Editorial

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This first issue of the International Journal of Social Quality is a new launch and is at the same time the continuation of the former European Journal of Social Quality. The European journal came into existence in 1999 and six volumes were published in the period up to 2006: twelve issues in total. The aim was to develop a new theoretical framework to analyze social realities in European societies and consider their policy implications. The European Journal sought to broaden the scope of understanding about citizens' well-being and to interpret how the constitution of society and its various component institutional arrangements affect social quality and personal welfare from a new perspective.

During this decade of work, social quality research has increasingly attracted the interest of scholars inside and outside Europe. It has clearly outgrown its European origin, as can be seen from the geographical diversity of authors of the articles in this opening issue of the new journal. The same aim—to build an understanding of the quality of daily circumstances that has a basis in a broad theory on societal changes, trends, contradictions and challenges, and to contribute in this way to promoting quality of societies—has been adopted by scholars elsewhere, including in many universities in East Asia and the Pacific. Their work and the increasing collaboration between researchers across Asia-Pacific and Europe has stimulated an evolution of perspectives and raised new sets of questions to pursue alongside the earlier ones.

Among the new questions raised are: How far is the European-originated social quality theory useful to understand circumstances, trends and challenges elsewhere? Can the social quality approach make a distinctive contribution to understanding and guiding the epochal processes of urbanization and societal change that are underway in Asia and elsewhere? In what ways does the theory need to be extended, changed or supplemented? What new light does it throw on issues of longer-term economic, socio-political and environmental sustainability? Social quality studies have become global, in terms of the scientific networks that are involved and cooperate, and also in terms of the many cross-national and trans-national questions and insights that have been added.

The International Journal of Social Quality responds to these challenges. It will be a multidisciplinary journal dedicated to promote research on social quality. It will publish papers that address crucial problems encountered by societies of the contemporary world. The journal will be a platform for addressing interconnected issues concerning, for example, health care, education, migration, urban development,

employment, ageing and pensions, and citizenship. It will also be a forum for dialogue between social quality thinking and other approaches.

In this first issue, several articles engage the issue of sustainability and its connotations in the European Union and East Asia and the Pacific. Walker presents a case for social quality theory as a scientific and normative vehicle to protect the sustainable growth of societies against a neo-liberal inspired 'race to the bottom'. Hiroi discusses the idea of sustainable welfare societies with reference to the post-war Japanese experience of social change. He considers the discourse of post-war Japan in relation to the issue of sustainability, claiming that new relationships between community, government and economy are required in order to secure sustainable welfare societies. Joshi looks at the particular challenge set by socio-economic transformation for the position of the elderly. He records the impact of globalization and other forces in loosening children's obligation to look after their parents, with reference to the case of India; and sees a necessity for the state to introduce legal and social protection measures to help the elderly.

While these papers present and use ideas from the social quality approach, those by Ka Lin and Korver explore its theoretical contents, using comparative perspectives. Ka Lin's article undertakes conceptual and contextual analysis and evaluates the methodological meaning of this theory. Korver's article illustrates both the original scope of concerns in the social quality approach in Europe, including the bases for the European welfare state, and its necessary evolution in the face of new conditions and new thinking. He argues that we should consider not just the rights (and duties) of workers, older people, and so on, each as distinct groups, but must consider citizens and citizenship more integrally. He proposes the importance of not only a conception of the 'social', but of a political conception of what a citizen is, should do, and should be enabled to do. These issues are central to social inclusion, social empowerment and, thus, to social quality.

The final three papers compare the social quality approach and the human development and human security approaches, and explore the different emphases on the 'human' and the 'social'. Phillips situates a comparison of social quality thought and human development thought within an overview of several theories about quality of life. He identifies the lack of a conception of the social in the work on human development, and indicates alternative responses, one of which is to co-operate with the social quality approach and its far more elaborate engagement with social theory. Gasper's article includes human security thinking also in the comparison, and uses a structured framework to identify how theories about quality of life differ. The human security approach like the social quality theory offers a way to upgrade the over-individualistic notion of humanity found in the UN's human development approach. The comparison suggests that these former two approaches could be mutually supportive rather than competitive. Giri's paper goes further into the very notions of 'social' and 'human', as products in European thought. He attempts to transcend Eurocentric, anthropocentric and dualistic habits of thought, and to present and take forward a comparative and global conversation.

With their diverse orientations, themes and case material, the articles demonstrate the richness of coverage in social quality studies, and at the same time the shared

and serious engagement with social theory which unites and energises the field. The social quality approach opens a large space for academic debate and for systematic exploration of the rich contents of social realities. This journal will function as a forum for these debates in analysing the critical issues of contemporary societies.