

## Review of doctoral thesis by

### ***Kaori Yamashita: „ Labour Market Integration of people with Chronic Disease/Non-Communicable Diseases in selected countries of the European Union”***

In her PhD thesis, **Kaori Yamashita** aimed to scrutinise a highly complex and particularly relevant social issue. The thesis is studying the potential obstacles and opportunities in the social and labour market integration of peripheral social groups – especially the groups suffering from Chronic Diseases/Non-Communicable Diseases (CD/NCD). She is trying to unveil how the fundamental economic and social changes of the past – approximately – three decades transformed the essence of the post-World War II integrational framework, the welfare state (manifesting in various forms, yet being based on uniform foundations), as well as the European Social Model (that is a significant element of the European Paradigm). Another remarkable objective of the thesis was to find out which areas and sources would need to be identified in the documents that had been created throughout the conception of the EU’s common programmes in order to reveal those objectives and means which were designed to aid the integration of peripheral social groups.

#### ***The relevance of the chosen topic and the scope of the thesis***

The pertinence of the study is best proven by the demographic changes, the fundamental transformation of welfare systems (that guarantee the social safety of ageing society) in the recent decades, high poverty and unemployment rates (being the side effects of the globalising economy), and the unsatisfied needs of the labour market of post-industrial society (that has been experiencing changes on an elementary level) – which factors have also been analysed by the author. At the part where the author is justifying the choice of the topic, she highlights two further, relevant factors. Well-known social problems are much more easily prioritised than the ones which are less known or barely visible for society when it comes to finding possible means for solution. The thesis is focusing on such a seemingly “invisible” group of employees. Through their example, the author is demonstrating what different needs and means of treatment could emerge throughout effective integration in the case of social groups who have been supported to a lesser extent so far. She aims to prove that the labour market and social integration of the CD/NCD target group is one of the most significant objectives of today. On the one hand this numerous group cannot be productive while they are being excluded from the realm of work, but at the same time, providing welfare services and

medical treatment for them has started to mean more and more expenses for society recently. On the other hand – according to the author – in the case of improving the employability of the target group and engaging them in employment, their welfare costs could be reduced in a relatively short time, thus significantly improving the self-sustainability and living standards of the target group.

The finished thesis conforms to the formal requirements for academic papers concluding the PhD process in all respects. The main body of the paper consists of 378 pages and is professionally and logically divided into 5 main chapters. The text following the introductory chapter (that discusses the choice of topic and the circumstances of the study) has been arranged in 4 major parts. The first chapter introduces the European Social Model as well as the different types of welfare states in the context of the changing economic and social circumstances. The author's analysis pays special attention to the significant factors of the changes of the labour market and active labour market policies, like the European Social Model. Chapter 2 inspects the institutional environment and labour market status of CD/NCD sub-groups, namely, individuals who are affected by asthma, migraine, or depression. The third chapter demonstrates the social security system – especially the health insurance system – of 5 specific countries (following the logic of the 5 main types of the welfare state), namely: Sweden, the United Kingdom, Germany, Poland, and Italy. In addition, the author gives us insight into the realisation of the characteristic employment policy models in said countries and the active labour market policies concerning the CD/NCD target group. Finally, in Chapter 4 – through the analysis of available community programming documents – the author attempts to describe the programme elements that reduce poverty and risks of the labour market, and that support active participation in the labour market. The author strongly believes that these specific factors can create an opportunity to efficiently integrate and improve the living standards of target groups that can be related to CD/NCD as well as other peripheral social groups.

### *Assessment of the question(s) of the study and the means of analysis*

In the introduction and the first chapter, the author presents a wide-scale review of the most important economic and social challenges that compel the European Union and its member states to transform welfare policies and to introduce fundamental reforms. She depicts the groups who are susceptible to poverty and social exclusion based on a wide variety of relevant literature, related up-to-date statistics databases and mainly the strategic documents that have been created within the framework of the European Union, specifically focusing on the disadvantaged situation of the designated target group (groups affected by CD/NCD). The key issues of the study are presented by the author on page 15 of the thesis. She wants to find out what framework the European Union's strategy up until the year 2020 (named EU 2020) can offer for the labour market integration of target groups affected by CD/NCD. The main hypothesis of the paper is that the most crucial elements that help integration can be found in the EU 2020 strategy. The author also presumes that the slight modification of these elements could ensure the labour market integration of CD/NCD patients.

The relevance of the questions and hypotheses formulated by the author in her study does not need to be justified extensively. Through assessing the European Union's objectives to reduce social inequalities, its integrative practice and the successfulness of that over the past 25 years, one might ask the question: what is the reason why – despite the political intention and efforts of the EU and the individual member states – the labour market and social exclusion of

peripheral groups lingers on, or in some cases, becomes even more prominent. The author sought to analyse this process in the case of a target group that is invisible from the perspective of policymakers or that has been addressed to a lesser extent so far in the policy-making process. With the demographic and social changes, however, the problem in question inevitably moves to the foreground of the programming that defines future development. The choice of the topic of the thesis demonstrates the author's outstanding attentiveness towards problems, while the formulation of the question of the study shows a strong commitment towards the topic that does not always support the realisation of objectivity on the part of the researcher. (See: e.g. the wording of the hypothesis: the modification of certain elements of the strategy only increases the chances, but it does not guarantee the improvement of the target group's status by any means.)

Regarding the operationalisation of the hypothesis (its measurability and justifiability) and the demonstration of the methodological boundaries of the study, the opponent might have further questions. On the one hand, a remarkably strong normative element can be recognised in the formulation of the hypothesis, and also later on in further chapters of the paper, which, to an extent, can justify the operationalisation and methodological difficulties. (The use of research methods that are objective, credible, and well-founded and valid with regard to their way of reasoning is highly suppressed when it comes to a normative perspective.) Linking the study's theoretical foundations and the methodological elements that serve the purpose of justifying the hypothesis in a consistent manner (the introduction of the study's dimensions, a detailed explanation of the means of analysis, validating empirical data) shows further deficiencies. The author – in the relevant chapter – states that she uses methodological diversity – which could even be beneficial for the analysis of such complex matter. The validation of the results of the research and the compatibility of the results of different means of research raise several methodological questions. The assessment of the validity and professional legitimacy of the results of the combined five different methods – quantitative and qualitative analysis, organisational analysis, systematic analysis, and comparative analysis – is not a simple task as the author has not presented the databases and the exact dimensions of analysis in most cases. It is unclear for the reader what sample and what target group has been involved in the qualitative and quantitative analyses (how many interviews have been done and how the sample had been chosen), along which factors she has performed the analysis and what the result of the empirical analysis applies to. Furthermore, there is also a lack of information with regard to which documents and data has the author used and for example, which organisations were in the scope of the organisational analysis. We can only obtain the information on the characteristics of the various research methods, however, in order to find out how the author is using these in expanding on her own topic of research, the reader is left to rely on their own assumptions and reasoning. It is quite unfortunate that these methodological elements have not been demonstrated, as the author has used a database accumulated from an extremely wide variety of sources and she has also put immense effort into discovering and introducing the strategical documents, and the preliminary systematisation and introduction of these would have served as an excellent compass and tool of validation for readers of the thesis as well.

Another reason why the methodological chapter would be a crucial part of this academic study is that the strategical documents and their policy foundations – due to the characteristics of their genre – contain many normative elements (mainly the imperative is used in their wording). This effect – especially for a beginning researcher – is extremely difficult to avoid. A solid methodological framework and its consistent realisation could help a lot to prevent using this style in an academic analytical paper that emphasises the priority of objectivity – and that mainly concentrates on 'is' rather than 'should'. With the lack of clearly phrased and

justified conclusions, and credible and valid research data, it is difficult to confirm if the hypothesis of the academic paper has been fulfilled or not.

The fundamental methodological criteria in the study – despite not being expanded on in the methodological chapter – are partially fulfilled. One of the author's most significant dimensions of analysis – though it is not implicitly expressed – is exploring the special needs of the target group. In the thesis, we can see a detailed analysis of the types of the diseases, the symptoms, the means of treatment, and the opportunities and obstacles that are relevant to labour market integration. Among these, the author considers the analysis of two fundamental factors – even though she can only back these partially with the results of the empirical analyses – to be of vast importance: namely, the analysis of low work performance and the unfavourable human relations formed at the workplaces – being the main two obstacles of integration. Regarding the analysis of strategic documents, she consistently seeks those goals and means that seem appropriate for reducing the effect of hindering factors.

### *Critical discussion of system and content of work*

The large-scale work of the author attempts to review the theoretical framework of two, already highly extensive areas along with the intention of integrating these. The depth and precision of analysing the European Social Model, and the professional and diversified scrutiny of the factors affecting the changes of the Model are all honourable and noteworthy qualities of the author's work. She equally delves into the circumstances that necessitated change over the course of time, as well as into the weaknesses of the allegedly desirable model: it could only be realised in the long run, and if economic factors are prioritised and the competition remains unbridled, the chances to tackle social inequalities will become much lower. Due to her vast learnedness, the author knows her way well around different theories of welfare, such as: the political theory of social right, functional system theory, theory of social organisation, theory of essentialism, ordoliberal economic constitutional theory, liberal Neo-Welfarism. Despite her diverse knowledge, the author has to face a difficult task when it comes to defining the essence of the European Social Model (ESM), because, as she also expresses it (p. 91.), a scientifically and empirically based definition of the Model is missing, as is the case for the method designated to measure and empirically study the efficiency of supranational control. This statement is also crucial for the reason that this fact affects the analysis of the research questions and the hypothesis of the paper as well. The author can delve into the strategic framework and the relevant social representations of the topic only, but she cannot assess the effects of the actual processes of intervention, i.e. if the strategies she is analysing and suggesting are successful or not. The same can be experienced in the analysis of e.g. the Open Method of Coordination, where the author demonstrates the pros and cons of the OMC's efficiency, but – due to the lack of measuring tools – she is not able to analyse the actual effect of it yet.

The presentation of the EU strategical documents that coordinate the activities of the nation states, mainly that of the EU 2020 strategy is detailed and to-the-point. The author introduces and delves into almost every EU strategical document that could be connected to the analysed target group. However, the reader can learn relatively little about the documents' circumstances of creation, the economic, social, ideological and political changes, or the relation of the documents. It is not clear what the direction, shared or differing content, or the curve of development of the specific developmental stages' strategy is regarding the target group, neither are those of strategical changes; the author does not share the points of

comparison regarding each specific document either, and in many cases, she even passes on the responsibility of comparison to the reader.

The author also covers the brief introduction of the different types of welfare states in the first chapter. This part might fit better in the beginning of the second chapter than being embedded to the analysis of the main characteristics and objectives of the European Social Model. It is quite unfortunate that in the introduction of the models (pp 66-79), the fundamental work and the author who laid out the original model have been completely omitted (*Esping-Andersen (1990):The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*). The types of welfare states are demonstrated by the author on the basis of the 17-page summary of the SensAge project.

In connection with the diversified analysis of the European Social Model, the author also presents the active labour market policies in Chapter 1.4. This toolkit becomes quite underemphasised in the brief chapter that clarifies a few definitions, especially taking into consideration that later on, it is regarded to be a promising toolkit for the labour market integration of the CD/NCD target group. It is important to note – for the reader’s sake – that studies and experiences regarding the use of the ALMP toolkit are in many cases quite critical and are not always interpreted as the means of reducing poverty and improving living standards. Thus, the differentiated discussion of the opportunities and constraints related to the ALMP is inevitable.

(See e.g.: the study of M. Ferrera (2013): *Liberal Neo-Welfarism: new perspectives for the European Social Model*)

In Chapter 2, the author demonstrates the target group that is being analysed in the paper, she looks into the different sets of symptoms and ways of treatment related to each type of disease. The author intends to scrutinise the critical characteristics from an economic, historical, political, psychological, anthropological and sociological aspect at the same time, but the task she has to accomplish is still extremely difficult, regardless of the multiple aspect approach. The available statistics on the target group are rather sporadic and also, the related literature is quite limited. Besides these, it is the author’s achievement that the reader can see an accurate and tangible image of the “labelling” that the target group can experience, the difficulties of receiving healthcare services, as well as the “diagnosis” of society. Another goal of the author is to reinforce the feeling of involvement on the part of the reader: anyone can be sick when society is labelling and excluding people with any kind of illness. In the second part of the chapter, the focus is shifted towards the relation between the analysed target group and the labour market. During the analysis, the author – in a spirit of the latest trend in social policy – sketches out the opportunities of social investment and active labour market policies. Although she analyses training and education in the framework of ALMP, it might be more effective to use the emphasis and analysis of special working time, working from home or non-typical forms of employment relationship (temporary agency work, self-employment) out of atypical forms of employment in the case of the target group.

The successfulness of the analysed target group’s labour market integration and the motivation of the individuals concerned regarding employment are also influenced by the type of passive benefits that are issued for individuals with a reduced capacity to work (e.g. the system of requirements for receiving social benefits or invalidity pension), as well as the support of entering employment (e.g.: the extensiveness of the system of institutions and tools of rehabilitation). During the further improvement of the research, it would be ideal to look into this as well.

In the third chapter, in accordance with the five types of welfare states, the author attempts to analyse five countries. Analysing the five welfare models in detail poses a serious challenge to the researcher, even if they focus on a few areas only. Nevertheless, the author makes a

relatively sound attempt, and she gives us insight to the operation of the analysed countries' healthcare support system, the structure of the labour market institution system and the unemployment benefit system, but we can also learn about the status of migrants who have come to the country. (The opponent believes that the insertion of the latter target group into the chapter that introduces the countries is neither necessary, nor elaborate enough.)

A unique merit of the chapter is the diverse exploration of the related literature with regard to the specific groups of illnesses in the respective countries. An extremely valuable part is the collection and systematic analysis of research data and information of panel analyses regarding the employment of CD/NCD clients, broken down into each subcategory as well, even if information is only available in a fractured, sporadic manner.

An unpleasant element of the chapter is that in some cases, the author uses absolute numbers (pp. 203; 211; 234; 251; 258.) which does not help the reader compare different data as the costs of e.g. early retirement presented in absolute numbers are very difficult to interpret in countries with very different population numbers.

The one paragraph long summary concluding the analysis of the five countries is in our opinion not suitable to summarise the similarities and differences of the specific models or to draw the conclusions that are in accordance with the hypothesis or that are contradictory to that.

In the third chapter, the author attempted to demonstrate the conditions of the target group's labour market integration as for the needed institutions, services and socio-economic requirements. In Chapter 4, she sums up which needs can be identified among the analysed target group as the conditions of successful integration.

In the first part of the chapter, the author intends to study – through the analysis of various integrational strategies – what the role, task and responsibility of the state is in the integration of excluded groups. She advocates the development of a multi-level and multi-participant model and through examples, she demonstrates the operation of a model with multiple participants, and the engagement of the target group in strategical planning as well as the practical realisation. Through the examination of the analysed models, we cannot learn much about the effect of those. Most criticism by experts, however, emphasises that the way tools are being used is extremely important. (See e.g. the writings of J. Kluve) In the following parts of the chapter, the author – focusing on the three key areas of the paper – reviews the potential solutions for boosting integration:

- reducing poverty (training, strengthening the employment role of non-profit organisations, organising welfare programmes)
- protection against risks in the labour market (establishing jobs, self-employment)
- rewarding participation in the labour market (insurance, health care, sick leave, financial support, mutual understanding between CD/NCD Workers and Non-CD/NCD Workers)

Regarding the analysis of each means of solution, the author equally builds on strategical documents, case descriptions and her personal opinion. She expresses her firm support of upgrading the tools, while focusing on the opportunities and obstacles of the target group. Contrary to the assertion of the public opinion – according to which it is wiser to stay away from work with such severe medical conditions – she conveys the approach (based on rational arguments) that there are aspects – that are not exclusively financial aspects – due to which it is favourable to provide the means of employment that are appropriate for the needs and skills of the target group.

Finally, in the concluding part of the paper – based on previous analyses – the author pronounces her hypothesis proven. After the detailed scrutiny of the EU 2020 strategy, she finds that her hypothesis is further backed by the fact that the EU 2020 strategy attempts to

realise the integration of marginalised groups through the involvement in the labour market. Even though there are some peculiarities of the CD/NCD target group that need extra equipment and attention, the author believes that slight modifications of the strategy – the areas of which are presented in Chapter 4 – would be enough to realise integration – that would provide the needed flexibility and treatment that takes personal needs into consideration. Regarding the validation of the hypothesis, the opponent would like to note that the author considers the hypothesis – that is not sufficiently operationalised from a methodological point of view – to be validated based on less objective facts than necessary.

### *The formal structure of the work*

The paper can certainly be an interesting reading for not only those who are concerned. Stylistically, it is most of the time descriptive, expressive, and to a lesser extent it is analytic, it exposes the underlying connections and it is also comparative. The author's commitment towards the topic can explain the devoted reasoning for the target group as well as the means of solution that are considered effective by the author, which reasoning often trespasses the boundaries of objectivity. Thus, the scientific arguments are sometimes accompanied by emotions and a committed declaration of intention on the pages of the work. As a result – as this is an academic analysis rather than a strategical document – the style of the text might need some adjustment in some instances and also the normative elements should be modified. The formal arrangement of the thesis is clear, systematic and aesthetically pleasing. There are, a few data sets that would be much clearer for the reader if they were arranged in a table format. Such examples are namely: the data sets regarding the change of the percentage of specific groups of diseases based on time; those regarding their employment; or the summarising tables that help international comparison based on available data. Other elements of the text – such as the detailed and extensive listing of specific types of illnesses – should have ideally been included in the appendix of the paper. The opponent also feels that other appendices of the thesis are missing, like the interview drafts, questionnaires used for the empirical analysis, as well as the referenced documents of the survey analysis. Besides these, the opponent would like to note that the use of resources incorporated in the work is exemplary, the 'works consulted' section in the appendix with more than 300 items is edited with extreme care and it is highly informative, and the abstract of the thesis serves the purpose of arousing interest towards the studied topic – with its elegant conciseness and informativeness – very well.

### *Summary*

#### *Assessment of the dissertation in terms of the requirements of Article 13 of the Act:*

The thesis, being based on an extensive scope of related literature, as well as being theoretically well-founded and delivered in a sophisticated manner, according to the opponent's opinion – despite the suggestions and criticism mentioned before – meets the requirements for PhD papers, both from the perspective of content and formality. The relevance of the chosen topic, the analysis of factors that obstruct the labour market integration of disadvantaged groups of employees and the organisational and institutional conditions assisting integration, focusing on the target group affected by CD/NCD will contribute a lot of unique output to the researcher community. The collection and systematisation of statistical data about the CD/NCD target group, the collection and systematic analysis of those points in strategical documents that apply to the target group, and the critical analysis of the European Social Model's efficiency regarding the integration of

peripheral social groups are remarkable merits or modern outcomes of the dissertation. With reviewing the strategies and potential set of tools of reducing poverty, reducing the risks of the labour market and motivating the participation in employment, the author also highlighted that for the individuals in the CD/NCD target group – which is ever growing due to the social and economic changes – the only way is through the changes in the mindset of the political and social environment, the reinforcement of welfare states' strategies of inclusion and the development and encouragement of special labour market integration programmes.

Conclusion: the reviewer positively assesses the thesis, and concludes with the release Ms MA Kaori Yamashita the subsequent stages of the procedure for awarding the degree of PhD in political science.

Debrecen, 10.08.2016.

  
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