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Developing Quality in Personal Social Services

Concepts, Cases and Comments

European Centre Vienna

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This book is about the challenge of introducing business-originated concepts of quality assurance, personal social services are currently confronted with all over Europe. Undoubtedly, the new orientation towards a more business-like approach in social welfare settings will raise professionalism, “client-orientation” and controlling (instead of mere inspection). There is evidence, however, that the specificities of personal social services are not always taken into account if it comes to introducing market values and mechanisms. Due to this development it becomes essential to promote more adequate criteria for quality standards in the very field of personal social services. The challenge is to maintain a certain standard of service provision while at the same time reconsidering the preconditions for defining quality. This will imply the search for a consensus between allegedly diverging approaches, i.e. between their different basic concepts, aims and standards.

Given the social and economic context within which these developments are taking place, the focus of the contributions is on their critical assessment in different European countries. An overview is given about national developments in the areas of care for older persons and other social services. The contributors from Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, and the UK look at how and by whom quality is defined and what challenges the actors of the traditionally mixed economy of personal social services are meeting. Empirical evidence about user involvement and satisfaction is given but also theoretical reasoning about the impact of business approaches on a “public good”. Thus, the book tries to fill an important gap in practice, research and policy-making concerning personal social services and quality issues.

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