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Manuel García-Ramírez

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Conference Report

II ECPA International Seminar: Integrating New Migrants in the New Europe. A Challenge for Community Psychology

Manuel García-Ramírez

Universidad de Sevilla

To increase the impact of community psychology on the European agenda for migration studies, the European Community Psychology Association (ECPA) has promoted the seminar 'Integrating new migrants in the new Europe; A challenge for community psychology', hosted by Universidad de Sevilla (www.portal.us.es), which took place from 19th to 21st September, 2007, in Seville (see complete information at www.migrantintegration.org).

The ECPA (www.ecpa.pt) is the European association of researchers and professionals who work in the context of community psychology and whose main purposes are:

- to contribute to the influence of community psychology in social initiatives and political actions
- to promote social change practices focused on personal health, human development and social justice outcomes.

The community psychology perspective understands migration as an ecological transition, and promotes models that observe the conditions of oppression of natives and migrants in terms of risk of social exclusion, actions that extol the diversity of social contexts, and processes of socialisation and inter-ethnic networks of support and integration. These proposals try to create conditions in which to develop migrants' capacities and potential in the social fabric, promote their integration into ethnically balanced communities, guarantee provision of community services and provide guidelines for creating identities that connect the cultural heritage of immigrants to European values.

In spite of the explanatory capacity of these proposals, the European agenda for the study of migrations does not pay it sufficient attention. To cover this gap, this seminar was called by the ECPA to bring together participants from various disciplines and places

of origin involved in both community and migrant research. The ecological perspective which is assumed by community psychology orientated the structure of the seminar. The main thematic line, therefore, was the relationship between power and well-being, in order to highlight the asymmetrical way in which migrants usually have to cope with incorporation in a new society. The other thematic lines were integration, acculturation and acculturative stress, social relations and social support, and enjoyment of social and community resources and services. Finally, the closing keynote speech offered a broad panorama of possibilities that European researcher networks offer to increase the interconnection between them.

In the opening lecture, Isaac Prilleltensky dealt with the opportunities that community psychology offers for amplifying knowledge about the connection between power and well-being. This connection focuses on a wider concept of well-being, in which people have opportunities to access and enjoy community and social opportunities, to decide what goals they want to pursue and what risks they want to assume, to contribute to the definition of their own problems, and to decide how they want to cope with them and who they want to receive support and care from. As Prilleltensky pointed out, as did many other researchers in their contributions, social cohesion and community integration are impossible without well-being, but to enjoy well-being, social cohesion and community integration are required. Many participants drew attention to the added risks of more vulnerable groups such as women and children. Specific female issues such as prostitution, rape, mistreatment and labour exploitation were tackled, using qualitative methodologies which make it possible to analyse deeply and critically specific gender issues, and to promote effective personal and social change actions. Children and adolescent issues were also tackled at length. Second-generation migrants, refugees and children

brought in by their parents' decision were target groups in several practices orientated to empowering them on personal, relational and community levels.

The seminar offered a broad perspective on a genuine concept of integration. Community psychology focuses on integration rather than adaptation. Adaptation is more related to acceptance of mainstream rules and the status quo, whereas integration emphasises symmetrical and reciprocal efforts between all people and groups who are living together. Integration refers to acquired personal and collective agency, the competences required for people to define their own lives and to enjoy social opportunities to pursue their goals. This perspective was tackled by Dina Birman's keynote speech, in which she pointed out the different contexts in which migrants have to manage their incorporation, where they have to adjust to contradictory purposes, frequently in hard conditions. Various contributions showed an understanding of integration based on the process by which migrants become part of the host society, by acquiring a sense of community, civic and political engagement, knowledge and experiences of public systems, social and cultural interaction, and use of the new language and the expectations of a more diverse community.

The stress of acculturation is an important issue related to the previous topic. Several contributions to this seminar offered a way to include the vision of community psychology in this topic on the European agenda. Community psychology has created useful tools to give voice to disenfranchised groups, enabling them to incorporate their own worldview in defining problems, overcoming a victim-blaming perspective and assuring well-being through practices based on social and personal networks, and care systems sensitive to community diversity. Following this thematic line, Charles Watters' lecture presented the state of the art on the requirement of mental health services for refugees and the availability of practices, services and care. He presented strategies to improve care for asylum seekers and refugees on one hand, and mental health service providers on the other. Others efforts designated to optimise the evaluation and treatment of acculturative stress (such as Ulysses' syndrome) were discussed in several panels.

The seminar contributions also showed how community psychology can offer a set of opportunities for a wider understanding of the role of social networks during the migration process. Usually, research findings emphasise the role of the personal network in providing support (with family and compatriots as the main providers), the role of community activism and participation in community-based organisations to ensure a voice in the control of social resources, and the importance of a sense of community and belonging among neighbours (avoiding prejudice and racist attitudes between different cultural groups). But, as Robin Goodwin pointed out in his keynote address and other participants in their contributions, migrants have to rebuild their personal network in such a way that weak links become stronger, instrumental ties become sources of emotional support, and friends and compatriots come to occupy family roles. While such links can contribute to preservation of the cultural heritage, which has been related to better mental health and healthier life-styles, too great a reliance on such ties can result in a higher risk of exclusion from the wider society, creating a glass ceiling in the labour market and other spheres of social advancement. Several contributions which tried to cope with these challenges were presented in the seminar.

The seminar gave special attention to the challenges related to adaptation to the health and social care systems required for a European multicultural society. Existing health and social care systems were designed for a homogeneous clientèle with similar health determinants, requiring a similar vision of care. Now the values of homogeneity must be changed to the values of heterogeneity, because national care systems should converge in a European system model. But migration entails a new level of complexity in meeting this challenge, configuring a tower of Babel which requires the attention of several disciplines to develop new best practices focused on entitlement, access and quality. Dealing with these topics, Fabricio Balcazar's lecture presented a wide overview of cultural competence studies and his community psychology-based cultural competence framework. Several contributions in which these challenges were seen through a lens of cultural, religious and gender diversity were presented as well. Health promotion in a multicultural society, and gender health issues (like coping with rape or pregnancy and

motherhood), are among the examples tackled in the seminar. Cultural adaptation and sensibility to diversity are also required in educational settings, and this preoccupation was discussed in various panels and roundtables. Several contributions showed the prominent role that intercultural teachers' competences and learning communities have in incorporation of parents in the educational process, and in coping with integration of teenagers in the school system.

Finally, the seminar tried to express that these challenges must be raised within an interdisciplinary outlook, because community psychology promotes scientific inclusive agendas that stimulate interdisciplinary collaboration and partnerships in the study of the community processes. This perspective concurs with the European agenda, which is engaged in creating research networks in order to optimise resources, findings and good practices. For this reason the closing lecture was in the charge of David Ingleby, head of the co-operation scientific technical network HOME and the Erasmus Curriculum Development Project Health and Social Care for Migrants and Minorities. He pointed out that progress in this field is threatened by the division of Europe into many separate disciplines, hampering the

creation of the sound knowledge needed to underpin initiatives. Various projects focused on overcoming this gap were presented in his keynote presentation. Additionally, many members of these networks participated in the seminar, and their contributions made possible the interconnection between European community psychologists and researchers from different disciplines, permitting mutual enrichment.

In conclusion, the seminar offers a wide prospect of how community psychology can contribute to improving our understanding of European migrations, at a moment in which Europe faces the challenges associated with migrant integration on community, organisational, institutional and relational levels. Because we have learned that integration means mutual enrichment, symmetrical relationships, personal and collective well-being and social justice, we are obliged to improve the knowledge base, creating researcher networks to share our findings, develop new models to ensure access by migrants to health and social care, and new strategies to avoid social fragmentation and to bridge the community diversity. This seminar expressed the prominent role that European community psychologists wish to have in this process.