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Anxieties and Expectations of Contemporary Man : Man Faced with a Breakthrough : (Report on a scientific conference)

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Anxieties and Expectations of Contemporary Man. Man Faced with a Breakthrough

(Report on a scientific conference)

In the present social and political situation in Poland and in the world, when faced with changes, people, as has always been the case, have to deal with two types of emotions: expectation that gives them strength and energy, and anxiety that motivates them to take action. Such a discrepancy forms tension, which results, for example, from unemployment, or from people's concern about their families or about their own health - creating serious mental distress and grave challenge for all people, also for us – researchers, scientists, and humanists whose task it is to help people in adapting to changes. On one hand – throughout their lives, people are accustomed to acting according to certain tradition; on the other hand – we are all strongly motivated to change our environment. Tradition gives people the feeling of security, whereas change makes them feel threatened. To a certain extent, people can adapt to changes. If, however, such a change is too profound, then – in case of our own area – we only assimilate certain superficial behaviours that adapt us to the change. In case of profound, global change, when the whole system changes, we can be faced even with eradication of culture. Many people in our country, as well as in our part of Europe, may feel stressed, and this is why the Departments of Psychology and Social Work of the Institute of Pedagogy and Psychology of Higher Teacher Education School in Częstochowa organised the First International Scientific Conference devoted to *Anxieties and Hopes of Contemporary People*. The conference was held in Kule near Częstochowa, on November 12 to 14, 2002.

It was the intention of the Conference Programme Board, chaired by Professor Romuald Derbis, to update the participants' knowledge on the current state of research studies carried out in various academic centres and practical social activity centres in Poland. Who deals with a concrete issue and what are his or her achievements? It was also expected that the most necessary research projects, the ones that are the most interesting and challenging for psychologists, educators and social workers, would be emphasized.

The Conference was attended by many excellent Polish and foreign scientists. Among them were: Professor Anna Brzezińska (the Adam Mickiewicz University, Poznań), Professor Romuald Derbis (Higher Teacher Education

School, Częstochowa), Professor Bernd Joachim Ertelt (Higher School of Public Administration, Mannheim, Germany), Professor Ewa Marynowicz-Hetka (University of Łódź), Professor Carsten Otte (Higher School of Social Work, Mannheim, Germany), Professor Andrzej Pluta (Higher Teacher Education School in Częstochowa), Professor Adam Rosół (Higher Teacher Education School in Częstochowa), Professor Marek S. Szczepański (Silesian University, Katowice and Higher Teacher Education School, Częstochowa), and Professor A. Witkowski (University of Wrocław).

The inauguration of the First International Scientific Conference was celebrated by Professor Tadeusz Panecki, the Vice-Rector for Science of Higher Teacher Education School in Częstochowa, and Professor Romuald Derbis, the Head of the Institute of Pedagogy and Psychology in Higher Teacher Education School in Częstochowa. The opening ceremony was attended by conference participants who arrived from various academic centres (such as: Częstochowa, Kraków, Lublin, Łódź, Opole, Toruń, Wrocław, Zielona Góra), as well as from institutions involved in shaping up social welfare and policy.

In the course of plenary meetings, our foreign guests informed the participants of the conference on the issues concerning German society after the Unification of Germany and with requirements that should be met by career counselling in the European Union. Polish Professors outlined the contexts of human development and people's activities in various fields, as well as discussed effects of social changes on individuals. Each of the presented lectures was an introduction to a scientific debate and panel discussion on contemporary man and threats posed by reality.

During the panel discussion, two viewpoints concerning interpretation of the topic (*Man faced with a breakthrough*) became very clear – the first one emphasised lack of a breakthrough in people's aspirations to realise their plans and intentions. The leading question was: *Are the new century or the new Millennium or changes that occur a breakthrough or are they merely continuation of history, another chance to liberate people's potential abilities.*

The second standpoint approached the breakthrough in terms of social, cultural, developmental aspects, as a chance for *people to leave the safety of their shells, a breakthrough as a multi-stimulating factor that motivates individuals to engage in different types of actions.*

Participants to eight live sessions and a poster session presented results of their empirical research studies, reflections and considerations in 48 presentations and on 9 posters. They discussed such issues as crises in the development of man in the context of civilisation breakthrough and his adaptation to the ongoing changes. The importance of social support for the adaptation was discussed as well as the importance of crises in the development of man. Educational opportunities and threats for children and adolescents were considered as well as profits and losses in professional development of an individual. Apart from that, much attention was paid to families. On one hand, anxieties and fears concerning families were discussed as well as the significance of a family environment in creating multi-functional

individuals. On the other hand – the whole array of psychological and social difficulties encountered by families nowadays and in the future was discussed.

Efficient organisation of the discussion and the atmosphere of a scientific event were due to competence and personal engagement of the Chairperson of the Organisation Committee of the Conference, Doctor Elżbieta Napora and the Secretary of the conference, Doctor Agata Woźniak-Krakowian.

Organisers of the Conference remembered also about passive participants, who were invited to visit various centres and institutions of social welfare and policy. This was done by careful selection of topics of the workshops they attended. Workshop meetings involved such issues as sources of helplessness and methods of coping with that feeling, social design in the work of people supporting development of individuals, and relaxation techniques. All workshops turned out to be interesting and the techniques of working the body allowed all those who joined in - not only the Organisers - to reduce tension and stress caused by excessive amount of responsibility.

Apart from that, the program of the Conference included integration meetings round a bonfire, where baked black Silesian sausages were served, and a candlelit supper attended by our honourable guests, representatives of local authorities.

Results of our conference will be published in post-conference materials, allowing detailed review of the issues discussed during plenary meetings, scientific debates, and displayed on posters.

On behalf of the Conference Organisers, we would like to thank all participants for high quality of their reports and presentations, and for their constructive remarks and suggestions, for their frank and warm-hearted attitude.

It is the organisers' intention to arrange a series of conferences on the topic. Taking advantage of the occasion, we invite all participants that may consider it worthwhile to attend such meetings.

