Editorial: Research from the CACSSS Postgraduate Conference

Guy Gerba (Section Manager)

Department of Government & Politics, University College Cork

The College of Arts, Celtic Studies & Social Sciences (CACSSS) at University College Cork held its annual *Postgraduate Research Conference* on 19 and 20 February 2025. Over two days, the conference held panels on various subjects consisting of papers with common themes. These included: "Environmental creativity", "Time, space and memory", "Care and wellbeing", "Gender identity and authority", "Interpreting historical voices and sounds", "Mapping the mind", "Programming counselling and coaching", "Student experiences and activism", "Devotions and obsessions: personal and political", "Migrations and borders", "Public and political systems and structures", "Periods of transition", and "Language acquisition and literary canons"

In accordance with previous volumes of the journal, which published conference papers, *Aigne* again issued a call for those who presented at the conference to turn their paper into a peer-reviewed article. We were delighted with the level of responsiveness to our call and plan to issue another call for the next CACSSS postgraduate conference which will take place in February 2026. We are pleased to strengthen our collaboration with the conference going forward to ensure that the CACSSS postgraduate community has a clear outlet for publishing research presented at the conference. The next paragraphs offer an overview of the articles published in this volume.

Michał Biedowicz's article 'Anarchy/ism and Democracy: A Conceptual Analysis' analyses the complicated relationship between democracy and anarchism. Often seem as incompatible, the article visualises these two concepts as two opposing poles which can be bridged by the conceptualisation of the term radical democracy. This idiom offers a path which endorses the best features of both ideas, the participatory and deliberative models. Anarchism is viewed as the most radical form of democracy, without crossing the threshold of becoming an anarchy, which

is its aim. The article portrays the three main characteristics of radical democracy and provides arguments showing that anarchism and democracy are compatible to a certain degree.

Jessica Cullen's article 'An Analysis of the Performance of Irish Higher Education Institutions Against Global Sustainability Ranking Systems' examines Irish higher education institutions' performance regarding sustainability. The escalating climate crisis has urged numerous sectors of society, including higher education, to demand swift action and long-term commitment. The article attempts to understand the reasons behind the divergent rankings of Irish institutions. In order to solve this conundrum, Cullen utilises three different ranking systems and explores the potential hurdles that the Irish higher education system faces. Her findings exhibit the need for long-term collaboration which would support underrepresented institutions and sustain and promote the achievements of others.

Graham Gill-Emerson's article 'An Overview of the History of Counselling and Psychotherapy and its Training in Ireland and the UK-Implications for Future Development' explores the training and development of trainee therapists in the field of mental health treatment. Counselling and psychotherapy, despite their long-standing presence as mental health treatments, remain relatively ill-defined as professional practices. While substantial research has established the characteristics of effective therapy and effective therapists, far less attention has been given to how therapists are trained and developed. In Ireland, ongoing transitions toward state regulation further highlight the need to critically examine current training frameworks. Gill-Emerson situates counselling and psychotherapy within their historical and regulatory context, reviews the existing empirical evidence on training and outlines key recommendations to strengthen and advance the field.

Hanke Kelber's article 'Apocalyptic misanthropy and the 'Fall' of modernity in mid-twentieth-century American post-apocalyptic fiction' investigates misanthropy and anti-modern sentiments in post-apocalyptic fiction through a close reading of *Alas, Babylon* by Pat Frank (1959). It argues that the novel frames apocalypse as both a moral reckoning and a restorative "clean slate", positioning the destruction of civilisation as a deserved punishment for a corrupt, modern humanity. The text constructs

a stark nature–culture divide in which technological modernity is condemned and a pastoral return to an idealised past is valorised. Situating the novel within the mid-twentieth-century nuclear imaginary, Kelber highlights how such misanthropic frameworks have shaped the post-apocalyptic genre and continue to inform broader societal fantasies about collapse, responsibility and the limits of imagining alternative futures.

Cornelius David Moynihan's article 'Cultivating the Creativity of Neurodivergent Thinking: A New Educational Approach for ASD Students' inspects the growing recognition of autistic and neurodivergent creativity as a powerful and underutilised resource within contemporary education. It argues that centring neurodivergent creative practices has the potential to challenge the increasingly rigid, rule-bound training models prevalent in many educational institutions. Building on prior research, Moynihan proposes the development of a collaborative third-level research project grounded in transformative participatory action research, outlining how such an approach could foster more inclusive, innovative and empowering educational practices while identifying key directions for future development.