



Marko Polo's Diary

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On disability and on difference

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Disability guidelines, a key element of social strategy is seldom high on the country's policy. Yet, disabled are frequently present in the rhetoric of governance structures, those now in place and those that might be expected to yield improved policy outcomes while promoting the democratic principles or pointing out to political oversights.

Society has a general tendency to repress the embodiment of difference. The issue of disability is thus a powerful territory for exploring shifts, attitudes, oversights as well as improvements within particular society groups.

Negative attitudes and behavioral stereotypes have been reinforced by society or religion over many centuries, setting up the care for disabled into charitable rather than medical care domain. Medicine underpinned by cultural attitudes and values about body went, on the other hand, under very slow process of shaping itself with regard to disabled treatment, rehabilitation or resocialization.

What was the situation in Croatia, how cultural setting shaped institutionalization of our medical practice, who was the role figure in that process, and how it developed further, were the key elements for setting the program of interdisciplinary symposium taking place in Croatian Academy of Sciences and Arts (CASA) on October 11th 2005. Entitled *Božidar Špišić: origins and developments of orthopaedics on our territory* it was dedicated to the memory of Božidar Špišić (1879-1957) the founder of Croatian orthopaedics, on the occasion of the 90th anniversary of the first Institute for Orthopaedics foundation in 1915. Promoted by the Department for the history of medicine of CASA the interdisciplinary character was its main feature. It was covering various topics from the sphere of humanities (art, history, and architecture, which

explored the setting during the First World War, the period which resulted in crowds of invalids) to strictly medical issues such as improvements of various orthopaedic techniques, the application of morfogenic proteins, orthopaedic approaches to patients with tumours, on the bone and joints decade, etc. Acknowledging the influence of Božidar Špišić's role and identity as our starting point we searched for the complex ways in which the notions of disability and difference were closely related. It was demonstrated how those two issues corresponded with each other within the framework of the orthopaedic institute established by Božidar Špišić, an entirely innovative complex and original idea within our territories. Growing and developing further it became the milestone of institutionalised orthopaedics.

Thoughtful projects of the past periods made me think that sometimes *time* takes away what was bad but also parts of that what was good. We are still not capable enough to overcome rhetorical level of disability and difference issues and we are often incapable to make valuable steps, as Špišić did despite of all obstacles, in his period. Above all medicine is not the only territory for fighting those battles. Cultural inheritance, together with personal boundaries should be conquered. Perhaps then the whole society would be capable to make majority of urgent steps making real efforts in supporting the difference. Chance to challenge peoples assumptions about difference is therefore another good chance to explore what we think of ourselves too. Perhaps this would be an opportunity to find out that *different* makes difference to all of us.

The world is waiting, sretan vam put!

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