# EUSOC - 14th International Doctoral Seminar in Social Sciences

Czech Mental Health Care Policy in the European Context: What is the Problem Represented to Be?

# Miroslava Janoušková

Masaryk University, Czech Republic

Faculty of Social Studies

Department of Sociology

Ph.D. candidate

M.janouskova@mail.muni.cz

ABSTRACT:

The aim of this paper is to analyse the problematizations within Czech mental health care reform in the context of international policies. Specific emphasis is placed on service users and their positioning within the reform process. The research question is: How the problematizations (of mental health policy) impact the subjectification of people with mental illness? The paper is based on discourse analysis and uses Bacchi´s approach What´s the problem represented to be? that sees policy not as a logical response to empirically known problems, rather as constructed and represented or problematized. Sources of data include policy documents, observations and interviews with key policy actors.

EXTENDED ABSTRACT:

Policy documents can be regarded as rhetorical however if we look from a perspective of discourse analysis we see how such documents generate discourse and produce policy problems, that subsequently influence solutions. The aim of this paper is to explore how mental health policy issues are constructed and represented because such problematizations have implications for how we are used to think and justify possible policy responses that affect various actors. Specific research question is: *How the problematizations (of mental health policy) impact the subjectification of people with mental illness?*

The first official governmental document Strategy of psychiatric care reform has been introduced only recently in the Czech Republic (2013) after one year of negotiations and discussions. This policy document is studied in the international and European context, especially that one represented in the Green Paper: Improving the Mental Health of the Population: Towards a Strategy on Mental Health for the European Union (2005) and WHO´s Comprehensive Mental Health Action Plan 2013–2020 (2013). Special emphasis is placed on the role and position of people with mental illness in the mental health policy because service users´ lives will be affected by decisions, problematizations and solutions most. There is growing evidence that empowerment and provision of increased voice to vulnerable population is important to improve health equality and to create policies that will meet needs of those groups. After negotiations those groups were engaged in the process of creation of the Strategy organized by the Ministry of Health of the Czech Republic. However, they faced confrontations with more powerful stakeholders, especially professionals from mental institutions, had to negotiate and legitimize their own position and called into question dominant medical discourse of mental health. Their position will be investigated within the framework of consumer / survivor discourse (Speed, 2007; Crossley, 2002; Pickard, 1998) that investigates the ways of service user involvement and participation in decision making.

The new Czech policy strategy has not been implemented yet. That is why it is useful to frame the research by an analytical approach that explores development of policy as problem representation and reflects its possible consequences on future solutions and changes in particular policy. The paper uses Bacchi´s analytical approach “What´s the problem represented to be?” (2009, 1999) that sees policy not as a logical response to empirically known problems, rather as constructed and represented or "problematized". Bacchi´s approach distinguishes from those which are concerned with problem solutions and belief that problems exist "out there" and are available for objective analysis. Rather, Bacchi emphasizes that problems result from political processes. Her approach goes beyond description of problematizations by stressing silences and comparison with alternatives. It is aimed at close examination of the values and beliefs that support policy statements and positions and ways in which these are regarded as taken-for-granted assumptions. Bacchi refers to the way how actors are involved by various representations, what their roles are, and how they are likely to affect, or be affected by, the problem representation.

Qualitative research strategy comes from social constructionist tradition and is based on Foucauldian discourse analysis. Sources of data are Czech and international policy documents (mentioned above), interviews with key policy actors, focus groups transcriptions conducted as a part of creation of the strategy, participatory observations at meetings, conferences and seminars that have been organized in the process of strategy preparation.

DISSERTATION THEME:

The theme of the dissertation is the policy change of mental health care in the Czech Republic. Special focus is on reform efforts and processes during the last two years when the policy document (Strategy of psychiatric care reform) has been adopted. The aim of the dissertation is to investigate the subjectification of people with mental illness in the mental health policy. Theoretical background is based on the Foucauldian tradition of discourse analysis that has been further developed by Carol Bacchi´s (2009) analytical framework “What´s the problem represented to be?”

The paper presented at EUSOC will be a shortened version of one analytical chapter from my dissertation. It also includes part of a theoretical framework. It will be a draft for future publication.