

## FOREWORD

The 2016 Philippine Journal of Social Development revisits the idea of “creative” or “creativity”, an oft-repeated standard in social development practice yet whose parameters are not always well-defined. What is creativity in social development? Does it entail the utilization of artforms such as songs, poetry or dancing? Is it the same as the creation of something “new”?

The literature on creativity is varied and pulls several ways, depending on the point of view of the discipline defining it. However, some answers have been put across. Creativity, for instance, have been popularly thought of as a characteristic of an individual or “person”, and concretized into a “product” such as a book, a song or a scientific formula. There is also the less tangible creative “process”, a way of thinking and doing that results to effective actions and outputs.

In 1961, Rhodes (as cited in Cropley, 2006) introduced a fourth “P” to the person, product and process concept of creativity: “press” or the pressure from one’s environment. This was an important addition as it locates creativity in people’s time and milieu. Creativity is a social phenomenon. While its attribution is usually individualized, the evaluation of what is creative or not is social. Society also has a role in shaping what kind of creativity can or will flourish in a given period, as well as in motivating people to be creative (Cropley, 2006).

However, creativity and creative actions or products can also influence social standards by (1) expanding its conceptualization of a domain to open new approaches, (2) surfacing issues that were not previously noticed, (3) modifying expectations, and (4) redefining standards for judging subsequent actions (Cropley, 2006). The social acceptance for something as creative is what differentiates creativity from acts that are merely deviant,

eccentric or illegal. Secondly, creativity is transformative: it leads to new insights and different pathways of thinking and acting.

Furthermore, creativity is localized, particular and culturally-specific in as much as social and cultural norms define the boundaries which creativity interrogates and challenges. There are also cultural perspectives on creativity. As Westwood and Low (2003) observed, Western literature on creativity is mostly focused on the product and ideas of newness and originality, while Asian authors highlight “revelation” or “rediscovery” i.e., “The creative person must find ways to access the insight, understanding and truth that are already pre-existent, but must be made psychologically manifest through the creative process.”

The articles in the current PJSJ do not claim to define creativity in the context of social development, rather, they put forward some initial discussion points in various contexts. This issue begins with Nicolas’ article on how social workers engaged in social administration define creativity in their work – what it is, what it entails, and how it can be sustained. The responses from the social workers show that creativity is a multi-dimensional concept referring to personal characteristics, one’s process of working or work ethics, or seen in the work output.

Creativity in social development is also a collective endeavor. It engages people as much as it revitalizes them. First and foremost, creative social development strategies should be effective, something that is not wholly possible if the people who supposedly stand to benefit from them are left out in its process of reflection-action-reflection cycle (or as some would visualize it, an upward spiral). More often than not, this process is sacrificed for the sake of efficiency: within strict program timelines and resource allotments, engaging the participation of vulnerable groups is regarded as time-consuming. At most there are the “consultations” which are mandated by law for development projects, yet conceptualized and implemented as token activities. This only highlights the need for more grounded discourses on social development in its various permutations.

Viliran poses the perspectives of urban poor relocatees against the popular conceptualizations of right to decent housing, that is, one which is based on the structure of the house itself – materials used, hardiness to weather and climate conditions, connection to basic utilities and size. Instead, the idea of decent housing as described by her research participants is closely connected to the idea of a decent life. A primary feature of this decent life is the freedom from the uncertainty of tenure, that one can be evicted from one’s dwelling at any time and thereby displaced from livelihood sources,

by natural disasters, or, more pointedly, by skewed urban development policies.

Similarly, Barrameda makes a case for rural poor women whose participation in local DRRM planning has been minimal, despite their carrying of multiple roles in household survival and food security in agricultural communities devastated by natural disasters. Agriculture is one of the most vulnerable livelihood bases to climate change. In Irosin, Sorsogon, where an average of 17 typhoons visit every year, women's home gardens and their local knowledge on planting vegetables, fruit trees and medicinal herbs take on an important role in ensuring not only the food access but the health of their families in general.

The article of Tungpalan focuses on the perspectives of another vulnerable group in Philippine society: the child laborers in sugarcane farms. Driven by household economic conditions, children are socialized into farmwork as soon as they are able to help their parents, sometimes as early as five years old. One effect of this is the normalization of child labor in the communities, and within the families themselves, even as parents and children decry the hazards it poses to children's health, education, and general wellbeing. In the midst of these are the children's aspirations for a better life which is a source of strength.

Ealdama reviews a classic social work text, *Twenty Years at Hull House (with Autobiographical Notes)*, for the PJSJ. Written in 1912, the book records Jane Addams' reflections on her work in the Hull House Settlement, which she established. During its time, Hull House was a community services hub for slum dwellers in Chicago, poor immigrants, and working mothers. It was also the center of social development discourse as activists, reformers and community members congregated in there. The Hull House also hosted labor union meetings and women's cooperatives. As Ealdama notes, the scope of Jane Addams' contribution to society goes beyond social work where she is most known; Addams was also a public administrator, a sociologist and a feminist.

Finally, the PJSJ 2016 also includes as special feature two reflection papers on the application of creative modalities and kinetic artforms in addressing personal and collective trauma, as well as in teaching. These articles are drawn from the authors' on-going studies in the field, and presented in the PJSJ as their reflections or notes on their experience. Ang-Reyes and Dimarucut are both educators in social work and human kinetics, respectively, who are exploring the possibilities of non-verbal expressions for people to articulate their pain, fear and, eventually, dreams and active

response. Their work, although still being developed, has received positive feedback when utilized with various groups who have gone through highly stressful events such as disasters (whether as direct service providers or victim-survivors), civil conflict and abuse.

Creative modalities can also be used in integrative exercises in the classroom in place of academic papers such as reports or mini-researches. Ang-Reyes reports that, while students found the exercises difficult at first, they also felt freer with the varied modes of expression opened to them to present their insights and lessons learned.

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The celebrations of the past are also celebrations of the future – an affirmative response to the challenges it poses. An atmosphere of quiet reflection hangs over the College of Social Work and Community Development as it nears its 50th anniversary in August 2017. In charting the milestones it passed through the years, it also turns a critical eye on what its role has been in the creation of the present society which is still characterized by poverty, gender inequality and human rights violations, among others. These are essentially not new social issues, however their manifestations may be different and amplified by digital technologies. There have been victories but there is still a lot more to be done. In this sense the challenge to be creative is all the more relevant.

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### **References:**

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