

## Editorial

The people of Aotearoa/New Zealand are engaged with, and variously in support of a range of government, voluntary sector and private enterprise formal and informal programmes designed to in various ways alleviate their concerns and difficulties or enhance their social wellbeing. These are embedded in a broader 'policy space' in which ideas, research efforts and appropriate social facts monitor existing programmes and agitate over their fate and the possibilities of new ones. This journal aims to tap into such debates and to promote research to finesse policy ideas.

Robert K Merton (1971:799) defines a Social Problem as "a substantial discrepancy. between widely shared **social** standards and actual conditions of **social** life". The term 'Social issues' seems less negatively loaded, but because normative social standards are central, a variety of viewpoints seems built into any discussion around social issues. The conception of 'social issues' draws attention to the full cycle of policy concerns, including early pre-policy stages of setting agendas and exploring underlying values, but also extending to program evaluation.

Contributions to debates around social issues can take a variety of forms. More than with mainstream academic work in the social sciences, social issues often have a time-relevance requiring fast turnaround. Moreover, it is important with social issues that a variety of expertise and perspectives may be brought to bear in discussions, so that opportunities for further commentary need to be made available. While theoretical work is important, for many papers it is sufficient to draw attention to a conceptual framework for understanding empirical material. Studies ought to be able to be presented without undue need for over-lengthy contextualisation and conceptualization. Relevant empirical work is important to include where available, but some useful contributions to debates can be made without this component.

Besides social issues others are economic or perhaps governmental, but it is not intended to draw an impermeable boundary around such categories. After all, issues and policies have a human or social aspect.

A wide set of audiences are aimed at, and these also form the pool of potential contributors:

- Academic social scientists;
- Government, NGO etc policy analysts and researchers;
- Postgraduate social science students;
- Public intellectuals and the interested public.

There are many journals around the world that carry social issues writings, so this journal can focus on Aotearoa/New Zealand-relevant material, which also tends to concur with the interests and competences of many potential readers/contributors. Aotearoa/New Zealand is diverse, and the journal will seek to represent that diversity as far as we can find ways of doing so. The Principles of the Treaty of Waitangi will be actively observed.

The ending of 2020 has some value as a launching point. 2020 is itself quite an arbitrary year, but it does have a certain ring. Throughout 2020 NZ has been successfully combating the scourge of coronavirus and there are lessons to be learned from this, especially as we

move in the phase of economic recovery. More importantly, the Ardren Government has just been swept into power, and timely appropriate scholarly material should be of value. It is recognized that there are and there has been other vehicles for carrying Aotearoa-New Zealand relevant social issues discussions.

Between 1993 and 2011 the Ministry of Social Development (and its precursor organisations) hosted *the Social Policy Journal of New Zealand* which published some 500 articles over this period – including several special issues, and with some attention to events relevant to social policy. Contributors spanned government, academic and private social researchers. However, the journal fell victim to political sensitivities, as is a possible fate of any department-published journal and ceased after its 37<sup>th</sup> Issue. To some extent the journal's demise has left a gap in the array of publishing outlets (for an overview of New Zealand social science journals see Crothers, 2017).

There is a *Policy Quarterly* (<https://www.wgtn.ac.nz/igps/publications/policy-quarterly>) run out of VUW but that tends more to the broader remit of 'public policy' and often is filled by special issues. There is an *Australian Journal of Social Issues* (which can be seen more as an ally than a cross-Tasman competitor). *Kotuitui* is a useful publishing site for general social sciences material relevant to New Zealand, but is not necessarily issue/policy orientated and has limited capacity. (Could arrange with journals to look at their overflow). There is some overlap but also something of a gap between *NZ Sociology* and the *Social Work Journal of NZ*. But several of these journals under the command of PBRF and other quality considerations are at least as much concerned with international as local publishing.

Finally, several texts form a platform for those interested in social issues, and can provide context. Although over the decades there have been a range of books on New Zealand social issues and policy only a few are current: see references. However, it is intended that contributions to this journal will flesh out topics necessarily covered lightly in such texts.

## References

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