

Call for papers:

Free choice - challenges and perspectives for European welfare states

Special issue of Social Policy & Administration (no.6, 2009)

Delivery of welfare state services and income transfers varies from centrally steered and managed in some countries to highly marketized welfare states in others. Changes have taken place over the last years making the boundaries between public and private welfare less distinct than in used to be.

Rhetoric behind changes has been elements such as:

Empowerment of users

From user to consumer

New Public Management - split between financing and provider

A more effective public sector.

All this has been part of the changes over the last 25 years around in Europe and within distinct different welfare states such as the Nordic welfare states (especially Sweden and Denmark) and a liberal welfare regime country like the UK. In Southern Europe and Eastern Europe this has also been part of the ongoing development of the welfare states.

However, more generally putting the consumer first, using a market metaphor has been an important aspect of implementing choice in development of welfare states. More choice has then often been linked with a wish to have increased competition between welfare providers, including areas with only public delivery of welfare, e.g. ensuring intra-organisation competition. Competition has been introduced in various ways including the use of per-user funding, vouchers and tax-credits. Supporting informal provision of care has also been part of the development. Establishment of free choice has only rarely been connected to analysis of transaction costs and other risk involved in establishing a free choice. This could, among other things, also be the increased stress on individuals when having to make choice.

Free choice has further been linked to the discussion on privatisation of welfare and how to make the public sector more efficient. A higher influence of users it has been argued would imply a more efficient public sector as the personal should be more responsive to the users needs.

This issue will describe and analyse recent changes with regard to free choice in the welfare states in Europe. Based upon this develop an understanding on how free choice have an impact on different welfare states around in mainly Europe. Furthermore, the analysis will be around whether implementation of free choice might have different impact in different welfare areas, especially with a focus on service welfare. It will also probe into the impact for the employees and their role in a choice welfare state.

Contributions should at least cover areas such as the UK, Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden and Denmark, as those countries have witnessed a clear increase in the use of choice. At least one Southern European and Eastern European contribution will also be included. The contributions will have to their background in various academic disciplines making it possible to cover different understandings of the choice revolution in welfare states. A few papers might be commissioned in order to ensure the balance of the issue.

A hypothesis to analyse throughout the issue is whether different welfare models have been influenced differently by the choice revolutions in welfare states.

Articles could revolve around one or more of the following topics:

- 1) Has the changes been argued in line with more effectiveness through efficient market provision or empowerment of users?
- 2) In which areas has free choice been implemented and what type of choice has been introduced?
- 3) Has the choice varied between different areas of the welfare state, including when choice have been expanded in order to increase market or civil society's role in the development.
- 4) Has free choice been connected to change in organisation and/or financing of the welfare benefits and services?
- 5) Who has gained and who has lost due to the changes - equity considerations
- 6) Any evidence on the administrative cost and other consequences of choice

7) Expected future trends in choice in the welfare state

Deadline for papers will be the 1st of February 2009. Abstracts are very welcome, and questions on how a paper can fit in can be directed to bgr@ruc.dk

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