

Foreword

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Articles published in this thematic part were presented at an international seminar on social exclusion and poverty, that took place in Portorož, March 13-15, 1995. The seminar was organised within the framework of a Tempus programme on European Social Policy Analysis (masters studies). Experts from some European universities participated, along with Slovenian professionals and experts working in governmental institutions and in the research sphere. The emphasis was on introducing the concept of social exclusion (not well known in Slovenia) and on the clarification of the relations between social exclusion and other familiar concepts - above all, the relations between social exclusion and poverty. The empirical operationalisation of both was also discussed and some empirical data was presented, mostly on poverty figures and trends in countries of the European Union. Social policy responses to poverty issues and different dimensions of exclusion were also debated, on the level of European Union directions and proposals, as well as on national social policy levels.

While the concept of poverty is being used frequently and is relatively well defined and operationalised, the concept of social exclusion is rather new and sometimes confusing, due to its wide nature, which is often understood and used in different ways. The concept of social exclusion derives from French social policy and political discourse, in which it refers to the processes of social disintegration in the sense of progressive break up of relationships between individuals and society, which occurs mainly as a consequence of long-term transformations in the structure and organisation of economic life. Recent popularity of the social exclusion concept and its introduction into the social policy discourse of many European countries is mostly due to the fact that it has been, since the end of the 80s, systematically used by the European Union (in several documents, directions and proposals for social action; often replacing the term poverty). At the European Union level, social exclusion is usually understood in connection with social rights of citizens (social exclusion as a denial of social rights) and as a multidimensional concept, covering different forms, dimensions and processes of exclusion in contemporary societies. In some European Union documents social exclusion is understood as an institutional problem, limiting social exclusion to the problem of inadequate or inappropriate social policy regulation (no adequate social policy programmes available or the existing programmes are inappropriate or missing the target groups). There are also some European Union researchers that see social exclusion in a much wider sense, as a situation when at least one of the four integrative systems fails: civic integration, economic integration, social integration and interpersonal integration in the society. So, if on one side, the concept of social exclusion seems to be very promising because of its multidimensional nature and wide scope (while the concept of poverty is more limited to the material dimension, that is on deficiency of material resources), it is on the other side, problematic exactly for that reason: because of its wideness and multidimensional nature.

mensionality the concept remains rather ambiguous, difficult to operationalise and measure.

Not all presentations from the seminar on social exclusion and poverty are published here, but the published ones reflect well the discussion at the seminar and present a contribution to the attempts to overcome the definition problems, measurement problems and above all the problems of the relation between poverty and social exclusion. Nevertheless, many questions are still left unanswered, and we can only hope that the discussion on the social exclusion subject will continue in Slovenia too.

In the first article *Peter Abrahamson* dips into an increasing interest in social exclusion at the European Union level and in the member states, revealing different reasons and possible explanations for the shift in terminology as well as the possible explanations of the relations between poverty and social exclusion. With some empirical data he also points to the increasing severity of processes and situations of deprivation in the countries of the European Union. In the next article, *Patrick Commins* presents the European Union's Third Poverty programme, its background, basic design and strategy, terminology, concepts, aims and principles, some of the actions within the project and its most important outcomes. The conceptual step ahead made within the Poverty 3 programme enabled researchers to see the problem of deprivation not only as a lack of material goods but also as an exclusion from opportunities, benefits and rights commonly available in contemporary society. The programme actions were based on the principles of a multidimensional and integrated approach to combat social exclusion, on establishing partnership models of organisation and on involving participation of target groups. In the article of *Henk-Jan Dirven* the author proposes, after revealing the political and scientific debate on poverty, deprivation and social exclusion in the Netherlands, a conceptual framework to distinguish between the concepts of income poverty, relative deprivation, impoverishment and social exclusion on the basis of the differentiation between direct and indirect definitions of poverty and, at the same time, between the processes and the situations. The author also presents some empirical data for the Netherlands on income poverty situations, relative deprivation, the processes of impoverishment and processes of social exclusion. Dirven also discusses some of the Dutch government policies to reduce social disadvantage. The Portuguese situation with respect to poverty and social exclusion, is presented in *José Pereirinha's* article. A detailed explanation is given of both rural poverty (especially concentrated in the population groups living from agriculture) and urban poverty, where the functioning of the labour market, low education and insufficient social protection are the factors of pauperisation. The author also presents some recent Portuguese social policy attempts to coordinate measures and policies in different spheres, and to include different actors (governmental and non-governmental) into the policy implementation in order to fight the multidimensional nature of poverty and social exclusion problems. In the last article *Silvia Ferazzi* approaches the topics of poverty and social exclusion from a feminist point of view, calling attention to some rarely debated aspects, namely the role of women in poor families. The authoress compares social assistance schemes in Italy and Britain that assume a family (and not an individual) as a benefit unit, and the consequences this has for women in both countries. Ferazzi points out that the interpretation of gender issues within the

social exclusion concept can be problematic: in the social exclusion debate the positive integrative function of interpersonal (informal) networks, especially the family, tends to be emphasised, while the possible negative effects of different forms of dependency within the family tend to be forgotten. The authoress argues for an individually-centred approach to social security instead of a family-centred approach in order to deal with gender issues in the field of welfare rights more effectively.