

A research project that deepens the understanding about service user participation in European Schools of Social Work

PowerUs Symposium 2

A Presentation of an ESF-funded research project

In this symposium we would like to present an ongoing ESF-funded research project that is conducted by researchers and service users from Belgium, Sweden and the Netherlands. A transnational approach provides opportunities for collective knowledge production through an analysis of the experiences and perceptions of all stakeholders. A comparison and analysis between educations and internationally is of importance given the fact that service users involvement in education is being approached in many ways. Different schools of social work in different countries (may) have different views about what service user involvement means and how it should be carried out. Furthermore, there is a wide and diverse range of experiences in working on exclusion in different areas: poverty, migrants, drugs and mental health problems. In Belgium (Flanders), service-user involvement mainly concerns people living in poverty and social exclusion. In Sweden service user involvement have also been including people who have experienced mental illness. A transnational project allows for a dissemination of good practice(s) between the project partners on a transnational basis. The partnership covers different regions in Europe, namely Belgium, Sweden and The Netherlands. Every project partner has an extensive expertise in the field of service user involvement, both in social work education and social work practice. Though each project partner has its own research activities and focus/emphasis, the common goal is to raise the awareness of the value of experienced knowledge and develop a methodological book/guide towards the systematic integration, hence employment of service users in higher education and welfare organisations/social work services.

This project applies a comparative analysis methodology by selecting some good practice examples of service-user involvement in Europe for a peer-review - extended description and analysis. A systematic comparative analysis enables us to compare and contrast the different tasks and responsibilities assigned to service-users in educational programmes in Europe, and to investigate the conditions under which their involvement and participation can generate the most powerful and meaningful effects for students, hence future social professionals.

This comparative analysis comprises:

- Mapping all forms of service-user involvement in professional education, in Belgium, Sweden, and other European countries using the network of PowerUs and other contacts.

- Identifying service users' tasks and responsibilities (1) the added value of their participation and involvement for the organization, lecturers and students (2), statutes/contract clauses under which service-users wish and are able to work, including methods of payments, staff regulations, embedding in the organisation and the durability of the extra input (3) as well as the organizational framework necessary to guarantee a high-quality collaboration (4)
- The final objective of this research is to develop and publish a methodological guide/handbook for educational (and welfare) organisations wishing to integrate service user involvement in their workings. The guide/handbook will be published in Dutch and Swedish.

Three main research questions will be elaborated on in the handbook:

- Which tasks/responsibilities can be taken up by service users?
- Which statutes are possible (job description, competency profile, payment)?
- What are the organisational conditions/ framework necessary to guarantee a high-quality collaboration? .

The symposium would include the following submitted abstracts for oral presentations:

1. Title: Service Users living in poverty as partners in education programmes: an evaluation by students.

Authors: Kristel Driessens, Vicky Lyssens Danneboom, Fauve Heremans – Karel de Grote University College in Antwerp, Belgium

2. Title: Empowering social work students by working together with service users living in poverty in the training course 'Counseling'

Authors: Wendy Peeters & Paul Rosiers - Karel de Grote University College Antwerp

3. Title: Gapmending strategies: Impact on social workers occupational practice

Authors; Heule, Cecilia, Knutagård, Marcus & Kristiansen, Arne

4. Title: Gap-mending alliances improving social work practice

Author: Aabinger, Dinah, Albrektsson, Catrin, Heule, Cecilia, Knutagård, Marcus Kristiansen, Arne, Månsson, Marianne, Petersson, Bo