Relational Social Work

Editorial

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Dear readers,

We are pleased to present the new issue of Relational Social Work *(Vol. 10, No. 2, October 2026). The contributions come from Italy, Finland, Ireland and Switzerland and address different areas of social work research and practice, including self-determination and participation, poverty, disability, professional networks, housing, sustainability and ecological issues.*

The first article by Maria Turati (Italy) focuses on self-determination and participation of people with intellectual disabilities. The author reflects these two core principles of social work, which can raise challenges for practitioners when people with intellectual disabilities are excluded from decision-making because of assumptions about their capacity to make choices. Drawing on the social work literature and on a participatory research experience in which the meaning of participation was explored together with people with intellectual disabilities, the article highlights the barriers that may limit their involvement in decisions and in relationships with professionals. The author argues for shared decision-making processes that recognise and support people's agency and participation.

This is followed by a systematic literature review by Andrea Gollini (Italy) on the role of the third sector and voluntary sector in addressing poverty. Focusing on advanced democracies between 2012 and 2022, the review highlights the complex and sometimes ambivalent relationship between third-sector organisations and public institutions. It also draws attention to the contribution of volunteers in identifying emerging needs and developing informal responses to them. The findings point to the importance of more structured collaboration between public authorities and civil society actors in responding to poverty.

The third article, by Mari Kivistö and colleagues (Finland), examines the relational conditions of structural disability social work. Based on focus groups with social workers working in Finland's newly established wellbeing services counties, the study explores the internal and external conditions required for structural disability social work. The findings identify relational conditions for collaborative practice that are considered important by social workers but are not yet fully realised. Attention is given to relational bindings and joint action among the different actors involved.

In their article, Luigi Tronca and Sandro Stanzani (Italy) investigate the relationship between social workers' personal support networks and their use of network intervention in professional practice. Drawing on a survey of social workers in the Veneto region and using Personal Network Analysis, the authors show that approximately one third of respondents identify network intervention among their most frequent professional activities. The findings

also indicate positive associations between the size and density of practitioners' personal networks and the importance they attribute to network intervention, offering an interesting perspective on the relationship between social workers' personal relational experiences and their professional practice.

The final three articles are linked to the April 2026 Special Issue, Eco-Social Work, Environmental Justice and Social Policy in Times of Ecological Crisis. New scenarios and transformative practices in a relational perspective*. They further develop the discussion on the ecological dimensions of social work. Katarzyna Wodniak and Waleed Serhan (Ireland) present a deliberative forum on cooperative housing in Dublin. Drawing on relational social work, the forum provided a space for building trust, navigating conflict, and co-producing knowledge about alternative approaches to housing. Participants, mostly young adults excluded from the conventional housing market, explored cooperative housing as a way of connecting environmental justice and community repair. The authors reflect on the potential of deliberative forums as an ecosocial practice and on their contribution to understanding housing as an urban common.*

Swetha Rao Dhananka (Switzerland) reflects on the relationship between social work and the Sustainable Development Goals. The article proposes an analytical triangle connecting the SDGs understood as commons, processes of commoning, and the ethical principles and competences of social work. Through examples from local and global contexts, the author shows how social workers can support participatory and community-led interpretations of the SDGs and contribute to building collective imaginaries for more just and sustainable futures.

Finally, Gregor Husi (Switzerland) explores the connections between ecological and relational thinking in social work. Starting from Lena Dominelli's green social work, the author brings this perspective into dialogue with relational approaches to social work, the relational sociology of Bourdieu, Giddens and Habermas, and social and political ecology. Attention is given to the concepts of societal relations with nature and the imperial mode of living. On this basis, Husi develops an understanding of green social work that connects social conditions, social relationships, and societal relations with nature, offering a framework for addressing contemporary socio-ecological challenges.

Taken together, the articles in this issue offer different perspectives on contemporary social work and its relational dimensions. They invite reflection on participation and self-determination, relationships between professionals and service users, collaboration among different actors and organisations, the contribution of civil society, and the connections between social and ecological issues. In different ways, they show how attention to relationships can contribute to understanding social problems and developing social work practices that respond to changing and complex contexts.

We would like to thank all the authors for their contributions and reviewers for their valuable work in supporting the scientific quality of the Journal.

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