

A care-crisis in the women-friendly welfare states? Gender (in) equality dynamics in the Nordic welfare states

Interest

The aim is to discuss the status of care work in the Nordic welfare states in light of the neo-liberal turn in welfare politics, *and* moreover, what this means for gender equality and the sustainability of the welfare state. The discussions will develop around the questions of whether it is justified to talk about a care crisis in the Nordic welfare states and, if so, what the characteristics of this crisis are, to what extent there are similarities and differences between countries, and what the major areas of concern are in regard to gender equality and welfare state sustainability. The concept of a 'care crisis' has been used for over two decades now by feminists (Hochschild 1995; Knijn & Kremer 1995; Saraceno 1997). The crisis has been related to the decline of informal, family based care and the withdrawal of the welfare state. Recently it has been linked to the relationship between productive and reproductive work and the predominance of a particular form of capitalism, financialised capitalism (Fraser 2016). While the literature speaks rather generally about a care crisis, the aim of the network is to contextualize this discussion in the supposedly gender equal welfare states: Norway, Sweden, Finland and Denmark.

But why at all discuss care crises in the Nordic welfare states in which state responsibility for care services and the professionalization of care work are already of major importance? This has enabled women to be mothers, daughters, workers and citizens, and to increase the status of care work. These issues do not only pertain to gender equality, but the very sustainability of institutional and social arrangements that foster inclusive and just societies (Borchorst & Siim 2008; Dahl 2010). Yet, four issues are of concern. First, during the last decade struggles have evolved around care work as calls for recognition and demands for better pay and working conditions (Dahl 2009, Hansen 2016). Moreover, changes in public health, elderly and child care policies in combination with active labour market policies have put pressure on the work and family life balance (Bjørnholt et al. 2017). Second, key gender inequality problems are very persistent e.g. the gender pay gap and male dominance in leadership. Third, the importance of paid labour for the financing and organisation of the welfare state has also passed on a male work norm making unpaid work less invisible as work *and* valuing care work less than productive work (Bjørnholt & McKay 2014; Borchorst & Siim 2008). Fourth, today, both the Nordic welfare state model and the Nordic labour market model are exposed to major challenges (e.g. Poutanen. & Kovalainen 2014; Hansen 2016). Economic inequality has been rising over the last decades, and there is a general tendency of scaling back universal entitlements. Moreover, outsourcing and privatization of care work in combination with work migration and increase of insecure employment have put a pressure on workers' rights and living conditions (e.g. Hansen 2016). All with gendered, classed and ethnic consequences. The question is how these developments will influence care, including its valuation, quality and gendered distribution. This question is of utmost importance for the sustainable development of the welfare state, gender equality in working life, and the good life for all citizens.

The aim of the network is to develop new knowledge by bringing together our expertise to discuss this in an edited book and at a seminar for policy and decision makers as well as to develop the basis for a joint research application. We will discuss fundamental theoretical, empirical and methodological questions taking the starting point in if we can talk about a care crisis and if so, how is the Nordic version of this, and what are the variations between states? Included in this are questions related to the understanding of reproductive work. Moreover, we will discuss the availability of data, and, how to employ a critical, feminist social scientific methodology towards studying these questions. We will focus on the status of reproductive/care work and the following aspects: the good life of care-workers, care-givers and care-receivers; the relation to productive work and to long-time economic sustainability; the possibilities to care for one-self, for households and for communities; equal pay and fair income, and individual and collective power resources representation and social cohesion; and the politics of care, how different ideas and political constellations have shaped the Nordic care regimes

Instead of women-friendliness we prefer to speak about gender equality. This is due to awareness of intersecting inequality dynamics *and* on the relationality of gender *as well as* new theoretical contributions (e.g. Borchorst & Siim 2008). One of the most important of these comes from Nancy Fraser (2003), who introduces the normative ideal of parity in participation. This ideal involves three dimensions of social justice: redistribution, recognition and representation. Kathleen Lynch (2014) adds a fourth dimension: relational social justice, paralleling the affective turn in feminism.

Organisation

- Academic meeting, November/December 2017, Turku/Tampere. Development of framework, presentation of research interests, and discussion on content of book.
- Academic meeting, August/September 2018, Roskilde University in combination with Graduate summer school in corporation with Center for Gender, Power & Diversity (CKMM)
 - a. Keynote by Nancy Fraser (New School, USA) on the relationship between productive and reproductive work (together with graduate summer school)
 - b. Presentation and discussion of first drafts of chapters, Nancy Fraser as discussant
 - c. Lectures and sessions for Nordic and international students
- Academic workshop, January 2019, Oslo. Presentation and discussion of crosscutting themes and concluding chapter. Discussion and planning of research applications.
- Dissemination conference, November 2019, Roskilde University. Conference for policy-makers and decision makers. Presentation of book, dissemination workshops on policy suggestions as well as discussions on future research. In corporation with Center for Gender, Power & Diversity (CKMM)

Lise Lotte Hansen (first applicant) will conduct the network and also be main responsible for the book and the dissemination conference. Christina Bergqvist, Margunn Bjørnholt and Anne Kovalainen (the three co-applicants) will take part in the organisation of the network meetings in particular the meetings in Oslo and Turku/Tampere. They will be co-responsible for the

development of the framework, the progress of the discussions, and the development of the basis for a joint research application. The applicants contribute with different perspectives on the care crisis discussion (please see additional information).

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