

Overlooked, neglected and denied: practices of discrimination based on personal circumstances in Slovenia

One of the key dimensions of the European Union's politics is respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, as well as respect for differences and diversity among people and cultures. For this reason, the European Union introduced several mechanisms for combating and preventing discrimination based on personal circumstances, and adopted several documents that serve as the basis of the politics of anti-discrimination, among others the Amsterdam Treaty (Article 13; 1997), the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union (Article 21; 2000), and the Green Paper on Equality and Non-Discrimination in an Enlarged European Union (2004).

The practice of implementation of the EU anti-discrimination documents, however, shows that frequently there is significant discordance between the documents and recommendations on the one hand, and their implementation in national legislations and politics on the other. Moreover, the empirical evidence of everyday life also shows that frequently, even if the national legislation and policies include anti-discriminatory elements, the implementation in practice is far from sufficiently effective to combat and prevent discrimination (Kuhar, 2006; Švab et al., 2008). According to the research findings (Švab et al., 2008), Slovenia is a case where discrimination based on various personal circumstances is present both as institutionalised discrimination, as well as discrimination on the level of practice of active citizenship (Kuhar, 2006). The former is evident either in the absence of certain policies and legislation, or in the presence of explicit or implicit mechanisms of exclusion and marginalisation based on personal circumstances. The latter means that due to their personal circumstances individuals are frequently excluded from equal citizenship as active practice of taking part in the society (Kuhar, 2006, Švab et al., 2008).

This thematic block presents selected examples of discrimination based on personal circumstances. Drawing on a recently completed research project on discrimination¹, as well as other relevant and available research data on discrimination in Slovenia, this thematic block brings new material and evidence, which span beyond the confines of one particular country-case.

The four articles discuss four examples of discrimination based on personal circumstances: religion, nationality, disability and sexual orientation. The analyses primarily deal with frequently overlooked aspects of discrimination, which remain neglected and may even be denied their relevance. In this context, special emphasis is put on *everyday life experiences of discrimination*, where age and gender are taken into ac-

¹ Research project titled "Consequences of Discrimination on Social and Political Inclusion of Youth in Slovenia" was funded by Slovenian Research Agency, Governmental Office for Equal Opportunities and Governmental Office for Growth from 2006–2008. It was based at the Centre for Social Psychology, Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Ljubljana and carried out in association with the Peace Institute, Ljubljana, and Science and Research Centre Koper, University of Primorska; project leader Alenka Švab. Although the title suggests that the focus was put on young people only, the research scope was subsequently broadened to include the whole population by agreement with the funders of the project.

count to study the intersection of various personal circumstances in the cases of discrimination.

The first article in the thematic block, *“Muslims in Slovenia: Between Tolerance and Discrimination”* examines the position of Muslims in Slovenia, with a particular focus on the articulation of the needs of an Islamic way of life as conveyed by the Muslims themselves. Using new empirical material, the interviews with representatives of the Muslim community, Veronika Bajt claims that the Slovenian Muslims find themselves in a peculiar situation of, on the one hand, being tolerated, particularly on account of sharing historical South Slavic bonds with the majority Catholic population; yet, they are at the same time faced with discrimination and prejudice. The research shows that – as Islam remains for the most part secluded from public discourse and thus prone to stereotypical representations pregnant with misconceptions and prejudice – the Muslims in Slovenia experience prejudice, and are exposed to particular discrimination in terms of practicing their religion.

The second article, titled *“When Ć becomes Č: discrimination of unrecognized national minorities in Slovenia”*, written by Ana Kralj, discusses the situation of members of “new” national communities in Slovenia, focusing particularly on their experience regarding discrimination in the spheres of education, work, social and political participation, access to the media and everyday life. The analysis provides an insight into the sorts, the extent, the circumstances and the consequences of the social, civil and political discrimination based on national or ethnic identity. The author argues that prejudices and stereotypes, which support the discriminative attitude towards the minority communities, are more than merely oversimplified judgements arising from narrow-sightedness or limited knowledge – above all, they are political measures, ideological tales, which are the crucial driving force of existing societies.

In the third article, *“Everyday Live of Disabled Persons in Slovenia – the Case of Family Life and Leisure Time”*, Ružica Boškić, Tjaša Žakelj and Živa Humer discuss discrimination of the disabled persons in their everyday life, with special attention to family life and leisure time activities. The authors claim that the private everyday life of the disabled persons is a topic that often stays in the background and is ignored in political attempts to gain equality for the disabled compared with the rest of the population. The authors examine how disability related factors, identified by Lutz and Bowers (2005) influence the domains of family life and leisure time. The basic conclusion of the article is that the gender and age of the disabled, the time when disability occurs and type of disability, strongly influence opportunities and characteristics of the analysed micro-aspects of the everyday life of the disabled. The micro-sphere of disabled persons is still strongly structured by their disability.

In the last article, *“Homophobia and Violence against Gays and Lesbians in Slovenia”*, Roman Kuhar and Alenka Švab present and discuss empirical findings from various research projects on homophobic violence in Slovenia. Existing research on violence against gays and lesbians shows a high level of verbal, physical and sexual violence experienced by gays and lesbians and at the same time a low recognition of such violence in society. Since most frequently homophobic violence happens in

public space, the authors deal with homophobic violence in public space in general, and in school settings in particular. In the third part of the paper, the authors discuss the socially hidden and invisible violence that arises from heteronormativity and the so-called heteronormative panopticon, and which takes many forms, from constant fear of being “disclosed”, of being a victim of violence, to self- violence accompanied by internalised homophobia.

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Alenka Švab

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