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Creating culturally relevant approaches to social work across Oceania

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Abstract
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Creating culturally relevant approaches to social work across Oceania

Over the last decade, the importance of creating a shared vision on the role of social work across Oceania has continued via the emerging themes of Pacific regionalism. As one of the largest geographical regions in the world, Oceania is generally defined in this context to include 16 island countries; including Australia, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Fiji, Tonga and Samoa, and 21 smaller territories; including Guam, Tokelau and French Polynesia. With a combined population of over 40 million people, speaking near to 30 official languages, this region is characterised by a rich array of local and indigenous knowledges, beliefs and practices; further supported by an emerging expansion of economic possibilities through the universal impact and role of globalization.

With such diversity, Oceania is also characterised by financial disparities, with larger counties like Australia and New Zealand perceived to be the paternal figurehead in supporting the emerging economies of the smaller island states. This level of dependency, overtime, may have continued to uphold dominant Western discourses that permeate funding expectations from entities generally providing aid from an altruistic perspective. However, such perspectives may be at the detriment of local and indigenous epistemologies and ontologies that should still be respected, and admonished in their respective countries, rather than expended due to a neo-colonial agenda. In addition to such pressures to conform to funding expectations, is another layer of assessment implemented by international conventions and treaties. Manifested in the adoption of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), larger countries are more readily able to implement such strategies, whereas smaller countries still rely heavily on their diplomatic relationship and good standing with funders to support such development in creating the needed outputs to gain the respective outcomes. It is within this tension that further research, and critical analysis on how individuals, families and community groups can contribute to the change process.

I believe this is where social work as a profession, alongside the Global Agenda, can create a more nuanced, and pragmatic approach to finding this balance within Oceania. With many academics and practitioners in this region committed to decolonising effective social work practice, policy and research, we are also moving towards the promotion of relevant social work education and teaching.

In this edition of Social Dialogue, our authors have contributed to the abovementioned themes, highlighting the importance of incorporating local perspective in the role of social work; whilst also exploring the various challenges that exist across modernity. As guest editor, I’ve been greatly encouraged by the shared vision to support the evolving professionalism of social work, alongside the need to promote inclusive discourses characterised by cultural differences across Oceania.

From the President’s Desk

Dear Colleagues and IASSW Members,

Welcome to the 15th issue of Social Dialogue magazine of the International Association of Schools of Social Work (IASSW). I would like to thank you all for your continuous support to our Association and its online magazine that is becoming more and more popular. This edition is as exciting and refreshing as other editions of which we are all very proud.

As the newly elected president of IASSW for 2016-2020 I would like to take this opportunity to build on past achievements and confirm my commitment to IASSW’s Mission and Vision to work on strengthening social work education across the world and its crucial role at local and international level. To devote myself to this position and the work of IASSW, and to be more free to travel in this first year, I have been granted a sabbatical from my university till September 2017.

I want to express my appreciation for all the work done by all those involved in this organization, from the IASSW Executive Board, Regional Vice Presidents, Chairs and Co-chairs and members of all the working committees for their ongoing commitment and hard work in achieving the goals and aspirations in their area of interest as well as the overall functioning of IASSW. I would particularly like to thank Prof. Vimla Nadkarni, Immediate Past President and Tetyana Semigina, Immediate Past Secretary and other members of the Board who have recently retired from their voluntary roles for their wonderful contribution and achievements over the period of their tenure.

Our work doesn’t stop here. We need to go further, both in reinforcing activities that are in place (such as the Social Dialogue, Capacity Building Initiative, Regional Resource Centers, Research and Publication activities, Global Agenda, IASSW work at UN, Disaster committee, and all other committees and task forces) and in creating strategies to strengthen the membership to enhance the communication between IASSW Executive Board and the general membership as well as continuing to strengthen relationships with IASSW regional and national associations, and to organize new initiatives such as the revision of the Global Standards for Education and Training etc.

There is incredible amount of dedication, skill and expertise in the various positions and role’s people have undertaken and I am sure that our diversity, in background, country, and experience will be an incredible treasure to direct future goals and aspirations.

I am pleased to present the first update as incoming IASSW President. It was a challenging time for me to take up the Presidencies and do the role effectively. However I have received the support from all my colleagues which has made role much easier to take on.

During these first months I have, on behalf of IASSW visited a lot of countries (eg Mexico, Russia, USA, Chile, Spain, Morocco and of course Italy) participating in conferences and meeting local associations and individual colleagues. I’ve realized skype consultations with all the Vice Presidents and Chairs of different committees to better know and support plans of actions, but also to have a clearer idea of problems and concerns they are facing. I would like to increase this way of communication to strengthen our relationship between the face to face board meetings.

Finally I would like to urge you all to join the IASSW as an individual or School member and help us in achieving our goals. Please visit IASSW website for recent updates and other details: http://www.iassw-aiets.org/Keep reading and send your feedback to us at hello@iassw-aiets.org.