

## Book Review

Social Work Across Europe. Account from 16 Countries. Edited by Peter Erath and Brian Littlechild. ERIS Monographs Volume 1. Publisher University of Ostrava – ERIS with Albert Publisher. 2010

ISBN 978-80-7368-910-0

Key Words: Social Work in Europe, International Social Work, Comparative Social Work, Social Policy, Social Welfare

### Reviewer – Prof. Dr. Stefan Borrmann

Professor for International Social Work Research, University of Applied Sciences Landshut, Germany

The book takes on the ambitious task to collect accounts of the history, development, current status and future challenges of social work in selected European countries. Sixteen countries (Austria, England and Wales, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Slovak Republic, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland) are represented in this book and therefore the reader gets a comprehensive overview of the variety and diversity of social work, social welfare and social policies in Europe.

According to the introduction of the book written by the editors themselves the different national authors of each chapter were given systematic guidelines on writing the country specific account. However after receiving the chapters it became clear that it was virtually impossible to use the same structure for each country. The national and cultural traditions of each of the sixteen countries were so diverse that following the same structure would mean trying to compare apples with oranges.

For that reason each chapter reflects this given diversity by using its own style, structure and approach in describing social work in the particular countries. Some accounts are focussing on the social policy and social welfare system and are therefore describing the place of social work in the social system (i.e. Austria or Spain). Some are emphasising more on the development of social work education within their countries (i.e. France). Others again are picturing the national characteristics of social work in their country by focusing on social work itself and are therefore describing theories, methods and values of social work, detailing user groups and social work organisations and reflecting on the professional status of social work within the country (i.e. England, Germany).

The plurality of these approaches can be seen as an asset and drawback at the same time. It is a weakness of the book because it makes it hard to compare one country to another. The book will disappoint readers who are looking for that kind of a comparative approach. But this is not the aim of the book and neither the editors nor the authors of each chapter are promising such kind of comparison. For that reason one has to focus on the strength of the book. Social work across Europe is influenced by a plurality of cultural, historical and ethical factors. The accounts from the sixteen countries given in this book are reflecting this diversity are therefore presenting the reader a tremendous chance to know more about other European countries. And that is exactly what the book was getting at. And knowing more about other

European approaches to social work might be a first step to pave the way from “Social Work across Europe” to an “European Social Work”.