
Legal-policy Structures for Participation: a Comparative Analysis of Disability Services in Six EU Countries

Michael Rasell*¹

¹University of Innsbruck – Autriche

Résumé

Disability activism and social policy advocate what is variously termed ‘participation’, ‘co-production’ and ‘co-creation’ in the development of disability services. However, critical voices highlight that participatory structures often do not fundamentally change services (Beresford 2021). Unequal power relations can reduce the potentially emancipatory effect of participation (Bobbio 2019, Uggerhoj 2014) and there is often no obligation on services to respond or utilise the feedback received. Institutional frameworks and funding mechanisms can also constrain the scope of possible changes (European Commission 2015). The end result is that citizens using disability services are typically confronted with programmes and interventions developed within ministries or NGO offices, especially at the stage of decision-making and final approval.

Against this background, this paper presents the results of a six-country comparative study of legal and policy structures for user and citizen participation in the development of disability services. The research will be conducted in April-May 2023 as part of the Horizon Europe project ‘Increasing responsiveness to citizen voice in social services across Europe’ (2023-2026, grant 101095200) and study national and regional-level laws and policies in Poland, Portugal, Romania, Austria, Denmark and France. Participation is understood both as input in service development as well as mechanisms for evaluation, feedback and complaints on existing services.

The paper shows if and how participation for social services is legally mandated, and whether frameworks provide resources and support for participation. It also considers whether attention is paid to diversity amongst people with disabilities along with the accessibility and support needs that may arise. Requirements on social services to respond and act on the basis of citizen input are a final aspect to be explored.

The paper will conclude by proposing a typology that can be used to classify the different ways in which participation is legislatively and politically mandated.

Literature

Beresford P. (2021) *Participatory Ideology: From Exclusion to Involvement*. Bristol: Policy Press

Bobbio, L. (2019) Designing effective public participation, *Policy and Society*, 38:1, 41-57.

*Intervenant

European Commission (2015) Literature review and identification of best practices on integrated social service delivery. Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.

Uggerhøj, L. (2014) 'The Powerful meeting between Social Workers and Service Users: Participation Processes in Agency Settings' in Matthies, A. & Uggerhøj, L. (eds) *Participation, Marginalization and Welfare Services – Concepts, Politics, and Practices Across European Countries*, Aldershot: Ashgate.