When social protection and emancipation go hand in hand: towards a collective form of care

Isabelle Ville

In the second half of the 20th century, all welfare states introduced social policies to help disabled persons. Yet since the 1970’s, social protection devices have been the object of two criticisms. Disabled persons movements and the disability studies denounce both the underlying domination and paternalism and the forms of segregation that fuel the dependency and passivity of the beneficiaries of such devices. More recently, neoliberal activation policies have been trying to restrict access to these devices, believing that because they encourage people to take advantage of national solidarity, they constitute an obstacle to self-determination. These two lines of criticism converge to consider forms of protection as forms of alienation; they associate emancipation with the exercise of autonomy and the defence of human rights on the one hand, and with individual accountability on the other.

By revisiting certain forms of protection related to French public policies – such as the introduction of social minima – and to civil society (associative work in particular), and by referring to different empirical studies, I will attempt to shed light on the conditions for forms of social protection that are sources of emancipation. I will show that they take place in arrangements that combine local care between peers with financial support from public policies. In this way I hope to make a modest contribution to Nancy Fraser’s project to forge “a new alliance between social protection and emancipation”.