

## International symposium ERIS - EURODIR – GIS REACTIFS

### PARTICIPATION : A PATH TO INCLUSION ?

From 29 September to 1 October 2020 in Strasbourg

From 29 September to 1 October 2020, the **European Higher School of Social Intervention (ESEIS)** is organizing an international symposium bringing together 3 networks:

- **ERIS** - European Research Institute for Social Work <https://eris.osu.eu/>
- **Eurodir** - European Association of Institutions Training Health and Social Institution Managers
- **GIS REACTIFS** – Group of Scientific Interest "Research-Action, Inclusion, Social Training" <https://www.gis-reactifs.fr/>

The topic of these three days of symposium is "*Participation : a path to inclusion ?*"

In Europe, **user involvement in social work** is recognized as a right, but it takes different forms depending on the country and local context. It can also meet many obstacles.

At the same time, **inclusion** is an emerging socio-political concept in Europe. For several years, the lexical and conceptual field has been evolving: the term inclusion is replacing that of integration. Born in the field of disability, the inclusive logic has spread in into numerous field of social action sector: poverty, aging, housing, etc.

How does participation contribute to inclusion? How do forms of participation help move the lines of society? What are the perverse effects, challenges, successes and positive impacts of an inclusive involvement approach?

The symposium will be an opportunity to develop the reflection on the link between inclusion and the participation of users of social services. These three days will be an opportunity to listen and debate around expert points of view, scientific work and feedback on the subject. The exposed papers will feed the following 3 themes.

## Theme 01 – User involvement in Europe : what inclusive terms ?

This symposium builds on the Council of Europe's longstanding work on citizens' rights. **User involvement** is now clearly identified to improve access to social rights.

In France, since the promulgation of the law of 2 January 2002, the participation of users takes two forms.

- The participation of the user in his own care. This translates into individualized support and the implementation of specific support documents, such as personalized projects.
- Participation in the life and functioning of the establishment. The law instituted a right of users to participate in the life of the structure in which they are accommodated or accompanied.

Participatory logic also means involving people in the implementation of public policies.

In Europe, there are **important differences between countries**, but the "report on user participation in social services provided to individuals" (Munday B., Council of Europe, 2007) identifies several fundamental principles of user participation in all countries. Those are :

- Participation as a right
- The essential consideration of the users' point of view and experience
- The fundamental importance of providing users with social services of sufficient quantity and quality.

There are many methods to increase user involvement in social services : Users' reflection group, Analysis of the critical incidents, Stories of customers, Citizen panels, Service management by users ....

Whatever the **methods employed**, the arguments for increasing user participation are numerous:

- "Improving the quality and efficiency of the service
- Modification of the imbalance between the users and the administration
- The service system acquires greater legitimacy  
Users become more confident and autonomous
- Participation is an education for democracy" (Dahlberg & Vedung, 2001)

In the field of public policies, social intervention and social training, experiential knowledge and the skills of users appear fundamental to promote their ability to act: they are then considered as actors and not as subjects.

However, the expression "user participation" is rather vague and must be examined in its context: that of democracy and the principles that govern citizens involvement in the life of society. The

definition of participation varies according to the country (some states have a federal model, others are more centralized, some have a history marked by participatory democracy, others favor a representative democracy ...). The meaning of **participation and community action** differs according to the history of territories, political models and local contexts.

The papers responding to this theme will analyze feedback from users' participation experiences, identify the obstacles and levers of this participation, as well as their links with political and local contexts. A comparative dimension between several territories, regions or countries may be proposed.

## Theme 02 - Participation and inclusion: which management?

In an establishment, the development of user participation is a managerial desire. For the director or the manager, it is a matter of stimulating a team dynamic, to mobilize the social workers and to support the acting power of the people concerned.

However, there are many barriers to implementing user involvement. These obstacles are :

- "Policies / Legislative: There is sometimes no legislative provision allowing the user participation or the legislation is not suitable;
- Administrative: The lack of clarity in the objectives of the administration and the lack of knowledge of good methods to involve users can be obstacles;
- Professionals: The consequences of frequent paternalism in social work can be disastrous;
- Linguistic: It is increasingly common that the first language of social service providers is not the same as that of beneficiaries. In addition, the language of some professionals may be highly technical and incomprehensible to many users, creating a significant barrier to communication and collaboration;
- Personal: Personal barriers may be caused by differences in attitude and perspective on participation (Heikkila, M. and Julkunen, 2003);
- Financial: True user participation entails significant costs for both service providers and users." (Munday B., op.cit.)

Beyond these obstacles, other questions often remain unresolved: how to get around the limits posed by the capacities of vulnerable or socially weakened people? Some are not autonomous and sometimes do not have access to verbal or written communication. In these situations, what forms of participation are possible?

Another question that arises is the consideration of user claims: What legitimacy is it possible to grant to complaints, claims of accompanied persons and their entourage? How does this upset the traditional postures of the manager, the social worker and the beneficiary of social action?

Confronted with these obstacles, some managers of social action struggle to implement user participation in their establishment. Others implement innovative experiments. Communications responding to this theme will help to better understand **the role played by the director / manager in promoting a participatory and inclusive approach for users?**

Is listening to users a lever for the management of a structure? What participatory approach can be used to develop a service project? How to manage experiments? What place to give to innovations, tests, errors? How to react to the modification of the power relationship induced by user participation? How to support teams of professionals and involve them in the reflection? How to promote an inclusive participatory approach, a real and meaningful participation of users?

The **posture of the manager** will be questioned, as will **the size of the establishment**. There is a lot of participatory experimentation in small institutions. But how to expand these initiatives in large institutions? How to avoid formalization and systematization becoming an additional obstacle? Are quality approaches a point of support, a lever or a risk in this area.

Finally, this axis will question the evaluation of user participation: what is an inclusive participatory method? How to judge the inclusive impact of the modalities implemented?

### Theme 03 – Participation, inclusion : what conceptual approaches ?

This third axis corresponds to a more conceptual reflection. In the social sciences, as in the field of public policy and social work, the notions of **empowerment and activation participation** are in full expansion. What are their origins, their meanings, their differences? Is participation real or simply symbolic? Is it simply user consultation or a real consideration of their point of view and their opinion?

For Heikkila and Julkunen, it is important to differentiate between **participation, involvement and user empowerment** (Heikkila & Julkunen, 2003). Participation is the weakest element as users are only partially involved and serve as informants. The involvement always indicates that the action of the users has repercussions on the services provided. Empowerment is the most active form of participation since it can involve Professionals waiving their power and control of services for the benefit of users. This situation rarely occurs. At a less extreme level, empowerment can refer to the power that users acquire by developing their knowledge and skills.

Presentations in this theme will explore the evolving conceptual field for qualifying different forms of participation. Examples of concrete situations can illustrate the differences between each notion and interpret the concepts.

It will also define **the status of the participants**. In most European countries, governments prefer, to varying degrees, a mixed policy of social assistance and social services. This offers a wide range of user participation opportunities. This implies to consider users as

- "*citizens* with rights and powers, an indispensable element of real involvement as opposed to symbolic participation;
  - empowered and protected *consumers* with choice and exit opportunities;
  - *clients* whose needs, opinions and preferences must be considered in modern and well-run public service organizations;
  - *co-producers* who assume their role as citizens and their priorities community members by cooperating with service managers and professionals or by setting up their own services.
- (Munday, op.cit.)

A reflection on the terminologies used to designate users of social services will highlight the issues behind these different statuses.

Finally, this axis will also focus on **the notion of inclusion**, frequently linked to user participation. Inclusion is also a polysemic notion, which is a dual concept in social science research. Some authors question authority, symbolic violence, domination and participation injunctions. This approach questions the development of norms and their relativity, institutional violence and the logic of action behind normative principles.

The second conception focuses on processes of participation, emancipation, and the social recognition of individuals and societies. This approach addresses capabilities, empowerment processes and equal opportunities. Inclusion polysemy and ambivalence can be overcome by a scientific approach that allows the interpretation of concepts and the analysis of lived experiences.

## Submission procedure

Contributors are invited to submit a summary (2 pages maximum) to the following email address [valerie.wolff@eseis-afris.eu](mailto:valerie.wolff@eseis-afris.eu) **before March 20, 2020**.

Proposals should

- Be written in French or English
- Indicate the names, first names, qualifications, e-mail addresses and home institutions of the author (s) (maximum 3 speakers per communication)
- Mention the title of the communication, the objective and the summary, a short bibliography

## Calendar

- Receipt of communication proposals: **March 20, 2020**
- Evaluation of the proposals and return to the authors: **early April 2020**
- Final submission of proposals: **end of April 2020**
- Publication of the program: **May 2020**

## Scientific committee

- Béatrice Muller: Lecturer in sociology, Director of the European School of Social Intervention, President of Eurodir, Member of ERIS and Director of GIS REACTIFS
- Emmanuel Jovelin: Professor of sociology, University of Metz-Lorraine, Member of ERIS and Chairman of the scientific council of GIS REACTIFS
- Valérie Wolff: Researcher at the European Superior School of Social Intervention, Lecturer in sociology, University of Strasbourg, Member of ERIS and member of GIS REACTIFS
- Laure Lienard: Trainer at the Lille social institute / Catholic University of Lille. PhD student in sociology (Dir: Emanuel JOVELIN), University of Metz-Lorraine, Member of ERIS and member of GIS REACTIFS

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Foucault M. *Sécurité, territoire, population. Cours au collège de France (1977-1978)*, Paris, Seuil, 2004 (éd. F. Ewald, A. Fontana, M. Senellart).

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