



FSD

UNIVERSITY OF LJUBLJANA
Faculty of Social Work

The Resisting Force of Social Work: Current Reflections in Critical and Historical Perspective

International Symposium at the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Work

7 – 8 November 2025

Topniška 31, 1000 Ljubljana

The International Symposium of Social Work will mark 70 years of education, professionalisation and academisation of social work in Slovenia and at the **Faculty of Social Work**, the only educational and academic institution for social work studies in the country. We invite friends, colleagues, and the academic community to celebrate this important anniversary together. The International Symposium aims to highlight the wide range of social work topics that are currently particularly relevant, especially from a critical and historical perspective.

At a time when crises due to neo-liberal policies, ecological disasters, wars, and the militarization of Europe and the world are multiplying, we seem to be in the midst of an era very similar to the historical period that gave rise to social work over a century ago. At a time of accelerating poverty, impoverished communities, the erosion of the common good, the rise of structural and interpersonal violence, the emergence of scapegoating ideologies, and the mushrooming of migration, social work, and its resisting force are all the more important.

But in such a world, social work itself is not embraced with open arms by neoliberal policies and populists. As social problems increase, so do the discourses that emphasize the inefficiency of the public sector and the need for its disappearance, the discourse of social work as a 'cost' and a 'burden', and the individualization and pathologization of people's economic and social problems. Societies appear to be a collection of individuals responsible for their well-being rather than a society in which people are interconnected and can only

exist in mutual interdependence and awareness of global interconnectedness. Systemically marginalized, social workers are also perceived, at least in Slovenia, as incapable of solving people's complex problems.

In such a difficult context, we are interested in the resilience of social work as well as in its critical reflection of these current processes and its ability to understand phenomena from a historical perspective. We look for continuities and discontinuities in what we have learned from past events, practices, and pioneers in all areas of social work as we zoom in on structures, interpersonal relationships, and identities.

The International Symposium aims to be transdisciplinary and is interested in a wide range of theoretical and methodological approaches in social work, intertwined with social policy, ethical dilemmas and situational ethics, disability studies, mental health, anti-racist social work and postcolonial theory, feminist studies and the empowerment perspectives and human rights.

The School of Social Work was founded on 7 November 1955, the anniversary of the October Revolution, with a modest commemoration in Ljubljana - It was covered by, surprisingly, four daily newspapers. With five schools of social work established between 1952 and 1958, first in Zagreb, then in Ljubljana, Belgrade, Sarajevo, and Skopje, socialist Yugoslavia became the only country in the world where the communist leadership allowed the establishment of social work education and practice before 1991. The communist authorities did not like the fact that the pioneers of social work were mostly women of wealthier social classes, some of them feminists, even though they were those who fought for social justice and continuously addressed social inequalities and the rights of the workers, women, and children. They believed that socialism itself would bring prosperity to the people, while social inequalities and human suffering, which were seen as the mere consequence of capitalism and the destruction of the Second World War, would be eliminated by state socialism itself, through universal employment, health care, social insurance and the right to a pension. This is why the schools of social work, where they already existed, were closed down when the communist leaders came to power.

After 1955, social work began to develop rapidly in Slovenia and other parts of Yugoslavia. A network of social work centers was established. Large social welfare institutions for children and adults with various disabilities, homes for the elderly, and institutions for young people with "deviant behavior" were opened and perceived as part of societal modernization and social protection. Socialist social work was not only a means of social redistribution to alleviate people's economic hardship, but also a realisation of the promise to educate and employ women and relieve them of unpaid care work.

After 1991, social work opened up the possibility of development in areas that had been burdened by prejudices and normative expectations in the past; the first NGOs were created, work on violence against women and children developed, and the deinstitutionalisation movement and the demand for human rights for people with disabilities and older people represented a revolt against the dehumanisation of many individuals. At the same time social workers also had to respond to the masses of newly unemployed after the rapid closure of factories and enterprises, the arrival of refugees from parts of the former Yugoslavia which experienced war, and to the growing bureaucratization and the new public management. The public image of social work deteriorated.

Nevertheless, social work as an organized social practice and as a social science discipline has remained vitally important in regulating social inequalities, advocating social justice, providing psychosocial support, and standing by people in need. Let's share the stories of the resisting force of social work across countries and beyond divides and hierarchies.

Please respond to the expression of interest as soon as possible, but **no later than 30 September 2024. By December 1, 2024**, we kindly ask you to send us:

-Your **abstract of up to 250 words** and 5 keywords (Word version, Calibri, Font 12, no formatting!)

-Your **BIO of up to 50 words** (Word version, Calibri, Font 12, no formatting!)

The scientific committee will send you the decision of your acceptance **no later than January 31, 2025**.

Contact: e-mail: darja.zavirsek@fsd.uni-lj.si

Practical information related to the international symposium

- 1.) You are welcome to come via the **Erasmus Teaching Agreement** and your **participation in the symposium will be recognised as teaching by the host university**.
- 2.) **The format of the symposium:** the international symposium will be a gathering of a small number of people with the aim of intensive interaction and exchange of scientific research results and experiences.
- 3.) All presentations will be given in **English and speakers will have 20 minutes** for their presentation followed by a discussion.
- 4.) The arrival date is **6th of November** and the official end of the symposium is the evening of the 8th of November 2025 (**departure 9th of November** or as preferred).
- 5.) A joint dinner will **be organized on 6th November** (individual payment of the conference participants).
- 6.) Catering will be organized during the symposium (**morning coffee and light lunch**).
- 7.) The International Symposium will be followed by **cultural activities**, such as the opening of an exhibition on the history of social work education in Slovenia and Yugoslavia (date and location to be announced).
- 8.) **Certificates** for the participants will be organised.

Travel and Accommodation

Coming from/ going to the airport (Jože Pučnik Ljubljana)

The Ljubljana Jože Pučnik airport is a 30-minute drive from Ljubljana city centre. You can either take a bus (to the central station), a shuttle or a taxi to get to your hotel. You can find more information here: <https://www.lju-airport.si/en/transport/bus/>, <https://www.lju-airport.si/en/transport/taxi/>. Maybe the best option is to take a shuttle that can drop you off at your hotel. It's not necessary, but still recommended to make a reservation beforehand. You can find shuttle services here: <https://www.lju-airport.si/en/transport/shuttle-services/>.

Coming from/ going to the airports near Ljubljana (Trieste/Zagreb/ Venice/Treviso)

You can reach Ljubljana by booking shared or private Goopti shuttle:

<https://www.goopti.com/en/> or by Flixbus: <https://www.flixbus.co.uk/> .These transports need to be booked in advance.

We recommend you to stay in the city center, as you can reach the faculty on foot (not too far), and also the taxi is not too expensive (especially if you share it).

Some options in the city center (but there are many more on the internet, please just check)

- City Hotel Ljubljana <https://www.cityhotel.si/en/>
- B&B Hotel Ljubljana Park <https://hotel-park-ljubljana.h-rzn.com/>
- Central Hotel Superior (Ibis) <http://www.centralhotelljubljana.com/>
- Urban Boutique Hotel Center <https://www.urbanhotel.si/>
- Hotel Mrak <https://hotelmrak.si/en/>
- Heritage Hotel <https://hotelheritage.si/en>
- Art Hotel <https://www.visitljubljana.com/en/poi/art-hotel/>

More expensive options:

- Hotel Slon: <https://www.hotelslon.com/>
- Grand Hotel Union <https://www.eurostarshotels.co.uk/grand-hotel-union-eurostars.html>
- Hotel Cubo <https://cubogroup.si/en>
- Hotel Lev <https://www.eurostarshotels.co.uk/exe-lev.html>

Useful tourist information: <https://www.slovenia.info/en>;
<https://www.visitljubljana.com/en/visitors/travel-information/>.

Conference scientific committee:

Prof. Darja Zaviršek, president of the scientific committee

Associate Prof. Mojca Urek, dean

Assistant Professor Ana M. Sobočan, vice dean of studies

Assistant Professor Sara Pistotnik

Assistant Professor Anamarija Kejžar

Anže Jurček, assistant

Klara Mestek

Cordially invited!