

6 - Paradoxes of Polarization and Post-Politics in the Nordic Welfare Regimes and Services.

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Democratic governance involves grounded social institutions and functional arrangements, but also contingency and political re-articulations – thus, difference and division, antagonism and polarization, are predicaments of a democratic polity (Stavarakakis 2018: 49). The Nordic welfare state aims at counteracting societal divisions through inclusive welfare policy and universal and accessible welfare service provision (Vike 2018). Thus, public welfare services can be conceptualized as ‘a commons’, referring to the complex of systems, practices and conflicts connected by a commitment to life beyond self-regulating markets. Neoliberalism – as rationality and form of governance – is ‘multi-vocal’ and articulates differently in various contexts. Yet, it has challenged and changed the welfare state through logics at odds with for example egalitarianism and universalism. The welfare state is currently conceived of as in ‘crisis’, and welfare policies are increasingly surrounded by turmoil that produces tight sequences of reforms in the name of ‘sustainability’ driven by a logic of ‘evidence-based’ innovation. The current political and institutional landscape is characterized by rising polarization and insurgent grass root resistance, yet, also by a consensus-mode through which neoliberal rationality is supported across all political party lines. This situation may represent a *disjuncture*, a triple movement overlapping Polanyi’s description of the structural properties of the ‘double movement’, yet, it is also different because of fragmented counter-hegemonic projects in the era of post-politics narrowing ‘the political’ (Fraser 2017; Mouffe 2019).

The aim of this panel is to scrutinize paradoxes of polarization and consensus-making as they articulate in public welfare services within changing welfare regimes shaped by the ‘triple movement’ of the forces of ‘marketization’, ‘social protection’ and ‘emancipation’ (Polanyi 1944; Fraser 2017). In order to theorize and operationalize the concept of polarization, this panel makes an analytical distinction between ‘societal polarization’ understood as the formation of (new) social divisions, and ‘political polarization’ understood as the increasing ideological distance between poles where the middle ground is abandoned and policy-making takes a new form and/or is made difficult.

Silencing labour in welfare production.

Anette Fagertun

The public welfare systems of Europe are today portrayed as being in constant crisis, resulting in unsettling processes of political crisis management and relentless state interventions and reforms. Innovative policies in Norway are influenced by global changes in the political economy, and one of the current and dominant political logics of all Western health care reforms is 'co-creation' (samskaping). Healthcare is a strongly politicized field, yet, Fagertun explores what she conceives of as a recent trend of de-politicizing. Through a critical policy analysis, inspired by Carol Bacchi's (2009) formulation of "what is the problem represented to be?", Fagertun shows that labour is rendered outside of current healthcare policy frames and that this has implications for how 'service innovation' is practiced in the municipalities. When the actual work and bodies of producing agent are invisible in the hegemonic policy imagery, this indicates a devaluation of care and a silencing of labour. Women dominate the municipal healthcare services, and the work here is feminized. Thus, the silencing of labour also has gendered implications. The more general argument is that although public healthcare is fiercely debated and massively regulated, one of the effects of the ongoing naturalization of neoliberal capitalist relations is a broader de-politicization and de-basing of labour.

**What is in the “co” in co-creation of welfare services?
Chasing the moving targets of “the private” and “the market”
in discourses of co-creation in older people’s care in Norway.**

Frode F. Jacobsen

After decades of New Public Management (NPM), with focus on efficiency and sustained efforts at treating public service organizations as if they were private companies, the idea of “co-creation” has emerged. Co-creation, emphasizing collaborative interaction in networks and partnerships between state, market and civil society, seems to capture some newer trends at national and local government level in many OECD countries including Norway (Torfing et al. 2019). While NPM treats all types of organizations in a homogenizing way, a belief that a plurality of different and unique actors together may be capable of improving the public sector services has gained terrain (ibid.). This development has been coined under New Public Governance (Osborne 2006), where a culturally constructed crisis (Roitman 2014) legitimizes the quest for a plurality of actors, including private actors, in welfare services in general and in older people’s care in particular (Meagher & Szebehely 2013). However, who the private actors and the “market” of older people’s care “are” and how they are represented in public discourses, is a complex matter where the different parties in working life and different political parties engage in a rather polarized discourses.

Paradoxes of polarization in the child welfare services: an analysis of children's participation practices.

Tone Jørgensen and Mari Husabø

Children's rights and the concept of "the child's perspective" have become important in public child welfare in Norway and internationally (Skivenes & Strandbu, 2006). The child welfare services (CWS) increasingly involve children as 'partners' in decision making processes, signalling a social and cultural shift in understanding children as 'beings' rather than 'becomings' (James and Prout, 1997). At the same time, a polarized public opinion about CWS' child centred practice is expressed, both in parents organising grass root movements to reform the child welfare as well as in rulings to protect family life and parental rights in the European Court of Human Rights. Following Howarth & Stavrakakis (2000) perspectives on discursive hegemony, this situation may illustrate competing discourses involved in a struggle for the power of representation in child welfare policies. This paper analyses the ongoing polarization within the field of child welfare through a case concerning practices for participation for children in low-income families in contact with the CWS and the Labour and Welfare Services (NAV). We argue that one implication of a one-sided rights-based approach to child welfare services reinforces an individualization of families' social needs.

The new elderly of the new welfare state.

Heidi Haukelien

Elderly care represents perhaps the most central symbol of the universalistic Nordic welfare model. Massive expansion of welfare services took place over a period from 1950/60th until around 2000. Compared to other welfare states, elderly care in Norden and Norway played an exceptional central role. However, during the last couple of decades we can identify shifts in the public discourse on elderly care from a cultural model of older people in need for care towards a cultural model of older people as active, rehabilitative and in search for autonomy – as agents who continuously manage the responsibility for maintaining their own independence. Parallel to these shifts the increasing number of old people is pictured as a big wave threatening to undermine the sustainability of the welfare state. Based on an analytical understanding of the significance of cultural models in institutional change, this paper investigates how these changes might be implemented in the elderly care services without an in-depth political and professional discussion about what kind of welfare regime the population wants and needs. Elderly care is an excellent prism for understanding regime change because it constitutes the most comprehensive and demanding form of service and forms (some of) the core of the universalist welfare schemes.