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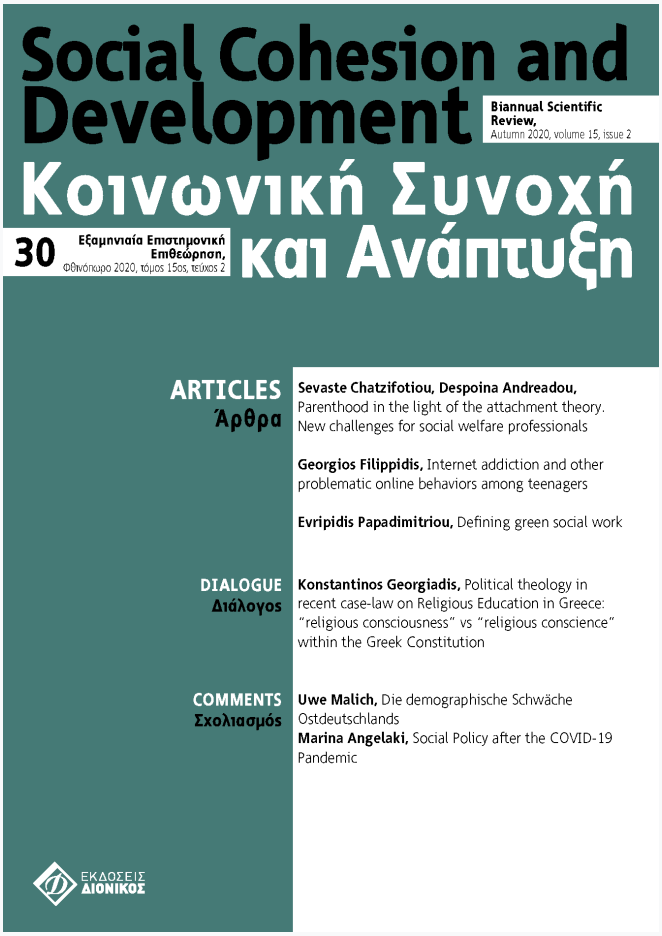

The social worker as a green profession

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Defining green social work

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Ορίζοντας την πράσινη κοινωνική εργασία

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ABSTRACT

In the current dispensation, there is a lot of work being undertaken globally by social workers to address the issues at the nexus of environmental and communi-ty sustainability. This is due to the fact that environmental problems are also proving to have a social angle and therefore social workers are increasingly finding it important to include the attainment of environmental justice and sustainability as part of their social interventions. The phenomenon is being referred to as green social work. The paper presents the basic proposals of scholars which concern the content and the particular attributes of this new example. In addition, it aims to connect the theoretical discussion with the practical application and to describe the role of the green social worker.

KEY WORDS: Green Social Work, eco-social approach, environmental inequality, sustainability.

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Τα ζητήματα της περιβαλλοντικής και της κοινωνικής βιωσιμότητας αποσπούν σήμερα σε διεθνές επίπεδο το ενδιαφέρον των κοινωνικών λειτουργών οι οποίοι έχουν συμβάλει στην παραγωγή σημαντικού ερευνητικού έργου. Καθώς όλο και περισσότερο αναγνωρίζονται οι κοινωνικές διαστάσεις των περιβαλλοντικών προβλημάτων, καθίσταται αναγκαία η συμπερίληψη των στόχων της περιβαλλοντικής δικαιοσύνης και της βιωσιμότητας στις παρεμβάσεις της κοινωνικής εργασίας. Πρόκειται για μια τάση η οποία αναφέρεται στη σχετική βιβλιογραφία ως πράσινη κοινωνική εργασία. Το άρθρο παρουσιάζει τις κεντρικές προτάσεις των μελετητών αναφορικά με το περιεχόμενο και τα ιδιαίτερα χαρακτηριστικά του νέου αυτού παραδείγματος. Περαιτέρω, στοχεύει να συνδέσει τη θεωρητική συζήτηση με την πρακτική εφαρμογή και να περιγράψει το ρόλο του πράσινου κοινωνικού λειτουργού.

ΛΕΞΕΙΣ-ΚΛΕΙΔΙΑ: Πράσινη κοινωνική εργασία, οικο-κοινωνική προσέγγιση, περιβαλλοντική ανισότητα, βιωσιμότητα/αειφορία.

1. Introduction

Green social work is a new paradigm for the management of social problems as well as dealing with the negative consequences brought upon the environment by the industrial society of mass consumption (Dominelli, 2012 & 2018). This approach recognizes a particularly important role for social workers in relation to the issue of environmental injustice and the development of sustainable communities and societies (Jones, 2018; Peeters, 2012; Hetherington & Boddy, 2013). Environmental injustice is the failure to use the earth's resources in a conscious, useful, and equitable manner. It is a concept that is based on the impact of environmental deg-

radation and climate change on the most vulnerable people as well as on the unequal distribution of the environmental 'goods and bads' (Bell 2009, p. 19) in the society. The social impact of industrialization on the environment worsened by unsustainable development models, power dynamics, consumerism, by the implementation of neoliberal policy and imbalanced resource distribution (Mason et al., 2017; Rinkel & Powers, 2017; Shajahan & Sharma, 2018). These factors are central to the prevailing socio-economic systems that exacerbate structural inequalities and worsen the situation for the poor and low-income individuals or communities (Bullard & Johnson, 2000; Montgomery & Chakraborty 2015). It is also these situations that undermine these individuals' capacities to reduce risk, and they also lower their resilience (Dominelli & Ku, 2017; Dominelli, 2012).

Thus, environmental justice is premised on equitably sharing the burdens caused by environmental deterioration and benefits that are involved in the maintenance of healthy and sustainable environments. Consequently, social workers have their roles to play in the achievement of this objective. The social worker mitigates the vulnerabilities that the poor people might be exposed to in their efforts to build resilience. It is also certain that the earth's environment should be maintained in order to meet the needs of the current and future generations (Bell, 2009; Rocha, 2018; Philip & Reisch, 2015; Lucas-Darby, 2011).

Dominelli (2012, p. 8) defines green social work as the practice that "intervenes to protect the environment and enhance people's wellbeing by integrating the interdependencies between people and their sociocultural, economic and physical environments, and among peoples within an egalitarian framework that addresses prevailing structural inequalities and unequal distribution of power and resources". The new environmental and societal context requires not only the further development of the theoretical background, but also the inclusion of environmental issues in the education of social workers (Närhi & Matthies, 2018; Boetto & Bell, 2015; Jones, 2013).

The article includes a review of the main ideas in the concept of green social work. It also seeks to explore the role of the social worker in the light of this new approach, to show how social workers have a part to play by ensuring that resources and individuals are mobilized when they declare the unacceptability of environmental degradation and where these efforts are aimed at formulating alternative socioeconomic and environmental protection models entrenched within the environmental justice principles for a healthy and sustainable existence (Coates & Gray, 2012; Beltran et al., 2016). The paper argues that the social worker is a formidable force in tackling environmental degradation and enhancing environmental and community sustainability through a combination and channeling of various factors such as education, enforcement, and possession of particular skills such as the mobilization of citizens towards this goal.

2. Environmental justice, sustainability and green social work

The interventions regarding environmental justice are aimed at the promotion of safe and clean environments through the meaningful involvement of all in the development of policy decisions that impact the environment (Jones, 2012). The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) defines this concept as the fair treatment and meaningful involvement of all people regardless of race, color, national origin, or income, with respect to the development, implementation, and enforcement of environmental laws, regulations, and policies. Concerning sustainability, the use

of natural resources in a responsible manner is necessary so that they will remain viable and available for future generations (Hayward et al., 2000). It is this cause that has attracted traditional social workers who have previously been involved in the promotion of social justice and human rights to become reliable partners of movements that advocate for environmental justice (Dominelli, 2012). Green social work is a practice that is rooted in the enhancement of the wellbeing of individuals and their environments. It is in this light that social work is by definition linked to the concepts of environmental inequality and ecosocial justice.

Social workers derive the authority for their interventions from the fact that most nation-states are current and active members of the United Nations. Thus, each state is tasked with the provision of resources that mitigate the risks exposed to its citizens. Subsequently, they are responsible for providing the necessities for the sustenance of life as the countries that have also signed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, i.e., UDHR (Boetto & Bell, 2015; Dominelli, 2012). Here, articles 22-27 indicate that nations should be committed to ensuring that the well-being of their citizens is taken care of in terms of their access to food, shelter, education, health resources, and clothing, among other necessities for the maintenance of human life. Moreover, the work of social workers in enhancing environmental justice is further supported by other protocols and treaties that promote environmental justice as a right and where human beings are supposed to live in a healthy environment, with examples such as the Rio and Stockholm Declarations (Dominelli, 2013). Nevertheless, some countries state their inability to comply with these demands as envisioned by the UDHR and declarations. New public management models combined with the impacts of fiscal crises and austerity policies have further aggravated the situation of the most vulnerable people and societies.

Notably, this is a phenomenon that is not only visible in poor countries, but also in rich nations whereby there are public expenditure cuts that have been incorporated as some of the examples of the austerity era. There has been a decimation of publicly funded welfare-provisions that negatively affect the citizenry's wellbeing (Jones, 2012). A typical example is the case of Greece, Spain and Portugal, where the economic crisis has dramatically affected the least privileged, while at the same time several social services have been disrupted and the capacity of the social state to support these social groups has been reduced (Teloni & Adam, 2016; Petmesidou, Pavolini & Guillén, 2014. Pentaraki, 2017; Kallinikaki, 2015).

It is against this backdrop that green social work is premised. Green social workers are concerned about the current unsustainable development forms as encapsulated by contemporary production, consumption, and reproduction modules. This is due to the fact that these methods exploit the labors of their citizens and the environment to perpetuate environmental and social injustice (Livingstone, 2014; Reese & Jacob, 2015). In dealing with the many forms of environmental degradation, the green social worker also has to adopt a political stance in recognition of the fact that there are power relations that determine human interactions (Rambaree et al., 2019; Jones, 2012; Molyneux, 2010).

Green social workers have to address structural-social-inequalities such as the unequal distribution of resources and power, to deal with poverty and its impact on people, to understand global interdependencies and to promote egalitarian and solid relationships (Mason et al., 2017; Dominelli & Ku, 2017). Furthermore, the green social worker also addresses how limited resources are to be utilized effectively. Consequently, the ultimate goal for the social worker is to support the reformation of the economic and social-political forces that are having deleterious impacts on the quality of life of the marginalized and poor populations, to secure the necessary

social transformations and policy changes that will enhance the well-being of the planet and the people on it both now and in the future (Nojd, 2016; Livingston, 2014).

Therefore, the specific areas that green-social-workers are concerned about include violations of human rights, environmental degradation, and the presence of economic systems that perpetuate inequalities as well as a lack of corporate responsibility. Many scholars argue that green social workers are concerned about including the neglect of cultural diversity plus the non-affirmation of indigenous and aboriginal lifestyles. The green social workers are also concerned with the lack of localities that are people-friendly and supportive of cooperative relationships that can deal with unsustainable economic development (Philip & Reisch, 2015; Ramsay & Boddy, 2017).

According to Rinkel and Powers (2017), practitioners undertake the following duties (a) supporting individuals in the affirmation of their human, environmental and social rights, (b) enabling the citizenry to protect their environments as well as enhancing their wellbeing and achieving environmental justice, (c) mobilizing individuals to be in various alliances and partnerships to promote their well-being as residents and (d) empowering the marginalized individuals, groups and communities that are in commercial and institutional routines as decision/policymakers.

3. Interconnections between green social work and other theoretical concepts

The eco-social approach refers to issues that are crucial to social work, such as human rights, promoting equality and social solidarity (Norton, 2012). The consequences of environmental degradation are examined in relation to preexisting social inequalities. Poverty, deprivation, social exclusion are connected to the socially unequal distribution of environmental goods, but also of the environmental burden stemming from pollution and the generalised degradation of the quality of the environment and of life. Climate change is the most dramatic example of how the natural environment can - sometimes even violently - affect all aspects of the lives of millions of people (Coates & Gray, 2012). This highlights the link between green social work and structural social work to the extent that the latter focuses on the structural causes of social problems, on the relationship between individuals and social and economic structures. Green social work proposes interventions by social workers to improve the ability of individuals to understand and deal with the impact of these structures on their daily lives (Hanesworth, 2017; Moreau, 1979; Mullaly, 1997; Payne, 2005). This new paradigm highlights the special role of ecological factors in the well-being of individuals and the community and proposes a holistic approach to these relationships. In this way we can also say that the eco-social approach highlights an important element which systems theory does not include in its own perspective (Närhi & Matthies, 2018). Systems theory sees society as a system that functions in a way analogous to a biological system, an organism. It focuses on the interactions and interdependencies between the parts of the system. It perceives people as parts of the social system and focuses on the relationships between individuals as well as between the individual and the social environment to which he belongs (Payne, 1994 & 2005). However, this approach does not take into account the role of the natural environment.

Scholars argue that the person-in-environment perspective of social work should be expanded to encompass "a more holistic view of human behavior and the inclusion of the natural

world" (Coates, 2003: 178). Boetto & Bell propose the expansion of the philosophical background of social work and the inclusion of eco-central perspectives in order to better manage eco-social issues (Boetto & Bell, 2015; Bell, 2019). Here, the concept of environment differs from the conventional sociocultural context and takes into account the interactions of the socio-economic and cultural context with ever-changing conditions in the natural environment. The term 'eco-social' highlights these interconnections (Närhi & Matthies, 2018).

The eco-critical approach was developed under the influence of environmental sociology, the idea of sustainable development and the environmental movement. Besthorn (2000, 2001 & 2002) was one of the first to explore the relationship between radical ecological approaches and the development of individuals and of society. Important for the development of the eco-social approach were the ideas of deep ecology by Arne Naess (1973 & 1984) and Murray Buchchins 'social ecology' (1996 & 2006). Deep ecology makes explicit the connection between the human and the eco-logical system. Naess makes a distinction between shallow and deep ecology movements. While shallow ecology movements focus on the impact of ecological problems on the economy, deep ecology movements are concerned with the relationship between human society and nature. Both the approach of deep ecology and social ecology put the blame on the dominant anthropocentric economic and political paradigm for causing several economic, environmental and social problems. Both approaches support the biocentric equality that holds that all entities in an ecosystem have intrinsic value and an equal right to reach their individual self-realization. Thus, they are related to the eco-social approach insofar as they look for the roots of social problems, among others, in the relationship between individuals and their natural environment. Social ecology criticizes modern culture and challenges the rational humanity that aims to tame nature. Humanity has created a non-human-friendly model of development, super-centralized institutions and an impersonal bureaucracy that manages the fate of people. These endanger not only the freedom of the individual, but also the ability of humanity to survive. Social ecology emphasizes the need to unhook the process of community development from extra-communal elements and resources, and to expand participation and promote the autonomy of the community. The political power that is concentrated in the hands of extra-communal actors leads to the preservation of the dominant culture and the homogenization of communities. The transition to an ecological society presupposes a fair distribution of political and economic power among citizens, the autonomy of the people and their active participation in decision-making processes.

The above shows that the eco-social approach refers to structural, critical and radical approaches. Many scholars argue that social work should adopt a more critical perspective on social problems and take on a more political dimension. The eco-social approach highlights the fact that social work "has not been able to defend the most vulnerable people and promote social justice" (Närhi and Matthies 2018: 494; Gray et al. 2012; Coates & Gray, 2012). Green social work expresses a broader understanding of the power relations that exist globally, goes beyond the person-in-environment and proposes strategies that will extend to the macro-level and to structures not only locally but also globally. In a globalized economic environment linked to both an unequal distribution of wealth and prosperity and the emergence of global environmental problems, it is important for social work to broaden its theoretical background and the scope of intervention of social workers. (Dominelli, 2012; Hanesworth, 2017). This places social work with a responsibility to highlight the links between all the factors, social, political, economic and environmental, which are worsening the living conditions of the most vulnerable people.

4. Attributes that define green social work

There can be an adaptation of core social work skills, values and knowledge for the promotion of social change and also assisting practitioners to mitigate and to respond to the impacts of environmental degradation (Schimitz et al., 2012; Ramsay & Boddy, 2017). Generally, social workers are tasked with addressing the immediate communal concerns that include health, housing, poverty, and child protection. However, they must be mindful of the fact that the magnitude of these issues is compounded by environmental degradation. Thus, the wellbeing and health of individuals can be taken care of or improved through the incorporation of the natural environment within the green social workers' practice. According to Ramsay & Boddy (2017), there are four key attributes that define green social work. These include (a) the creative utilization of skills by green social workers in environmental concepts (b) being open to different ways and values of doing and being (c) executing changes in orientation and (d) operating across boundaries as well as within multiple spaces. These attributes will be presented below by taking into account the contributions of other scholars.

a) Concerning the creative application of existing social skills to environmental concepts, an examination of various texts concerning green-social-work suggests that social work skills such team building, empowerment, management, community development, the promotion of anti-oppressive and culturally competent practices, the conducting of multi-level assessments, relational practices, and holistic interventions are essential in mitigating and managing the effects of environmental degradation (Dominelli & Ku, 2017; Lucas-Darby, 2017). Nevertheless, more environmental protection can be achieved through better planning that is based on holistic environmental assessments that enhance the existing resilience available. Thus, the application of creative skills should combine with the involvement of the local populace in the decision making and disaster reduction initiatives that promote sustainable development. Teixeira & Kings (2015) state that these are measures that would ensure that poor decisions are not made that would further undermine environmental integrity. Furthermore, through these practices, there is a co-production of partnerships and knowledge that crosses the divides of various disciplines, and that facilitates contact between experts and the local population (Beltran et al., 2016, Dominelli & Ku, 2017).

b) Regarding the openness of green-social-workers to different values and methods of doing and being, there has to be a shift in practice, values, and theories that can be incorporated within natural environments (Kings et al., 2018). Boetto & Bell (2015) state that social workers can begin by accepting the different ways and values of doing and being as some of the attributes that concentrate on the growth of self-awareness. Also, Nojd (2016) states that it is here that green social workers can focus on understanding other cultures, appreciating how valuable other forms of life are and their contribution to the ecosystem as well as having an awareness of the ways that natural environments support life so that the workers can make the correct choices that are congruent with the functions of green social work and their lives. According to Shajahan & Sharma (2018), these are assertions that have been agreed on by most researchers. Consequently, there has to be a recognition of the innate value that nature has to necessitate a move to ecocentrism. Even though there is a place to respond to natural disasters, nevertheless, green social workers need to be proactive in the prevention of environmental deterioration (Ramsay & Boddy, 2017) and strengthening community resilience.

Many scholars suggest that green social work may involve learning from indigenous cultures and spirituality. Thus Beltran et al. (2016) state that many scholars have also been evaluating aboriginal, native American-Indian, and African traditions as well as Taoism, Buddhism and collectivism, Jungian psychology, and romanticism to conclude that spirituality is helpful in the development of the green social work framework. It is here that researchers suggest that through spirituality, social workers could learn and be inspired by such cultural diversities and spiritual traditions (Weiss-Gal, 2008; Beltran et al., 2016).

Moreover, it is suggested that there should be an incorporation of the natural environment in green social work and its education through the integration of environmental practices and values within curriculums (Boddy et al., 2018). Most scholars in their writings suggest that simplistic environmental conceptualizations should be avoided through the application of a critical lens and if the education concerning green social work happens outside formal settings, it should be part of the professional development process of eco-social endeavors (Teixeira & Kings, 2015; Drolet et al., 2015).

Also, there should be an appreciation of the intrinsic and instrumental values for the non-human being, that means, a shift to ecocentrism (Rocha, 2018; Livingston, 2014). It is recommended that green social workers should change their strategies and depart from anthropocentricity i.e., the longheld view that humans are the most significant creatures of all living beings on earth to the notion that green social work is fulfilled when it is also connected to the natural environment since it improves wellbeing and gives purpose, fulfillment, insight, and confidence. Thus, Mason et al. (2017) state that it is this knowledge of the instrumental benefits by green social workers that enables the justification for their efforts concerning environmental interventions when they engage anthropogenic power configurations.

c) Adopting an improved change orientation: green social workers should have the ability to critique the status quo. As stated by Phillip and Reisch (2015) and Ramsay and Boddy (2017), they are the conclusions of at least 85% of the articles concerning green social work wherein they state that in conducting their work, green social workers need to understand and analyze these paradigms to reveal the anti-oppressive and radical practices that underlay anthropocentrism, contemporaries, andropocentrism, somatophobia, speciesism, environmental racism, and greenwashing among others. Additionally, new and ecocentric narratives to encounter postmodern and modern narratives have to be developed.

A change in orientation also means a change in societies whereby societal changes concerning the environment must be undertaken both at macro and micro levels to imprint the notion that the practicing of environmentally destructive tendencies is immoral. Green social workers should use forums such as the mass media, the facilitation of public forums and workshops to enhance public consciousness as well as researching alternatives to ensure the quicker achievement of environmental justice (Drolet et al., 2015). As well, Kings et al. (2018) state that green social workers should be at the forefront in advising key critical decision-makers, informing public discussions, contributing, and lobbying policy formulation towards these goals. Green social workers could also participate in social actions, civil disobedience and protests as well as facilitating others to join these endeavors (Nojd, 2016; Kings et al., 2019; Rambaree et al., 2019; Bent-Goodley, 2015). The objective would be to call on governments to enforce and enact the necessary environmental safeguards whereby limits are set on the levels and rates of human population and growth, the promotion of motivation for environmental activities, and advocating for systems that shift from continual industrial growth to sustainable economies. Furthermore, Rambaree et

al. (2019) indicate that the advancement of alternative paradigms, whereby environmental practices are adjusted to include non-linear problem solving and nature, should be considered. Also, in their work, green social workers should advise on the evaluating and monitoring activities of big conglomerates as they critique greenwashing and expose exploitative companies to hold them responsible for environmental damage. It is through these efforts that green-social-workers would be seen as explicitly valuing ecological and environmental justice, and they would also be seen as those that commence the change processes that would ensure the creation of sustainable societies (Androff et al., 2017; Dominelli, 2012).

d) Working across boundaries and multiple spaces: the green social worker should work within multidisciplinary teams through which they are to develop and maintain inter-disciplinary partnerships with activists, cultural leaders, community leaders, and other professionals. Such collaborations provide renewed insights, skills & knowledge that are critical in solving the current and complex problems caused by environmental exploitation (Coates & Gray, 2012; Dominelli & Ku, 2017; Rocha; 2018)). It is also through interaction with nature that there is an improvement in cognitive, physical, spiritual, and emotional wellbeing. It is because it gives space for individuals to socialize, to derive aesthetic pleasure, social cohesion and for the development of communities. Furthermore, the connection with other animals enables individuals to overcome stress and to provide awareness of the perilous position of various ecosystems (Rambaree et al., 2019; Drolet et al., 2015). Moreover, operating across boundaries and within multiple spaces enables people to collectively and individually decrease their environmental footprint even as they care for themselves. Thus, individuals will act compassionately in minimizing the suffering in all scopes of life (Livingston, 2014).

It is also here that green social workers need to work with communities in achieving environmental justice, whereby the sharing of local resources and knowledge assists in the development of resilience and strength to overcome environmental problems. An examination of various research documents (Dominelli & Ku, 2017; Rinkel & Powers, 2017; Nojt, 2016) indicates that the interventions that green-social-workers would apply are required to mobilize, support and educate community activism, establish alliances & assist in building capacities for community initiatives such as food cooperatives, local production, permaculture, cohousing and the purchase of clean technologies Mapp et al., 2019; Dominelli, 2011). Thus, it is one of the ways to sort out the issues with materialism, consumerism and the individualism that is associated with capitalism (Drolet et al., 2015; Mason et al., 2017;). It is also crucial for green social workers to cooperate with individuals in assisting them to gain the requisite skills to reduce their environmental footprint and to care for the environment and themselves. Furthermore, individuals require assistance to reclaim and accept their dependence on and interconnection with the natural world (Lucas-Darby, 2011).

The adoption of these attributes of green social work create a vision and an increase in professional integrity whereby the objectives of anti-oppression, social justice, and equality will be fulfilled to ensure human survival, wellbeing, the comprehension of systematic discrimination and have the compassion to value the innate qualities possessed by other animals as well as recognizing their moral right to exist (Rinkel & Powers, 2017; Rocha,2018). Thus, the collaboration of green social workers with the community and individuals results in an interaction with nature, and consequently there is a zest for life that is exhibited through having confidence, feeling purposeful, empowered, and fulfilled. It is also here that authenticity, self-insight, knowledge, and sensitivity are increased as concepts that assist in professional and personal development (Jones, 2012).

5. Guideposts for green social workers

In addition to the United Nations as one of the organizations that regulate green social work, there are two other types of international organizations that regulate the conduct of social workers, i.e., the International Federation for Social Workers (IFSW) plus the International Association of the Schools of Social Work (IASSW). They have jointly developed the accepted international standards that guide how social worker should be done, including its definition, education, and practicing standards (Shajahan & Sharma, 2018; Rocha, 2018; Mason et al., 2017). The documents argue that even though the social worker should be trained within the local context, there should nevertheless be core purposes and universal paradigms that should guide the practice of the social worker across the boundaries (Teixeira & Kings, 2015; Beltran et al., 2016; Dominelli, 2015).

There are several paradigmatic guideposts that traditional social workers can use to weave in the environmental justice context. Teixeira and Kings (2015) consolidate the 8 paradigms included in the original document into following 4 guide-posts: They include (a) the recognition of the worth and dignity of all human beings, the recognition of their strengths, and the identification of the inherent potential within all human beings. (b) There should be an identification of the inter-connectedness that is inherent in mezzo, macro, and microsystems. (c) The significance of advocacy as well as the changes in political, economic, and social-structural conditions that disempower, exclude, and marginalize individuals. (d) Focusing on capacity building and the enabling of individuals, groups, families, communities, and organizations through human-centered and developmental approaches (Teixeira & Kings, 2015; Jones, 2012; Rambaree et al., 2019; Drolet et al., 2015).

The recognition of worth, dignity, strengths, and diversity

There should be an examination of their interventions to ensure that they meet the thresholds of fairness and equality. Therefore social work trainers should educate potential green social workers to identify and tackle the reasons for social problems instead of blaming the victim. It is one of the approaches that can be applied by even green social workers in solving eco-social problems (Teixeira & Kings, 2015; Ramsey & Boddy, 2017; Coates & Gray, 2012). Thus, instead of the poor being blamed for their problems, social work professionals can emphasize the underlying political, economic, and social systems that result in environmental degradation and how social workers can intervene. Nojt (2016) states that some of the social problems that would be out of reach of the poor and yet cause environmental degradation would include living in constrained housing conditions that are in hazardous environments due to limited financial options. Moreover, because it is widely known that the host communities will reject any hazardous developments, therefore, most corporations decide that they will build in politically marginalized regions (Jones, 2012; Nojt, 2016)

The recognition of the interconnectedness among the mezzo, macro & microsystems

Primarily, social work is premised on the appreciation of the multi-systematic nature of social problems, and therefore social workers are unique compared to the other helping professions. Therefore as green social workers, existing sociological guidelines can be used to understand the mechanics of the built and the natural environment as part of macro contextual practices. Thus, through the green social worker, he/she will bring multi –systematic perspective and a capability

to work across and within systems as one of the ideal jump-offs to educate other social workers that environmental injustices are global issues that have local, global and individual implications (Jones, 2012; Ramsay & Boddy, 2017).

The significance of advocacy &changes in the social-cultural, economic, & political conditions

Social workers are committed to the advocacy of the changes in the conditions that cause detrimental conditions in individuals or communities. It is one of the integral parts of social work that can also be used to execute and advance environmental justice against the background of the existing social systems. It originates from the fact that social work trainers teach various methods such as social action and consciousness raising (Rocha, 2018). Thus, so that the common traditions can be integrated within the context of the pursuit of environmental justice by green socia workers, social work trainers must lead in the formation of discussion groups and in the organization of public awareness events that highlight the disproportionate use and placement of the locally undesirable land that is where the poor live and the impacts that such use has on the health of the people (Mason et al., 2017; Rambaree et al., 2019).

Capacity building of individuals through human-centered developmental approaches

Here, social workers evaluate empowerment as both an outcome and process whereby there is a promotion of approaches and interventions to build community and individual capacities that allow professionals to leverage their assets, skills, and influence across systems (Nojd, 2016; Shajahan & Sharma, 2018; Ramsay & Boddy, 2017). Thus, in as much as empowerment is an ambiguous term whereby information is required in its most basic form, concerning social work and the advocacy for environmental injustices, green social workers may be required to acquire highly scientific and technical information and decipher it into forms that can be understood by ordinary citizens. It is here that green social workers can utilize the empowerment concept to push for more citizencentered governance. Therefore, there has to be an understanding of the various proposals that are to be considered as well as the viewpoints of everyone that can be affected including developers, residents and government officials (Lucas-Darby, 2011; Dominelli & Ku, 2017).

6. Challenges for green social work

Even though various themes concerning green social work by scholars have been highlighted, nevertheless, there is also some divergence. These differences should be expected since both social and cognitive changes are evolutionary processes as the literature on green social work gravitates towards the practice and awareness of reciprocal ecocentrism from anthropocentric and instrumental opinions concerning nature (Kings et al., 2018). Some of the gaps include the fact that there are minimal examples concerning green social work that have been implemented when compared to other forms of social work. Therefore, in the development of their practice, green social workers should also develop their test methods as do other professionals so that they can engage in thorough research and practice to come up with a convincing theory base in this area. Thus, it will involve the development of both content and process knowledge (such

as ecological information), social media, information and technology utilization, among others (Dominelli & Ku, 2017; Rocha, 2018; Nojt, 2016).

Furthermore, the articulation of change by green social workers might face various difficulties as they seek to prioritize the physical environment. Therefore, they must strike a balance between an obligation to enable widespread environmental and social change, the social worker's commitment to protect minority groups, the respect of the rights of individuals to self-determination, which is a daunting task. However, Androff et al. (2017) state that such predicaments are not unique, but they need a detailed and dedicated critical analysis as one of the strategies that are mindful of the maintenance of the values that govern social work as well as the interconnectedness that is present between human health, wellbeing and the natural environments (Livingston, 2014; Teixeira & Kings, 2015; Rinkel et al., 2017; Shajahan & Sharma, 2018). There is more work required to clarify how green social work can negotiate on these issues and how social workers must challenge the status quo and tackle the present environmental issues.

Other challenges include the maintenance of grassroots support and momentum for the implementation of their interventions against bureaucratic systems. This is because these systems ensure that innovations are slowly implemented, and therefore green social workers must maintain their connections within and without their disciplines for innovations to happen while maintaining social change. The maintenance of these connections by the professionals may be through online and social media communities (Beltran et al., 2016; Androff et al., 2017). However, it should be noted that even though green social workers borrow from other professions, they should also expand into other fields that can be great contributors to environmental science. It is because having sufficient knowledge in such fields is one of the strengths in addressing the complex concepts such as biodiversity loss, climate change, access to clean and freshwater as well as food security that green social workers will perform well in the execution of their duties (Drolet, et al., 2015; Kings et al., 2018). It is also through an expansion in their knowledge of other fields that they can identify the contributions they can make in furthering their goals. These fields may not be environmental and may include counseling, politics, business, and teaching (Androff et al., 2017; Kings et al., 2018; Nojd, 2016).

7. Implications for the education of social workers

Combined with the increasing visibility of environmental justice issues during recent years, the agitation for green social work, practices, and education is timely. Therefore, there has been a burgeoning of social work scholarships whereby educational content regarding environmental justice has been incorporated into the curriculum concerning social work (Ramsay & Boddy, 2017; Rocha, 2018). Moreover, environmental sociology scholars have insisted on the inculcation of the content that concerns human behavior within eco-social environments. Here, there will be an exploration of gaps in environmental behavior and knowledge. Therefore social work students will be assisted in understanding and analyzing the complex interrelationship between human wellness, health, and environmental problems through the advancement of fieldwork and research opportunities (Philip & Reisch, 2015).

Also, for meaningful change to happen whereby social work mutates to green social work, the social work education needs to be restructured in such a way that students are allowed to

critique and explore the dominant paradigms that are responsible for exploitation and inequality. Therefore Dominelli (2012) states that it is through these curriculums that educators will accord students the time to make reflections that will give way to the integration of both political and personal connections. Also known as transformative learning, students are introduced to change and its nature to consequently shift in the way they view the meaning of global events. It is from these reflections that there is a birth of ecological consciousness whereby the educator creates disorienting dilemmas for the students as they engage in the out of class activities through social justice curriculums (Shajahan & Sharma, 2018; Rinkel & Powers, 2017; Teixeira & Kings, 2015; Hanesworth, 2017).

To summerize, the full support of green social work to address issues that surround environmental justice can only happen when the institutions that are involved in social work such as the profession's governing and disciplinary bodies begin to decisively enforce and direct that the values that define social work should be inculcated in the clamor for environmental justice (Weiss-Gal, 2008; Androff et al., 2017; Kings et al., 2018; Naranjo, 2020). It should be done on a larger scale so that the corresponding educational content can be created and later applied concretely.

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