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**DESGAITASUNA,
ESKUBIDEAK
eta INKLUSIOA**
NAZIOARTEKO
KONGRESUA



CONGRESO
INTERNACIONAL
**DISCAPACIDAD,
DERECHOS
e INCLUSIÓN**

IZENBURUA-TÍTULO:

REIMAGINING DISABILITY SOCIAL
POLICY – WHAT NEEDS TO
HAPPEN?



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DATA-FECHA:

2019/10/27



Gipuzkoako Desgaitasun Fisikoa duten
Pertsonen Federazio Koordinatzailea
Federación Coordinadora de Personas
con Discapacidad de Gipuzkoa

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1. PAPER: REIMAGINING DISABILITY SOCIAL POLICY – WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN?

There is a deepening crisis with regard to disabled people's emancipation. Continued austerity measures and a gradual shift towards the entrenchment of neoliberal politics has placed disabled people in a precarious situation. A review of the ANED report (Crowther 2019) highlights that despite progress across a few European countries to deliver community-based support, there are widespread concerns over the prevalence of institutional care and a lack of common definitions of independent living. There are: extensive cuts to public services, a refusal to develop effective social policy to address disabled people's support requirements, stricter eligibility criteria is used to reduce access to support, and all of this is happening at the same time that the media, the states throughout Europe, and other agenda setting platforms, question disabled people's value to society. This has led to disabled activists, their organisations, researchers and policymakers committed to improving disabled people's social position, constantly attempting to justify why support schemes are important, why the need for protection through legislative frameworks, and why it is essential to develop opportunities to influence political bodies, social policy processes, and bureaucratic structures (Sépulchre 2018; Bulic-Cojocariu and Kokic 2018).

For there to be a sustainable, and effective, change through the pursuit of inclusive policies, emphasis must be placed on the action that is occurring at the micro-level. Disabled people, and their organisations, need to be regarded as active welfare citizens participating in the production of social policy, not just viewed as consumers of welfare provision. DPMs across the globe are committed to the importance of representation, ensuring disabled people are involved in the decision-making procedures that affect their daily lives. This is reflected in the common slogan and chant that appears at disabled people's rallies, protests, and as part of campaign strategies and manifestoes: "nothing about us without us" (Charlton 2000). A focus is required on the importance of critiquing how current social policy attempts to, and rarely succeeds, in addressing the marginalisation experienced by disabled people (Priestley 2007). By evaluating contemporary social policy, it is possible to identify the windows of opportunity to engage with a radical, but pragmatic, alternative to the current direction of policy. However, to achieve this it requires two integral factors: firstly, a critical review of current social policy must be led, and coordinated, by disabled people; secondly, it is essential that any critique is firmly rooted in the ideas and practices that occur at a micro level.

With regard to the first point, any successful attempt to create lasting social change is dependent upon the involvement of disabled people's organisations. It is paramount that disabled people's organisations are resourced, supported, and provided with opportunities to engage with policymakers. This is an effective approach to provide commentary on the design, development, and delivery of policy. However, it raises the question as to the role and participation of academia and intelligentsia within this context. It is argued here that researchers are to resource and provide opportunities to elevate the demands and ideas of disabled activists engaged in the review of current and emerging social policy. As way of an example, consider the development of UK Disability Studies and the relationship between the scholar community and disabled campaigners. The pioneers of Disability Studies, such as Morris (1991) and Finkelstein (2007) were also integral to the development of the DPM. Their access and status granted by their role in academia provided opportunities to draw on historical and contemporary research to offer data and evidence in the hope of improving living conditions. The inclusion of academics could permit access to policymakers and parliamentarians; the role of academia could assist with cementing the position taken by activists and campaigners outside of the intelligentsia.

The second point, in reference to investigations at the micro-level, is significant for creating action within localities. Action that is initiated by disabled people and their organisations will affect existing social, political, economic, and cultural structures within the local community. This, in turn, can initiate further engagement with diverse communities affected by the hostile, unjust policies that marginalise groups beyond disabled people (Liasidou 2012). By supporting disabled people and their organisations to engage critically with social policy process, at a local level, there is an opportunity to identify how disabled people are establishing resistance practices to challenge oppressive and discriminatory aspects of current social policy. Engagement at the local level remains pivotal for developing activities and reactions that can constitute structural change as realised by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Whilst Article 4 of the Convention calls for States to actively involve disabled people in the legislation and policies implemented to realise disabled people's opportunities for full and equal participation within society, it is argued here that this can be achieved most effectively by concentrating activity at the local level.

The justification for this argument is based upon the need to instigate demand for social change at the local level, which transcends individual identity characteristics, and is primarily focused on re-envisaging the opportunities to create a safe, just, fair and inclusive society. This requires understanding disability as a way to illustrate the normative and “ableist” values (Campbell 2009) that are sustaining social injustice for the majority of communities, not just disabled people. Inclusive policies should be less preoccupied with integrating disabled people into the existing systems and structures that constitute the formulation and production of society. Instead, social policy analysis should be engaged with understanding how and why disabled people are resisting contemporary ideas and procedures found within education, employment, and social security provision. If focus is placed at the micro level, the collective demand for change increases and this leads to structural, top-down change - as proposed through the aspirations of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In order for inclusive policies to be realised, disabled people's campaigns, commentary, and vision for an inclusive society has to extend beyond the traditional and hierarchical networks. There must be a collective response of support and recognition for the significance of disabled people's resistance practices against existing social policy practice (Oliver and Barnes 2012).

This requires increasing the numbers of politicised disabled people, and working to establish partnerships with non-disabled allies, unions, occupational groupings, and transnational communities to identify and engage with local strategies that promote or restrict inclusive practices. The importance of raising consciousness of disabling procedures becomes evident here, disabled people's organisations must produce precise, coherent lines of argument: society is organised in a deeply unjust and inaccessible way, for the majority of people, but through disabled people's demands and campaigns there is an opportunity to consider how society should be organised to take into account individual and collective variations in the way human beings exist, identify, and are valued and respected.

If society is to be fair, safe, accessible, and inclusive for all, it requires an exploration of being and existing in various ways (Crenshaw 1989). This means challenging the normative expectations, practices and ideas associated with performing daily activities. It means ensuring that education, employment, and social security systems embrace the importance of difference and move beyond the notion of tolerance. Instead, celebrating the importance of unconditional acceptance, and challenging the restrictions and inflexibility of existing services that typically categorise people according to administrative labels and structures.

Social policy pertaining to disabled people's lives is inherently ableist, and there is a desperate need to demonstrate how specific contemporary policies that affect disabled people's lives reinforce normative ideals. Through disabled people's campaigning, demands and ideas, disabled people's activism has illustrated the destructive impact of institutionalisation, oppressive "caring" regimes, and the continuation of assessing impairment and health-related aspects in order to make judgements on what disabled people should receive in terms of support (Berghs et al. 2019). However, there is need to go beyond existing activist strategies and illustrate to disabled and non-disabled people alike that sustaining programmes of institutionalisation, painful and ineffective therapies, rehabilitation and cure initiatives at the expense of radical, socially just services of provision can no longer be tolerated. There is a need for disabled people's organisations to be equipped to document, highlight, and challenge the continued violence experienced by disabled people through the continuation of these oppressive programmes. There are deliberate decisions taken by dominant figures and groups, who prioritise certain outcomes and resources, which in turn means disabled people are prevented or restricted in their participation in society. It is essential that disabled people's campaigns, strategies, and research aims, explore why and how mass populations across Europe tolerate this explicit injustice encountered by disabled people.

In realising inclusive policies, it is argued that attention should be focused on opportunities for disabled people's organisations to engage critically with existing social policy development at the local level. However, there is an additional point to consider: establishing accessible spaces to further develop understanding of the politicised nature of disability and impairment, and how this can contribute to the development of alternative, preferable options for social policy. Disabled people and their organisations should organise, strategise, and contribute to the evolving contemporary policies that affect the development of an inclusive society, but that should not come at the expense of having an accessible, resourced space where groups (including academic activism) can debate and consider what is it that needs to be achieved to realise the aspirations of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

As it is documented, disabled people's movements have competing ideas and perspectives as to what disabled people's inclusion means, there are different definitions of social justice and emancipation (Griffiths 2019). There must be desire and opportunity to debate such terms and consider how inclusive social policy forms part of those ideas and visions. The continuation of fragmented disability politics results in a crisis because there are sporadic, often challenging ideas and visions for how society is structured (Sheldon 2006). Beyond disability, there is no coherent vision to offer those that are marginalised, those that are exploited, and those who want something different. This is reflected in the way disabled people's social movements are organised. There is a need for clarity and a coherent vision as to what independent living means. A vision that challenges the neoliberal ideas and values that has reduced independent living to a transactional relationship between service user and service. This brings into focus questions over what is expected from the various actors across the social world, for example: the state, the market, the family.

In summary, three points are made: firstly, disabled people and their organisations must document and analyse how, at the microlevel, current social policy practice is restricting disabled people's participation within society. This also requires consideration of how and why disabled people resist current ideas and practices that render disabled people in exploitative, marginalised, and unjust social positions. Secondly, by focusing at the micro-level there is opportunity to create a collective resistance and action to understand the prevalence of oppression and marginalisation within society. Going beyond the parameters of singular identity characteristics, it is as possible to engage with an intersectional approach to understand how society is currently inaccessible for numerous, diverse communities. Through an analysis of disability, ableist and normative values within current social policy practice can be scrutinised. This injects the possibility for imagining alternative possibilities for how society should be organised. Finally, to ensure sustainability and the effectiveness of the two points outlined above, there is a need to reflect on the current operations of disabled people's organisations. This means analysing how organisations are structured, the process in which priorities are set and campaigns are organised.

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