

Editorial

This issue is dedicated to the outcomes of the research project “Poverty and Shame: Perspectives and Practices Concerning Anti-poverty Measures in a Global Context” and funded by the Research Council of Norway. Erika Gubrium and Sony Pellissery, partners on the project, present a series of articles with emergent findings from five cases of service provision interactions between antipoverty measure providers and recipients, namely in China, India, Norway, Uganda, and the United States. The project focused on professional practices at the level of everyday interaction and the impact of service delivery on those receiving antipoverty measures. The article authors are especially focused on two issues: first, if antipoverty measures cause deep feelings of shame or may be “shame proofed,” and second, if they mitigate or stimulate feelings of dignity.

During the past two decades, social quality research has been restricted to a set of (objective) conditional factors of social quality (socioeconomic security, social cohesion, social inclusion, and social empowerment) with the application of social quality indicators. This restriction causes confusion. The outcomes are necessary but insufficient for determining the extent of social quality experienced in daily circumstances at a specific place and time. Additional (subjective) constitutional factors are also a condition sine qua non for obtaining insight as to the extent of social quality experienced (in terms of personal human security, social recognition, social responsiveness, and personal human capacity).

As Steve Corbett has suggested, the rise of populism in the Western Hemisphere as a powerful movement for supporting very right-wing politics is not understandable without a consideration of the level of the subjective factors. This is especially the case with regard to the grievances, opinions, and feelings that have been systematically ignored by governments, mainstream parties, and the media (Corbett 2016: 14). This topic is elaborated further in the new “Post Brexit Declaration on Social Quality in Europe,” recently distributed online and within the context of the UK decision to leave the European Union. The new declaration serves as a warning to other EU member states of the risks of Brexit and as a reminder to progressive opinion in Europe of the unacceptable levels of inequality and environmental degradation, caused by, among other things, the dominant neoliberal perspective within the EU (Walker and Corbett 2017). The EU thus far underestimated the significance of the constitutional factors for social quality.

The relevance of this thematic issue lies in its orientation toward these subjective aspects. According to the introduction by the guest editors, the question of “shame” refers to an individualized sense of powerlessness, as well as to one’s inability to control



the circumstances that prevent one's functioning according to prevailing norms. This has a strong affinity with the constitutional factor of "social responsiveness," with reference to the openness of groups, communities, and systems. It is linked to the process of self-realization in the interactive setting of biographical development. The concept of dignity, serving as a possible antonym for shame, has a strong affinity with the constitutional factor of "social recognition," which refers to respect and dignity. It is mainly related to processes of self-realization in the interactive setting of societal development and the world of daily life (Van der Maesen and Walker 2012: 58).

This thematic issue, with its focus on essential feelings of people, may stimulate social quality research to really take on board this important aspect of daily circumstances. As has been described, "the (subjective) conditional factors are the starting point for the processes that lead to social quality—the essential foundation of social life that determines the capacity of individuals to engage social actors subject, in turn, to the (objective) conditional factors" (Van der Maesen and Walker 2012: 90).

References

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- Walker, A., and S. Corbett. 2017. "The Post Brexit Declaration on Social Quality." *IASQ*, 8 March. <http://www.socialquality.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/The-Post-Brexit-Declaration-On-Social-Quality-In-Europe.pdf>.