

GUEST EDITOR'S LETTER: SOCIAL WORK AND COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

In a world where societies face diverse challenges, the roles of social work and community development become crucial in shaping more sustainable and inclusive communities. What connects social work and community development is their focus on improving the quality of life for individuals and communities. The correlation between social work and community development is reflected in the common values evident in international professional definitions. Both social work and community development are practical professions and academic disciplines dedicated to advancing social justice, human rights, and empowering individuals (the International Federation of Social Work 2014, the International Association of Community Development 2018). Through the synergy of these perspectives, we explore how their integrated approach can serve as a powerful tool for creating inclusive and resilient societies.

Communities are not isolated from global trends. What is more, today more than ever they are sensitive to all the changes happening around them. Communities in the 21st century are experiencing growing impacts from substantial social, economic, political, and cultural transformations, influencing these crucial connections and consequently generating requirements and possibilities for social work services. In a swiftly evolving society, there is a continuous need to focus on how social work conceptualizes, comprehends, involves, and ultimately contributes to change within the community (NASW 2011). As the needs of different communities can be complex, so can the roles of social work in the community, which can be multiple and organized within different sectors (public institutions, civil sector). The role of social work in community development varies. Social work takes on various key roles, including facilitation, enablement, mediation, brokering, coordination, and mobilization (Kirst-Ashman & Hull 2009). Empowerment, support, and constant participation of community members in all changes affecting the community can create a community that will constantly develop and allow members to constantly improve their environment and build resources that facilitate their satisfaction of various needs. Real and lasting changes in people's lives are possible only if the environment in which communities operate is changed in a planned way.

In this edition, we present articles that shed light on various aspects of social work and community development. Readers will find five papers dedicated to exploring how collaborative efforts can drive positive changes at both micro and macro levels. Two articles delve into the significance of community social protection services and offer ways to enhance them to better align with people's needs. Similarly, the paper that explores the presentation and analysis of mental health protection services within the public and civil sectors in the Republic of Serbia emphasizes the importance of promoting deinstitutionalization, establishing health-social services, and community support systems. Through analyzing the current state and identifying challenges, these papers underscore the importance of adapting health and social protection services to be more effective, accessible, and relevant in addressing the complex social and economic needs of the community. One of the papers thoroughly explores the concept of social pensions as a potential model for reducing poverty, overcoming

discrimination, and alleviating social exclusion among the elderly, both at the local level within communities and on a national scale. In the last paper, there is an analysis of social entrepreneurship in the Republic of Serbia, emphasizing the current status of the sector and its capacity to integrate socially vulnerable population groups. The author advocates for the development of deliberate public policies, the establishment of robust institutional frameworks, and the creation of comprehensive support networks as necessary directions for the further development of social entrepreneurship.

Social work and community development are interconnected with the themes of the papers through the provision of support, identification of needs, and promotion of sustainability and quality of life in a broader societal context. All these components form an integrated ecosystem of support for individuals and communities, where collaboration across different sectors and services enables a comprehensive approach to enhancing the quality of life and well-being of communities. This interconnectedness demonstrates that social work and community development are not isolated practices but are closely linked to various dimensions of community life.

In the 21st century, social work practice has witnessed a resurgence in the significance of community development (Kirst-Ashman & Hull 2009). The acknowledgment of community development approaches should be recognized as an integral component of social work practice, aligning with the profession's definition, values, principles, and ethos (O'Brien et al. 2023). Through an integrated approach, these fields can collectively contribute to building more sustainable, just, and resilient communities, and we hope that this issue of the journal is one step on that path.

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