



CALL FOR PAPERS

Special Series

The Loss of the 'Social' in Social Pedagogy and Social Work? Implications and Future Directions

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For publication summer 2026

Expressions of interest accepted until: **31st October 2025**

Deadline for draft papers: **30th April 2026**

The relational and social dimensions of social pedagogy and social work have been at its core since the emergence of the 'social professions' in the late nineteenth century (Lorenz, 2004; Parton 2008; Philp 1979). These professions have historically sought to foster cohesion, inclusion and solidarity in the face of complex social, political and economic challenges. However, in an age shaped by the pressures of late modernity – including rapid technological change, economic precarity and shifting institutional norms – there is growing concern that the very concept of the 'social' is being eroded from both discourse and practice. This special series of the *International Journal of Social Pedagogy* invites contributions that critically examine the implications of this loss and consider ways to reclaim or reimagine the social foundations of social pedagogy and related fields. Please send us your expression of interest by submitting an abstract and a short bio (details below).

The *International Journal of Social Pedagogy (IJSP)* is a peer-reviewed, open-access diamond journal (meaning we do not charge authors for publishing with us and also grant readers free access to all journal articles), publishing articles on social pedagogy in the broadest sense. You can read about our journal vision in [this editorial](#).

Thematic context for this special issue call:

The 'social' mandate of social pedagogy and social work is at risk of being sidelined amid accelerating trends of individualisation, managerialism and technocratic governance. Practice has become increasingly pathologised and decontextualised, favouring psychological, legal, or public health paradigms that often sideline community-based, relational, and socially transformative approaches. Social work, for instance, is dominated by psychological or public health theories, such as attachment, Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), or the current vogue for trauma-informed practice (Smith, Cameron and Monteux, 2021). Some have argued that social work derives its very mandate from its connection to how modern societies can function – 'to the creation and maintenance of cohesive bonds under radically changed social, political and economic conditions' (Lorenz, 2004, p. 3).

This view underscores the profession's role in maintaining social cohesion and supporting individuals in ways that are explicitly relational and collective. Yet, we are currently witnessing a shift away from these foundations. Where once social pedagogy and social work addressed collective needs, engaged with social needs and adversity and fostered solidaristic relationships, they now often operate within frameworks that emphasise individual deficits, measurable outcomes and standardised interventions.

Legalistic notions of human rights frequently serve as symbolic references, with little grounding in emancipatory practice. Meanwhile, social pedagogy and community work are increasingly marginalised or repurposed to serve neoliberal state agendas and the relational core of mental health work is being displaced by more clinical imperatives. The question is: *Where does this leave the 'social' mandate and core of the social work professions?*

These transformations call into question not only the purpose and identity of the social professions but also the wider societal conditions under which they operate. This raises further questions such as: *What remains of their social mandate? What knowledge and practice paradigms are replacing it? And how can a social pedagogical orientation reclaim its relevance in an age of accelerating change and institutional disconnection?*

This special series seeks to explore the societal, cultural, political and philosophical drivers contributing to the erosion of the 'social' in social pedagogy, social work and related professions. At the heart of social pedagogy is a commitment to relationship-centred practice – relationships that are not merely interpersonal but profoundly social, situated within broader networks of community and societal structures. As such, when the social dimension is diminished – when practice becomes individualised, clinical, or pathologizing – social pedagogy risks losing its distinctiveness and transformative potential. This issue, therefore, invites contributions that interrogate how relational work is being reconfigured and ask what is lost when the social context of relationships is overlooked or sidelined.

We therefore seek forward-looking contributions that critically examine these shifts while also presenting theoretical, empirical, or practice-based ways to revitalise the social core of the relational practices that define social pedagogy and related fields.

We welcome submissions that:

- **Trace the key forces** – political, economic and epistemological – reshaping the social professions and their relational mandates.
- **Provide critical analyses** of how the ‘social’ has been conceptualised, practised and challenged in different national or cultural contexts.
- **Offer examples of practice** that resist or reconfigure dominant paradigms, suggesting ways to reinvigorate relationship-based and community-rooted work.
- **Engage with the philosophical underpinnings of social pedagogy** as a practice founded on inherently social relationships and its positioning in an increasingly technocratic and individualised welfare landscape.

Submission to this special issue

Expressions of interest

Please send early expressions of interest to the IJSP Editorial Office (editors@internationaljournalofsocialpedagogy.com) by **October 31st 2025** in the form of an abstract of 300-500 words, up to six references, and a 50-word biographical statement.

Full-draft submission deadline

Authors will then be invited to submit a full draft for editorial review by **April 30th 2026** through the journals online submission system. Please consult the notes for authors on the journal’s webpage at <https://journals.uclpress.co.uk/ijsp/>.

Pre-submission enquires about your ideas are welcomed by emailing the journal, who will be happy to provide further guidance. The journal is keen to encourage new and existing writers and as such we can offer support in a variety of ways, e.g. for new writers, or for writers who are less confident about writing in English.

References

- Lorenz, W. (2004). *Social work and a new social order: Challenging neo-liberalism’s erosion of solidarity*. *Social Work & Society*, 2(1), 1–9. <https://www.socwork.net/sws/article/view/240>
- Parton, N. (2008). Changes in the form of knowledge in social work: From the “social” to the “informational”? *British Journal of Social Work*, 38(2), 253–269. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1093/bjsw/bcl337>
- Philp, M. (1979). Notes on the form of knowledge in social work. *Sociological Review*, 27(1), 83–111. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-954X.1979.tb00326.x>
- Rosa, H. (2021). *The uncontrollability of the world* (J. C. Wagner, Trans.). Polity Press. (Original work published 2020)
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