



N
E
ICSW
S

International Council on Social Welfare



Welcome Letter

by Antonio López Peláez, ICSW Executive Director

Dear ICSW members, friends, and interested readers,

Welcome to the September 2026 issue of our newsletter.

Following the World Congress of Social Work in Nairobi (SWSD 2026), Kenya, where we held the ICSW General Assembly, this past September 2026 has been a very busy month, as we prepared for the international seminar in Marrakesh in October 2026, the proposal for a side event at the UN Commission for Social Development in February 2027 (the proposal must be submitted in the coming weeks), and collaborating with the ICSW and the IFSW on new initiatives, such as the award for best practices in AI and social work, which, led by Professor Tiong, we will be launching soon. This initiative strengthens our global networks and positions us at the forefront of critical analysis on AI and social welfare.

In this newsletter, in addition to the traditional contribution from our president, Dr. Sergei Zeleney, we feature two articles from the North America Region—one on the conference in Nairobi and the other on heat relief across the U.S.—as well as an interesting article by Rafael do Santos on the social dynamics of poverty.

I appreciate all these contributions and extend my heartfelt thanks to everyone involved in producing the newsletter.

In the “Publication in Focus” section, Professor Emilio Díaz de Mera provides a detailed analysis of the recent publication related to the ICSW’s activities in 2024 and 2025, which led to the Ronda Declaration 2025 on Meaningful Participation, Inclusive Social Welfare, and Democratic Local Governance, also endorsed by the IFSW and the IASSW.

The book, titled “Participatory Governance, Social Work, and Social Policy in Times of AI,” published by Routledge, is organized into three sections: Part I. Participation, Digital Innovation, and Social Services: Global Dynamics and Future Challenges; Part II. Participatory Governance¹, AI, and Social Services: Country Cases; Part III: Global Organizations, AI, and Social Participation. I recommend this book to all readers of the Newsletter; it is well worth reflecting on best practices in the field of AI and social work.

Finally, this September, our administrative officer, María Yepes, is leaving ICSW after a year of exemplary service. I thank her from the bottom of my heart and wish her the very best in her future endeavors. María will always have a home here at ICSW.

Thank you very much, María!

Effective October 1, Carmen Obi will be joining us as administrative officer; I also extend a warm welcome to her at ICSW. Welcome, Carmen.

I am confident that, together, we will ensure that ICSW’s upcoming activities and projects are a complete success.

Take care and stay healthy.

Antonio
ICSW Executive Director

¹ <https://www.icsw.org/es/publications/newsletters/276-ronda-conference-rethinking-participation-for-responsive-and-adaptive-welfare-systems>

President's Corner



Why Intersectoral Approaches Matter in Social Policy

by Sergei Zelenev, ICSW President

I have become increasingly convinced that one of the most important challenges facing contemporary social policy and social development practitioners is not simply to develop better policies within individual sectors, but to overcome the boundaries between them. The problems we seek to address—poverty, inequality, social exclusion, loneliness, ageing, unemployment, poor health, housing insecurity, and many others—rarely belong to a single policy domain. They are interconnected, and their causes and consequences extend across institutional and administrative boundaries. Yet in many countries, systems of government remain organized largely in the opposite way: ministries, agencies, professional disciplines, budgets, programmes, and accountability mechanisms are divided into distinct sectors.

This contradiction between the interconnected nature of social problems and the fragmented organization of public policy is, in my view, one of the central challenges facing social welfare today.

Recently, I was reminded of this challenge in an unexpected way. I am neither a chemist nor, even less, a scholar of chemistry. My older son, however, is a chemist, and from time to time he sends me interesting articles from his professional literature. One of them, published this July in *Chemical & Engineering News*, was written by three Canadian researchers: an Indigenous knowledge researcher and practitioner, a professor working on intercultural relationships, and a professor of biotechnology. Their article explored what generational and Indigenous thinking could contribute to green chemistry and sustainability research.

What struck me was not chemistry itself, which is far outside my field, but the way the researchers approached a complex problem by bringing together different forms of knowledge and perspectives. They were not simply placing several disciplines side by side. They were exploring the intersection between scientific knowledge, Indigenous knowledge, relationships with land and community, and questions of sustainability. They asked questions that are not normally central to conventional scientific research: What are we trying to change? For whom? What relationships are we entering into? What responsibilities do those relationships create? They emphasized that knowledge is not abstract but situated, relational, and carried by people.

Reading this, I immediately thought about social welfare and social policy.

The lesson seemed clear to me: if even highly specialized scientific research increasingly recognizes the importance of bringing different forms of knowledge and perspectives together, social policy—which deals directly with people, communities, institutions, and relationships—has even less justification for remaining trapped within sectoral silos.

Departure Point: Social Problems Do Not Respect Institutional Boundaries

The strongest argument for an intersectoral approach is simple: social problems do not respect administrative boundaries.

Take loneliness and social isolation. It would be a mistake to consider them exclusively as issues for social services or mental health professionals. Addressing them may require cooperation among health services, social protection systems, housing, urban planning, education, culture, transportation, employment, digital policy, civil society, and local government. A neighbourhood without accessible public spaces, adequate transportation, community facilities, or opportunities for participation can contribute to isolation regardless of how well social services are organized. Being good neighbours requires supporting infrastructure.

Similarly, as we well know, poverty cannot be addressed by income-support programmes alone. It is connected with employment and education. Housing, health, childcare, transportation, taxation, social protection, and economic policy also play very important roles. In the same vein, housing insecurity is simultaneously a housing issue, a poverty issue, a health issue, an employment issue, and often a community-development issue.

This is why I believe that the conventional question—*"Which ministry is responsible for this problem?"*—is increasingly inadequate. The more appropriate question is: *"Which combination of policies, institutions, knowledge, resources, and actors is necessary to address this problem effectively?"*

That is the fundamental logic of intersectoral social policy.

A Particularly Clear Example: Health

The importance of intersectoral action is perhaps most visible in health-related social policy. Health is not produced by the health sector alone. Decisions made by ministries or other authorities responsible for housing, education, employment, transportation, or the environment can have profound consequences for people's health.

Road injuries, for example, have obvious health consequences, but preventing them requires cooperation with transport authorities and urban planners. Poor housing can contribute to respiratory and other health problems, requiring cooperation among health, housing, and environmental authorities. Food insecurity connects health with social protection, employment, agriculture, education, and local community systems. Mental health is influenced by social and economic circumstances and therefore cannot be reduced to clinical treatment.

This logic has already influenced health policy through approaches such as **Health in All Policies, Healthy Cities, and One Health**. Although these approaches differ, they share a fundamental recognition: complex health challenges cannot be solved by one institution or one profession acting alone.

For me, the broader lesson is that health policy should not simply ask other sectors to cooperate with the health sector. Rather, health and well-being should be considered when decisions are made across government.

This is a subtle but important distinction.

If the health ministry asks the transport ministry to help with a health programme, we are still thinking primarily in sectoral terms. If transport policy is designed from the outset with consideration of its consequences for health, accessibility, safety, social participation, and equity, we are moving toward genuine policy integration.

I also see an important distinction between *multidisciplinary* and *intersectoral* approaches.

Multidisciplinary work brings different professional perspectives to the same problem. This is valuable, but it does not necessarily change how institutions operate. Several experts may sit around the same table while continuing to work according to their separate mandates.

Intersectoral action goes further. It requires institutions to recognize their mutual dependence and to organize their work accordingly.

For me, the ultimate objective should therefore be to move from sectoral coordination to genuine policy integration.

Coordination may mean exchanging information, attending the same meetings, or consulting one another. Integration requires something deeper: shared objectives, joint planning, complementary resources, agreed responsibilities, common indicators, and mechanisms of mutual accountability.

This is difficult precisely because government institutions have developed along sectoral lines for good reasons. Ministries have different mandates, professional languages, organizational cultures, budgets, procedures, and performance indicators. A health ministry may measure success through mortality, morbidity, service coverage, or health outcomes. A housing ministry may focus on construction, affordability, or renovation. A finance ministry may prioritize fiscal sustainability. All of these objectives are legitimate, but they do not automatically fit together.

The problem, therefore, is not that sectors have different priorities. The problem arises when those priorities are pursued without recognizing their interdependence.

What Can ICSW Do?

This is also where I see an important role for an international civil society organization such as the **International Council on Social Welfare**. An organization of this kind cannot replace governments, nor should it attempt to prescribe a single institutional model for every country. Its comparative advantage lies elsewhere: **bringing people and perspectives together, generating knowledge, creating spaces for dialogue, and helping translate experience across sectors and countries.**

First, ICSW can make intersectoral policy itself a subject of international dialogue. The conferences and seminars that we convene, ICSW-sponsored publications, our regional structures, and our relationships with the United Nations provide opportunities to bring together social workers, social policy specialists, health professionals, educators, economists, housing experts, local authorities, civil society organizations, and representatives of other sectors. The objective would not simply be to hear different perspectives, but to explore where their responsibilities and interventions intersect.

Second, ICSW can encourage cross-sectoral analysis of major social policy issues. Instead of examining poverty, ageing, loneliness, social protection, or digitalization exclusively from a social-policy perspective, it can ask what health, housing, employment, education, environmental, technological, and community policies mean for the same problem—and how these policies interact.

Third, ICSW can document and disseminate examples of successful intersectoral practice. Many innovative initiatives are local and remain relatively unknown outside their immediate setting. An international NGO can serve as a bridge, identifying promising experiences, comparing them across countries, and making them available to practitioners and policymakers elsewhere. Such comparative learning can be particularly valuable because institutional solutions cannot simply be transferred from one country to another; they need to be adapted to different contexts. ICSW can also promote shared indicators of social well-being.

Finally, ICSW can use its international position to bring intersectoral thinking into global policy processes, including the United Nations. It can encourage dialogue among UN entities and civil society organizations whose mandates are often closely connected but institutionally separated. In doing so, ICSW would be performing one of the roles for which international civil society is particularly well suited: **building bridges where institutions have become separated by mandate, discipline, or tradition.**

I believe this may be one of the most constructive contributions that an international social welfare organization can make today. The future of social policy may depend less on creating ever more specialized programmes and more on our ability to connect the programmes, institutions, and forms of knowledge that already exist.

Ultimately, intersectoral policy is not simply an administrative technique. It reflects a different way of understanding social problems. People do not experience their lives in sectors. They experience them as whole human beings, within families, communities, workplaces, neighbourhoods, and societies. Public policy should therefore strive to see those lives with the same degree of interconnectedness. The task is not to abolish sectors. It is to build bridges between them.



Nairobi-2026

by Cudore Snell

I was honored to attend the Joint World Conference in Nairobi, Kenya, in June 2026 and to participate in the activities of ICSW-Global, including the Board meeting and the General Assembly.

As our Executive Director, Dr. Antonio López, noted, this biennial meeting is “part of a vital tradition for ICSW—to share space, exchange experiences, and chart the future of ICSW.” It was indeed a stimulating gathering, bringing together colleagues from across the globe. New networks were established, existing connections were strengthened, and important discussions took place about the future direction of ICSW over the next two years.

I attended two seminars organized by ICSW, both of which attracted strong participation and generated lively discussion. The first was the *ICSW International Seminar: Participatory Governance, Social Work, and Social Policy in Times of AI*. The second focused on the *ICSW Global Situation Report: Navigating Contemporary Dilemmas in Social Policy and Social Welfare*.

The Global Situation Report was a joint endeavor of the ICSW membership. It was based on an analysis of responses to a questionnaire circulated among ICSW members in advance of the conference, providing an opportunity for the different regions to contribute their perspectives and experiences. The report was launched during the conference, highlighting and celebrating the contributions of members from different parts of the world. The interest generated by the publication was particularly encouraging, with participants queuing to receive hard copies during the launch.

As a member of IASSW, I also had the opportunity to participate in a groupwork panel with colleagues from the United States and Spain. Our presentation, titled “*Building Sustainable Futures through Groupwork: Strengthening Collaboration through Exploring Highlights, Challenges, and Resources*,” attracted an exceptionally large audience. The room was packed, with standing room only. The session was highly interactive and participatory, creating a lively exchange of experiences, ideas, and perspectives. It was also a valuable opportunity to establish new connections and strengthen professional networks with colleagues from many parts of the world.

Traditionally, ICSW convenes its General Assembly during the Joint World Conferences, with delegates participating either in person or online. The Nairobi General Assembly continued this tradition and provided an important forum for reflecting on the organization’s achievements, challenges, and future priorities.

At the General Assembly, the President, Dr. Sergei Zelenev, delivered a visionary and forward-looking report. Among other achievements, he highlighted ICSW’s growing visibility and increasingly effective partnerships. He emphasized that ICSW remains an organization open to the world. During the past period, the ICSW website had been refurbished and modernized, while the newsletter had also been redesigned and strengthened. Although the organization’s institutional capacity remains modest, ICSW continues to demonstrate its ability to accomplish a great deal with limited resources.

The President also identified several important issues requiring attention as the organization moves forward. He noted that “ICSW is approaching a historic milestone: in 2028, ICSW will celebrate its centennial in Paris. One hundred years of engagement in advancing social welfare, social justice, and human dignity represents an extraordinary achievement.”



He drew particular attention to the need to expand membership and strengthen engagement with young people, including in the context of succession planning. Another important area for consideration and discussion was the growing significance of well-being in public policy and social development. Finally, he encouraged members to approach the preparations for the centennial as “a process of renewal, reflection, outreach, and strategic repositioning.” As he put it, “If we work together creatively and with determination, Paris 2028 can become not only a celebration of our history, but also the beginning of a new chapter for ICSW.”

The discussion that followed was constructive and helped to identify possible directions and further steps for the organization.

I am grateful to the President and Executive Director for making this memorable opportunity possible. I am also deeply appreciative of the support extended by the President of ICSW-USA, Madam Patricia O’Meally.

Dr. Cudore Snell
Member of the ICSW Board
ICSW Global Treasurer



The Social Dynamics of Poverty

by Rafael dos Santos da Silva

Introduction

The approach to the social dynamics of poverty uses a structuralist lens to understand poverty from the perspective of social structures and their constitutive implications. This has made it possible to articulate a new concept of poverty which, as a phenomenon, can be observed as the dynamic process of deterioration which is composed of social, economic, environmental, and political stages, pushing/moving the collective toward disaffiliation. This movement is the result of political choices that affect society, impacting its structures. Such reality presupposes the political reason of the collectivity – hence the talk of citizenship – to support the idea that it is only possible to overcome poverty in a collective way. Against this backdrop, the construction of the Social Dynamics of Poverty map articulated, in a single space, the distance provoked by inequality, the extent generated by social exclusion, and the depth established by the condition of hunger. These three cycles should, from this work onwards, be observed as expressions of the same process: poverty. “This made it possible to identify the main barriers to the exercise of citizenship within the cycle of inequality.” In a second stage, the variables related to the cycle of social exclusion were analyzed. This is an environment in which other variables will negatively affect citizenship in the territories. The dimension of citizenship is understood here as the most powerful lefebvrian expression, insisting on the right to the city as something greater than simply accessing bureaucracies. It is intimately related to the task of revolutionizing the city by constructing elements capable of perceiving and acting upon material reality, which is why the notion of democracy, and the dimension of participation, becomes crucial. The last dimension analyzed was absolute poverty, where hunger is the key characteristic. This dramatic zone depends exclusively on political decisions that establish the criteria for deciding who, where, and above all, when hunger will affect.

1 The Evolution of the Concepts of Poverty and the Poor

The urban environment today is the space that has most profoundly influenced the reconfiguration of poverty. Whereas poverty was previously associated with an individual's capacity to respond to hunger, the ability to confront poverty is now, for the first time, closely related to access to economic resources. This, however, raises a fundamental question: who determines what constitutes adequate economic resources? From this perspective, poverty is fundamentally a political process.

Historical records indicate that hunger was the primary expression of poverty until the Middle Ages. In its modern form, however, poverty manifests itself through two new dimensions which, despite their distinct characteristics, constitute different expressions of the same underlying reality: inequality and its consequences for income, and social exclusion, particularly in relation to access to the infrastructure necessary for the reproduction of modern life.

The transformation of poverty—from hunger to inequality and, subsequently, to social exclusion—was a process largely shaped within the urban context, which became a space marked by profound social inequalities. According to Gennari and Albuquerque, the direct consequences of the urban model contributed to the emergence of the “new poor.” This new profile includes both skilled and unskilled workers who were displaced from their jobs, as well as individuals who never entered formal employment because of “industrial or technological reconversions.”

This thesis is reinforced by Brisset, who observes: “l’essor urbain[...] fruit lui-même du développement de l’économie d’échanges, constituant en contrepartie un stimulant aux progrès de la misère” (urban poverty itself, a product of the evolution of the exchange economy, constitutes, in turn, a stimulus to the progress of misery). For Brisset, the urban environment witnessed a revival of the trilogy that had disappeared in the eleventh century: “famine, plague, and war”. The author states: “les pauvres des villes souffrirent davantage” (the poor in cities suffer advantageously).

From this perspective, it is possible to argue that the evolution of poverty within urban space is a socially constructed phenomenon that has progressively acquired a pejorative character in relation to those experiencing it. Over time, the diversity of these subjects has been translated into a downward social trajectory, not only stigmatizing them but also contributing to the construction of the notion of “dangerous classes.”

As a sociological object, poverty assumes an inherently collective dimension. In an attempt to provide a structural interpretation of the concept, Professor Jaume Fernando of the Universidad Nacional de Misiones states that “poverty is a totally descriptive category.” In his view, “poor is the one that in comparison with other individuals from all society achieves, from a series of features taken as characterizing, the lowest levels.”

According to Jaume, a key to understanding the reality surrounding poverty lies in recognizing that “it is a category that allows us to qualify the concrete condition of existence of certain social groups, by contrast or comparison with other groups in the same society that are not poor.” However, he emphasizes that defining poverty solely through material contrasts ultimately restricts the researcher to a descriptive result, limiting the possibility of investigating the structural causes that produce and reproduce poverty.

From this perspective, the structural dimension of poverty, particularly in urban areas, becomes more meaningful. This is evident in the work of the renowned Brazilian professor Milton Santos, especially in *Urban Poverty*, where he argues that, when confronted with “a complex and dynamic object, the impossibility of conceptual definition is assumed.” For the author, “approaches to the subject can lead to real conceptual pitfalls, generating more confusion regarding objectives and theoretical formulations.”

Poverty, therefore, “almost always [remains] incomplete...” It continues: “poverty cannot be restricted to partial definitions,” because doing so would reduce the phenomenon to simplistic categories that may be easy to understand but lack the theoretical depth required to address it adequately. According to Milton Santos, “because it is a social problem...at once synthetic and complex, poverty cannot be studied in an isolated and fragmented way.” Poverty is a social reality and, as such, must be confronted in its full complexity; otherwise, humanity risks being trapped in a cycle from which there is no apparent return.

Confronting poverty requires the imperative of defining it, recognizing, in the words of the Brazilian professor, that “every measurement implies the elaboration of the concept of that which is measured.” Santos therefore emphasizes that only a contextualized examination of reality can produce a coherent understanding of social phenomena. In this context, the author argues that it is essential to understand the functioning of variables and the ways in which they interact and respond to one another in order to infer patterns when the general behavior of poverty is not yet fully understood.

In this sense, Milton Santos reaches the root of the problem when, referring to Gaston Bachelard's *La Formation de l'Esprit Scientifique*, whose eighth edition was published in Paris in 1972, he states: “it is more important to understand a phenomenon than to measure it.” Therefore, given the difficulty of measuring poverty, the appropriate—or at least possible—task is first to locate and understand the problem within its broader context.

The evolution of this debate leads to Crespo and Gurovitz, for whom the concept of “poverty” must be associated with some form of “value judgment.” The authors argue that this category incorporates a subjective dimension and is therefore abstract, moving between the “relative” and “absolute” poles. Because these subjective and abstract categories require clear analytical criteria, they are generally expressed through relative concepts [to what?] and absolute concepts [by how much?].

Poverty can nevertheless be characterized through the establishment of minimum standards capable of guaranteeing human dignity. Such a definition must articulate basic indicators supported by economic variables, such as income; biological variables, such as caloric intake; and political variables, particularly access to rights and essential resources.

This understanding is consistent with what Ivo describes as “the minimum limits foreseen by collective action” to mitigate the effects of poverty on individuals exposed to such conditions. The

identification and definition of poverty as a political phenomenon must, therefore, take into account the social structure in which it is embedded. Its structural dimension constitutes an essential instrument of social categorization, understanding individuals experiencing poverty as a political category inherent to the broader social fabric.

From Simmel's perspective, "poverty constitutes a unique sociological constellation: an individual who occupies a specific organic position within the whole... luckily, poverty is not a lack of resources. Sociologically, the poor person is the individual who does not receive help because of that lack of resources..."

At this point, it is important to understand the figure of the impoverished person—that is, the figure of the poor as produced by unjust social processes and characterized by exclusion from structures necessary for life. It is in this sense that Simmel defines the poor through what may be understood as an ethical minimum. For him, the poor are those "who have created a typical average of needs and are often not helped," giving rise, in the author's words, to "gradual modifications" that ultimately complete "a circle characterized by poverty."

Within this dimension, Ivo argues that "politics is not a separate sphere, but in some way a category of collective experience." Simmel is therefore relevant in emphasizing that the discussion of poverty must move beyond an individualistic perspective and recover the relationship between the individual and the social totality.

According to Ivo, this perspective allows for the emergence of social subjects insofar as "the poor [...] belong to the broadest of political circles, that is, the collectivity of the state." In Milton Santos's analysis, however, the concepts surrounding poverty are dynamic. Consequently, the notions of resources and needs associated with poverty are also dynamic, varying according to position, scale, time, and place, while simultaneously modifying and being modified by the social structure. Following this reasoning, "the notion of poverty cannot be static, nor valid everywhere."

Milton Santos consistently opposes a simplified understanding of poverty, arguing that "the notion of poverty must go beyond statistical research and be able to situate man in global society." Along similar lines, in *For Another Globalization*, Milton Santos argues that poverty cannot be defined solely through statistical measures: "being poor is not just earning less than an arbitrarily fixed sum; being poor is participating in a structural situation, occupying a relatively inferior social position."

For Santos, experiencing poverty ultimately means being affected "essentially by systemic perversity." This perspective resonates particularly with Simmel's understanding of poverty as a social category connected to the ethical and moral limits of society. Their perspectives converge again in recognizing that, sociologically, the individual's position within the gradations of poverty is articulated through their place within the political community. This condition may effectively place the poor outside the State, reducing them to an inert social object deprived of rights within the broader objectives of the collective.

In this context, Milton Santos observes that individuals living in poverty experience deprivation that may be intensified according to their capacity to establish connections with the broader social fabric. Along these lines, Buchanan argues that "the term poverty implies not only the degree of deprivation, but a way of life that is directly related to a complex set of social, economic, and cultural institutions" that ultimately shape people's circumstances and everyday lives.

Attempts to explain or understand the evolution of poverty through simplified approaches can therefore lead to insufficient, or even erroneous, conclusions. Conceptual difficulties may remain unresolved at different levels of abstraction because of the multiple and heterogeneous realities encompassed by the phenomenon.

Ultimately, what is poverty? This study understands poverty as the result of a dynamic process characterized by the deterioration of social relations, which progressively displaces individuals—or communities—toward isolation or complete disaffiliation. The next step is therefore to examine how different perspectives on poverty have shaped academic thought throughout the twentieth century.

1.1 Approaches to Poverty

The conceptual construction of poverty requires revisiting the broad historical framework through which its epistemic foundations have been developed over time. Consequently, contemporary understandings of poverty must extend beyond conceptual models and consider its modern manifestations, variations, and ramifications. This subsection presents an analytical framework for examining different approaches to poverty in relation to the realities they seek to explain.

Approach	School	Synthesis	How do you view poverty?	The Role of the State
Culturalist or Culture of Poverty	American School	Used to justify the asymmetry between economic growth and the increase in poverty.	The result of individual behavior characterized by passivity and a lack of political organization among individuals.	Punishing Poverty
Liberal Approach to Poverty	Contractualist School	It seeks to explain poverty based on individual failures to adapt to the system.	It opts for individualization, associating poverty with the inability to access the market.	Deregulate the market
Socioeconomic Approach to Poverty	International Organizations	It relies on government strategies to designate distributive functions for economic resources.	Ability to Access Consumption	Guaranteeing access to consumption through income distribution.
A Latin American approach to poverty.	Latin American school	It is understood that the combination of structuralist and socioeconomic schools of thought can contribute to overcoming economic dependence.	The absence of a productive system creates a political category of social exclusion.	It focuses on measuring the number of poor people by establishing a poverty line and unmet basic needs.
Structural Approach to Poverty	Marxist School	Poverty results from political choices made in the economic, environmental, and social dimensions.	The individual, or the household, is seen as a victim of the system when not produced by it.	To reorient social structures in such a way as to reduce the effects of capitalism.
An Approach to the Social Dynamics of Poverty	Structuralist School	Poverty is a socially produced, cyclical process whose structures break down social safety nets.	It is a structural process systematized by inequality, exclusion, and hunger.	To confront the political, social, and economic structures that produce poverty.

Table – The Evolution of Approaches to Poverty

Source: Author's own elaboration, based on the Social Dynamics of Poverty

Professor Maria Ozanira da Silva e Silva of the Federal University of Maranhão identifies three principal approaches to poverty: (a) culturalist; (b) structuralist; and (c) liberal. Capucha proposes a fourth approach: (d) socioeconomic. The literature also presents a Latin American approach, particularly as developed by dependency theorists.

The following section provides a synthesis of Western theoretical production, with a particular emphasis on twentieth-century approaches, although some of their principal theorists developed their ideas at different historical moments. The following Table provides an analytical framework through which these approaches may be contrasted, complemented, or critically examined.

While evolving from multiple approaches, this shifts the notion of deprivation of material goods to essential goods for life, making the denial of collective rights the central issue. This is not a simple play on words, but a substantial change in what systemic complexity might represent, reshaping the urban environment of modern cities.

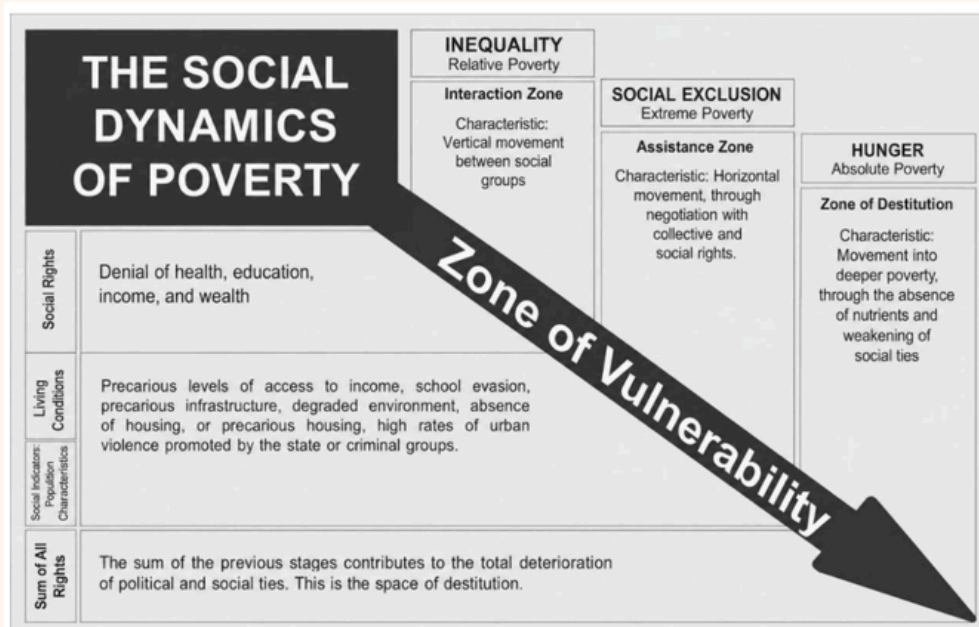
2 The Social Dynamics of Poverty

To think about poverty epistemologically is to think about it holistically, starting from inequality which, in turn, cannot be decontextualized from social exclusion leading to hunger. The epistemology of poverty thus demands that all these elements be considered together, because, although the cycles have their own dynamics, they do not occur in isolation.

Thus, an individual may be subjected to inequality in a given context of unemployment, but in another may be socially excluded due to being denied access to basic sanitation services. In yet another scenario, they may earn a minimum income and thus avoid hunger. Or all of this may reveal aspects of the same dynamic, essentially when the impoverished person is simultaneously exposed to inequality, exclusion, and hunger. The task, therefore, becomes defining the stage of this dynamic, thus providing an epistemology capable of clarifying its nuances.

Poverty, as a social dynamic, needs to be analyzed through a sociological lens in as comprehensive a way as possible. In other words, it needs to be considered from the perspective of its structural conditions. These structures encompass the ideas of social justice, democracy, and citizenship. However, fragmented examinations of the political order, economic elements, and social fabric generate uncertain environments that increasingly weaken people's lives.

In these terms, it was decided to consider poverty from the perspective of three cycles: (I) inequality – relative to income and access to education and health; (II) social exclusion marked by extreme conditions related to urban infrastructure; and (III) the hunger cycle situated at the limit of absolute poverty where bodies find themselves in the ultimate degree of vulnerability. All this may reveal the construction of a new epistemology of poverty, whose diverse and complex movements occur respectively in vertical stages (cycle of inequality), horizontal stages (cycle of social exclusion), and in depth (cycle of hunger). The following Figure attempts to outline the proposal.



Source: The Social Dynamics of Poverty (2025)

This instrument enables the researcher to situate the degree of poverty within the social fabric. In this way, the objective is to understand the complexity and multidimensional nature of the structure of poverty. Furthermore, this study adopts a dual approach. The first draws on Castel's contributions to the study of vulnerability, which help conceptualize poverty as a process that expands and progresses across individuals through the different layers he describes as “zones of social cohesion,” characterized by interaction, assistance, and disaffiliation. The second draws on Mendes, who argues that “vulnerability is not simply exposure to risk, but the deepening of unequal conditions that precede the occurrence of poverty.” In this sense, the concept of vulnerability is employed to facilitate an understanding of “exposure to natural and anthropogenic risks,” thereby allowing for a more flexible interpretation of the phenomenon.

Regarding the analytical tools employed, it is important to consider the contributions of the Citizenship Indicators (INCID), developed by IBASE (Instituto Brasileiro de Análise Sociais e Econômicas). These indicators encompass social, collective, and political rights, enabling the identification of perceptions of citizenship within a given territory and, consequently, serving as reference points for locating the variables under investigation. In other words, these indicators facilitate a closer relationship between the research subject and the object of study.

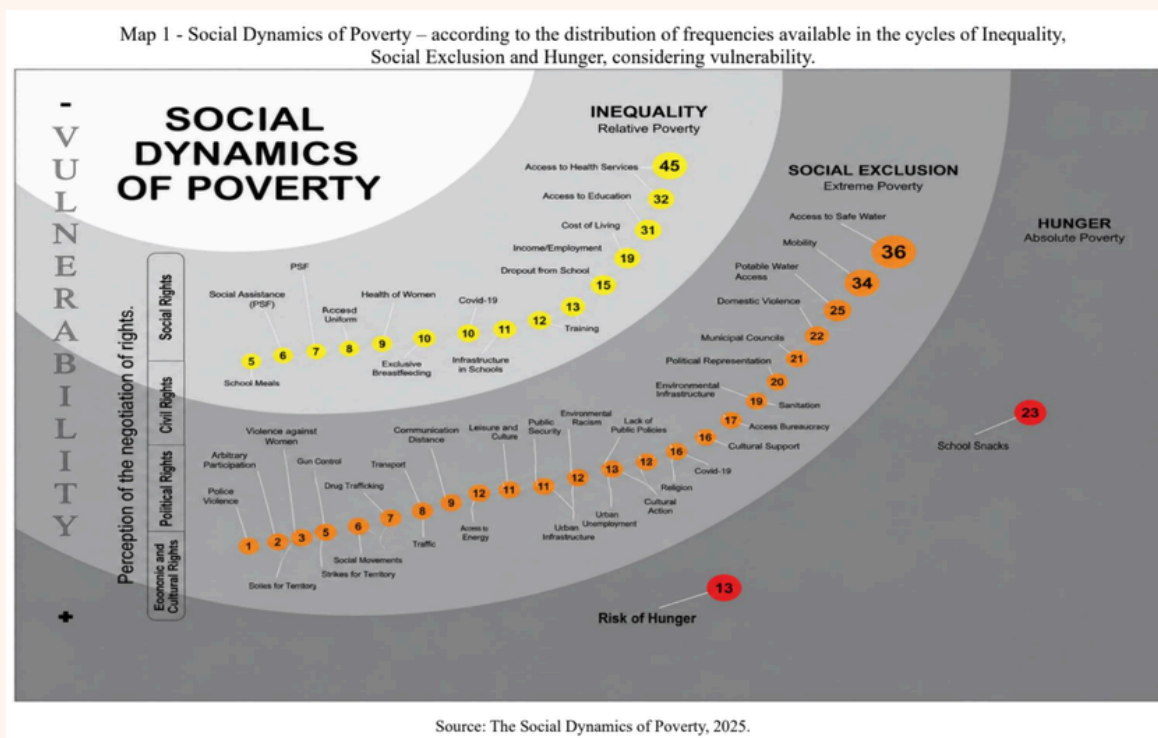
In summary, the social dynamics of poverty and its constituent elements indicate its temporal progression, direction, and spatial location, thereby giving meaning to cycles structured around the concepts of inequality, social exclusion, and hunger. Within the cycle of inequality, dimensions of relative poverty characterize the zone of interaction and affect individuals according to their vulnerability in relation to income, health, and education. The next stage is the cycle of extreme poverty, which may place individuals within the assistance zone, a context of intensified

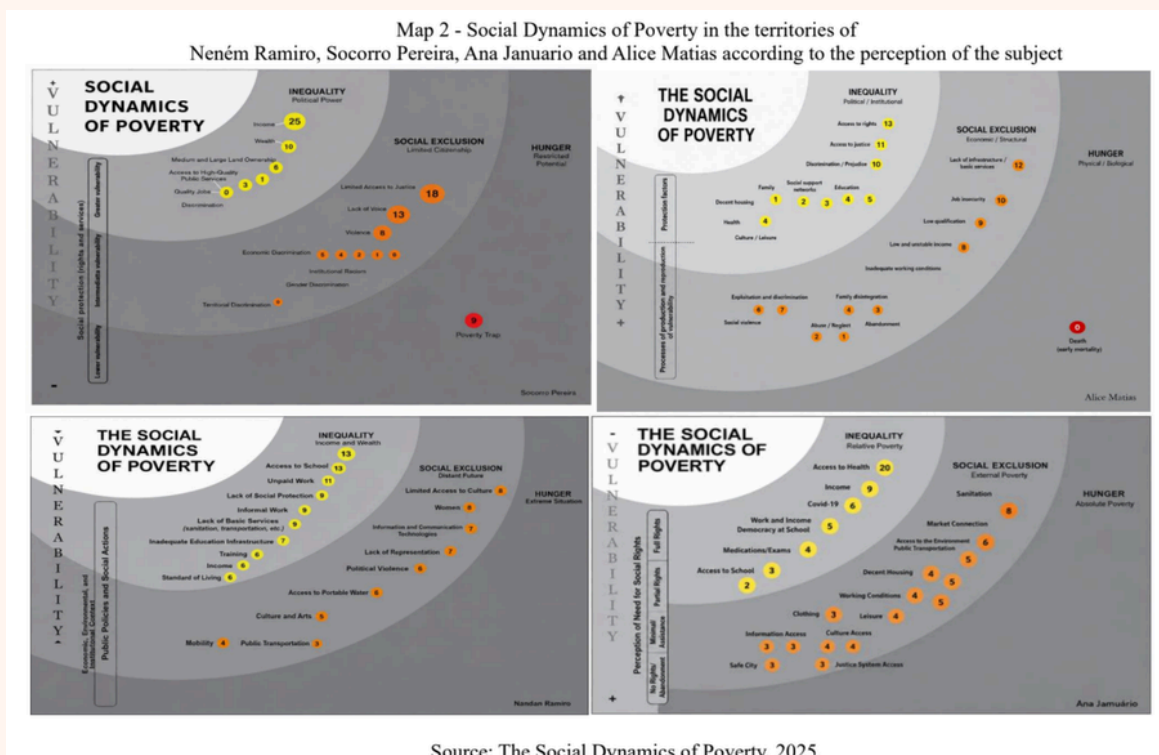
vulnerability that promotes the horizontal separation of social strata through the denial of collective and political rights. Finally, the third cycle concerns absolute poverty, associated with the absence of adequate food. At this stage, the individual is situated within the zone of disaffiliation, where vulnerability is intensified through the simultaneous denial of the social, collective, and political rights mentioned above.

In short, the social dynamics of poverty begin with inequality, develop through social exclusion, and reach their most acute expression in hunger.

2.1 The Social Dynamics of Poverty in Practice

Between January and March 2021, eight focus groups were conducted with members from four territories of the Christian Social Front (FSC): Nenem Ramiro, Socorro Pereira, Ana Januario, and Alice Matias. These territories are located in the urban area of Crateús (Ceará, Brasil). The study involved 50 participants across two rounds of focus groups. Subsequently, the participants' statements were entered into MAXQDA software, and frequencies were extracted from their discourse. These frequencies indicate the number of times a given category emerged in each participant's statements, thereby providing an indication of its relative importance. Accordingly, the variables with the highest frequencies were interpreted as the most critical for the promotion of citizenship. They were subsequently distributed on the maps presented below. Map 1 presents the Social Dynamics of Poverty as applied to the urban reality of the FSC territories in Crateús. It also presents the results separately for each territory investigated, thereby providing empirical support for the thesis that poverty is a dynamic phenomenon. Map 2 provides evidence of the social dynamics of poverty across the territories investigated. It reveals variations in the way poverty is perceived, while indicating that its underlying structure remains consistent.





Conclusions

The Social Dynamics of Poverty is composed of structural cycles that assume different forms and require consideration of diverse social realities. This conclusion is fundamental for two reasons. First, this new approach makes it possible to distinguish the cycle through which poverty takes shape at the local level, moving from structural conditions to their concrete manifestations in everyday life. The methodology employed makes it possible to reconstruct the reality of poverty from the levels of individual participation and citizenship practices, considering their relationship with social, collective, and political rights and thereby bringing the analysis closer to the everyday realities of the territories investigated. Second, this approach contributes to the planning of actions capable of mitigating the effects of poverty and addressing the conditions that produce and reproduce it.

As a result, this approach may be particularly relevant for governments, public policymakers, planners, and local communities, as it enables poverty to be understood in its broader social context. Examining poverty through its social dynamics represents a methodological innovation insofar as it proposes a sociological category that remains the subject of ongoing academic debate. In this sense, the central concern of this study was to approach poverty as a social category, avoiding, in Simmel's terms, a sociology of poverty reduced to naturalistic or substantialist dimensions. Instead, poverty is revealed through the fabric of practical life. This approach does not adopt an anthropological perspective in the sense of treating poverty as an exclusively individual condition; rather, it proceeds from the concrete action of “analyzing poverty, and the condition of being poor.”

Through this perspective, it was possible to examine poverty in urban areas as a phenomenon structured through interconnected cycles. The term “dynamics” is used here to express the flexibility and variability inherent in the constitutive dimensions of a given social logic. This perspective makes it possible to reorient the theoretical understanding of poverty and ultimately to conceptualize it as a sociological category.

As a result, a new conceptual orientation toward poverty emerges from its underlying structure, providing the basis for a new practical approach. This process brings to light local variables that contribute to the production of poverty and that vary according to the specific characteristics of each social reality without, however, necessarily altering the underlying structures. In other words, the theory proposed in this study supports the argument that, although the variables identified through the research differ because they emerge from different local realities, they affect the social fabric through the structural cycles of poverty identified in this study as inequality, social exclusion, and hunger. It is through the articulation of these three dimensions that the phenomenon of poverty can be more fully understood and confronted. Hence, the concept of the Social Dynamics of Poverty.

Finally, whenever the proponents of liberalism seek to portray poverty as a necessary evil, it is important to emphasize that poverty is, in fact, an extreme form of oppression reproduced within modern capitalism, particularly in its urban manifestations. This scenario demands meaningful citizenship practices, which, in turn, require democratic institutions grounded in popular participation. Only under such conditions can poverty cease to be understood merely as the counterpart of wealth and instead become a question of social justice, expressed through citizenship and guaranteed access to a livable environment.

Until then, poverty remains one of the greatest civilizational failures produced by political and social choices. Despite its complexity, however, it is not an inevitable condition. Its reduction and eventual eradication depend upon political, collective, and public decisions capable of transforming the structures and social relations through which poverty is produced and reproduced.

Bibliographic References

- BUCHANAN, Iain (1972) *"Singapore in southeast Asian"*. London, Bell and Souns.
- BRISSET, Claret. (1996) *'Pauvretés'* Paris Éditions Hachette.
- CAPUCHA, Luís, Manuel, Antunes (2000) *"Territórios da Pobreza, onde é preciso voltar."* Revista Marginalidade e Exclusão. pp 8-15. Editora Afrontamento. Lisboa PT.
- _____, Luís, Manuel, Antunes (2004) *"Desafios da Pobreza."* Tese de doutoramento defendida em Instituto Superior de Ciências do Trabalho e da Empresa. Lisboa, Portugal.
- Acessado em 25/09/2019 - Disponível m
https://www.researchgate.net/publication/304042048_Desafios_da_Pobreza/link/5764818b08ae421c44835c85/dow.
- CASTEL, Robert (2008). *"As Metamorfoses da Questão Social: uma crônica do salário"*. 7a Edição Petrópolis. Ed. Vozes.
- CASTELLS, Manuel (2020). *"A Questão Urbana"*. 7a Edição Rio de Janeiro. Ed. Paz e Terra.
- CRESCO, Antonio P. A., GUROVITZ, Elaine (2002). *"A Pobreza como um Fenômeno Mutidimensional"*. ERA-Eletrônica, F.1, No 2, Dezembro 2002. Disponível em
<https://www.scielo.br/j/raeel/a/LVPkw9yHZfJ9kvjC8VSgTsh/abstract/?lang=pt>.
- GENNARI, Adilson, ALBUQUERQUE, Cristina (2011). *"Globalização, Desemprego e a (Nova) Pobreza: estudos sobre impactos nas sociedades portuguesa e brasileira"*, Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais, 92, 51-73. Disponível em: <http://rccs.revues.org/3970> Acedido em 30.07.2018
- IBASE (2010). *"Indicadores de Cidadania – INCID"*. In Instituto Brasileiro de Análise Sociais e Econômicas – IBASE. disponível em <http://incid.org.br/site/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/incidrelatorio1.pdf> Acedido em 30.08.2018
- _____, (2015) *"Mapas da Cidadania – Metodologia de campo"*. In Instituto Brasileiro de Análise Social e Econômica – IBASE disponível em <http://incid.org.br/biblioteca/metodologias/>
- IVO, Anete. Brito. Leal. (2008). *"Viver por um fio: pobreza e política social."* São Paulo: Annablume.
- JAUME, Fernando G. (1989) *"El Concepto de Marginalidad"*. Cuaderno de Antropología Social. Universidad Nacional de Misiones Instituto de Ciencia Antropológicas. Disponível em <http://revistascientificas.filo.uba.ar/index.php/CAS/article/view/4849/4338/>
- LEFEBVRE, Henri. (2003). *The Urban Revolution*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- MENDES, José Manuel (2015) *"Sociologia do Risco – uma breve introdução e algumas lições."* Imprensa da Universidade de Coimbra. Coimbra – PT.
- SANTOS, Milton (2007) *"Por uma outra Globalização"* do pensamento único à consciência universal. 14a Edição Rio de Janeiro. Ed. Record.
- _____, Milton. (2013) *"Pobreza Urbana"* 3a Ed. 1a reimpressão. Editora da Universidade de São Paulo – São Paulo.
- SILVA, Maria Ozanira da S. e (2002) *"O Debate Sobre a Pobreza: questões teóricas-conceituais."* Revista Eletrônica de Políticas Públicas. Ed. UFMA. V.6, N.2 pp 65 – 102 disponível em <http://www.periodicoseletronicos.ufma.br/index.php/rppublica/article/view/3720/1753>
- SILVA, Rafael dos Santos – A Dinâmica Social da Pobreza. Editora Escola Cidadã, 2a edição. Contagem-MG, 2025.
- SIMMEL, Georg (2015) *"El Pobre"* in SOCIOLOGÍA: Estudios Sobre las Formas de Socialización. Traducción: José Pérez Bances. Edición Fondo de Cultura Económica pp 745 –796.

Rafael dos Santos da Silva, Post-doctoral degree in Sociology from the Federal University of Ceará - UFC. PhD in Sociology of Poverty from the University of Coimbra-PT. Professor at the Federal University of Ceará – UFC.

Author of the books:

Marginal Letter: on poverty and democracy and The Social Dynamics of Poverty.

rafael.silva@crateus.ufc.br

Heat Relief Across the US

As summer temperatures climb across the United States, The Salvation Army is on the front lines of heat relief—offering hydration, shelter, and compassion to those most vulnerable. From bustling cities to rural communities, their network of 3,000 officers, 64,000 employees, and 1.5 million volunteers mobilize from The Salvation Army's nearly 7,400 service centers each year to combat the dangers of extreme heat.

When heat advisories are issued, The Salvation Army activates cooling centers in community centers, shelters, and corps locations nationwide. These centers provide air-conditioned spaces for rest and recovery, cold water and snacks to prevent dehydration, overnight shelter in select locations and access to hygiene supplies and case management. These centers offer a lifeline to seniors, families, and individuals experiencing homelessness. In areas where access is limited, mobile units deliver bottled water and electrolyte drinks, sunscreen, hats, and hygiene kits and referrals to shelter and medical care. Street teams also check on older adults and those with chronic health conditions who may be at higher risk of heat-related illness.

To help people stay cool at home, The Salvation Army partners with local businesses and donors to distribute box fans and portable A/C units and energy-efficient cooling systems for seniors and low-income households. These efforts are especially critical in regions like the South and Southwest, where temperatures regularly exceed 100°F.

Pathway of Hope

This initiative works to stabilize vulnerable families and break cycles of intergenerational poverty through strengths-based case management and holistic support from Salvation Army congregations. Over the past 5 years 12,108 families were enrolled as participants. 65% of service recipients are single parent families and those who fully engage in goal setting and case management show the most growth in gaining stable housing and improving their income through employment.

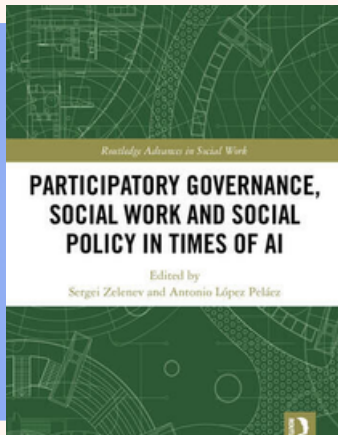
Summer Camps

During camp season, The Salvation Army provides a wide range of engaging summer camp activities for kids, such as swimming, canoeing, hiking, archery, and other sports. In addition, the camps also offer educational and non-sports programs, such as arts and crafts, music, and drama. Kids are encouraged to develop social skills through team-building activities, leadership training, and community service projects. The Salvation Army summer camps provide kids with the opportunity to learn new skills, make friends, and create lasting memories—impactful childhood experiences that too often are only enjoyed by children from higher-income homes.

Every year, these summer camp programs provide thousands of kids of all ages with a fresh perspective on life as they meet new friends, discover new talents, and experience the benefits that being outdoors provides. And because children living in stressful social and economic conditions have limited opportunity, resources, and/or access to leisure activities, including arts and sports—summer camp holds special meaning. In addition to the fun camp activities, kids can learn to swim, play sports, make music, create arts and crafts, and participate in scouting—all under safe and supportive supervision by trained counselors. Moreover, The Salvation Army camp counselors are equipped to help children navigate the complicated emotions and struggles that can arise for those who experience poverty and related hardships. More than just a seasonal refuge, summer camp for children can have a positive impact on a child's self-esteem, confidence, and overall well-being.

The Salvation Army is one of the largest humanitarian aid providers in the world, combining religious ministry with massive social welfare operations.

Publications in Focus



Book Review:

Participatory Governance, Social Work and Social Policy in Times of AI

by Emilio Díaz de Mera

Zelenev, S., López Peláez, A. (eds.). 2027. *Participatory Governance, Social Work and Social Policy in Times of AI*. London: Routledge

Artificial Intelligence is the defining issue of our time (López Peláez, Marcuello-Servós, Kalenda and Castillo de Mesa, 2026). It is also central to welfare systems, health (López Peláez, Erro-García and Pérez, 2026), social services, and social work. Whether in our professional interactions with clients or within the organizations where we work, social workers are facing the rapid integration of AI and digitalization (Domingo Calduch and López Peláez, 2026). We are not alone in this, and it is not a new phenomenon. Over the past 130 years of social work history, we have already faced other technological revolutions. In fact, social work emerged as a scientific discipline and as a profession amid a context of rapid technological transformation (industrialization, the automobile, aviation, cinema, and mass media), seeking to address situations of vulnerability, poverty, and social exclusion.

From my perspective, the difference between the past and the present lies in the fact that, for the first time in human history, those affected can evaluate, participate in, and decide on technological development—at least in democratic societies. And this is the key point of the book I am presenting to the readers of the ICSW Newsletter. This collective work addresses a key theme: participation as a strategic tool that enables us to co-design AI and co-design the reform of our welfare systems. It is a relevant, highly timely book that does not merely tell us how AI is used or how we should prepare to use AI. It has much greater theoretical depth: what it brings to the table are the different dimensions of AI and how they affect social welfare systems. It then addresses participation as a key strategy in the governance of our societies.

The book is organized into three main sections. The first section, titled “Participation, Digital Innovation, and Social Services: Global Dynamics and Future Challenges,” analyzes the main challenges and dynamics of AI implementation, including, for example, an analysis of AI bias and the protection of minors (Chapter 3), the governance challenges posed by data capitalism (Chapter 6), co-design methodologies (Chapter 7), a review of green social work from the perspective of citizen participation—referred to in Chapter 4 as “Participatory Green Social Work”—and the use of AI for the common good (Chapter 9).

The second section, titled “Participatory Governance, AI, and Social Services: Country Cases,” presents best practices from various countries: Finland, Morocco, Northeast Asia, Indonesia, Spain, India, Sweden, and Ireland. For me, this analysis of best practices is one of the major contributions of this book—and, more broadly, of the books published in recent years that present the results of activities led by the ICSW (López Peláez, Suh, and Zelenev, 2023; López Peláez, Keet, and Sung, 2025). Theoretical analyses and intellectual debates must be grounded in professional practice—in what we are actually doing in social services—at least from a social worker’s perspective.

In the third section, titled “Global Organizations, AI, and Social Participation”, the editors give a voice to the main global institutional actors in social work: the ICSW, the IASSW, and the IFSW. In their respective chapters, the presidents of the three organizations present each organization’s perspective on the challenges of AI and its role in the field of social work and social welfare.

From my perspective as a professor of social work, a very significant contribution of this book is that, beyond theoretical analyses and debates, it seeks to promote a common front to address the challenges of AI. Bringing together the three major social work organizations (the ICSW, the IFSW, and the IASSW) and collectively adopting a guide for action—a Declaration to promote citizen participation as a key tool for co-designing AI and digitalization that is inclusive and respects human rights—is a major achievement, and the results are published in this book. AI and digitalization can offer an opportunity to address distance, loneliness, isolation, and challenges to social inclusion. How can we do this collectively, and how can we agree on a guide for action?

This book details the participatory process led by the ICSW in 2024 and 2025, thanks to funding from the provincial government of Málaga (Spain), the Málaga Provincial Council, and the collaboration of the Ronda City Council. Thanks to both institutions, two international seminars were organized in Ronda, along with an intensive participatory process involving participants from various countries around the world. Two side events were also held at the United Nations Commission for Social Development (2024 and 2026).

The result, as can be found in Annex I following Chapter 22 (pp. 303–312), is the *Ronda Declaration 2025 on Meaningful Participation, Inclusive Social Welfare, and Democratic Local Governance*. This Declaration, endorsed by the ICSW, the IFSW, and the IASSW, focuses on the key elements that must be promoted to strengthen participatory governance. It is well worth reading and reflecting on this Declaration, which is also available on the websites of the ICSW, the IFSW, and the IASSW.

In short, this book clearly illustrates the type of leadership in the fields of social policy, social services, and social work education that characterizes the ICSW, the IFSW, and the IASSW—and which is also evident in the Global Agenda. This leadership is grounded in a rigorous analysis of the challenges we face and the ability to reach consensus on theoretical approaches and proposals for action based on human rights.

References:

Domingo Calduch, Y., & López Peláez, A. (2026). Well-being, digitisation, and social work: participatory strategies for inclusive digitisation in social services. The Catalan case. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 40(2), 251–263. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650533.2026.2657959>

López Peláez, A., Marcuello-Servós, C., Kalenda Vávrová, S., & Castillo de Mesa, J. (2026). Social work practice and AI at the digital frontier: promoting well-being among vulnerable groups. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 40(2), 175–178. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650533.2026.2661527>

López Peláez, A., Erro-Garcés, A., & Pérez-García, R. M. (2026). From competence to care: digital leadership in eHealth. *Journal of Social Work Practice*, 40(2), 229–250. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02650533.2026.2657967>

López Peláez, A., Suh, S.M., Zelenev, S. (eds.). (2023). *Digital Transformation and Social Well-Being. Promoting an Inclusive Society*. London: Routledge

López Peláez, A., Keet, A., Sung, Ch.M. (eds.). (2025). *Social Welfare Programs and Social Work Education at a Crossroads. New Approaches for a Post-Pandemic Society*. London: Routledge.

Emilio Díaz de Mera

Associate Professor, Social Work.
Universidad Rey Juan Carlos (Madrid), Spain
emilio.diazdemera@urjc.es

More Activity at ICSW- Save the Date!

TO ICSW Europe Members!

In the European Region this year we have to elect the Regional President, Regional Vice-President, Regional Vice-President, Regional Treasurer and the members of the Regional Board.

Important dates:

- Voting will be in an electronic way in September - October 2026;
- The results of the electronic voting will be announced and approved at the General Assembly in Vienna on **13 November 2026**.

For questions, please, contact the Secretariat of ICSW Europe: gabriela.siantova@icsw.org

Joint Seminar – Marrakesh, October 22–24, 2026

**From Exclusion to Belonging: Inclusive Practices to
Strengthen Social and Community Ties**

**Organized by the ICSW MENA region, in
collaboration with ICSW Europe and the ICSW Global
Office.**

More news coming soon on the ICSW website



<https://www.icsw.org>

Contributions to the newsletter are welcome!

The content of the ICSW News may be freely reproduced or cited provided acknowledgment of the source. The views do not necessarily represent policies of ICSW.

News Editor: **Antonio López Peláez, Executive Director, ICSW alopez@icsw.org**

ICSW - International Council on Social Welfare. Office number 34.

Department of Social Work, Faculty of Law, National Distance Education University (UNED).

C/ Obispo Trejo 2, 28040 Madrid (Spain).