

## EDITORIAL

### New perspectives in disability research?

The aim of this issue of *SJDR* is to bring new perspectives into disability studies and research. This intention was important within the Rokkan Centre's disability research project 'Identity politics among disabled people and public service provisions in a new landscape' (2005–2008), funded by the Norwegian Research Council's Welfare Programme. In May 2007 we ran an international PhD workshop in Bergen with the heading 'New perspectives in disability research?' as one of the activities within this project. Some of the lectures and PhD essays from this workshop have been transformed into articles – and they are presented in this special issue. In the workshop we focused on concepts such as Globalization, Technologies, Governmentality, Performance, Identity, Aesthetics, Culture, Bodies and Gender. The aim was to provide a fresh outlook on key questions within contemporary disability research. From various theoretical perspectives (political science, social anthropology, philosophy and sociology), and through in-depth analysis of empirical cases and theoretical innovation, we explored common questions: *What is the relation between experiences (bodily, socially) and identification? What is the relation between multiple individual identities, cultural diversity and political recognition of group differences? How are differences and hierarchies within groups handled? And how does this affect public policy and service provision for disabled people?*

In order to address this, we explored the dynamics between politics of identity and identity politics, as a necessary dual perspective. The concept of *identity politics* is generally used to signify minorities' and other groups' politics aiming at obtaining recognition and a larger share of prestige and wealth. This we call a bottom-up perspective. Research into the identity politics among disabled people includes self-understandings, experiences, practices and fronting in everyday life, as well as in more public circumstances. *Politics of identity* labels identity politics occurring in a wider institutional sphere, including states and regional and global organizations. This is a more top-down perspective referring to public policies on how to deal with diversity and recognition. Both perspectives serve as background knowledge in order to analyse the *meeting point between disabled people and public service provisions and arrangements*, and hence generate insight into how barriers – new and old, hidden and openly exposed – are toiled with at different levels. *Is there a move towards a non-discriminatory practice? How do disabled people's identity politics challenge established pictures and the welfare state provision of services?* By connecting studies of identity politics and service provisions, we will be able to explore the interface where different expectations, discourses and ways of understanding are actualized and put at stake.

The following articles deal with aspects of these key questions theoretically and/or empirically. In the first article, Mårten Söder explores the present tensions within disability studies on a theoretical level. He particularly discusses *intersectionality* and *juridification* as recent trends that should be, and increasingly are, taken seriously. In the next article, Ingunn Moser discusses the role of the body and *embodying processes*

that take place after a road traffic accident. Her account is inspired by feminist and social studies of science, technology and medicine, and approaches bodily realities as emerging in practices and as an ongoing open process of mattering and embodying. *Dynamic recomposition* is one of her key concepts. In 'Identity politics by design', Bodil Ravneberg discusses how the users of assistive technology and the markets and the public service provision for this technology work in Norway. In particular, she explores the significance of *aesthetics* and individual *design* within assistive technology. She argues that this is a heavily neglected issue in the public service provision policies. In Karen Christensen's 'In(ter)dependent lives' the author confronts *independence*, one of the key slogans of our time, with empirical analysis of how this is actually practised by individuals in everyday life. Using a cross-national case study on *cash-for-care* for disabled people in the UK and Norway the article points at two different social political independency discourses and suggests that neither of them cater for *the praxis of interdependence*.

The last three articles come from PhD candidates who participated at our workshop, representing sociology, social anthropology and philosophy. In 'The significance of ICT in disabled youth's identity negotiations', Sylvia Söderström investigates the significance of the use of the internet among Norwegian disabled youths, and how age, gender and disability intersect. Both mechanisms of exclusion and of inclusion become apparent when disabled youths use information and communication technologies. In 'Embodied space in the making', Cecilie Høj Anvik explores the various ways visually impaired or blind people craft their own space through practice. This is *space making* beyond sight. Hearing, smell and touch become important senses, and important to understand if one shall capture the complex and diverse ways in which bodies relate to and experience the spatial world. Finally, in 'Deaf or deaf?', Patrick Kermit discusses the dichotomous problem inherent in understanding deafness in relation to paediatric cochlear implantation (CI). The assumption is that there are two mutually exclusive conceptions of d/Deafness – a medical/biological as opposed to a cultural/social constructed one. Much of the ongoing *bioethical discourse* on CI relates to this. In the end, Kermit proposes that whether or not cochlear implants represent something useful or something harmful to deaf children depends on how the interaction between the different notions of d/Deafness is implemented and understood.

All the articles in this special issue shed important light on key topics and challenges within disability research, and I am happy to present it to an international readership. My thanks go to the authors of the articles, *SJDR's* editor, and to all the qualified reviewers involved. It has been a pleasure to work with you on this joint contribution. Enjoy!

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