

Participation, marginalization and welfare services: Concepts, politics and practices across European countries

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As the title would suggest, this book sets out to articulate concepts, politics and practices which lead to participation and marginalisation across European Countries. The editors aim to present arguments as to why the “link between participation, marginalization and welfare services exists” (p.3), offering typology, frameworks and tools to encourage the reader to challenge their own thinking and practice when working to involve service users.

The book has been designed as a series of discussions on “shared focus topics” rather than “traditional comparative studies” (p.3). It achieves this by highlighting a number of research studies undertaken with the lens of Social Work, Social Economics, and related Social Sciences. Each article discusses how communities, social services and politics contribute to citizen participation, user involvement and inclusion.

The style of the articles encourages the reader to reflect on how the connection between participation and marginalisation is multidimensional, and complex while also appearing rather contradictory if viewed as a continuum.

Each research study is presented in a systematic manner which aims to support the reader to shape their own understanding of three central questions:

1. What kinds of conceptual discourses, political programmes and practical phenomena of participation and marginalisation have been studied in the field of welfare services?
2. What kinds of progressive models of participation or emerging experiences of marginalisation can be seen and shared across Europe?
3. How are the challenges of marginalisation, conditions and forms of participation and the role of welfare services in these processes interlinked?

While the research covered has a European context, the reflections and recommendations offered are worthy of examination for the Aotearoa New Zealand Social Work context. It is important for social workers to consider political and economic influences, and how they can contribute to the weakening of the welfare systems in which they work. Finding ways to strengthen systems are key to supporting the processes of genuine participation of vulnerable groups in neoliberal times.

For those looking for practical tools, programmes or models there are also plenty on offer. With a caution to tread gently between providing support services and further marginalising vulnerable groups, this book caters for students, practitioners, educators, politicians and people who use services, and invites us all to engage in the ongoing discussion.

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