

Mag. Silvo Šinkovec

Revija *Vzgoja*, Društvo katoliških pedagogov Slovenije, Ljubljana, Slovenia

Social dimension of a human person

Searching the inner motivations

Družbena razsežnost človeške osebe

Iskanje notranje motivacije

Abstract

Workshop *Social dimension of a human person* introduces the theme of social immersion of an individual's life into social environment. Personal identity develops also through his/her social involvement. For this reason the awareness of a person's connection within the net of social relations is of key importance for the development of a human person. Using an example of the exercise *Dialogue with the society* taken from the seminar *Personal diary*, the author illustrates the work for personal development by exploring an individual's participation in certain social groups, for example family, school, profession, ethnic group, state, group of particular interests or values, political party, religious community. By discovering these inner relations there grows the possibility of a person's active participation in social activities, also in the form of active citizenship.

Key words

human person, identity, society, inner motivation, inner dialogue, active citizenship

Povzetek

Delavnica *Družbena razsežnost človeške osebe* predstavi umeščenost posameznika v družbo. Osebna identiteta se oblikuje tudi s pomočjo umeščenosti v družbeno okolje. Zato je poznavanje lastne vpetosti v mrežo družbenih odnosov ključnega pomena za razvoj osebnosti. Ob primeru vaje *Pogovor z družbo* iz seminarja *Osebni dnevnik* avtor pokaže možnost dela za razvoj osebnosti ob raziskovanju družbenih razsežnosti svojega življenja. Osebna identiteta se izraža tudi v pripadnosti družbenim skupinam, npr. družini, šoli, poklicu, narodu, državi, interesnim skupinam, politični stranki, verski skupnosti. Ko posameznik

prepozna svojo tesno povezanost z nekaterimi od teh razsežnosti, odkriva notranje motivacije, iz katerih raste večja možnost aktivne udeležnosti v družbenih dejavnostih, tudi aktivnega državljanstva.

Ključne besede

oseba, identiteta, družba, notranja motivacija, notranji pogovor, aktivno državljanstvo

Person and Society

The relationship between a human person and society is fascinating. At a first glance it seems easy to define and explore it, but the more one tries to rationalize it, the more s/he discovers both the difficulties and richness of this relation. Freud's approach through ego and superego was one way of exploring it; Jung's collective unconsciousness was another attempt to comprehend it. There are of course many other approaches.

Narrative form of consciousness

Individuality of a person is defined by genetic code, social environment and personal involvement in activities. Human person was defined as *homo sapiens*, *homo faber*, *homo ludens*, *homo sociologicus*, *homo religious* etc. Each of these definitions underlines one particular level the capacity or dimension of a person's life. Steven Crites (2) argues that the human consciousness maintains a narrative form. This approach introduced a new way of comprehending a human person. Somehow it is linked to with Jung's personology and Frankl's logotherapy.

Every particular experience is included into the 'whole-life' experience. This 'whole' is a personal story (inner, consciousness' narrative). Personal story is therefore awareness of a person's life story, as it is perceived by a person's consciousness. When a person can perform a reasonable story, s/he lives at peace with himself/herself because all particular events and experiences are meaningfully connected and integrated into the whole life story. But there are moments in life when a person cannot include a certain experience as a meaningful part of a personal story such as troubles, suffering, painful conflicts. Something does not fit into the perceived story. It seems as something not reasonable and not a normal part of life. On one hand, searching the meaning of such experience means to look for the appropriate inclusion of the experience into the whole life story, on the other hand a particular experience requires the change of the whole, a change of the perception of the life

story. Such moments could be defined as a shift of the personal horizon, as Bernard Lonergan (7) would define it.

This narrative approach, which is founded on the narrative nature of human consciousness, offers several possibilities for psychological development, including the formation of a personal identity.

No one is an island

Every person is immersed into environment and society. Links with the society are not merely external, for example geographical (we belong to a particular city, country, state, seaside), political (we belong to a particular party, ideological group), racial (we are white, black, red etc.), but also internal by participation to a certain group in terms of interests, values, beliefs and goals. These are very important in the formation of a person's identity. For this reason it is important to explore more in depth these inner links with particular groups in the society. Well-defined goals can be a good motivational factor in a person's life and a solid ground in building communities. A well-formed personal identity helps a person to find out these belongings through which s/he will be able to reach personal goals, together with the others.

We should take into consideration another thought. It is not enough to form inner links between an individual and society. For democratic culture it is central to see what kinds of values are included in this relation. From the history we have learned how dangerous powerful ties of the individuals with the society could, for example in the totalitarian regimes. There is a great difference between the qualities of such bonds. It is the values that define the quality.

Active citizenship requires an inner motivation of a person and such motivation can come up only from a well-formed individuality. Subjective and social dimension come together. If we believe that an active participation is required for a well-functioning democratic society, then we ought to approach the question how to foster this inner process, how to help the individuals to explore deeply and adequately their personal social dimension, to explore the quality of their inner motivation and values (Šinkovec, 17). This can be done in several various ways.

Example: Personal diary

The intensive journal workshop programme called *Personal diary* that we have been proposing for twenty years, following the method of Ira Progoff (15), offers an interesting written exercise by which a person can investigate and develop his/her own social dimension. This exercise enables the participant to explore his/her history, cultural background, national history, race, professional identity, and other social dimensions. "At various points in our life, it becomes important that we deepen our group situation into which we were born. This may be a national group, Italian or English or Japanese. It may involve not only biological connections but the geographic ties of living in a particular area, being mountaineers or farmers or city workers, living in the South or West or East of a particular country" (Ira Progoff, 15).

Every person slowly, through personal experiences, develops this social dimension. The awareness of this level enriches personal life and helps a person to form personal commitment. Through active participation a person may experience and develop particular talents, personal interests, inner motivations, formulate personal goals and discover the meaning of his/her life as well as the meaning of the community to which s/he belongs. "As we continue to work in the *Intensive journal process* over a period of time, these relationships have an opportunity to grow and change and deepen themselves. Our social identifications are not necessarily fixed, therefore, by a decision or commitment that we make at any particular point in our lives. As our inner experience deepens, our social identifications can be correspondingly deepened and enlarged in their meaning and in the quality of action which they suggest to us" (Ira Progoff, 15).

Changes in the society provoke changes in individuals

By enlargement of the European Union every country questions itself: what is our role in this big setting? What are we going to get from it? What can we contribute to it? Which values do we actually share with the others? Is this grouping save enough for us and for all? What dangers should we expect in this large community? On the personal level, every person struggles with similar questions. How much am I Slovenian and how much European, Austrian and European, French and European? Everyone should find out personal reasons, values and goals in order to feel an inner motivation for active participation in this community. Without understanding why one should be involved in this society, it is not possible to take an active role in it.

A very modest participation from the part of electorate in some EU elections in the last period of time shows the difficulties on this level of awareness. Something more should be done on

this level, not just on economical and juridical one. The question of identity, the level of participation presents a great challenge in adult education. Our nations, school systems, adult formation programmes are challenged by this question. An individual cannot develop his/her own identity without discovering and developing his/her social dimension. By discovering this personal dimension and reasons why to be involved in some particular social action, aspirations for active participation grow up. The changes in the society reflect and require some changes also on the deepest level of personal lives, on the level of awareness of belonging.

Learning opportunities

I believe that the exercise suggested within the context of the whole seminar *Personal dairy* is a valuable opportunity to promote active citizenship. There is a great need to provide opportunities that people could learn the method and then offer possibilities of further support in order to foster personal work which only can bring out significant changes in forming inner motivations for active citizenship.

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Some words about the author

Fr. Silvo Šinkovec, S.J. (1957), special pedagogue, theologian and psychologist, priest since 1988. Since 1988 he has been working in the Association of the Catholic Teachers of Slovenia. He has experience in school counselling. Since 1986 he has been running a workshop *Personal diary*, since 1995 *School for parents*, since 2002 a workshop *Formation of leaders of School for parents*, and since 2003 a workshop *Fostering development of self-esteem and self-consciousness*. He lectures for various groups, he was a moderator of project of volunteer work *Men and Women for others*, and leads *School for mission* at the Spiritual Centre of St. Joseph in Ljubljana. He is a chief editor of *Vzgoja*, a magazine on education. He is a counsellor and has many colloquies for personal growth.

Predstavitev avtorja

Silvo Šinkovec, S.J., (1957) specialni pedagog, teolog in psiholog, duhovnik od 1988. Tri leta je bil duhovni asistent Skupnosti krščanskega življenja, od leta 1988 deluje v Društvu katoliških pedagogov Slovenije. Ima izkušnje šolskega svetovalnega delavca. Od 1986 vodi delavnico *Osebni dnevnik*, od 1995 vodi *Šolo za starše*, od 2002 seminar *Usposabljanje voditeljev šole za starše* in od 2003 seminar *Spodbujanje razvoja samozavesti in samospoštovanja*. Predava različnim skupinam po vsej Sloveniji in izven nje, sodeloval je pri projektu prostovoljnega dela *Človek za druge* in vodenju *Šole za poslanstvo* v Duhovnem središču sv. Jožefa v Ljubljani. Je urednik revije *Vzgoja* in ima veliko pogovorov za osebno rast.