



## 25th International Summer School in Social Work & Social Sciences 2024 SOCIAL WORK FROM A GLOBAL PERSPECTIVE

# Possibilities and limitations of participation of service users

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# Participation - Definition

- literally:
  - fact of taking part, involvement, engagement, sharing something in common with others
- in a broader sense:
  - cooperation, co-design and self-organization
- process of involvement of individuals, groups and communities in decision-making processes which affect them directly or indirectly.

**Where are you able to  
participate?**

**Where are you excluded/included?  
Where do you exclude/include?**



# Exclusion – Inclusion



Exclusion  
? Negativ



Inclusion  
? positiv

# Paradox: outside and inside

- e.g. prison: exclusion by inclusion
- monastery?
- fortress Europe  $\leftrightarrow$  EU-internal market
- exclusive club
  - „exclusive participation“ (golf club)

# Areas of participation

- economic      exklusion/inclusion
- iuristic      exklusion/inclusion
- spacial      exklusion/inclusion
- social      exklusion/inclusion
- political      exklusion/inclusion
- religious      exklusion/inclusion

# Levels and models

- Participation can be described - according to the way of involvement - as “**direct**” or “**indirect**”.
- Participation can be anchored statutorily - or not.
- In this context *Buse* and *Nelles* design a scheme with four alternatives:
  - statutory and indirect (representative) forms of involvement
    - e.g. elections
  - statutory and direct forms
    - referenda and petitions for referenda
  - non-statutory and direct participation
    - citizens’ initiatives and public campaigns
  - non-statutory and indirect forms of participation
    - groups of interest and citizens’ fora.

# consumerist model and empowerment model

## consumerist model:

- uses consultation and participatory initiatives for decision support, but not decision-making.
- business-like approach to improve the satisfaction of the customers

## empowerment model:

- requires a transfer of power
- amount of power transferred is the measure of participation



# Extent of participation

*Shelly Arnstein: Ladder Model*

- weak participation: tokenism, alibi
  - information, consultation
- strong participation
  - partnership
  - delegated power
  - citizen control
- cf. Arnstein (1969): A Ladder of Citizen Participation, in: Journal of the American Institute of Planners, S. 217 u. 222.

# Social Work

- active and effective involvement of clients as service users in the provision of services as well as in the decision-making processes affecting these services (Schnurr 2001, S.1330)
  - participation means moving from “doing” services **to** people to doing things **with** them.
  - clients should have a say in the provisions set up for them and play an active part in influencing the services they use.

# Principle Statements

- processes of empowerment are a precondition for participation
  - i.e. enabling clients to be self-determined
- participation does not exclude the need for support
  - but describes how support should be provided
- clients are equally-entitled citizens and not inferior to anyone else in society
  - same rights as anyone else in the community
- participation should be voluntary
  - consider how people want to be involved
- clients are experts regarding their situation.
  - they have first-hand experience
  - they know better than anyone else what they really need from services

# Transfer of Power

- clients are simply less powerful in terms of resources and information than the stakeholders they are seeking to influence
- participation is a matter of power and the transfer of power is the measure of participation
- the challenge is how power is distributed and whether, as a politician or service provider you are willing to hand over power.

# Clients' participation - principal considerations

- clients are people with multiple disadvantages and may feel disempowered
- they have often been excluded from decisions which affect them
- they are confronted with prejudices and stigmata
  - regarded as loss-making human-beings and 2<sup>nd</sup> class citizens.
  - seen as criminals, scroungers, addicts, people who misuse the social system.

## → questions may rise:

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Are clients able to participate?

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What individual capabilities are necessary to participate?

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Are you allowed to refuse participation in certain circumstances?

- participation is a learning process. Human beings are not simply capable or incapable, they develop:
  - *„You are learning participation by participation not by preparing for participation. Different levels and degrees are not in opposite to each other but design in their interaction the participation-culture of an organization“* (Urban 2005, S. 182)

- Participation is only worth having if it has an impact and adds value to the decision-making processes.
- It **has to make a difference** to service provision
- Adopting participate approaches means changing working practice and power relations
  - Participation must be embedded in the organizational service user and public service culture.



- In enabling people to participate there must be a shift from a view that service users are ***not only people with needs*** to a view of ***service users as a resource and as actors***.
  - Service users should be the main actors in their situation and in the solution.
- Clients' problems also have structural reasons.
  - cannot be solved by service providers and service users alone,
  - there have to be changes concerning policy, e.g. laws, funding, working facilities

# Approaches to participation – meaningful methods

- The first consideration ensuring meaningful participation is: How do clients want to be involved?
  - Participation is voluntary and a slow process which should start from the issues that people are interested in changing.

# Participation is a process and happens gradually

- *information*
- *consultation*
- *deciding together*
- *acting together*
- *independent service user organizations*

# Participation needs empowerment

enabling for self determination

EMPOWERMENT



# Empowerment

- Empowerment is no method, but a professional attitude,
  - which focuses the enhancement of hidden potentials, self-organization and cooperation
- Support to discover, develop and use strengths/resources in situations of deficiency
  - get involved in decisions about oneself
  - get control over your own life

# Core-element: consciousness raising

- Be aware that you can influence situations or events and you are not completely dependent and on the mercy of external circumstances
- Discover one's resources in connection with your biography
  - make your own history
- change structures in a way that they enhance procedures of empowerment

# P. Freire: Pedagogy of the Oppressed

**„conscientização“:** awareness process

- naïv-transitive consciousness
  - my situation is unalterable
- semi-transitive consciousness
  - I realize injustices concerning my life circumstances
- critical-transitive consciousness
  - I reflect these life circumstances and try to find solutions
  - My situation can be changed!!!



# Participation practices in Services





# Participation - useful?

leisure  
activities

installing  
house rules

extent of  
sanctions

recruitment of  
staff

use of funding

admission of  
residents

## **most common and widespread participation activities**

- informal discussion groups
- resident meetings
- satisfaction questionnaires
- suggestions and complaint boxes
- Service user representatives

Is there real involvement in decision-making???

# Barriers and Risks

## concerning participation



# Overly high expectations

- In the beginning participation can be a struggle
- service providers can first get the impression that clients don't want to participate.
  - They may be disappointed about the lack of immediate success.
- taking over of participation by the staff
  - when there is not the patience and time needed for participation

- In all forms of participation service providers should be careful not to place too much stress and pressure on the users because they may become exhausted. Too much involvement can lead service users to burn out.
- You can burden some representatives too much and thereby create professional clients or they can relapse falling back into destructive patterns.
  - The support system for the representatives should be similar to that for the staff (e.g. supervision).

# status and behaviour of the service users

- substance abuse, illnesses, fragile and vulnerable state and mental health and behavioral disorders
- clients may fear a risk attached to criticizing the service and speaking out too loud will have negative impacts on the way you are treated
- clients might focus only on the most immediate and pressing problems, and only on their own.
- special users or user groups can become too dominant and alienate others.

# Added Value for Service Users

greater rights,  
responsibilities and  
resources

receiving services which  
are responsive to their  
needs

a budget dedicated to  
participation and  
lobbying

increased confidence,  
problem-solving skills,  
negotiating skills, self-  
help capacities

awareness of the  
process of political and  
organizational decision-  
making and funding

access to wider  
community social  
networks

# **The added value of participation**

**positive forms of social capital and  
increased social cohesion**