Ethnological Research on Family and Unemployment

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Since the early 1990s significant socio-economic and political changes have occurred that have affected the structure of Croatian labor market. Unemployment, insecurity, a failure to adapt to the new economic value system and its newly re-established relationships and requirements, have all influenced the individual and family life.

Families' experiences and strategies used

A central theme of the research will deal with questions of individual and family strategies as survival strategies, i.e. how the confrontation with the new financial situation and values has repercussions on everyday life of the family, the questions of personal identity, and self confirmation.

Research questions

Due to diminished and restructured (formal) labor market, drastic changes, and a “crisis” in the Croatian economic system, how have individuals and families re-established a balance in everyday life?

How have uncertainty, replaceability, and an increase in social inequality affected the lives of families and individuals in Croatian society from the 1990s until today?

What has happened to families and individuals outside of the formal labor market, i.e. in what ways have long-term formal unemployment and activities in the informal labor market shaped the culture of living and everyday life in Croatia?

Empirical research shows that the importance and value of gender and generational social categories are significantly defined by just such changes in the labor market (Mylas 1990; Robertson 1998; Jackson 1999). That raises the question: what has happened to those categories in the context of mass lay-offs and long-term formal unemployment in Croatia from the 1990s until today?

Field research

Is primarily aimed at urban context in a number of families who share the experience of long-lasting unemployment (having at least one member of the closer family formally unemployed for a long time starting from the 1990s in the 20th century). The families and the individuals will be “selected” on the basis of the criteria of unemployment experience and not on territorial basis. The research will not be limited to a part of the town. Instead, in accordance with the concept of a family as a part of a dynamic and open system, the research will be extended to the complex network of social relationship and interactions. Ethnological research will put the focus primarily on the qualitative aspects of being unemployed. This will include issues like individual identity (self-assessment, social, family, gender, and generational roles), family influence (family strategies; cooperation, or lack thereof; and conflict), social exclusion (lack of formal working-collective, the formation, or re-formation, of informal social groups), social norms and values (discourse and symbolic levels, cultural significance, political and economic context) and social structures (power relations and class).

Methodological procedures and data analyses

Descriptive, analytic, comparative and interpretative levels, i.e. A combination of archival work at the sources (newspaper articles, statistics, and visual media) and open interviews with elements of observation and participation.

A specific segment of the research work: the researcher’s double insider position as a cultural insider (so-called anthropology at home) and a family insider (the members of the researcher’s closer family will be a part of the collectives). In a methodological and epistemological sense, the research work will be a continuous self-reflexive process (auto-ethnography).

Expected scientific contribution

Presentation of a multi-level marketing company’s products in a family apartment in Zagreb, March 2008.

Expansion of the knowledge of the basic relationship between individuals/families and the modern socio-economic systems of Croatia (through strategies, alternatives, decision-making processes, exclusion, etc.).

A better insight into the state and tendencies of Croatian transitional society, of socio-economic processes after socialism, and of the transitional period before entering the European Union.

A description of the characteristics of the problem of socialist and post-socialist transformations of informal social, notably family relations, observed through the problem of long-term unemployment in family.