

THE SHADOW THAT LETS ONE STEP OUT OF THE SHADOW. PERSONAL ASSISTANCE FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES IN POLAND AND NORWAY

The book addresses the issue of personal assistance for people with disabilities in Poland and Norway. The authors conducted research in both countries between 2020 and 2022. The countries differ in the social policy model adopted and level of implementation of United Nations' Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. Comparative analyses of the collected data highlight the cultural determinants of the implementation of personal assistance services, which allows the authors to identify and discuss dilemmas arising from the design of the service and to develop an original equality-participatory formula within which personal assistance for people with disabilities can be implemented.

The authors present and compare the personal assistance services' institutional and cultural contexts in Norway and Poland, and point to the dynamic and ongoing nature of their development and implementation. This notion informs much of the argument presented in the book.

The data was gathered from existing sources, such as official documents, especially commissioned research reports, and existing literature on the subject, but above all from semi-structured interviews with disability experts in Poland and Norway, who included people with disabilities themselves, and interviews with personal assistants in both countries.

Further, the authors investigate the ideology of Independent Living underlying the Convention and the notion of personal assistance. They analyse the differences between "care" and "assistance", and why it might be difficult to introduce personal assistance within the existing social care and welfare services framework. They consider the consequences of implementing personal assistance and independent living for the agency and subjectivity of both the people with disabilities and their assistants. The nature of work and working conditions of personal assistants are also analysed, in particular in relation to the notion of emotional labour.

The authors argue that personal assistance should not be viewed primarily as a form of help, but as a tool enabling equality and active participation in society of citizens with disabilities, on par with people without disabilities.