

✿ Laidlaw LiA Report

# Research into Degrowth and Social Work in Australia

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For my Leadership in Action project, I was lucky to travel to Sydney, Australia to conduct research at the University of Sydney. I collaborated with Professor Ruth Philips of the University of Sydney School of Education and Social Work on a research project looking into the role social work may have in promoting degrowth at a global level.

Focusing on redistributive support for low-income countries and communities, we wanted to outline strategies that acknowledge global sustainability pledges while recognizing the harmful conflation of continuous economic growth with development. Operating within neoliberal structures, the social work industry is greatly restricted in its ability to further its mission of social justice and, in some cases, may exacerbate inequities. As the necessity for alternative political-economic systems is becoming more apparent, post-growth pathways have emerged as a radical school of thought that predicates society on social equity and environmentally sustainable principles. Specifically, degrowth is a planned reduction in material throughput that decouples gross domestic product with environmental pollution, asks that industrialization between countries be more equitable, and redistributes wealth so that quality of life can increase for more people. Social work can play a crucial role in the socio-ecological transformation of society because of its proximity to community welfare and development.

To envision a more sustainable planet, we delved into the pillars of the degrowth movement, which may be challenging to actuate within the dominating neoliberal capitalist society. Our paper looked at the presence of degrowth teachings in Australian higher education social work curricula to determine the current state of post-growth pedagogy in academia. The hypothesis was that social work plays a critical role in promoting degrowth practices, but that there exists little to no presence of degrowth in the social work pedagogy at universities across Australia. My tasks included creating an annotated bibliography, starting an ethics proposal, setting up a questionnaire to be sent to participants, and drafting the initial paper. Though I started all these tasks during my time in Australia, I plan to stay on with Professor Phillips through the end of 2024 to complete co-authoring the research paper virtually.