Where academia and policy meet: A cross-national perspective on the involvement of social work academics in social policy, Oxford University Press, 2017

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Where Academia and Policy Meet: A Cross-national Perspective on the Involvement of Social Work Academics in Social Policy.
John Gal and Idit Weiss-Gal, eds.
Bristol, Policy Press, 2017, pp. xv + 281, ISBN 978-1-4473-2019-7 (hardcover), £70.00

When social work academics and practitioners operate against 'a background of a profession under siege' (p204), as UK social work is described in this text, there is a tendency for entrenchment, for a focus on the specifics of practice and place and of how we do things here. A book which helps widen that view to include international perspectives and policy is to be welcomed.

Gal and Weiss-Gal have edited a text which brings together contributions from authors in twelve countries ranging across the globe, including Europe, the Americas, Australia, South Africa and China. The authors are brought together with two very specific aims; to identify the degree and characteristics of social work academics' policy engagement in different countries and to identify what motivates, facilitates and provides opportunities for policy engagement. To achieve those aims the book reports on a cross-national comparison of twelve countries where data was collected and analysed using identical questionnaire based research tools, to create a series of country based case studies which can be compared to shed light on the role of social work academics in policy.

Each of the twelve chapters focus on one country, beginning with a short but fascinating account of that country's welfare system, social work profession and pattern of social work education. This is followed by a description of method, findings and an interpretation and discussion of the data. The editors provide an introduction to the project and a final chapter reflecting on the case studies and what they describe as the social work 'academia-policy nexus' (p243) which is the focus of the volume'. Although following the same format the chapters do differ, reflecting the various sample size and the amount and quality of data collected alongside the analysis presented. Where the chapters are most effective is when the authors are able to consider the data from individual perspectives on for example facilitators for policy engagement, within the context of the specificities of the time and place in which they practice.

Gal and Weiss-Gal argue that a commitment to social justice is at the core of social work with a consequent expectation that social workers are involved in the policy processes. Furthermore social work academics are expected to have a threefold impact, on the profession they teach, the field in which they research and the society in which they live. As this study shows acting on these expectations and value commitments is difficult. Cross-nationally academics who were surveyed saw their main role as impacting on the social work profession rather than wider society, and although seeing affecting social policy as a major role, engagement at the level of policy is modest with actual policy impact even harder to achieve.

This text is essentially a research report, albeit a very rich and multi layered report, and in that sense it raises the question of who the book is for and who will it most benefit. Students

of social work and social policy will benefit from the accounts of welfare systems and social work delivery that begin every chapter. They will also benefit from an example of a research design well executed. To get the best value from the book however requires some prior knowledge. This is most apparent in the introductory chapter, where the succinctness of the discussion of academia and policy, coupled with the denseness of referencing, can make engagement with the ideas presented a little difficult. For academics seeking to develop their involvement with policy and increase their impact, alongside expanding their world view, studying the analysis of motivators, facilitators and opportunities presented in the text could pay dividends.

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