

GLOBAL JOURNAL OF

# Community Psychology Practice

PROMOTING COMMUNITY PRACTICE FOR SOCIAL BENEFIT



## **Chicago Conference and Transnationalism: Turning resources into capacities**

Antonio Augusto Queiroga (ISPA, Lisboa Portugal) & Nicholas Kaufmann (UIC, Chicago Illinois USA)

Key words: transnationalism, community psychology practice

Running head: TRANSNATIONALISM

Recommended citation: Queiroga, AA, & Kaufmann, N. (2012). Chicago conference and transnationalism: Turning resources into capacities. *Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice*, 2(3), 1-12. Retrieved Day/Month/Year, from (<http://www.gjcpp.org/>).

## Chicago Conference and Transnationalism: Turning resources into capacities

*Antonio Augusto Queiroga (ISPA, Lisboa Portugal) & Nicholas Kaufmann (UIC, Chicago Illinois USA)*

### Abstract

This piece presents the perspectives of two community practitioners who attended last month SCRA's Biennial Conference in Chicago. They wrote their contributions based on their mutual interests and conversations surrounding transnationalism, a phenomenon that reaches beyond or transcends national boundaries. This phenomenon, they believe, remains a tacit resource to be exploited within the global context in which community psychology is practised.

### *1. Reflections from Lisboa, Portugal*

Chicago was not my first International Conference, but it was my first SCRA Biennial Conference. Although I was expecting a Conference centred in the North American reality, I was surprised to see people coming from many different places such as Taiwan, Japan, Spain, Italy and we were at least five coming from two different Institutes in Portugal. I also could see researches conducted in places like Brazil, Vanuatu, Central and West Africa and Italy, among others. And with all the stickers from the Global Journal "walking" around in people's clothes I began to realize how international SCRA really is.

However, I would like to think beyond internationalism and talk about the potentials underneath SCRA's Transnationalism shown in 2011 Biennial. Transnationalism is a much broader concept than internationalism, because capabilities, capacities, resources and knowledge may not just cross borders but must intersect and merge leading not just to social change, but to social integration.

The studies presented in Chicago may seem geographically localized from the insider perspective, for example, what is done in Brazil just reflects a brazilian community-based reality, but from the foreign SCRA researcher it shows, instead, how broad Community Psychology main philosophies and goals are.

It shows how many researchers SCRA members have their own personal history

linked with transnationalism. I am an example among many others: son of parents from two different nations, lived in six different countries in three different continents working for the UN and other International Organisations. In Chicago I also met Italians doing the PHD in Portugal, Americans researching in Vanuatu, Mexicans teaching in the US, etc. How diverse SCRA is? And how many Capacities are there?

Transnationalism is an important social capital asset that, if strengthened, may increase achievements, broader perspectives and create pathways to build bridges in very different contexts and in many communities around the Globe.

Let us reconnect with our transnational history and reconnect our life stories with the present, the ideas with the feelings, merging science with action, theory with reality. We have to learn to tell our own stories and our communities' stories to understand the potentials we have. To therefore be able to transform them into the capacities we need to fulfil our needs. Our stories are the fundamental resources to help to find new paths, new strategies, new commitments. Making Community Psychology and Community Action a transforming process for everybody involved.

Transnationalism is not just a source of knowledge or culture interchange, but can become a tool for empowerment. We may want to ask ourselves how much transnationalism can add to create new perspectives and to enrich the actual practices, methodologies and theoretical perceptions we, as SCRA researches, have now and want to have in the future.

And the Global Journal is an important vehicle to explore and share our transnationalism, bringing this out to other researchers, creating project possibilities and thus achieving transformative results by turning resources into capacities.

**Antonio**

## 2. *Reflections from Chicago, USA*

SCRA's efforts to attract community psychologists from around the world to its Biennial Conference are indeed laudable. This biennial conference included both an array of persons from countries other than the U.S., as well as several sessions that acknowledged the global spirit of community psychology. Not surprisingly, during a round-table entitled *Examining the Present and Future of International Community Psychology*, the conventional

round of personal introductions left only 25 minutes of discussion time. The topic of international community psychology attracted wide interest seemingly among US and foreign-based participants alike.

As a doctoral student eager to learn about the practices of community psychology around the globe, I was left to wonder after the session if this growing field can overcome the potential constraints brought on as much by geopolitical as disciplinary boundaries. While there can be no easy answer to this question, I certainly looked forward to further engage in envisioning the field's global perspective during the Biennial's sessions that followed.

With much anticipation, I attended the session on *Migrant Liberation Psychology: A Global Endeavour* given by a group of renowned community psychologists from various countries. Far from being disappointed by the quality of the presentations on migration-related research, I was at the same time surprised of there being no mention in them of transnational processes that are known to influence migrants' lives. The presentations displayed past and ongoing research projects whose heavy focus on migrants' incorporation into receiving societies prevented the audience from appreciating the transnational context in which many live.

With an awareness of there being to date little attention paid to transnational contexts in community psychology, my colleague, Noe Chavez and I, facilitated a round-table session entitled *Change in Latino (Im)migrant Families: A Transnational Perspective*. In this session, participants shared their personal histories linked to various predominantly Latin American transnational contexts. Much of the round-table was taken up by this activity for each participant had a rich transnational story to share as either a community researcher or practitioner. I described myself as the son of a British mother and German father, who both raised me in the French-speaking part of Switzerland, while maintaining strong ties with their countries of origin. My cultural background is now interwoven with my partner's Mexican heritage to influence the upbringing of our US-born daughter who frequently interacts with her relatives in Europe and Mexico. Each participant evoked in this manner the relevance of transnationalism within their personal and professional lives. One community practitioner asserted that while many Latinos/as in Chicago engage in transnational living, mental health service provision often overlooks this fact.

While community psychology's disciplinary broad-mindedness is affirmed through the field's established links with diverse areas of mental health practice, scholars and

practitioners need to concern themselves with transnational phenomena manifested in their personal and/or professional lives. Perhaps this implies a process of overcoming what Veblen called 'trained incapacity', that is the inability to see what is there because of how we have been trained to look (cited in Smith, 1998). In today's increasingly globalized world, transnational phenomena only appears salient to those who see *beyond* a world fragmented by geopolitical borders. Therefore, caution must be observed when reifying these borders in forums on the internationalization of a field like community psychology.

Working towards the global expansion of community psychology requires casting as large a net as possible and encouraging a wide range of collaborative partnerships *structured on equal terms*. In other words, promoting global access to resources and opportunities within the field depends for example on the extent to which the English language continues to predominate. Future conference organizers in the U.S. might do well to provide spaces and guidance for the multi-lingual expression of and interaction around themes of relevance to the field. In so doing, resources will be turned into capacities in accordance to the transnational context we live in.

***Smith, R.C. (1998). Transnational localities: community, technology and the politics of membership within the context of Mexico and US migration, in: M.P. Smith / L.E. Guarnizo (Eds) Transnationalism from Below (New Brunswick, NJ, Transaction)***

***Nicholas***

**Antonio Augusto Queiroga** is part of the ISPA Doctoral program in Lisbon studying with Jose Ornelas. After working with the UN in several Conflict and Developing Countries in Africa, Asia and Americas, during the last decade, is currently doing his research with the Immigrant Community in Portugal.

**Nicholas Kaufmann** is working towards a doctoral degree in Community and Prevention Research from the University of Illinois at Chicago. He remains actively involved in youth development and migration-related research and interventions, collaborating with community-based and international organizations across Europe and the Americas.