GREEN SOCIAL WORK AND COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

Milica Stojanović[*]

University of Niš, Faculty of Philosophy, Niš, Serbia

ORCID iD: Milica Stojanović   https://orcid.org/0009-0005-6671-4393

Abstract

Consumerist culture, industrially oriented societies, and urban lifestyles have led to profound changes in the environment, resulting in climate change and natural disasters. The negative aspects of the ecological crisis are closely linked to the social functioning of individuals, causing issues in physical and mental health, housing, material security, nutrition, and more. Environmental sustainability represents not only an ecological but also a social problem, and consequently, a problem for the profession of social work. There is a need to mobilise the community towards building resilience in the face of various difficulties. Green social work, as a distinct field, focuses on recognising the interconnection between ecological and social issues, while striving to overcome disparities, empower individuals and communities, mobilise social capital, and prevent the further progression of environmental pollution consequences. This paper will address the ways in which the ecological crisis affects social communities and their members by examining the role of green social work in this field. Additionally, the importance of the concept of community resilience and how it can be built with the help of social work will be highlighted.

Key words: green social work, community, resilience, ecological crisis, empowerment, social capital.

ЗЕЛЕНИ СОЦИЈАЛНИ РАД И ОТПОРНОСТ ЗАЈЕДНИЦЕ

Апстракт

Конзумеристичка култура, индустријски оријентисана друштва и урбанистички начин живота довели су до коренитих промена у оквиру животне средине које резултирају климатским променама и природним катастрофама. Негативни аспекти еколошке кризе уско су повезани са социјалним функционисањем појединаца, узрокујући проблеме на пољу физичког и менталног здравља, становања, материјалне обезбеђености, исхране и слично. Одрживост животне средине представља не

* Corresponding author: Milica Stojanović, University of Niš, Faculty of Philosophy, Ćirila i Metodija 2, 18000 Niš, Serbia, milica.stojanovic@filfak.ni.ac.rs

само еколошки, већ и социјални проблем, те последично и проблем професије социјалног рада. Постоји потреба за активирањем заједнице ка изградњи отпорности за случај суочавања са разноврсним тешкоћама. Зелени социјални рад, као засебна делатност, усмерена је ка препознавању испреплетености еколошког и социјалног, улагању напора ка превладавању диспаритета, као и оснаживању појединаца и заједница, активирању друштвеног капитала и превенцији даљег узнапредовања последица загађења животне средине. У раду ће бити обрађен начин на који еколошка криза утиче на социјалне заједнице и њихове чланове кроз сагледавање улоге коју зелени социјални рад има на овом пољу. Додатно, указаће се на значај концепта отпорности заједнице и начину његове изградње уз помоћ социјалног рада.

Кључне речи: зелени социјални рад, заједница, отпорност, еколошка криза, оснаживање, друштвени капитал.

INTRODUCTION

The environment serves as the foundation for human functioning, yet, as a society, we often fail to recognise its importance. Significant economic and industrial advancements have been made possible through the irresponsible use of natural resources to the detriment of the environment, with an increasingly noticeable separation of individuals from nature since the beginning of industrialisation. As a result, we have adopted a culture of excessive consumerism that accompanies overproduction. Thus, in the context of the processes of excessive exploitation and the consequent suffering of the environment, we can speak of an ecological crisis reflected in climate change, the emission of harmful gases, air and soil pollution, a reduction in biodiversity, and numerous other unfavourable occurrences. Consequently, problems such as high temperatures, earthquakes, processed food, drinking water shortages, diseases caused by harmful sun rays, air, soil, and water, among many others, arise (Peeters, 2012). Thus, environmental pollution does not remain solely within the bounds of ecology but penetrates every aspect of an individual's life, significantly endangering the social security of citizens. The sustainability of the environment is a prerequisite for human functioning and meeting life needs, which is why there is a pressing need for collective action and the development of community mechanisms to address this issue. It is necessary to accept the ecological and social responsibility we have as members of the society, to understand the interdependence of systems, and to build resilience by nurturing community protective mechanisms. The profession of social work and green social work have a significant role in this field, striving to achieve sustainability in the relationship between individuals and the social environment. The subject of this paper is the impact of the ecological crisis on the functioning of people and the communities to which they belong, with a particular focus on the role that green social work as a profession has in responding to ecological risks, specifically through the development of community resilience. The aim of this paper is to highlight the role of green social work in responding to the direct

and indirect consequences of the ecological crisis on the functioning of individuals and communities. A particular goal is to emphasise the importance of preventive measures and the building of community resilience as a key tool for addressing ecological risks, including the development of strategies and programs based on the principles of empowerment and social capital. Examples of good practices from existing initiatives in the field of green social work will be considered, with the aim of identifying effective strategies and approaches that can serve as models for future activities, with a review of the limitations of practice.

THE ECOLOGICAL CRISIS AND THE SOCIAL FUNCTIONING OF PEOPLE

There is a social tendency to control, exploit, and establish dominance over the environment and its resources (Norton, 2012). Urbanisation and life in a capitalist society imply working and living away from nature, as well as against it, which consequently reflects on the quality of life of individuals. Numerous ecological problems create insecurity in daily life through difficult access to drinking water and nutritionally rich food, high temperatures, unpredictable weather conditions, and changes that threaten physical and mental integrity. Particularly, marginalised segments of the population, such as spatially segregated, financially deprived, ill, and socially and psychologically vulnerable individuals, groups, and communities, find themselves at a disproportionately greater risk from the adverse effects of ecological threats (World Bank, 2013). Often, locations lacking adequate resources, inhabited by marginalized and economically disadvantaged population groups, are most affected by ecological risks.

Illustratively, research conducted in rural Ethiopia and India indicates that droughts are a primary factor contributing to the maintenance of poverty among communities, while China cites natural disasters as a key factor hindering poverty reduction processes (Shepherdet al., 2013 as cited in World Bank, 2013). Also, with the increase in global temperature, we can expect more frequent instances of extreme rainfall in tropical regions. An example is Bangladesh, which has recorded 70 natural disasters caused by climate change in recent years (IPCC, 2013; Kemp et al., 2015). Conversely, in arid and subtropical regions, the same phenomenon leads to droughts and fire risks, indicating the dual nature of risks with the same ecological background (Kemp et al., 2015). The effects of these ecological disasters have thus expanded to include others, such as population migration, difficulties in sustaining agriculture, the instability of farmers' incomes, and similar challenges that significantly hinder daily life (Molyneux, 2010). Consequently, numerous ecological disasters necessitate relocation, implying a complete loss of part of one's identity and

usual way of life. Here, we can apply the term ecological refugees to describe those forced to migrate due to environmental changes that prevent safety and the meeting of life needs, conditioned by the ecological crisis. According to projections by the Environmental Justice Foundation in 2009, nearly 10% of the world's population will be in the role of ecological refugees and at risk of displacement due to climate change (Kemp et al., 2015). The risk of ecological disasters in the Republic of Serbia is also on the rise, with the number of natural disasters increasing from 100 to 2800 over a 10-year period compared to the 19th century. Floods represent the greatest risk among natural disasters in the Republic of Serbia, accounting for 62% of the total, while fires also rank as significant risks, as evidenced by the 2007 catastrophe that burned over 22,000 hectares of forests (Sekulić, Dimović, Kalman-Kranjski-Jović & Todorović, 2012).

Risks to citizen safety can also be observed in job and income insecurity, especially in industries threatened by climate change. Additionally, the degradation of food quality and nutritional value, as well as the availability of certain foods, is becoming an increasing risk (Kemp et al., 2015). Soil and marine life pollution, along with industrial food and livestock production, result in food that is less nutritious and constantly rising in price, making it inaccessible to the poor population. Another way in which the ecological crisis impacts human functioning is through negative effects on the physical and mental health of the population, evident in the increasing prevalence of diseases such as cancer, respiratory and cardiovascular diseases, infectious diseases, and others (Molyneux, 2010). Experiencing ecological disasters often leads to difficulties in emotional functioning, such as the presence of post-traumatic stress disorder or depression. Additionally, there is a highlighted need for professional assistance in overcoming crisis situations, given research results indicating a connection between the availability of mental support and positive outcomes in responding to ecological disasters (Boscarino, Hoffman, Kirchner, Erlich, Adams, Figley & Solhkhahet, 2013). However, experiencing natural disasters is not the only way negative impacts on mental health manifest. The very feeling of insecurity, helplessness, and fear concerning the sustainability of the environment and the future of subsequent generations leads to feelings of anxiety. Thus, we can conclude that current life on Earth is not organised in a way that allows for environmental sustainability and, consequently, the social security of citizens. These effects call for the participation of multiple stakeholders in the remediation process, underscoring the role of social work and green social work as key areas of focus.

GREEN SOCIAL WORK: THEORETICAL FOUNDATION, DEVELOPMENT AND SCOPE OF ACTION

The foundations of green social work are established in the theory of human development and the breakdown of beliefs in the social vacuum through emphasising the reciprocal influence that individuals and various social systems exert. Centering on the mutuality of relationships, where the individual plays an active role, the agency of individuals in creating their own reality is highlighted (Hertler, Figueredo, Peñaherrera-Aguirre, Fernandes & Woodley of Menie, 2018). The reciprocity of relationships becomes clear when we consider the main causes of the ecological crisis, which can be categorised under irresponsible human actions. By emphasising active individual participation in changing the environment we establish the groundwork for taking responsibility for the current state of affairs and empowering community members for processes of positive change. Metzner (1995) spoke of the alienation of individuals from nature, which inevitably leads to ecological catastrophes, where this alienation is reflected in insufficient awareness of our dependence on nature and the impact that everyday consumer habits have on its destruction (Metzner, 1995). Based on this, Ungar (2002) advocated for improving the relationship between individuals and their environment by introducing the ecology and natural surroundings of individuals into the ecosystem approach (Ungar, 2002 as cited in Wang & Altanbulag, 2022). These concepts significantly contribute to the shift from an individualistic perspective, focused solely on the individual, to duality and the individual as an integral part of the environment. On the other hand, the anti-oppressive perspective and intersectionality theory provide a framework for understanding unequal exposure to ecological risks. The anti-oppressive perspective offers insight into structural inequalities, which, in the context of green social work, particularly highlight inequalities caused by capitalist and consumerist cultures of inadequate natural resource management (Wang & Altanbulag, 2022). Intersectionality theory provides additional insight into the overlapping of multiple identity elements that collectively contribute to the unequal distribution of resources, treatment, and risk exposure (Andersen & Collins, 2010 as cited in Wang & Altanbulag, 2022). Consequently, the environment is recognised as a significant factor in human identity, which can influence daily functioning and quality of life in countless ways (Wang & Altanbulag, 2022). As a result of intensified ecological risks and based on the aforementioned approaches, an eco-critical approach in social work was developed, which included the environment and its sustainability in the discourse of social work (Kati Närhi & Matthies, 2001). Over time, this approach has evolved into a distinct area of the profession known as green social work.

Green social work can be characterised as a form of community social work focused on the consequences of natural disasters and, indi-

rectly, other problems caused by human actions, such as social inequalities, poverty, unemployment, and more (Dominelli, 2018). Additionally, green social work involves not only recognising nature as a significant factor in human functioning but also working to improve the relationship with the environment and incorporating it into planned intervention processes (Wang & Altanbulag, 2022). The scope of green social work can be divided into subgroups such as crisis consequence mitigation, empowerment, advocacy, community work, prevention, and education on protective mechanisms, among others, aimed at improving social functioning in the context of ecological risks (Dominelli, 2018). Direct assistance from social workers in situations of acute vulnerability caused by ecological risks includes providing basic necessities such as food, drinking water, clothing, shelter, and a safe environment. After the crisis, a service plan is created based on the assessment to ensure safety and meet the needs of individuals, families, and communities, especially in the areas of family protection, member reintegration, and ensuring the best interests of children at risk (Dominelli, 2018). Addressing the consequences does not only cover the visible effects of the crisis but also focuses on the mental health of the population by providing psychosocial support through counselling and/or therapy (IACS, 2007 as cited in Dominelli, 2018). Activities at the micro, meso, and macro levels include various actions, from assessments and therapeutic work with individuals, families, and communities, to mobilising community members, organising group interventions and activities, and initiating political actions (Hay, et al. 2023). What distinguishes green social work in the realm of ecological disasters from other helping professions is its extensive focus on macro level interventions within groups and communities aimed at reducing risk and vulnerability to hazards, while also developing resilience and effective recovery capabilities post-disaster (Ersing, 2020). Connected to this is the significant area of community empowerment, which involves identifying available resources that individuals can rely on for support in the process of returning to previous levels of functioning, and providing additional education to build capacities for dealing with similar problems in the future. The specific importance of social work participation in the context of ecological crises is reflected in the compassion and adaptability of the profession, which has a tendency to view individuals 'in a broader environment,' providing a holistic approach to interventions, and placing particular focus on the needs and rights of especially vulnerable groups (Drolet, Lewin & Pinches, 2021).

In relation, social workers often advocate for the interests of their clients within the community and beyond, aiming to increase the visibility of their needs and attract the attention of the public and decision makers who would enable an adequate approach to the problem. The advocacy process involves creating connections and support networks, especially

within the civil sector, with numerous organisations and associations that pursue the same goals, which also includes involvement in social and environmental movements (Peeters, 2012). Thus, the task of the social work profession lies not only in ensuring the fulfilment of individual needs but also in working towards ecological awareness in communities and creating significant changes in the treatment of the environment (Dominelli, 2018). For this reason, advocacy receives special attention, initiating positive changes in public policies that promote social justice and improve the system's sensitivity to the needs of marginalised communities particularly negatively affected by ecological disasters (Ersing, 2020). Additionally, green social work is important as an academic discipline through its research work, which contributes to raising awareness about the significance of ecological sustainability and shedding light on the disproportionate exposure of marginalised communities to ecological risks (Peeters, 2012; Dominelli, 2018). Ultimately, although the potential for action is great, the significance of social work in the context of disaster response is poorly recognised. This can be associated with an excessive emphasis on practices that include psychosocial support, blurring the boundaries between social workers and counsellors or clinical therapists (Sim, He & Dominelli, 2022). Additionally, there is a noticeable dominance of micro practices, with insufficient institutional support and development of social workers' competencies that would enable larger scale action at the macro level (Hay, et al. 2023).

COMMUNITY RESILIENCE AND GREEN SOCIAL WORK

Green social work is defined as community work that aims to achieve set goals using tools such as empowerment, the development of social capital, and building community resilience (Peeters, 2012). Community resilience, as a significant area of preventive action, involves encouraging the development and enhancement of resources, knowledge, skills, and the community's readiness to respond to risks, maintain existing capacities, and return to a previous level of functioning (Ćurčić, Milić Babić & Šimleša, 2018). Thus, community resilience can also be defined as the ability to resist, overcome, or adapt to change (Roussy, 2013). Accordingly, the tasks of green social work are aimed at improving the capacity of the community and individuals to cope with the negative effects of ecological crises, and to return to or enhance the previous level of functioning. Additionally, resilience refers to the community's ability to cope with a lack of resources, where the role of green social work is focused on initiating changes in living habits that contribute to sustainability, such as community activities aimed at ensuring greater resource security (Čurčić et al., 2018). Furthermore, resilience is characterised by efforts to change capitalist and urbanistic values, as well as work to ensure

the stability of the most important social systems for future challenges (Roussy, 2013).

As the role of green social work in community resilience development is based on the social aspect of the concept of resilience, the focus is on community mobilisation, which starts from the bottom up. Although they have a small effect on a global level, local initiatives for community improvement and empowerment with the support and guidance of social workers contribute to building social capital, which is a key tool for social change. With further development and the institutionalisation of similar initiatives, we can achieve proactive citizen actions and greater awareness of the needs of the most vulnerable groups, whose readiness to face risks is significantly enhanced. Consequently, these practices create pressure on state bodies to introduce more comprehensive responses to crises and risks, focusing on strengthening institutional capacities for timely responses. This is supported by the results of research on case studies exploring the practice of green social work in the context of global disasters related to three different hazards – natural, intentional, and technological. In the analysis of each of the following cases: the COVID-19 pandemic, the European refugee crisis of 2016-2018, and the crisis of the lack of clean drinking water in indigenous communities in Canada, the significant role of green social work in protecting at risk marginalised groups from hazards is noticeable (Breen, Greig & Wu, 2023). The main steps towards building resilience are achieved by educating the local community, informing about social services, advocating for refugees' rights, providing support in meeting needs, resettlement, and protecting citizens' rights (Breen, Greig & Wu, 2023). Social workers represent actors who, in situations of major crises, will make an effort to protect and advocate for the most vulnerable, who often do not have enough power to convey their experiences and needs to a wider audience. Indeed, the work on building resilience extends beyond interventions during ecological crises, involving continuous work with communities on preparation, empowerment, and ensuring citizens' safety, in cooperation with various civil or government actors. In addition to community work, social workers at the macro level have a significant role in building community resilience by initiating the development or amendment of disaster mitigation strategies through advocating for the implementation of sustainable policies to reduce harm from adverse events (Breen, Greig & Wu, 2023).

The current state regarding global capacities for resilience to crises shows a lack of resilience in terms of infrastructure, economy, social protection, and available community resources. In many countries, due to a lack of awareness of ecological risks in the area of social care, which is a key area of green social work, there is a lack of universal rights to health and social services aimed at ensuring citizens' well-being, improving personal capacities to recover from difficulties and build resilience for future

risks (Dominelli, 2014). Consequently, it becomes clear that the backbone of resilience lies in the community capitals - political, economic, social, and ecological, whose interaction and direction of development directly affect the capacity and dimensions of community resilience (Stotten, Schermer, & Wilson, 2021). Therefore, legal frameworks of action and political structures, dominant market mechanisms, and economic stability, along with the quality of interactions and engagement of community members, significantly determine possible paths for resilience development.

Building community resilience is a challenging and multidimensional process encountering numerous obstacles along the way. Primarily, a significant challenge is the lack of a clear legal framework that further regulates this area, limiting proactive action in green social work. The rigidity of institutions, preoccupation with bureaucracy, and numerous work obligations, along with the absence of regulations that define ecologically oriented actions of social workers, negatively affect community engagement. In the international context, the World Bank particularly focuses on introducing policies for managing ecological disasters through numerous actions, from which disaster risk reduction (DRR) programs stand out. DRR aims to prevent new and reduce existing disaster risks while simultaneously managing these risks to strengthen resilience and achieve sustainable community development (UNDRR, 2016; World Bank, 2022). Key areas of support include: risk identification and reduction activities with a special focus on resilient infrastructure; integration of DRR activities into institutional and public policy plans; activities aimed at risk preparedness, such as the wage subsidy scheme (EWS); and disaster risk financing (World Bank, 2022). Research has shown that investment in disaster risk reduction results in significant social and economic benefits, with a return of four US dollars for every dollar invested in infrastructure investments, and a reduction in the negative impact of future disasters on citizens' living standards by 31% (Hallegatte, Rentschler & Walsh 2018; Hallegatte, Rentschler & Rozenberg 2019, as cited in World Bank, 2022). On the other hand, the universality of wage subsidies also has the capacity to reduce losses in property, mortality, and individual well-being when faced with risks (Hallegatte et al. 2017, as cited in World Bank, 2022). Due to the capacity of DRR in nurturing community resilience and improving citizens' well-being despite ecological risks, the World Bank highlighted this area as one of the main goals of the 2021-2025 Climate Change Action Plan. However, despite the importance of disaster risk reduction programs and activities, there is noticeable underinvestment, with only 4.1% of the total disaster development aid budget between 2010 and 2019 directed towards prevention and preparedness activities (UNDRR, 2021 as cited in World Bank, 2022).

As the World Bank's activities are implemented globally, the Republic of Serbia is one of the countries that adopted the National Disaster Risk Management Program 2016-2020 in light of the major floods in 2014, aiming to develop community resilience to face future risks and mitigate existing ones (World Bank Group, 2021). Regarding the achieved results in the area of institutional development in the Republic of Serbia, a legal framework for emergency responses and risk reduction has been created with the adoption of the Law on Emergency Situations (2009); the Law on Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management (2018); and the National Strategy for Protection and Rescue in Emergency Situations (2011). Article 11 of the Law on Disaster Risk Reduction and Emergency Management involves "building a culture of safety and community resilience to disasters," which aligns with the goals of preventive resilience development (Sl. glasnik RS, br. 87/2018). Nonetheless, the Action Plan for the implementation of the National Disaster Risk Management Program lacks specifics on planned activities by which the Government of the Republic of Serbia aims to achieve this. The Action Plan determines direct response activities to the consequences of crisis situations and addresses risk assessment, however lacking its definitions of preventive resilience building activities may be. Furthermore, among the entities of the disaster risk reduction and emergency management system, there is a lack of a clearly defined role for the social protection system and the social work profession, despite their significant capacity to support at risk communities by contributing to the development of risk preparedness and the recovery process of affected communities. In the area of risk identification and monitoring, there is also a noticeable lack of a comprehensive national risk assessment, as well as a deficiency in institutional capacity to reduce risks associated with ecological problems (World Bank, 2022). The most important recommendations that can potentially strengthen institutional resilience relate to: engaging the entire community in the process of developing disaster response plans; aligning local public and private infrastructure interests with resilience improvement goals consistently; improving communication channels for information transmission, experience sharing, and raising risk awareness; developing community response preparedness; and complying with construction rules to ensure infrastructure aligns with potential risks (Council, 2012; Cutter et al., 2013, as cited in Cvetković, 2020; Cvetković & Bošković, 2021). In this context, green social work, through its work in the community, advocacy, and activation of social networks, can significantly contribute to community engagement, raising awareness, information dissemination, and connecting resources and experiences. Building on institutional and infrastructural capacity, strengthening community resilience is closely linked with the coordination of actions by key actors, including the government, local municipalities, legal and civil sectors, in-

ternational organisations, and the citizens themselves. Summing up, concerning disaster risk management activities in the Republic of Serbia, there is a predominance of reactive actions, focusing on emergency crisis responses, while preparation and work on building resilience in local communities and the state as a whole are lacking. Consequently, although the area of community resilience, along with the role of green social work, is addressed globally, national legislation and practices still lack an ecological focus, significantly limiting the actions of social workers (Wu, Greig, & Bryan, 2022).

EMPOWERMENT, SOCIAL CAPITAL, AND THE NEED FOR PREVENTIVE MEASURES

The current environmental crisis and the extensive consequences it brings leave little room for uncertainty regarding exposure to environmental risks. Consequently, the role of preventive measures is clear; among other things, these measures prepare the community and its members for potential impacts. Facing difficulties of any kind is never pleasant; however, the unexpected nature of such troubles and the unpreparedness in meeting them intensifies the negative effects they may have. Unpreparedness to face environmental risks undermines stability and fully exhausts the protective mechanisms of an individual or community, making them vulnerable and in a state of existential insecurity (Peeters, 2012). As a result, the field of prevention, which includes the principles of empowerment and social capital, is of great significance due to its role in preparing the community to respond to difficulties and reduce the risk and extent of negative effects caused by environmental impacts (Dominelli, 2018).

A strengths based approach ensures the identification of available resources and protective factors in the immediate environment, enabling their preservation and improvement (Dominelli, 2018). By empowering individuals and communities, we enhance their ability to manage their own lives by nurturing both individual and collective capacities and resources. The principle of community empowerment aims to achieve autonomy, undertake initiatives for important activities, and participate in the development and implementation of prevention, management, and crisis protection strategies (Belchior Rocha, 2018). The key to this approach is focusing on strengths rather than weaknesses and identifying and nurturing existing resources that can help build community resilience. Social capital stands out as one of the critical resources that needs to be improved, recognised as an essential tool in responding to environmental crises. Social networks can be interpreted as a tangible form of social capital, representing the formation of relationships between various actors that can help mitigate negative impacts (Ersing, 2020). Consequently, ac-

tivating social capital and fostering community spirit develop collective efficacy, utilising personal, group, and organisational resources to contribute to the recovery process from environmental impacts and develop community resilience principles (Aldrich & Meyer 2015, as cited in Ersing, 2020). The crucial role of social connections is also supported by research results, which showed that individuals with more complex social networks were perceived as less vulnerable in the context of the impending dangers of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in the USA in 2005. The explanation lies in the greater availability of resources through various networks of relationships that an individual possesses, providing sources of help, information, and security (Collins et al. 2018 as cited in Ersing, 2020). Related to the activation of the community and its members, a study on citizens' attitudes towards providing support to vulnerable people and volunteering during disasters in the Republic of Serbia revealed that a small number of respondents are willing to offer some form of help to vulnerable individuals (Cvetković, Milašinović & Lazić, 2018). The primary barrier to providing help is the belief among citizens that this is primarily the responsibility of state authorities, highlighting a lack of awareness on the importance of volunteering. Therefore, it is necessary to work on raising awareness about the significance of citizen engagement and expanding support networks, particularly in light of the state's limited capacities and the need for swift intervention (Cvetković, Milašinović & Lazić, 2018).

In the context of the mentioned environmental catastrophe, the importance of informal organisation development, as a form of social capital in crisis response, was also noted, exemplified by the Alliance of Active Women. Namely, migrant agricultural workers found themselves in a particularly vulnerable position after the hurricane due to the neglect of their specific needs by public emergency management services. For this reason, women from this population initiated the development of a network to collect and share necessary resources such as food, clothing, personal hygiene items, and many others. Through their work and development, the group later established contacts with other volunteer and religious organisations, expanding the capacity and scope of this social network, ultimately establishing their own Community Emergency Response Team (Ersing, 2020).

Besides better utilisation and exchange of resources, collective action is significant in strengthening the voices of individuals from marginalised groups. Highlighting the importance of informal, but also other organisations such as civil society organisations and others that aim to help at risk groups, underscores the capacity of the social work profession to initiate and support the development of social capital 'from the ground up' by connecting various actors with the same motives. Thus, social workers, thanks to their participation and acquaintances with numerous

organisations at the local and international level, activate social capital and use their networks and connections for support during disasters, but more importantly, develop preventive measures and community resilience (Dominelli, 2023). Additionally, by understanding the experiences and needs of diverse social groups, social workers strive to utilise field knowledge in planning and implementing action plans, implying the active participation of groups directly affected by the problem (Ersing, 2020). Accordingly, research results on the role of social workers in crisis situations showed that the greatest benefits were achieved in providing mental health interventions and empowering affected residents through organising collective active involvement in the community's long term recovery (Cleary & Dominelli, 2020). Consequently, the Federal Emergency Management Agency in the USA recommends community involvement in emergency planning, highlighting the share these practices have in empowerment and resilience within communities, ultimately having a positive effect on relieving the burden on the state protection system (Ersing, 2020).

Thus, strong community connections are emphasised as one of the key protective factors in facing risks, where networking enables joint work on creating resources that can represent a source of security in cases of environmental difficulties. Building on this, the mentioned tendency can be observed in the field of community social economy, characterised by sustainable production and focus on individual well-being (Peeters, 2012). Examples of this include community agriculture, social gardens and eco-farms, various community services, recycling programs, and the like. The concept of social enterprises marked by environmental sustainability relates to ensuring the security of essential resources in cases of environmental crises (Peeters, 2012). Social gardens are a useful and creative way to mobilise community members through work and enjoyment in green areas. Individuals, educational institutions, companies, civil society organisations, and others participate in maintaining the gardens, subsequently enjoying nature and its fruits (Čurčić et al., 2018). Social gardens are also significant for networking and creating social connections with others in the community (Peeters, 2012). These initiatives are common in more developed countries, but their examples can also be found in our neighbourhood. Since 2012, Croatia has had a 'network of urban gardens' encompassing around twenty cities (Čurčić et al., 2018). Furthermore, the importance of connected initiatives such as recycling programs or organised goods exchanges through local actions similar to flea markets is reflected not only in reducing individual participation in the culture of excessive consumerism but also in promoting socialisation (Matthies, 2001). The importance of local initiatives promoting sustainability and improving citizens' quality of life is also evident. Thus, young people in Leicester, UK, with the help of local researchers, built bicycle

lanes to reduce oil consumption and exhaust emissions, while also encouraging fun and a healthier lifestyle (Boeck, 2000 as cited in Matthies, 2001). Similar goals are pursued by initiatives for arranging green spaces and organising activities in them as a way of using forests sustainably, preventing their logging, and enabling recreation and entertainment (Matthies, 2001).

Permaculture stands out as one of the significant local initiatives for prevention and building community resilience through promoting environmental sustainability (Čurčić et al., 2018). The term permaculture encompasses a larger number of activities aimed at caring for the environment, some of which were already mentioned, and relate to joint food production, agriculture and gardening, the use of renewable resources, reducing excessive consumption, and pollution (Kiš and Kiš, 2014 as cited in Čurčić et al., 2018). Permaculture thus contributes to building capacities to face the inevitable effects of environmental crises, contributing to greater resource security and citizen preparedness (Čurčić et al., 2018). Green social work participates in initiating and implementing such initiatives as part of preventive action plans aimed at increasing community resilience. However, the local level should not be the only one implementing changes, which is why the field of advocacy and representation of environmental interests, as well as individuals threatened by environmental risks, especially those most affected by the negative effects of urbanisation and industrialisation, is significant. Therefore, it is crucial to gain the support of broader systems such as governments, international organisations, and the civil sector in processes aimed at improving environmental sustainability and creating community protective mechanisms for dealing with environmental difficulties. This includes government provisions aiming to prevent the exploitation of non-renewable resources and ensure the constant availability of essential resources (Matthies, 2001). Additionally, it is important for the government to educate on and encourage the adoption of sustainable practices, not only by individuals but also by numerous organisations and companies. Moreover, government support for local environmental initiatives and the civil sector is vital to jointly build a stable community resistant to multiple environmental risks.

CONCLUSION

The ecological crisis is a global phenomenon that affects the daily functioning of people and threatens the social security of citizens. Water, air, and soil pollution, resource insecurity, and accelerated climate change that causes natural disasters and a multitude of other risks bring uncertainty to communities and emphasise the urgent need for action. The field of green social work has developed as a response to these risks with the aim of ensuring the well-being of citizens through interventions in the

event of ecological crises, as well as preventive activities aimed at enhancing resilience in case of exposure to the negative effects of the hazards. The social support system is essential for the long term recovery of individuals and communities, with social workers playing a unique role in addressing the needs of vulnerable social groups through interventions at the micro, meso, and macro levels. Their support in responding to and preventing ecological crises includes empowerment, strengthening social ties, advocacy, facilitating access to support resources, including mental health, with a particular focus on building community resilience. Community resilience is of great importance for the well-being of individuals in situations of risk exposure and is achieved through education, networking, preventive measures, and local sustainability initiatives aimed at improving protective mechanisms within the community. Social work, as a helping profession, has the potential to play a significant role in the process of building resilience through community work, nurturing resources, connecting individuals and communities, and advocating for the needs of those at risk. This has been recognised by international organisations; however, there are noticeable deficiencies in state regulations of practices responding to ecological disasters, with particular ambiguity in the role of the social work profession and lacking funding for preventive practices. Micro level activities need to be enhanced to higher levels to achieve impactful changes, and it is necessary to work on establishing green social work as a distinct practical and scientific discipline, with mandatory training for professionals in this field. The development of the legislative framework, infrastructure, financing systems, and crisis response plans are key to creating the foundation for green social work, which has the potential to implement positive changes in developing community resilience. Additionally, there is a noticeable lack of research on the topic of real practices of green social work globally and in our country, which highlights the recommendation for conducting more extensive research in this field.

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ЗЕЛЕНИ СОЦИЈАЛНИ РАД И ОТПОРНОСТ ЗАЈЕДНИЦЕ

Милица Стојановић
Универзитет у Нишу, Филозофски факултет, Ниш, Србија

Резиме

Еколошка криза представља значајан ризик за социјалну сигурност становништва, поготово изражен код припадника маргинализованих група који су у већем степену изложени негативним последицама. Зелени социјални рад развијен је као одговор на растуће ризике еколошких криза, са циљем унапређења добробити појединаца и група кроз различите интервенције, укључујући санацију последица криза, оснаживање, заступање, рад у заједници, превенцију и едукацију о заштитним механизмима. У овом домену, развој отпорности заједнице истиче се као посебно значајна област деловања зеленог социјалног рада којом се тежи унапређењу капацитета заједнице и појединаца за суочавање са негативним ефектима еколошких криза. Ове активности могу имати превентивни карактер или служити као подршка у процесу опоравка и повратка на претходни ниво функционисања након кризних ситуација. Улога зеленог социјалног рада у развоју отпорности заједнице првенствено се заснива на мобилизацији заједнице, кроз приступ „одоздо на горе“ који обухвата активности оснаживања, повезивања, едукације, заговарања права посебно угрожених група и имплементације одрживих политика, али и подстицања локалних еколошких иницијатива. Водећи процес у развоју капацитета за отпорност једне заједнице представља оснаживање појединаца кроз неговање индивидуалних и колективних снага и ресурса. У том контексту, друштвени капитал издваја се као један од важнијих ресурса јер омогућава успостављање мрежа подршке и сарадње између различитих актера у самој заједници, али и шире. Ово обухвата и неформалне облике организовања и повезивања грађана, којим се доприноси јачању социјалних веза и омогућава заједничко деловање, стварајући основ за развој отпорности. Међутим, ипак кључну улогу у изградњи отпорности имају политички, економски, друштвени и еколошки капитали, чија међусобна интеракција утиче на капацитет заједнице да одговори на кризе. Док, тренутно стање одликује недостатак отпорности у кључним областима као што су инфраструктура, економија и социјална заштита. Последично, упркос значају превентивних мера, улагања у активности припреме и превенције су недовољна. Регулативни оквир Републике Србије карактерише усмереност на реактивне мере и процену ризика, при чему изостају одредбе о превентивним активностима изградње отпорности. Додатно, насупрот значајном потенцијалу професије социјалног рада у изградњи отпорности заједница, улога система социјалне заштите и професије социјалног рада у активностима смањења ризика од катастрофа и управљања ванредним ситуацијама остаје недовољно дефинисана. Самим тим, како би се постигле значајне промене, неопходно је радити на утемељењу зеленог социјалног рада као научне и практичне дисциплине, при чему је кључан развој законодавног оквира, инфраструктуре, система финансирања и стратешких планова одговора на кризе.