

Social Policy and the Capability Approach. Concepts, Measurements and Application. / Yerkes, M., Javornik, J., Kurowska, A. (eds) Policy Press, 2019. 172 p.

It has been argued that social policy in Europe is limited by its instrumental and utilitarian underpinnings that individualises risk and responsibility. This volume applies Amartya Sen's Capability Approach to social policy research and practice, addressing the question of '*to what extent do European social policies empower individuals to freely use the tools and instruments created by these policies*' (Yerkes et al. - Chapter 1, p. 1). The Capability Approach emphasises situated agency and the real freedom individuals have to live lives that they have reason to value. Offering a unique evaluative perspective, it is increasingly applied to the study of social policy. However, this work does not adequately reveal how to shift from a Capability Approach to social policy to capability based social policy (Yerkes et al. - Chapter 8, p. 148). It is this gap which this volume, via state-of-the-art short empirical and theoretical chapters written by key social policy and Capability Approach scholars, seeks to address.

In Chapter 1 Yerkes and colleagues provide an accessible and succinct introduction to Amartya Sen's Capability Approach, which will be especially useful for readers unfamiliar with the capabilities literature. The authors convincingly argue that social policy is a resource to provide individuals the opportunity to live a life that they have reason to value. A Capability Approach highlights normative reference points in policy development, and the ways in which an individual's social policy engagement is socially, culturally and economically embedded. The subsequent chapters take this argument forward via empirical and theoretical application of the Capability Approach in a range of social policy domains.

Chapters 2 to 5 offer examples of applying the Capability Approach in social policy research. They provide a comparison of capability and social investment approaches to education policy (Bonvin & Laruffa - Chapter 2); a capability analysis of the European Commission's Active Ageing framework (de São José et al. – Chapter 3); and an examination of the interdependencies of policy and ecological, economic and societal contexts with regards to parental leave (Javornik & Oliver – Chapter 4; Kurowska & Javornik– Chapter 5). These chapters effectively reveal that social policy is not value neutral. The neo-liberal paradigm emphasises economic and social activities, rather than inclusive and participatory frameworks focused on the real opportunities. The ways in which structural opportunities and constraints perpetuate inequality and diminish the capabilities of end users are highlighted.

Chapters 6 and 7 then consider capability based social policy research. From the point of view of policy professionals and practitioners, Javornik and colleagues (Chapter 6) highlight the contributions of the Capability Approach to policy and practice, as well the practical issues in its application. Hearne and Murphy (Chapter 7) report on research that empowered homeless families to engage in policy design and evaluation. These two chapters demonstrate the value of the Capability Approach in terms of providing a framework that improves and changes individual lives, and reframes end users as a valorised and legitimate community.

This innovative volume provides an excellent and accessible addition to the current social policy and Capability Approach literature. As well as clearly articulating the importance of capability based social policy, it also highlights the practical issues in making it effective; for example, the need for a simplified and common language and consideration of feasibility issues (Hearne & Murphy - Chapter 7). The need for a systemic shift towards the Capability Approach, rather than a shift at policy level alone (Yerkes et al. - Chapter 8) is clearly

demonstrated but should not be underestimated. While the volume is predominantly focused on the European context and a sub-section of social policy domains, it provides a clear account of the social policy landscape supported by a well-presented empirical and conceptual analysis from academic, end user and practitioner viewpoints. This volume will be of interest to students of, and researchers examining, social policy and public administration; scholars of the Capability Approach; and members of the policy maker and practitioner communities.

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