next election in Kosovo must know the answers to the questions of what anti-corruption institutions, policies and measures are currently in place and how they support the reduction of corruption in health sector, which parts of medical services are affected by poor quality due to informal payments in health sector and which groups are most affected in terms of equity due to informal payments. Only then the drafting of an effective action plan of attack against corruption in health services can start.

Arta Uka

fellow researcher at Health Policy Institute, SK

NO, TO RACISM! THE STRUGGLE OF CZECH ACTIVISTS AGAINST NAZI PROPAGANDA

Since gaining independence, Czechs have been facing a rising anti-Roma movement, which has resulted in the murder of 5 Roma people, and increasing violence against this minority group on a daily basis. In recent years, hundreds of Roma protests have taken place in several towns in the Czech Republic. The neo Nazi movement is attracting more and more followers as time passes. In addition to organizing protests, last year Neo Nazis used a new tactic for spreading their ideology – addressing high school students via pamphlets with racist content.

“It is very dangerous that Nazis have started focusing on sharing their pro-

paganda among very young boys and girls, which are 13 or 14 years old. It's very easy to manipulate them and fill their minds with false ideas. They mostly approach them via Facebook, asking if they want to become part of their group. They even go to schools and try to talk to them” says human rights activist Lukas Houdek, who has worked on promoting Roma rights for several years. He has started a project “Theory of adaptive”, which includes photos of both Roma people and Czech Neo Nazis. Soon, he was asked by some local schools to present the project to the students, in order to teach them about the consequences of this movement on society. “When I

started communicating with the students directly, I saw that a lot of them had had some kind of personal experience with Nazis which was shocking. Most of them had been contacted by Nazi activists” says Lukas.

Shortly after, with the Open Society foundation, he started a project aimed at educating high school students. So far he has visited two schools in Děčín (in the northern part of the Czech Republic) and Stříbro (Western Bohemia). “Until now, we have provided a forum for discussion and met with an ex-leader of the Neo Nazi scene in Germany. He talked with students and taught them how to recognize Nazi propaganda. It is

essential when someone from the 'inside' shares his experiences, as this is an effective way of explaining why something is not good, especially for young kids."

The Roma minority in the Czech Republic number between 250,000 to 300,000 (out of a total population of just over ten million). While the overall unemployment rate for the Czech Republic at the beginning of the millennium hovered around eight or nine percent, Roma experienced unemployment rates estimated at 45 percent for the same time period. Although high, it's one of the lowest Roma unemployment rates in the region. Hungary's figures lie at 56 percent and Slovakia's at 70 percent. "Roma students mostly attend 'practical' schools, not regular schools like Czech children. Therefore, they are less qualified on the labour market. That's why the unemployment rate is so high among this minority" says Czech activist Lucie Bitalova.

Anti Roma protests in the Czech Republic started in the 1990s. Ethnic tensions started in times of economic stagnation in the Czech Republic. "Before independence, during communism everybody had a job, it was a kind of state policy. But after 1989, we adopted capitalism as our economic system, and things changed. Some people lost their jobs, but also mostly Roma people. However, everybody in our country blames them for the economic issues that we have experienced, since they are mostly dependant on the social welfare system" says Petra from AntiFa. AntiFa is a non-formal organization which has existed for more than 18 years and works on "promotional, informative and practical ways to combat all authorities', ideologies and groups promoting any kind of oppression, particularly Neo Nazism and right-wing radicals". "Social security is the hottest topic, many urban legends exist about Roma getting rich from welfare benefits. Nobody wants to aim at the real causes – corruption, structural racism, state violence... Roma people are the scapegoats for our failures" continues Petra, whose identity is hidden for fear of potential violent acts by Neo Nazis.

A survey conducted by the Perfect Crowd market research agency

for the University of New York in Prague showed that over 60 % of the population harbour negative feelings towards the Roma – more than for any other single ethnic group, well above the levels of hostility felt towards Russians, Ukrainians and the Vietnamese minorities. In this survey, 31.7% of respondents perceived the Roma as being biologically different from the rest of the population; 76.8% perceived the Roma as living a parasitic lifestyle and 92.5% believed the Roma to be abusing the Czech welfare state. According to Lucie Bitalova "Most Czechs say I am not racist, however, I don't like Roma people. People are unfriendly to people who have a different culture and tradition from them."



Aleksandra Zhivkovikj

Another problem is the passivity of political structures in this question. Strict state intervention in preventing violence against Roma people, is missing. "During the Roma protests, political parties and the government stayed quiet. They didn't say anything. Political parties don't do anything because they are afraid of losing votes, as generally Czechs are not so friendly to Roma people" adds Lucie.

Facing this lack of political will, the Roma movement has inspired lots of organizations and individuals to get involved in improving the position of this minority in the Czech Republic, which gives hope for change. On the other hand, civil activism against the Neo Nazi movement in the Czech Republic is improving, and many initiatives for solving this problem have

arisen in past years. A variety of activities took place in 2013. It has become increasingly common for far-right marchers to be matched in numbers or outnumbered by anti-racist protesters. Civil activists even stayed at houses of Roma families during the pogroms, protecting them from potential violence. An activist from Brno created the web platform "Nic než názor", which collects opinions by respectful members of the Czech society regarding the problem of racism.

The platform "Blokujeme!" is one of the online spaces where human rights activists organize themselves. In the past year they offered a platform for organizing creative offline protests, such as collective reading books in public spaces where Neo Nazis planned to gather or blocking their passage on the way to Roma neighbourhoods with music concerts.

As for Lukas, he continues with his project for educating young students. In the future, Lukas will organize open discussions between students and authorities on this issue, but also organize a public forum where students can present their opinions about the stereotypes related to Roma people, and their negative effects on daily life in the Czech Republic.

The struggle against the Neo Nazi movement is a long-term process, say the activists. It requires joint action and precise policies. "We must educate people that racism is bad, especially those young members of society, since they are the future of our country. Roma people are discriminated against today, but tomorrow it will be another ethnic group, if we don't stop this immediately. It's a chain reaction that will impact on everybody's life in our country. If we don't stop this now, many other people will be violated against. We don't want more people be killed" ends Lukas.

The activities of DEMAS are determined independently and exclusively by the member organizations. DEMAS is politically non-partisan, and its actions reflect neither any political or ideological positions nor the interests of any other institution.

Aleksandra Zhivkovikj

fellow researcher at Transition online, CZ

Summer School

7–11 July 2014
Dublin, Ireland

Global Citizenship Education in a post-2015 context

The Pontis Foundation (Slovakia), Kimmage Development Studies Centre (Ireland) and the NGO Support Centre (Cyprus) are announcing the Call for Applications for the **international summer school on global citizenship and development education**. The summer school is going to take place in **Dublin on 7–11 July 2014**.

I. Objectives

- To stimulate theoretical and practical knowledge of cross-sectional issues associated with Global Citizenship Education and the post-2015 agenda;
- To critically reflect on concepts, skills and values related to Global Citizenship and Global Citizenship Education;
- To create the space for critical debate around the opportunities and challenges associated with Global Citizenship Education and the post-2015 agenda;
- To provide the space for cross-border and cross-sector debate and networking about global justice and poverty.

II. Participants' profile

- Academics, teachers and PhD students involved in global citizenship education, development education, global education and their relevant sub-topics
- University students with active interest in the above-mentioned topics
- NGO representatives working in the area of global and development education

III. Duration and logistics

The summer school is taking place on 7–11 July 2014 in All Hallows College, Drumcondra, Dublin (<http://www.allhallows.ie>). **The participation fee is 50 Euro**; other expenses (travel, accommodation, meals) will be covered by the organizer.

The number of participants is limited. Applicants will be selected based on their professional background, experience and motivation. **Working language of the summer school is English.**

Deadline for sending applications is 31 May 2014

More information about the summer school as well as the **application form** and other details are available on our webpage <http://www.nadaciapontis.sk/rozvojove-vzdelavanie> or via email michal.cenker@nadaciapontis.sk.

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