

A case of institutionalization of local mental health networks: the Belgian therapeutic projects

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Since the end of the 1980s, a new vision of mental health has been developed under the influence of the Belgian "Psychiatry" permanent work group of the National Council of Hospital Facilities. This new vision adopts a holistic perspective which takes into account the diversity of factors at stake and aims to give a central place to the patient and his or her needs. The principles on which this innovative vision lies fall within an international trend (among other developed in the WHO declaration of Helsinki) which aims to put the patient at the centre of the system but also in field actor practices.

This vision is made concrete in a restructuring of mental health care sector in terms of care circuits and networks, which necessitates an "interinstitutional" and interdisciplinary cooperation. With this approach the old bureaucratic model of organising a sector would be replaced by a post-bureaucratic one marked by notions such as networking or negotiation. The "Therapeutic projects", organised by a Royal Decree in 2006 after a long term decision making process, constitute the experimental phase of this new mental health care concept. It is a wide ranging pilot project which aims to achieve, by the end of the three-year experimental phase, the definition of guidelines and the implementation of norms as regards mental health care circuits and networks.

The purpose of this contribution is to (1) give a presentation of the mechanisms which have lead to the creation and implementation of the therapeutic project. Using a case study method, we will also (2) analyse the functioning of a therapeutic project, showing at the one hand the tensions between the philosophy of the project (network functioning and flexibility) and the technocratic temptation developed by the administration which funds them, and, at the other hand, we will also examine how the "traditional" psychiatric rationality is able to maintain its central position in a context where other fields and actors should emerge.

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