



SOCIAL WORK AND THE ENVIRONMENT

PART TWO: THEORY TO PRACTICE

IASW ONLINE

6TH NOVEMBER 2024

1-3PM

Rebecca Conway MSW, BA

Researcher

PhD Candidate

Bielefeld University, Germany

rebecca.conway@hotmail.com

[Rebecca Conway – LinkedIn](#)

[ESR4: Rebecca Conway — Astra](#)

Eileen Lauster MSW, BA

Maire Curie Fellow

PhD Candidate

Durham University

eileen.lauster@gmail.com

[IRIS Profile](#)

[ESR7: Eileen Lauster — Astra](#)



ABOUT REBECCA

- Originally from Dublin.
- Bachelor of Social Science, specialisation in Social Work (UCD, Ireland).
- Masters of Applied Social Work (Massey University, Aotearoa New Zealand).
- PhD at the Social Work Department of the Faculty for Educational Science (Bielefeld University, Germany).
- Before the ASTRA programme I lived in Aotearoa/New Zealand for 7 years.
- Social work practice history: Statutory child protection, community-based mental health, and community development.





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ABOUT EILEEN

- Originally from Detroit, Michigan, based in Galway for 26 years
- PhD student, Durham University, England
- External Tutor with the University of Galway, MA in Social Work Programme in the School of Political Science and Sociology
- Self-employed trainer and consultant through LCT Services
- Social Work practice areas: Social Enterprise Officer, Researcher and Trainer on CPVA and NVR intervention, Community Development, Child Welfare and Residential Services.
- More information on Astra Project at:
<https://www.jyu.fi/en/research/astra>

LEARNING OUTCOMES

For both webinars:

- Gain knowledge on the importance of expanding social work to include the natural environment from a sustainability lens.
- Understand the connection between social, environmental, economic and climate justice and their relevance to social work.
- Incorporate innovative ecosocial actions into your current social work role.





EXPLORING OUR AGENDA

Day 1: Intro to the topic 9th October 2024

- Current situation
- Relevance for social work
- Evolution of ecosocial work
- Justice issues
- Sustainability and social work
- Social work's ethical obligation
- Our responsibility and skill set
- Shaping social work education

Day 2: Theory to practice 6th November 2024

- Revisit webinar 1
- Individual and family-level practice (micro)
- Community practice (meso)
- Structural change (macro)
- Practice research

WEBINAR 1 SUMMARY

- Global crises highlight society's divisions, **intensifying inequality, exclusion, and marginalisation**. The effects of these are disproportionately felt by those in the most vulnerable situations.
- Until recently, social work has played a marginal role in advocating for true sustainability.
- Emerging environmental approaches in social work highlight the need for a transformational shift to **approach all social issues and structures through an ecological lens**.
- Social work should view **environmental and climate justice as core components of social justice**. We can also use our skills to highlight social justice by addressing environmental degradation.
- To honour the fundamental rights of humans, we must **develop and implement approaches to resolve environmental issues**. We must work together to achieve a solution by framing policy and taking action.
- Social workers have a responsibility and the necessary skills to **advocate for people and nature**.
- Some professional bodies are recognising this responsibility in their **codes of ethics** and academics are beginning to incorporate this into **social work education and research**.

ECOSOCIAL WORK IN ACTION

- Environmental and ecological activism (Dominelli, 2012; Ramsay & Boddy, 2017)
- Community mobilising (Timariu, 2022)
- Policy and political advocacy and lobbying (Coates, 2005)
- Decolonising social work (Coates, 2013; McLafferty Bell et al., 2019)
- Personal sustainable changes (Boetto, 2016; Ramsay & Boddy, 2017)
- Supporting those impacted by climate change (i.e. natural disaster survivors & climate migrants) (Medina et al., 2022; Timariu, 2022)
- Partnering with Indigenous experts (Shokane & Masoga, 2018)
- Centring Indigenous knowledges (Powers et al., 2021)
- Educating communities on adaptation techniques (Chenoweth & Stehlik, 2001)
- Community development initiatives, e.g. community gardens (Bailey et al., 2018; Jennings, 2021; Norton, 2012)
- Local solutions to environmental degradation (Alvero, 2017; Shackelford et al., 2024)
- Nature-based interventions (Obeng et al., 2023; Lytzen & Kineweskwêw, 2024)

ECOSOCIAL WORK IN ACTION

1. **Individual and family-level practice (micro)**
2. Community practice (meso)
3. Structural change (macro)
4. Practice research



MICRO-LEVEL PRACTICE

- Eco-social work framework for integrating theory with micro-level practice, including detailed strategies for caseworkers (Boetto, 2016).
 - As part of practice, how can we promote sustainability of the environment and address disproportionate impacts of environmental disasters and decline?
 - How can we incorporate the natural environment as part of day-to-day practice?
- Integrated approach to practice with 4 interconnected stages:
 1. Engagement
 2. Assessment
 3. Intervention
 4. Evaluation



1. ENGAGEMENT

- Building rapport with the individual or family to establish a positive and effective working relationship (Boetto, 2016)
 - Trust
 - Empathy
 - Genuineness
 - Warmth
- Opportunities to increase contact with the natural environment in order to improve the overall therapeutic process
 - Simple observation of nature (e.g. window view, poster, office plants)
 - Being in close proximity to nature (e.g. local parks, garden near house)
 - Having direct interaction with nature (e.g. walking, gardening, hiking, interaction with animals)
- Opportunities to promote sustainability through subtle awareness-raising techniques
 - Posters depicting pro-active sustainability behaviours or environmental issues
 - Information (e.g. pamphlets) about local environmental groups or alternative economies (e.g. community gardens, food co-ops)

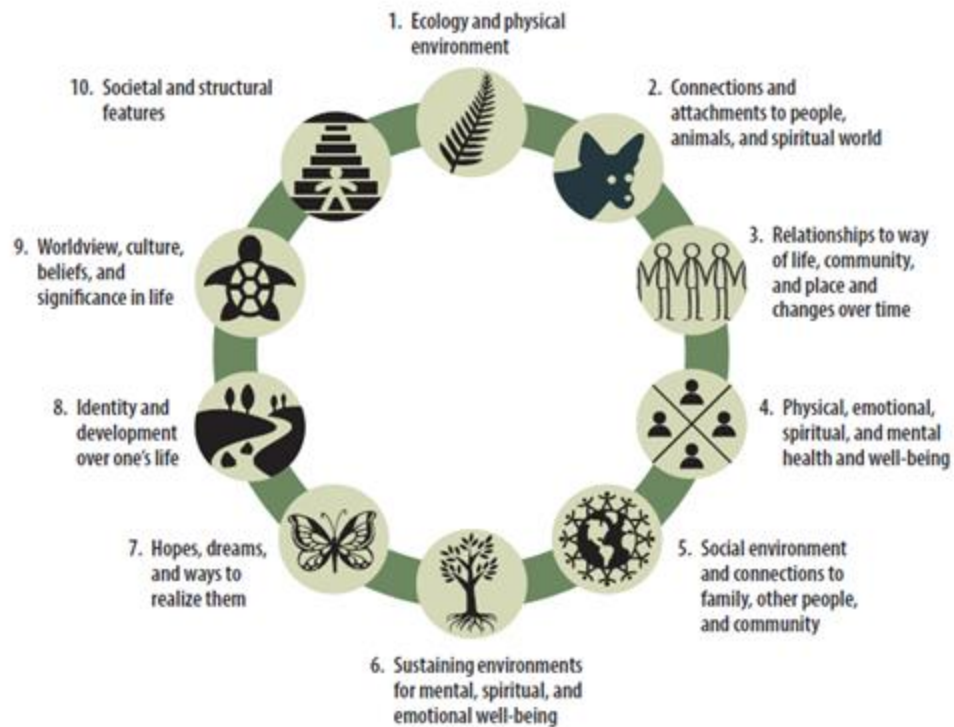
2. ASSESSMENT

- The assessment process in eco-social work practice investigates the individual's current level of contact with the natural environment (Boetto, 2016)
 - Acknowledges positive impacts that the natural environment has on human health and well-being
 - Identifies limited access or exposure to the natural environment
 - Identifies opportunities for developing appropriate interventions
- Explore the structural factors (social, economic and environmental impacts) experienced by the individual that are associated with global warming, including environmental disasters and decline.
- Include environmental considerations in assessments: (Timariu, 2022)
 - Are there any issues linked to environmental degradation or hardship (e.g. home heating, energy poverty)?
 - Are there any risks from environmental hazards near to home (e.g. industrial pollution)?
 - Are there any health problems due to a poor environment (e.g. asthma)?
 - Is the insulation in the house adequate (e.g. renters vs. home owners)?
 - Do they have access to green and blue spaces (e.g. parks, rivers)?
 - Do they have any more-than-human relationships they consider important (e.g. pets, trees, sea)?

2. ASSESSMENT

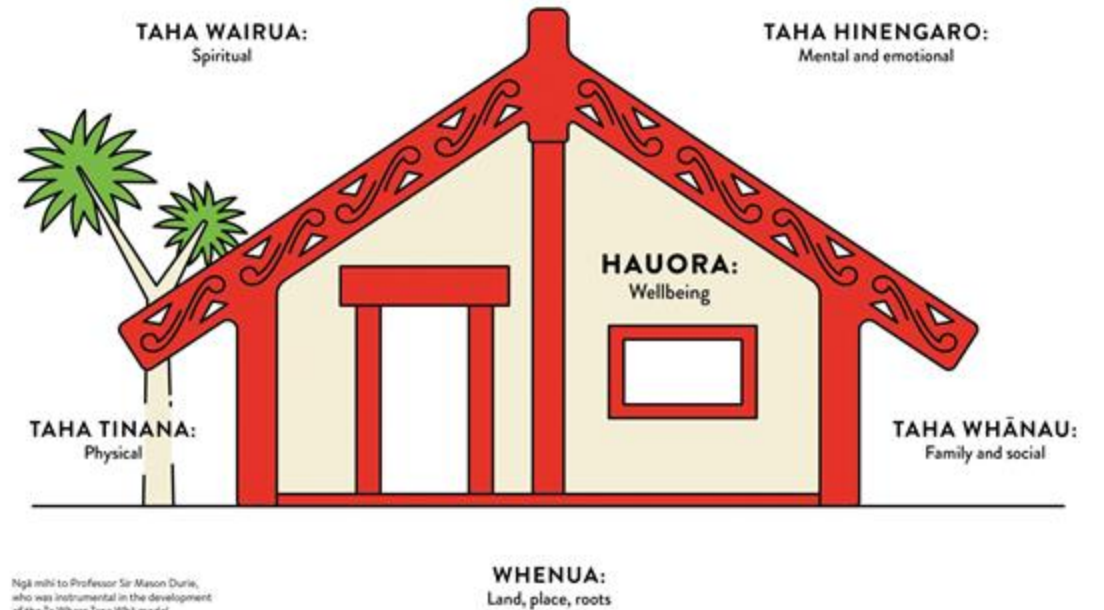
- Use or create culturally appropriate, place-based assessment forms:

Figure 1.2 Ten Components: A W/holistic Assessment and Practice Model



Ten Components: A W/holistic Assessment and Practice Model (Heinonen et al., 2022).

Te Whare Tapa Whā



Te Whare Tapa Whā (Durie, 1985).

3. INTERVENTION

- How can the natural environment complement existing techniques to enhance the therapeutic process? (Boetto, 2016)
 - Nature-based interventions
 - Walking mindfully
 - Wilderness therapy
 - Animal-assisted therapy
- How can we incorporate the natural environment as part of day-to-day practice?
- Consideration of individual and family issues caused by structural dimensions of environmental decline such as environmental hazards, increasing energy costs, food security and protection from extreme weather events (e.g. heat waves and cold snaps)
 - Potentials for improving health (e.g. removing household environmental hazards or adding positive environmental qualities)
 - Alternative economies (e.g. food co-ops, community gardens, local markets)
 - Rising energy costs (e.g. info about support programmes, free energy audits)

SOCIAL & GREEN PRESCRIBING

Social Prescribing:

<https://www.allirelandsocialprescribing.ie/>

“Social Prescribing is a key part of health service provision and is being integrated across Community Healthcare Networks in line with the HSE Social Prescribing Framework and is also identified as a priority in the HSE Mental Health Promotion Plan Stronger Together.” see source at :

<https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/question/2024-01-17/1810/>

Green Prescribing: access full report:

<https://www.hse.ie/eng/services/publications/corporate/evaluationgreenprescription.pdf>



NATURE-BASED INTERVENTIONS

- Goal-based activities carried out within the natural environment that maintain and **improve human well-being and quality of life** (Shanahan et al., 2019).
- Activities may happen in rural and agricultural environments, forests, mountains, gardens, urban parks, and in water.
- Relate to various disciplines such as youth work, community development, health promotion, psychotherapy, prevention of health problems, social or health rehabilitation, **social work**, etc.



NATURE-BASED INTERVENTIONS

- Possible benefits of NBIs evidenced in research:
 - Illness prevention (Frumkin et al., 2017)
 - Stress reduction and management (Corazon et al., 2018)
 - Improvements in physical, mental, social, emotional or spiritual health and well-being (Carlin et al., 2020; Shanahan et al., 2019; Taylor et al., 2022)
 - Maintaining an ability to work (Adams & Morgan, 2016)
 - Increasing self-esteem (Barton & Pretty, 2010)
 - Enhancing social inclusion (Conway et al., forthcoming; Kogstad et al., 2014)
 - Improving nature connectedness (Silva et al., 2023)
 - Boosting care relation to natural world (Martin et al., 2020)
 - Supporting rehabilitation (Vibholm et al., 2020)
 - Increasing pro-environmental attitudes and behaviours (DeVille et al., 2021; Silva et al., 2023)
 - Improvements in welfare and well-being of non-human animal collaborators (Conway & Barrett, forthcoming; Ng & Pfeiffer, 2023)

NATURE-BASED INTERVENTIONS

- [Active Connections](#) (Dublin, Cork, Tipperary, Kilkenny, Carlow, Wexford & Waterford)
- [Commeragh Wilderness Academy](#) (Waterford)
- [Crosscare's Outdoor Learning Team](#) (Dublin, Bray & North Wicklow)
- [Festina Lente](#) (Bray, Co. Wicklow)
- [Havin' a Laugh](#) (Sligo, Leitrim, Donegal, Mayo & Cavan)
- [Headspace Adventures](#) (Connemara)
- [Liquid Therapy](#) (South Donegal)
- [Meitheal Mara](#) (Cork City)
- [New Wave Wild Project](#) (Kerry & nationwide with travel supplement)
- [Outdoor Education and Training Centres](#) (nationwide)
- [RISE Project](#) (Wexford)
- [Sail Training Ireland](#) (nationwide)
- [Sailing into Wellness](#) (nationwide)
- [Social Farming Ireland](#) (nationwide)
- [Soearth Projects](#) (Kildare)
- [Surf2Heal](#) (Garretstown Beach, Co. Cork)
- [Tiglin](#) (Dublin & Wicklow)
- [Venture Out](#) (Galway & nationwide)

4. EVALUATION

- Opportunity to review the impact of the intervention and celebrate achievements (Boetto, 2016)
 - Did contact with the natural environment increase?
 - If so, were there any benefits?
 - What feedback has the individual or family provided?
 - Are there further intervention opportunities?
- Review of opportunity for promoting sustainability and empowerment of people at risk of experiencing environmental disasters or decline.
 - Was time dedicated to discussing personal and public dimensions of environmental disasters, decline and hazards with the individual and family?
 - Did their environmental awareness increase?



NATURE-BASED INTERVENTIONS

- The Nature and Environment to Attain and Restore (NEAR) Health Project (2016-2019) jointly funded by the EPA and the HSE (Carlin et al., 2020)
 - To connect people with blue and green nature spaces through
 - Designing and piloting inclusive nature-based solutions to assist communities value a healthy environment, maintain healthy lifestyles and promote and restore wellbeing
- It investigated:
 1. How people value and experience nature, health and wellbeing,
 2. The barriers and bridges to connecting with nature
 3. What people want from their healthy future environment
 4. Nature-based activities that benefit people's health and wellbeing
- Info video
 - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=o1lO8SN1CNs>
- Download their toolkit here
 - <https://www.epa.ie/publications/research/environment--health/research-348-toolkit-connecting-with-nature-for-health-and-wellbeing.php>



REFLECTIVE QUESTIONS

- To what extent do you believe ecological crises are something that should concern social workers?
- What role can individual social workers play in addressing environmental issues?
- What is the unique contribution that social work, as a profession, could make?
- How might you support social workers to integrate environmental considerations in their daily practice?
- Think about some of the families your team currently supports. How are they affected by environmental degradation and/or hardship?
- For developing eco practice, how might you help social workers to better understand the impact of environmental issues on children's development and on parents' parenting capacity?
- What steps could you take within your role to encourage social workers to include eco-practice strategies in their work?
- What key actions could you take in order to integrate environmental issues in your own and your team's practice?

ECOSOCIAL WORK IN ACTION

1. Individual and family-level practice (micro)
2. **Community practice (meso)**
3. Structural change (macro)
4. Practice research



What is a Community?

In the past, it may have referred to a geographical area, now it incorporates groups of people with a shared interest or issue.

(Sewpaul, 2008; Sjöberg et al., 2015)



COMMUNITY PRACTICE



Community work is central
to social work practice

In many countries, professional social work originates from community work practice, alongside individual casework practice.



Community practice activities include:

Community organising, prevention activities,
policy advocacy, and organising functional
communities

Climate change and environmental degradation affect not only individuals but also whole communities, including non-human community members. It is important to move beyond individual efforts and come together as a community to address these challenges. Building relationships and community connections are crucial in creating social, economic, political, and environmental change.

ECOSOCIAL WORK IN ACTION

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MACRO LEVEL

- Promotes change at the **community, research or policy level of practice** to address the structural issues associated with global warming, including environmental disasters and decline (Boetto, 2016)
 - Political action
 - Lobbying
 - Consciousness raising
 - Research to influence policy and social change
 - Consider whether environmental issues exist in the community
 - Hold thematic community meetings or forums
 - Write letters to local, state and national government representatives
 - Advocate for disinvested groups affected by environmental issues
 - Support existing local community groups to adopt ecological focus
 - Develop communities of practice – connect with like-minded social workers and others
 - Highlight social/environmental connection with other agencies (e.g. interagency meetings)
 - Connect with other disciplines/professions (e.g. agriculture, urban planning, environmental psychology)
- This level of practice can have **far-reaching impacts** on large sections of people in our communities.

COLLECTIVE CLIMATE ACTION

- Actions taken by a **collection or group of people**, acting based on a collective decision.
- Direct action is a **collective action** which takes on a defined target so as to achieve a certain demand (Cwikel & Blit-Cohen, 2018).
- Using the **power of large coalitions** to achieve **society-wide change**, e.g.:
 - Holding demonstrations
 - Volunteering for pro-environmentalist organisations or politicians
 - Signing petitions
 - Organising boycotts
 - Using education and outreach to engage people with less access to information
 - Filing a lawsuit
 - Civil disobedience
 - Collaborating with like-minded people or organisations
 - Resisting non-violently

COMMUNITY ORGANISING

- A social movement that brings ordinary people together for the **common goals of building power and achieving social change** (Bobo et al., 2010; Brightest, 2019).
- A powerful way to mobilise people in the fight for justice.
- Organising has **clear, long-term objectives** aimed at extracting gains (Richard, 2018).
- The group **creates solidarity, sets a goal** and then puts a lot of (often voluntary) work in to institute (positive) change.
- They typically invite anyone to participate – the more people in the group, the stronger, more resilient and more impactful the group can become.
- Imagination is important to be **able to envision something different** and create positive change.
- Community activism and organising in social work has been lacking in recent years, and social work has been criticised for largely moving to traditional methods of social casework.

COMMUNITY ORGANISING

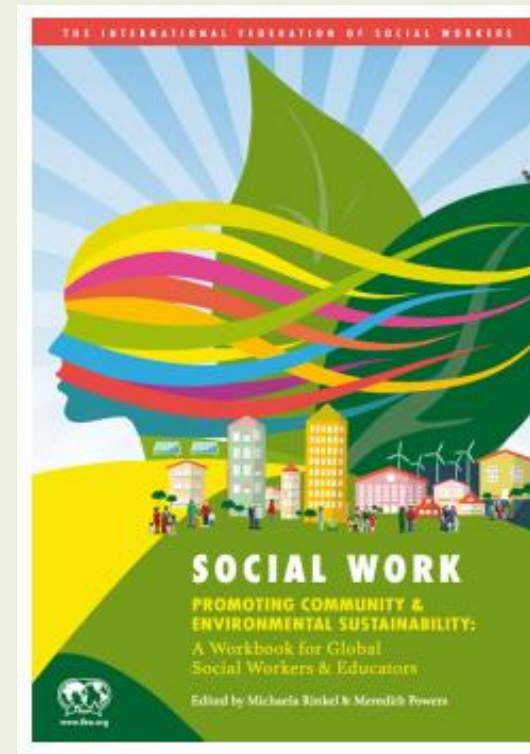
- **Popular social work practice in the 1950s and 1960s** (Duff, 2019), community organising is defined as:
 - primarily aimed at helping people within a local community to identify social needs, to consider the most effective ways of meeting these and to set about doing so, in so far as their available resources permit. (Younghusband, 1959)
- Many social work skills are useful for community mobilising:
 - Identifying and understanding local communities, their root problems, and how the existing system has created problems
 - Building relationships, bringing people together, and collaborating to help carry out the plan
 - Creating an action plan to achieve the desired solution by winning collective power - often through the political system



What about the social work community?

Practitioners and Educators

- IASW
- IFSW
- CORU?
- CPD?
- If you are a Practice Teacher, can ecosocial work be part of the fieldwork?
- If an educator, can a module on ecosocial work, and sustainability be in the curriculum?
- Joint trainings with HSE and Tusla on social work skills and experience to improve well-being and health.



ECOSOCIAL WORK IN ACTION

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4. **Practice research**



PRACTICE RESEARCH

Value of Practice Research

Can improve service delivery, social work research, policy development and service user advocacy (Kelly et al., 2020; Uggerhøj, 2011)

Can include Participatory Action Research (PAR) (Lauster, 2024; Israel et al., 2012; Pain et al., 2007) and Citizen Science (Toomey, 2020)

It can be a bottom-up knowledge production (Flyvbjerg, 2001)

Can form Practice Research Networks like IASW and BASW

Some possible Challenges

It can be threatening to management and other professions- turf battles

May require extra effort and coordination

Access to research tools and expertise

PRACTICE RESEARCH- Some Possibilities

Considering personal information collected already, can ethical approval be secured for conducting an analysis?

Could a group of clients do a community assessment using Photovoice, walk-along, or bike-along interview techniques? Would this work with the group's normal activities?

Once the analysis is completed, can efforts to improve infrastructure take place?

What about public input on climate action plans? How can clients without skills or access to a computer partake? Could a social worker lead out on this?

Most universities have a community engagement service. An MA in Social Work thesis could also support a small, time-limited research project.

Does anyone have some ideas to add?

SUMMARY

- We started and will end with our ideas of how to bring ecosocial work to your practice.
- We presented theory and examples from
 - Individual and family-level practice (micro)
 - Community practice (meso)
 - Structural change (macro)
 - Practice research
- Community Organising for structural change, with service users and among ourselves.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

- Words of encouragement
- Communities of practice
- Opportunity for IASW SIG?
- Stay in touch on LinkedIn and through email on any initiatives you or your agency take

THANK YOU!

FURTHER READING AND RESOURCES

- Practice tool from UK in incorporating ecosocial work into practice: https://practice-supervisors.rip.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/2797_Helping_social-workers_eco-practices_in_their-work_21pp_v2.pdf
- IFSW workbooks on 'Social Work Promoting Community and Environmental Sustainability'
 - Volume 1: <https://www.ifsw.org/product/books/social-work-promoting-community-and-environmental-sustainability/>
 - Volume 2: <https://www.ifsw.org/product/books/social-work-promoting-community-and-environmental-sustainability-volume-2/>
 - Volume 3: <https://www.ifsw.org/product/books/social-work-promoting-community-and-environmental-sustainability-volume-3/>
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