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Proposed dissertation topics in the social work study program for admission to doctoral studies in the 2026/2027 academic year

Mgr. Daniel Markovič, PhD.

The transformation of social and career counselling in the era of artificial intelligence

The dissertation responds to the unprecedented transformation of the labour market caused by the rapid integration of artificial intelligence (AI), which is increasingly causing "technological anxiety", fears of algorithmic discrimination, and loss of control over their own career paths. The research is theoretically grounded in an interdisciplinary framework of social work, career counselling, and technology ethics, primarily building on career construction theory (CCT), resource conservation theory (RCT), and global ethical standards for helping professions with an emphasis on maintaining human presence in the decision-making process (the "human-in-the-loop" approach). The main objective of the work is to analyse the psychosocial impacts of AI implementation on the experiences of social and career counselling clients. The thesis will apply a sequential mixed-methods research design, which in the first phase uses a quantitative cross-sectional survey with internationally validated instruments to map the level of technological anxiety and career adaptability. The subsequent qualitative phase will use phenomenological analysis and semi-structured interviews to explore in depth the subjective experiences of clients, their barriers, issues of trust, and the key need for human contact when interacting with AI tools.

doc. PhDr. Markéta Rusnáková, PhD.

The role of social work in reconciling collective historical traumas: Approaches, challenges, and perspectives

(possibility to focus on a specific region of Slovakia, Europe, post-communist countries, etc.)

Historical memory and its political framing significantly influence social relations, identity, and reconciliation processes, especially in communities that have experienced collective traumas such as wars, totalitarian regimes, or systematic human rights violations, marginalization, and segregation. Social work plays an important role in facilitating dialogue, reconciliation, and building social cohesion in post-conflict or historically burdened societies.

This dissertation will address the question of how social work can contribute to the reconciliation of historical injustices and the promotion of collective memory that facilitates social integration. The research will focus on existing approaches, intervention options, and obstacles that social workers face when working with individuals and communities in the context of historical trauma.

To examine the role of social work in the process of reconciling historical conflicts – to analyze the theoretical foundations and practical strategies of social work in this area. Identify challenges and barriers when working with groups affected by historical trauma – how past injustices affect social interactions, community ties, and public policy. To analyze existing reconciliation initiatives in post-conflict societies – to examine examples of good practice from around the world (e.g., South Africa,

Rwanda, post-communist Europe). Propose a model for involving social work in historical memory policy – develop recommendations for involving social workers in the creation of public policies and community programs to promote reconciliation.

Methodology proposals: Case study analysis – selection of specific countries and community projects that have addressed historical memory and reconciliation. Qualitative research – interviews with social workers, historians, activists, and members of post-conflict communities. Analysis of public policies – evaluation of legislative and institutional approaches to the reconciliation of historical injustices.

The work will contribute to a better understanding of the role of social work in reconciling historical conflicts and strengthening social cohesion. It will provide practical recommendations for social workers and policymakers on how to address collective historical traumas more effectively through dialogue and participatory approaches.

doc. PhDr. Markéta Rusnáková, PhD.

Family reunification after placing a child outside the family: predictors of success, stability of return, and a model of follow-up support in social work

In the context of the proposed dissertation topic, the doctoral student should focus on defining the methods and procedures of family reunification—the return of a child from foster care (or another form of placement outside the biological family) back to the original family environment—as a key process with a long-term impact on the child's safety, parental capacity, and the stability of the family system. In practice, the return is often evaluated on a "point" basis (fulfillment of conditions), but its sustainability over time and the factors that lead to repeated failure (re-entry), recurrence of risks, or the need for new intervention are less systematically monitored.

The aim of the work should be to identify the decisive factors for successful and stable reunification and, on this basis, to design and pilot test a model of follow-up support in social work that reduces the risk of re-placement of the child outside the family while strengthening the safety and functionality of the family. In this work, we propose to focus on identifying predictors of success and failure of return (e.g., parental competencies, economic stability, housing, support network, mental health, addictions, domestic violence, cooperation with the school), the quality and content of reunification planning (safety planning, goals, criteria for the readiness of the child and parents, the child's voice), and the quality of the content of follow-up interventions after return (intensity of contact, case management, family rehabilitation, multidisciplinary coordination).

Methodologically, in the context of the research, mixed methods could be used due to the focus of the work: the quantitative part, for example, could analyze data on the course of reunification and its stability (e.g., maintaining the return within 6–24 months, repeated interventions, school attendance, safety indicators), while the qualitative part would use interviews and analysis of case files with social workers, parents, and, depending on ethical considerations, also with children, in order to understand the mechanisms of success/failure and the real needs of families after return. The outcome of the research could be a proposal for procedures for the reunification of children in terms of improving this process.

prof. dr. Irena Zemaitaitė

Participatory Research as a Pathway to Active Engagement Among Adults: Strengthening society through learning: opportunities for inclusion of older people

In Lithuania, Slovakia, as in other EU Member States, older people - those aged 60 and over - are becoming a larger and larger proportion of the population every year. The main demographic indicator

of ageing is the proportion of older people in society. The European Commission's Ageing Europe report (2019) estimates that in three decades' time, Lithuania's population could be one of the 4 oldest in Europe. The World Health Organisation points out that it is not enough to aim for longer life expectancy, but it is also necessary to make life at older ages as healthy and productive as possible (Šukytė & Čepukienė, 2017). Healthier, more active and creative people are the basis for an active society and a growing economy, and ageing trends only reinforce the importance of these components in the context of the 'silver' economy. The participation of older people in the labour market and in social, economic and cultural life is an important area for successful ageing. Successful ageing is determined by financial security, preserving health in old age, maintaining social relationships and staying physically active (Jankūnaitė & Naujanienė, 2012). While population ageing is a predictable process, it is important to take stock of the economic and social changes that are taking place, to address the challenges that are emerging and to find solutions to keep older people active for as long as possible. One of the most important features of modern life is the need for continuous learning. The importance of lifelong learning as a way of democratising education was reiterated at the seventh UNESCO conference in Morocco in 2022. UNESCO documents emphasise that the aim of adult education and lifelong learning is to equip people with the necessary skills to exercise and realise their rights and control their destinies. It promotes the personal and professional development of adults, the increased involvement of adults in the creation of learning communities and sustainable environments. European documents mention lifelong learning as one of the key factors ensuring the readiness of Lithuanian and Slovakian societies for global change and enabling the development of a learning society. When analysing the needs and opportunities for adult learning in Lithuania and Slovakia, more and more attention is being paid to the aspects of the teaching and learning process for adults.

In Ružomberok, February 27, 2026. Approved by: doc. PhDr. Markéta Rusnáková, PhD.