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# Towards a Conceptual Framework of Service User Involvement in Social Work Education: Empowerment and Educational Perspectives

Marion Laging and Thomas Heidenreich

## ABSTRACT

A topic that has recently gained widespread attention in social work education is service user involvement (SUI), a term denoting the call to include users of social work services in teaching social work students. Despite the widespread use of the term SUI, this label includes a wide variety of approaches with different aims and scopes. A conceptual framework that distinguishes empowerment from educational perspectives in current SUI approaches is proposed, and a number of elements that should be discussed in each of these perspectives are introduced: theoretical background, role and tasks of the institution, areas of implementation and role of service users, and effects of SUI and their assessment. Implications for further SUI projects and research approaches are discussed.

## ARTICLE HISTORY

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The development of programs and curricula in social work is an ongoing and changing process. In many countries in Europe and across the world, the involvement of service users in this process has gained increasing significance. The “Global Standards for the Education and Training of the Social Work Profession,” a statement adopted in 2004 by the General Assemblies of the International Federation of Social Workers and the International Association of Schools of Social Work in Adelaide, Australia (Sewpaul & Jones, 2005), recognizes the importance of service user involvement (SUI) in social work education (SWE). It is clear from the beginning of this statement that the rights and interests of service users (SUs) and their participation in all aspects of education is the underlying goal (Sewpaul & Jones, 2005). On a scientific level, a growing number of reports of SUI in SWE have been published, including a special issue of *Social Work Education* (McLaughlin, Sadd, McKeever, & Duffy, 2016).

As the leading country in SUI in SWE, the United Kingdom has played a major part in these developments, as indicated by the “11 pioneering articles from the UK” in the first special edition of SWE in 2006 (McLaughlin et al., 2016, p. 863), and SUI has long been a feature of SWE in this country (Beresford & Boxall, 2012). Moreover, in the United Kingdom, the involvement of SUs is a mandated feature of SWE (Department of Health, 2002). As a consequence, service users now regularly participate in the design, delivery, and evaluation of social work curricula and also in student selection and assessment. Initiatives in other countries such as Sweden (Kjellberg & French, 2011), Norway (Askheim, 2012), and Germany (Laging & Heidenreich, 2017) have also introduced SUI-oriented approaches that impart significance and influence to service users in SWE.

Thus, a wealth of literature on SUI in SWE has amassed in the wake of these developments, with a large proportion deriving from the United Kingdom. The majority of this literature consists of reports and self-evaluations of individual projects involving SUs (Heidenreich & Laging, 2016); however, several overviews and reviews have been published (Chambers & Hickey, 2012; Robinson & Webber, 2013; Wallcraft, Fleischmann, & Schofield, 2012). In addition, there are some publications relating to reflections on separate, specific aspects of SUI in SWE (Beresford & Boxall, 2012). Apart from a few exceptions (Beresford & Boxall, 2012; Skoura-Kirk et al., 2013), the available

documentation consists mostly of reports written by academics. In spite of the more recently available reviews and summary publications, no coherent theoretical framework or conceptualization of SUI in SWE exists to date, even though certain lines of argumentation are repeatedly used to justify it.

The aim of this article is to develop a conceptual framework of SUI in SWE to guide further research and practice. More specifically, we identify, describe, and order the different available conceptualizations of SUI and the theoretical constructs and justifications that lie beneath this seemingly contradictory and haphazard field. In this area, two basic schools of thought can be identified: In the educational perspective, the educational gains achieved by the students through SUI are emphasized, and in the empowerment perspective, the participation of SUs is in the forefront.

### **The challenge: Heterogeneity in the approaches of SUI in SWE**

Before we develop the conceptual framework for SUI in SWE, the scope and heterogeneity of existing approaches are briefly presented to demonstrate the variety of approaches that have to be encompassed within a conceptual framework.

It is important to note that the group of people identified as SUs is defined differently in different approaches: Whereas some assume that an SU has or has had experience with social services, others (Warren & Boxall, 2009) consider SUs as people who are affected by or threatened with social exclusion and recruit SUs who have been excluded in different ways for SUI projects. SUI in SWE has included SUs from a variety of target groups. Clients with mental health issues and addictions have been regularly involved as well as former clients of child welfare services. Other important groups such as older people have been involved to a lesser degree. Some approaches also involve carers—family members or other people close to the SU—in SWE, whereas in others they do not appear to play a role (Chambers & Hickey, 2012). In their overview, Webber and Robinson (2012) note that in the discourse surrounding SUI in SWE, the term *meaningful involvement* (having sense and is useful and reasonable) is increasingly used, although up to now there has been no consensus on what this is or how it might be measured (Farrow, 2014).

### **Areas of implementation**

The institutional areas where SUs have been active and the projects they have participated in are very diverse. A requirement in the United Kingdom is that SUs must be involved in all areas of SWE (Department of Health, 2002, p. 9); these areas are furthermore specified as student selection, design of the degree, teaching and learning provision, preparation of practice learning, provision of placements, learning agreements, assessment of students, and quality assurance (Department of Health, 2002). The available papers and reports show there is a definite tendency to involve SUs more strongly in the areas of recruitment, selection, and teaching and rather less intensively in the area of assessment (Wallcraft et al., 2012). Others stress the involvement of SUs in research (Beresford & Boxall, 2012; Završek & Videmšek, 2009).

### **Role of SUs**

A brief look at the available literature reveals that the types of roles and tasks that involved SUs are assigned in the context of SWE can be quite disparate. Although SUs appear in some projects as academics' partners in education, that is, as equal "co-teachers" (Gutman, Kraiem, Criden, & Yalon-Chamovitz, 2012, p. 203), in other approaches they have the status of "the status of students" (Askheim, 2012, p. 3; Denvall, Heule, & Kristiansen, 2007, p. 8; Kjellberg & French, 2011, p. 950). Yet other approaches described how students, together with teachers or SUs, designed and carried out participative approaches (Laging & Heidenreich, 2017; Terry, Raithby, Cutter, & Murphy, 2015). For

example, in a project in Germany, students with the support of lecturers developed their own SUI approach. The students selected their own topics of interest, collaborated with SUs, and developed appropriate formats for involving SUs in teaching (Laging & Heidenreich, 2017).

### **Effects of SUI in SWE and their assessment**

As a final point, defining the expected effects of SUI in SWE and developing the means to assess these effects have been quite diverse. On the one hand, when focusing on an empowerment perspective, effects should be expected in the extent of participation and empowerment that SUs experience in SWE; on the other hand, when focusing on an educational perspective, effects can be expected in the development of students' skills. For example, with regard to the empowerment perspective, SUs describe how SUI helps them to overcome the role of victim, or as Sadd (2011) put it, "moving service users away from the role of victim" (p. 8). They also report a feeling of being heard and valued and gaining knowledge and insight, practical skills, and confidence and developing self-esteem (Matka, River, Littlechild, & Powell, 2010, p. 2148). With regard to the educational perspective, the effects for students include enhancing their communicative abilities (Skilton, 2011, p. 304) and gaining greater insight and awareness into the perspectives of people on the receiving end of services (Duffy, 2012, p. 728).

### **A conceptual framework based on educational and empowerment perspectives**

As the previous section has shown, SUI in SWE is a rich and heterogeneous field. Following Webber and Robinson (2012), we distinguish an educational as well as an empowerment perspective in SUI approaches. The first perspective emphasizes SUI for the development of students' skills (educational perspective), and the second stresses the importance of SUI for empowering people from marginalized and excluded groups (empowerment perspective). Both perspectives are associated with different views on four important domains: theoretical background, areas of involvement, role of service user, role of institutions, and effects of SUI and instruments to assess these effects.

Contributions and research that describe SU involvement in SWE from the perspectives of power and empowerment or participation (models that focus on the process of involvement such as empowerment or partnership) are dominant in the available literature. In contrast, there are fewer contributions concentrating on and describing how and in what ways SUI relates to the demands of teaching and learning, thereby contributing to the development of teaching and education in social work (Robinson & Webber, 2013).

Table 1 shows the heuristic of distinguishing between an educational and an empowerment perspective and the implications of these views on various areas of SUI. We discuss each of these domains with regard to differences relating to the educational and empowerment perspective.

**Table 1.** Educational and empowerment perspective in different domains.

Domain	Educational Perspective	Empowerment Perspective
Theoretical background	Pedagogic and didactic theories, pedagogy of the oppressed, lifeworld orientation	Human rights, disability movement, empowerment theories, political background
Role and tasks of institutions of higher education and universities	Improving education via SUI, developing criteria for responsible SUI	Overcoming exclusion and marginalization
Areas of implementation and role of SU	Adapting curricula modules, assessment of student readiness for practice, teaching, assessment, coteachers	Including service users in research, student admission, work in academic committees
Effects of SUI and their assessment	Student skills, such as increased empathy, reduction of stereotypes and prejudice	Degree of involvement, ladder of participation

Note. SU=service user; SUI=service user involvement.

## ***Theoretical background***

Educational and empowerment perspectives are rooted in different theoretical backgrounds. Although the educational perspective naturally turns to pedagogic theories, the empowerment perspective is rooted in human rights and empowerment theories. We examine each of these in turn and discuss their differences and similarities.

### ***Theoretical background of SUI from an educational perspective***

From an educational perspective, SUI in SWE is theoretically seen as a means for improving teaching and training; consequently, the student perspective is at the center of attention. A broader theoretical discussion of how SUI fits into adult education or higher education has been rarely attempted. We first try to present an overview of theoretical background that has been discussed as justification for SUI in SWE from an educational perspective.

As one possible theoretical framework of SUI in SWE, Gutman et al. (2012) propose placing the work with SUs in SWE in the context of the work of Freire (1998). For Freire, education is intricately linked to the pursuit of social justice. In the context of his critical pedagogy, learning is understood to be a process in which the development of critical consciousness of social reality is central; out of this consciousness, a chain of reflection, implementation and activities, and further reflection develops. An additional feature is the integration of academic knowledge with experience through processes of dialogue. At the center of this dialogue is the problem of where and how people stand in relation to society. Critical pedagogy always views teaching and learning processes through the lens of power discrepancies and inequality.

A further strong theoretical orientation for the inclusion of SUs to improve education is the lifeworld orientation described by Hans Thiersch (Grunwald & Thiersch, 2009). This reflects one of the central theories of social pedagogy, a perspective that is particularly influential in German-speaking countries. The concept has its roots in critical-hermeneutic pedagogy. Social work and social care with a lifeworld orientation support everyday coping patterns in the struggle for a successful daily life. The concept stresses the need to understand and support clients in leading their daily lives. It is of great importance for social workers to know about the subjective perceptions, needs, experiential world, attributions of meaning, perspectives, networks, and resources of clients, and moreover, for them to use these as the starting point for delivering services. (Grunwald & Thiersch, 2009). It follows that differentiated and detailed knowledge about the lifeworld of SUs is also necessary, as well as the skills to communicate with clients as equals to obtain this knowledge.

This elementary theoretical approach in social pedagogy is taught widely, at least in German-speaking countries, and the importance of understanding the subjective experience of SUs to successfully conduct social work is uncontroversial. Nevertheless, this paradigm has until now not been reflected in university educational structures (with the exception of the United Kingdom); instead, the focus has been on academic knowledge as the only domain relevant to social work qualifications.

### ***Theoretical background of SUI from an empowerment perspective***

From this perspective, SUI is above all viewed as having the paramount aim of involving SUs as comprehensively as possible in SWE and thereby to make a contribution to their own mobilization, empowerment, and development. This empowerment is to be achieved on as many different levels as possible.

The discourses in this perspective are strongly guided by the philosophy of the disability movement, in which the demands and requirements for self-determination and self-definition are succinctly expressed in the slogan “Nothing about us without us.” The empowerment perspective places the involvement of SUs in the context of social movements that have the aim of deconstructing existing social constructions of disability, mental health problems, and youth, and to find new answers to these topics and incorporate them in the systems of higher education and training

(Kirwan, 2013). The involvement of SUs in SWE is positioned in the context of the debate on inclusion and the social model of disability that addresses the barriers impeding inclusion as a source of problems for excluded people. It is exactly these barriers that SUI in SWE addresses and seeks to deal with (Warren & Boxall, 2009).

As a consequence of these considerations, the ensuing epistemological discussion has focused on the significance assigned to different forms of knowledge, their position in a possible hierarchy of knowledge, and the ways that knowledge is generated. A project group commissioned by the United Kingdom's Social Care Institute for Excellence (Pawson, Boaz, Grayson, & Long, 2003) has worked out an alternative concept to the hitherto accepted gold standard model, which is based on the assumption that randomized, controlled studies provide the strongest evidence base. Many authors have referred to the findings of the institute's working group (e.g., Gant, 2012; Gupta & Blewett, 2008; Humphreys, 2005). For a practice-oriented science and profession like social work, this means questioning the hierarchy of knowledge and proposing a contrasting system that denies the existence of such a hierarchy, proposing instead that there are merely different sources of knowledge that are pertinent for determining what body of knowledge is relevant for practice and education in social work. Service user knowledge based on firsthand experience and reflections on intervention is regarded as an equal to organizational and research knowledge.

In the interplay of these sources of knowledge that can contribute to SWE, the particular knowledge of the SUs is accorded an exceptional place and significance, according to Gupta and Blewett (2008): It is more than just the representation and legitimation of SUs' viewpoints and voices. The acceptance and involvement of the SU perspective has played a decisive role in the development of an emancipatory theoretical conceptualization of social work, its tasks and role (Gupka & Blewett, 2008).

In the same vein and following Foucault (Gordon, 1980), Humphreys (2005) argues that knowledge and power are closely linked and that this fact is "at the political heart of a profession" (p. 797) with implications for who can speak and who holds authority and influence. This is especially true of social work which, according to Humphreys (2005), has always suffered from "insecurity about the nature of its foundational knowledge" (p. 798).

### ***Role and tasks of institutions of higher education and universities***

These two perspectives imply differences in the ways universities are perceived and which functions and tasks they are assigned in connection with SUs. We explore each of these in turn.

#### ***Role and tasks of universities from an educational perspective***

In this perspective, universities are seen above all as educational institutions responsible for giving students the best possible qualifications. Thus, reflections on ethical and power aspects of SUI are paramount. Because students and their development are the major target from this perspective, it must be made clear that SUs are neither harmed nor exploited (e.g., Duffy, Das, & Davidson, 2013; Skilton, 2011). Common themes from this perspective are (a) the questions of whether the SUI approach in SWE is justifiable (b) which risks or dangers for SUs are potentially inherent and how should these be dealt with, and (c) what conditions are necessary to make the SU's contributions meaningful.

A central requirement in this discourse is to clarify the roles of SUs. Universities should draw up a kind of profile containing details about what is expected from the SUs to enable them to fulfill their roles responsibly. Moreover, it is essential to investigate whether the SUs can actually fulfill these role expectations effectively (Skoura-Kirk et al., 2013). Furthermore, responsible SUI includes a requirement on the part of the academic community to ensure that academics reflect on their use of language and terms (jargon) to not marginalize or humiliate SUs (Skilton, 2011). Another important topic that has to be discussed is confidentiality (Kirwan, 2013). Students and service users alike have to be clear about what and how much they want to share with each other.



Moreover, the question of which service users are being addressed by SUI projects is highly relevant. Skoura-Kirk et al. (2013) point out the danger of selecting certain SUs to avoid uncomfortable points of view. In addition, is there not also (and equally) a responsibility to ensure that students receive, for example, appropriate assessments and feedback from SUs in the interests of quality assurance? As a consequence, all selection criteria, including any political implications, should be transparent.

Further, there are discussions that concentrate on specific vulnerabilities that individual SU groups may have. These include, for example, minors in youth welfare work (Leonard et al., 2015), users in palliative care (Agnew & Duffy, 2010), or victims and survivors of political conflict (Duffy, 2012).

### ***Role and tasks of universities from an empowerment perspective***

At the center of this approach is the question of how SUs can be meaningfully empowered and how the unequal power relationships SUs are involved in can be restored and rebalanced, not only in the academic system but also in social work practice. In this process, higher education institutions are assigned a central role in overcoming exclusion.

From an empowerment perspective, universities are often described and characterized as institutions that by erecting certain barriers primarily support the interests of those who are part of the university system. This viewpoint describes how the basic rules and *modus operandi* of the scientific industry and its procedures for generating knowledge with its notions of validity, reliability, stringency, accuracy, and peer review tend to support, defend, and strengthen the still dominant conceptions. Academic standards and requirements of objectivity tend to represent the interests of researchers rather than those individuals whose lives are being researched. Under these conditions it is rather improbable that no matter how proactively SUs assert their position they will be accorded much recognition by the academic system if they advocate views that contradict the academic mainstream (Beresford & Boxall, 2012). Similarly, Basset, Campbell, and Anderson, in Warren and Boxall (2009), point out that although such institutions of higher education frequently lay claim to the notions of freedom of thought, speech, learning, and research, in fact, they are more accurately characterized by their hierarchical structures, pecking orders, and an exaggerated and institutionalized feeling of being the experts. At least in our Western societies, universities and other institutions of higher education claim for themselves an exclusiveness in the generation of knowledge in society because of their possession of the so-called right methods for acquiring and generating knowledge. However, if we view these methods as channeled by vested interests and as instruments for repelling *disagreeable* influences, it becomes only too clear that new systems of generating and ordering knowledge into hierarchies need to be conceived.

An important consequence of these analyses of power relationships in higher education institutions is that SUs should be involved in the academic system as organizations. Involving SUs individually has often meant that traditional and dominant theories and concepts of disability are perpetuated. Thus, in this context, a collective approach to participation is being called for which addresses institutionalized barriers and access difficulties (Beresford & Boxall, 2012). Basset et al. () analyzed the access difficulties and barriers faced by SUs in the university system. They identify 10 university-specific access difficulties and propose diverse strategies for an accepting and sensitive involvement of SUs in SWE, which is based on appropriate preparation and provides adequate conditions for the target groups.

### ***Areas of implementation and role of the SU***

As can be expected, the areas in which SUI approaches are implemented and the roles and tasks of SUs in each area tend to vary between these two perspectives. Although the educational perspective places its main emphasis on involving SUs in academic teaching, the empowerment perspective

places more emphasis on structural, organizational, and research aspects. We examine each of these perspectives in turn.

### ***Areas of implementation and role of SUs from an educational perspective***

Studies and reports in this area are often empirical in nature. Project descriptions regularly contain evaluations that concentrate on students' success in learning and include ethical reflections that were touched on in the section "Role and Tasks of Institutions of Higher Education and Universities." Although there is quite an impressive variety of creative examples of the meaningful incorporation of SUI into existing educational programs (or changing these programs by SUI), only a few are mentioned here. Methods reported in the literature include complex approaches such as problem-based learning (Green & Wilks, 2009), special versions of the World Café (Terry et al., 2015), and role playing (Duffy et al., 2013). Furthermore, completely new pedagogical approaches have been developed such as "spending 24 hours with people who use services and family carers" (Gee, Ager, & Haddow, 2009, p.691) and "speed mentoring in teaching and learning" (Leonard et al., 2015, p. 666). As shown later, additional studies and reviews not only describe learning effects but also mention problems encountered in the implementation of SUI among students (Irvine, Molyneux, & Gillman, 2015; Robinson & Webber, 2013; Tanner, Littlechild, Duffy, & Hayes, 2017). A number of publications provide detailed reflections on ethical aspects of SUI in this context (Duffy et al., 2013; Skilton, 2011).

As mentioned earlier in the discussion on the role and tasks of universities, in every SUI project it appears crucial to consider the exact roles of the SUs and what tasks are associated with these roles. This includes evaluating the specific characteristics as well as responsibilities of the role. Skoura-Kirk et al. (2013) make it a requirement that the role of an SU should be clearly defined as trainer and thus advocate its professionalization.

When questioning academics who thought the main objective of SUI was to improve teaching, Webber and Robinson (2012) concluded that it would be preferable to aim for a consistent involvement of a relatively small group of users and carers throughout all the phases of the curriculum. This type of instruction promotes the development of the SU into the role of consultant or partner.

### ***Areas of implementation and role of SUI from an empowerment perspective***

From an empowerment perspective, universities are not merely seen as places for acquiring education and qualifications and thus places for imparting knowledge; instead, and especially in later publications, they are seen as places for generating knowledge (Warren & Boxall, 2009). The requirements for involvement thus reach beyond merely imparting knowledge; instead, they extend to the selection of knowledge from the preexisting literature to the production of knowledge and also to research (Beresford & Boxall, 2012). As an example from the mental health sector, Beresford and Boxall (2012) assert that biomedical theories and concepts dominate in dealing with mental health illnesses and disabilities, with a clear underrepresentation in teaching and practice of conceptualizations, such as the recovery model, that place social factors at the center of attention.

One issue that has been discussed frequently and to some extent, controversially, is representativeness, that is whether the SUs involved in SWE are typical representatives of service users of certain areas. Molyneux and Irvine (2004) argued that these concerns might not be relevant because their personal experience, which is likely to be at least similar for SUs in these areas, constitutes their legitimacy and role. Even more important, these concerns should not prevent higher education institutions from implementing SUI approaches. Thus, this question of representativeness can be answered in the following way: All people who are affected by or threatened with marginalization should be included in the emancipatory process of empowerment.

In their survey of academics, Webber and Robinson (2012) found that this group of educators saw the main objective of SUI as the empowerment of SUs to pursue the aim of challenging the traditional power discrepancies between SUs and carers and the system. They emphasized two key criteria: (a) the importance of offering all SUs the same access opportunities to SUI in SWE and



(b) ensuring that universities do not adopt selection procedures that favor certain user groups on the basis of particular sets of abilities that might make them seem more suitable than others. This type of SU can be described as a *professional user*, with unambiguously negative connotations.

### **Definition and assessment of effects of SUI**

As can be expected, the educational and empowerment perspectives focus on achieving different effects, which are assessed by different methodologies and instruments. Successful SUI from an educational perspective improves student's skills, whereas successful SUI from an empowerment perspective is characterized by improved participation of SUs.

### **Effects of SUI and their assessment from an educational perspective**

Although there have been a number of articles on the involvement of SUs and their carers in SWE, assessments of their efficacy are prone to a number of limitations. As McLaughlin et al. (2016) pointed out, "The evaluations though, tend to be module/workshop-specific and, except for Levy, which covers a 3 year period, tend not to be longitudinal. There is also a bias within these articles of being primarily qualitative" (p. 865).

In their review of effects of SUI in SWE, Robinson and Webber (2013) included 29 studies that present SUI projects and report the effects of SUI on students and SUs. Their first conclusion is that the majority of the studies are based on self-report, whereas only three studies report changes in attitudes and behavior. The perceptions of the different stakeholders regarding SUI are nevertheless overwhelmingly positive, although those of the academics tend to be less enthusiastic than those of students and service users. Similarly, in their review of studies, Tanner et al. (2017) also conclude that the effects identified thus far can be assessed as overwhelmingly positive and summarize them as follows: Service user involvement (a) provides greater insights and awareness of the perspectives of people on the receiving end of services, (b) challenges stereotypical views of service users and carers and recognizes their strengths, (c) develops greater empathy with service users and carers, (d) sees people in the context of their families and environments, (e) develops better communication skills, and (f) creates links between theoretical learning and practice.

Tanner et al. (2017) also report that criticisms of SUI from a student perspective are rarely mentioned; those cited in the literature include various concerns such as lack of diversity in contributors, worries that service users might be distressed, and an overemphasis on negative experiences. It has also been noted that service user contributions are described as too professional and sometimes too anecdotal.

The positive effects reported by SUs include (a) an increase in confidence and self-esteem, (b) the feeling of being valued as respected partners, (c) satisfaction from improving the quality of future social workers, (d) transcending the victim role, and (e) developing skills and abilities that may open up future work or other opportunities. The challenges facing SUs are partly practical (payment, poor access and transport, inadequate training and support), but questions about the status and appreciation of experience-based knowledge are also raised (Tanner et al., 2017).

Only one study investigated the extent to which university social work graduates were actually able to transfer the knowledge, competences, and values gained in the context of SUI to their social work practice, and which factors could be identified that facilitated or hampered this process (Tanner et al., 2017). The students were questioned up to 6 months after graduation and could all provide concrete examples of how the contributions of SUs and carers had directly affected their social work practice. Most aspects that were reported related to the work practice of former students, whereas some reported organizational change that they attributed to SU influence. The issues that were reported most often related to day-to-day experiences with punctuality, quality of communication, and so forth (Tanner et al., 2017).

### ***Effects of SUI and their assessment from an empowerment perspective***

As discussed earlier, effects of SUI from an empowerment perspective should mostly relate to an improvement of SUs' participation. However, it is less clear how these effects can be assessed. One important and very frequently cited model and instrument of analysis in the context of empowerment, which describes the degree of involvement, is the ladder of participation: This ladder is intended to help explore and elucidate the extent to which SUs are involved. A variety of different models exist, all of which more or less draw on or are derived from Arnstein's (1969) ladder of participation as a model of citizen participation. In Arnstein's eight-step model of manipulation, therapy, informing, consultation, placation, partnership, delegated power, and citizen control, the extent of involvement is measured in the sense of opportunities to exert influence and power. The principles of this model have often been borrowed and transferred to SUI in SWE, for example, in Hickey and Kipping's (1998) four-step model of information and explanation, consultation, partnership, and user control. Similarly, Tew, Gell, and Foster's (2004) four-step model consists of no involvement, limited involvement, growing involvement, and collaboration partnership. Nevertheless, a difference between the latter two models is found in the last step: SUs have acquired more power in comparison to academics in Hickey and Kipping's final level, whereas Tew et al. postulate a partnership as equals as their final level.

A somewhat different perspective is provided by Chambers and Hickey (2012, p. 7), even though the extent of involvement and, hence, a focus on power remains the central determinant of their categorization scheme. They suggest an integration continuum with the poles "systemic SUI" and "piecemeal SUI." In their view, systemic SUI means that service users are involved in each and every step of education, in designing and in delivering courses, and in student selection, assessment, and evaluation. Although this model is very well known and has been cited in various articles, as far as we can determine, there have not been any systematic or comparative studies investigating SUI with particular reference to its effects on the ladder of participation

### **Conclusions and recommendations**

The two main perspectives of SUI in SWE described here demonstrate different views of SUs and academics and show that depending on the perspective different questions and theoretical conceptualizations become relevant. To gain a better understanding of the underlying processes, we analyzed and presented these perspectives separately. With regard to theoretical background, we found a number of differences between the two perspectives that have direct consequences for the understanding of the roles of service users and the tasks of institutions of higher education. Also, desired effects differ between an educational and an empowerment perspective. In the following, we show that these perspectives are not mutually exclusive, and we discuss implications of these findings for the development of concepts that should be transparent and incorporate a balanced view of these perspectives.

In planning SUI projects, all relevant stakeholders and their aims should be described in detail, and the means to assess these different perspectives, aims, and progress toward these aims should be spelled out clearly. Examples are the extent to which participation is realized in the various areas of the curriculum and which specific educational aims are targeted for students. The institutional setting should be described in detail also, with regard to positive developments and the resistance that institutions usually present. This should include criteria for choosing SUs (SU groups and individuals), their role, preparation, access, professional confidentiality, and last but not least, appropriate remuneration. Universities should make these conditions and prerequisites transparent and have them available in written form. Committed university lecturers and universities should join to formulate standards for SUI in SWE, and they should campaign for an acknowledgment that responsible use of SUI requires additional resources. As long as there is little valid knowledge on the outcome of SUI, criteria focusing on structural and process quality (e.g., qualification and supervision of SUs) have to be developed and implemented.

With regard to outcome criteria for SUI approaches, differences between the two perspectives should be taken into account: Although from an empowerment perspective SUI is successful if SUs move up the ladder of participation in as many areas of teaching as possible; from an educational perspective, it is considered successful when students learn to deal with complex issues. A balance between the empowerment and educational perspectives is highly important to counter attempts at functionalizing either SUs or students.

To the best of our knowledge, there have been no contributions until now that have shown whether or in what way greater involvement of SUs along the ladder of participation leads to improved learning outcomes in students and vice versa. Thus, studies should be conducted that can show changes in students' and SUs' attitudes and behavior. One such example is reported in Cabiati and Raineri (2016), who examined students' attitudes with an adapted version of the Attitudes to Mental Illness Questionnaire before and after a one-day meeting with service users and were able to show a reduction in students' stigmatizing attitudes. Studies such as this one could help universities and SUs justify the approaches that should or should not be further pursued.

In spite of the differences between the two perspectives it should be noted that both perspectives share a paramount goal: changing social work practice for the benefit of SUs. In particular, social work practice should be tailored to the needs and expectations of SUs. These attempts must be seen in the context of contributing to the development of an inclusive society.

## Notes on contributors

*Marion Laging* is Professor for Social Work and Vice Dean at Esslingen University of Applied Sciences. *Thomas Heidenreich* is Professor for Social Work and Vice Dean at Esslingen University of Applied Sciences.

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