

Disability and citizenship. Politicians' views on disabled persons' citizenship in Finland

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Active citizen participation has today become increasingly highlighted in political debates worldwide. The aim of this article is to analyse the impact of so-called active citizenship ideas on disability policies in Finland by scrutinising how people with disabilities, disability policies and disability policy actors were constructed by MPs in relation to the parliamentary debate about the Government Report on Disability Policy in 2006. The results show that people with disabilities were seen as a group with equal rights to societal participation. Furthermore, the role of municipalities was viewed as crucial for realising this goal through its provision of support and service. However, there were also signs of a shift towards active citizenship insofar that measures for facilitating employment among disabled persons were emphasised while some claims requested disability benefits to be made more reciprocal.

Keywords: disability policies; active citizenship; participation; parliament; qualitative content analysis; Finland

Introduction

As a defender of social citizenship, the Nordic welfare state sought to guarantee its citizens individual and standardised social rights in order to enhance wellbeing and to facilitate participation in society. During the last decade or so, the notion of active citizenship has become increasingly highlighted around the world as a new conceptualisation of the contract between state and individuals. As such, it has also come to challenge the idea of social citizenship. Allegedly, what the welfare state now needs is not only a more pluralised facet of welfare provision in order to meet more diversified demands, but also a 'new' balance between rights and obligations as well as a general decree for citizens to actively participate in society (ct. Johansson and Hvinden 2007). Whereas many of the welfare state reforms conducted in Finland during the last two decades – most notably pension and unemployment benefit reforms – can be seen as more direct responses to this activating creed (ct. Nygård 2007; Timonen 2003), there is less knowledge as to the impact that active citizenship has had on disability policies.

This article seeks to contribute to the overall understanding of the politicisation of disability in contemporary welfare states by discussing how disability policies have been legitimised on the Finnish parliamentary arena. More specifically, the article analyses the parliamentary debate relating to the presentation of the Government

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Report on Disability Policy in 2006. The report, as well as the debate about it, can be seen as a major turning point in the development of Finnish disability policy, and has also been influential on subsequent policy developments in this field. Parliamentary debates are fruitful study objects since they play an important role for the channelling of policy claims as well as for the recognition of rightful service providers and policy clientele. Therefore such debates can offer fruitful insights into the political construction as well as the legitimization of disability policies. The overall idea in this article is to analyse the impact of different ideas concerning citizenship and the responsibility for welfare policies in general and disability policies in particular (see Table 1). Moreover, the views of the individual as well as her/his social rights also differ between the two perspectives. On the basis of this distinction, three analytic questions can be posed: a) how were people with disabilities portrayed as a group, b) what social rights were seen as essential for disabled persons, and c) to what extent was the responsibility for fulfilling these rights delineated to public authorities, the private and third sector or individuals?

The article makes two contributions to the literature on the politicisation of disability policies. First, it illuminates and exemplifies the ways that people with disabilities are constructed within a country-specific socio-political discourse. Second, it argues that such discourses are largely premised by welfare-institutional legacies, which in this case means that the disability discourse has been quite resistant to ideas that aim at reinterpreting, or even circumscribing, the role of the state in social policy.

The article is organised in the following way. In the next sections we focus on citizenship and disability policy. First we look at how the concept of citizenship has changed over time, and then we discuss the current state of disability policies in Finland and the effects of changing citizenship on these policies. After this we move on to the empirical analysis: the fourth section addresses the data and method and is followed by a presentation of the findings. Ultimately, in the last section the findings are drawn together and discussed.

Changing conceptualisations of citizenship – from social citizenship to active citizenship?

As noted by Turner (1993), the concept of citizenship is a widely debated topic. Partly this is a consequence of the concept's attachment to territorial ambitions of the nation state as well as to distributive concerns for those (not) being a part of that ambition. In a Finnish judicial setting, citizenship can be said to denote an ascribed or acquired status of a person in relation to a certain country that on the one hand includes civil, political and social rights, and on the other hand includes certain responsibilities – even though many of the rights and responsibilities are not necessarily linked to the status of official citizenship (Medborgarskapslag [en: The Finnish Nationality Act], 359/2003).

In the early post-war period, the concept of social citizenship came to represent a notion of justice defined in terms of need, insofar that every person, regardless of birth, merit or class was seen as entitled to community aid as an extension to his or her status as citizen (cf. Parker 1975). To Marshall (1973), the notion of social citizenship referred to a certain number of guaranteed rights that covered:

...the whole range from the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage and to live the life of a civilized being according to the standards prevailing in the society. The institutions most closely connected with it are the educational system and the social services. (Marshall 1973, 72)

Marshall (1973) emphasised that social rights should be universal and linked to everyone's equal status of citizens, rather than employment or social class. Nor should social rights be stigmatising. Also Titmuss (1979), to whom universalism was seen as superior to selectivism, particularly emphasised the state's responsibility for guaranteeing the social rights for all. He did not want the responsibility to be laid on the individual or the market, since he saw especially the latter as being incapable of considering the needs of small and vulnerable groups in society, for example people with disabilities (Johansson 2008; Titmuss 1979). According to Marshall (1973) and Titmuss (1979), the fulfilment of social citizenship would make everyone better secured as to the incidence of social risks. In order to be eligible for social benefits, citizens were expected to work for their living, to do military services and to pay their taxes (Johansson 2008).

Notwithstanding its once impregnating role as a normative fundament for the welfare state, the notion of social citizenship has today become increasingly criticized for putting too little weight on citizens' responsibilities in relation to their rights. Social rights have also sometimes been seen as too generous which makes people less willing to work for their living (Jensen and Pfau-Effinger 2005; Johansson 2008). The criticism has led to a number of new policy perspectives on the welfare state, as well as reconfigurations of the concept of citizenship. One example is the so called Third Way in Britain in the 1990s – a paradigm that emphasised that citizenship should require duties in exchange for rights (Giddens 1999, 2000; Johansson 2008; Óskarsdóttir 2007). Another example is the so-called social investment paradigm (cf. Esping-Andersen et al. 2002; Jensen 2010). In its quest to reconcile social policies and notions of equality with economic growth and higher levels of employment, this perspective has put its emphasis on enabling (or activating) social policies, investments in human capital as well as more reciprocal ways of interpreting both welfare entitlements and citizenship (e.g. Jensen 2010; Newman and McKee 2005; Lister 2004; Lister 2009; O'Connor 2005).

However, alongside these 'top-down' pressures on classical notions of social citizenship, there have also been 'bottom-up' pressures emanating from processes of growing individualism, demographic changes and claims for higher levels of welfare democracy and higher individual-level expectations as to the quality and flexibility of services (Johansson 2008; Johansson and Hvinden 2007; Óskarsdóttir 2007). These pressures have a lot in common with some of the imperatives of the communitarian tradition, which call for more individual or local modes of governance, moral duties of individuals and community responsibility (e.g. Etzioni 1993; Sandel 1998).

As a result, we today witness a trend towards a more activating notion of citizenship according to which citizens are to an increasing extent made responsible for their own welfare and social security (Johansson and Hvinden 2007; Kotkas 2010; Óskarsdóttir 2007). The boundaries between a 'traditional' notion of social citizenship and a 'modern notion' of active citizenship are however not exact, nor are these two entities mutually exclusive or even equally meaningful in all country settings. Rather it seems more fruitful to discuss these entities as ideal types or, put differently, as two characteristic ways of conceptualising citizenship. It can also be

argued that ideas pertaining to active citizenship have had a more profound impact on some areas of the welfare state than on others. As an example, unemployed Finns are today expected to actively seek jobs and comply with activation plans in order to receive unemployment assistance (ct. Nygård 2007).

In Table 1 the two ideal conceptualisations discussed above are juxtaposed with each other in a Nordic setting. Albeit overtly simplified, this constellation can serve as a heuristic tool for a content analysis of policy debates on citizenship since it highlights some characteristic features of the two ideal types of citizenship that we have chosen to anchor our analysis in. According to the first ideal type, the social conceptualisation of citizenship *à la* Marshall or Titmuss, we can expect the role of individual agency and responsibility to be downplayed in relation to the state, whereas this relationship is more likely to be more fluid and diversified in an active conceptualisation of citizenship.

As to the nature of social rights, whereas the social conceptualisation of citizenship tended to entail universal social rights with a redistributing ambition in mind ('equality in outcome'), the active conceptualisation views social rights in a more conditional way. Furthermore, this conditionality has often been coupled with ambitions of achieving equality in terms of opportunity. Finally, as to the role of the state, the social conceptualisation of citizenship generally took a positive stand on extensive state intervention while modern and active conceptualisations have tended to downplay old-style state intervention in favour of more pluralistic views on welfare provision.

Table 1. A presentation of the main characteristics of social citizenship and active citizenship.

	Social citizenship	Active citizenship
The role of the individual	The individual is a receiver of state guaranteed service and support, minor or no responsibility expectations on the individual. Social benefits are the premier source of income for people with disabilities.	The individual shall be given responsibility and options, and actively participate in decision-making in society as well as in matters concerning oneself. Paid work is the premier source of income for people with disabilities.
The design of the social rights	Universal, contractual rights. Redistribution and equality in outcome.	Conditional, 'reciprocal', rights. Activation (enabling) and equality in opportunity.
The (state's) responsibility for the disability policy	Emphasis on state-guaranteed individual rights to service and support for people with disabilities. Scepticism towards alternative solutions and service producers within the disability policies.	Emphasis on individual rights to employment and state-provided support for employment as well as services and support for disabled persons. Openness towards alternative solutions and service producers within disability policies.

Activity in the light of recent disability policy changes in Finland – a changing paradigm?

It is estimated that approximately five per cent of the Finnish population today experience some sort of a mild disability whereas the kind of disability is more severe in around one per cent of the cases (Government Report on Disability Policy 2006). In Finland the definition of disability and the distinction between severe and mild disabilities are not based solely on medical grounds such as diagnosis, but primarily on the individual's long-term need of help and support for the daily living (Räty 2010). Within the Finnish judicial framework, disabled persons, especially the ones with a severe disability, enjoy a somewhat more protected status than many other groups as they are seen as being in need of extra support and tailored services in order to be able to take part in society (e.g. Tuori and Kotkas 2008, 269). Therefore, some of the statutory social rights directed to the severely disabled are so-called subjective rights, i.e. more compelling forms of social entitlements such as the right to personal assistance, transportation service and some aids for daily living. Subjective rights can be seen as judicial 'trumps' insofar they guarantee that a claimant, which fulfills the legal criteria for a social entitlement, cannot be denied the entitlement on the grounds of insufficient public means (Räty 2010). Despite the existence of nationally binding legislation, the actual implementation of the laws is performed by municipalities. Since the legislation is also to some extent open to interpretations and the municipalities have varying resources, there is variation within the country when it comes to disability policies in practice (Räty 2010; Government Report on Disability Policy 2006).

One of the main criticisms against Marshall's notion on social citizenship was that he failed to acknowledge that different groups in society stand unequal when it comes to their chances of actually being capable of fulfilling this idea (Johansson 2008; Dwyer 2004). For example, although employment plays a significant role for the fulfilment of active citizenship it is often difficult for disabled persons to find suitable jobs. Despite the fact that the employment of the disabled is supported through – for example – wage subsidies, employer compensations for special arrangements caused by the hiring of disabled persons, vocational rehabilitation and so called social enterprises, people with disabilities often find it harder than others to get access to the labour market and to remain employed. Partly this problem may relate to the existence of discrimination or environmental barriers, partly it may be a result of insensitiveness or rigidity in the public support system regarding disabled people (e.g. Barnes and Mercer 2005; Dwyer 2004; Vick and Lightman 2010). Although both national legislation and international regulations prohibit discrimination due to disability, there is still discrimination hidden in the institutions of society (Kumpuvuori and Högbacka 2003; Kumpuvuori and Scheinin 2009).

There is today a shared ambition among NGOs acting on behalf of disabled persons as well as the Finnish government to enhance the resources of the disabled in order to help them to actively participate in society. Therefore, questions concerning disability have received more attention in the past few years and there has been a development in the field of disability policy – both nationally and internationally. In Finland, one recent central turning point was the Government Report on Disability Policy in 2006 that signalled a more progressive view on disability policies. Not only was it the first of its kind in Finland, it was also a consequence of changing

international regulations and paradigms in relation to disability. The NGOs were also involved in the making of the report and afterwards several of them made public statements on it as well.¹ One central impetus was the prohibition on discrimination of people with disabilities in the 1995 statute for a new Finnish constitution (1999/731). Other impetuses were the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam and the 2004 Finnish Non-Discrimination Act (Lag om likabehandling 21/2004). Moreover, the Government programme of Premier Minister Matti Vanhanen in 2003 had acknowledged a need for a report on disability policies (Government Report on Disability Policy 2006). When the Government Report on Disability Policy was finally presented in 2006, it was already known that the Council of Europe would present its Disability Action Plan and the UN its Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities later that same year. The Finnish government signed both the UN convention and the optional protocol in 2007.

Some of the most important legislative changes so far were made in 2009 when the Act on Services and Assistance for the Disabled (Lag om service och stöd på grund av handikapp 380/1987) was partially renewed. The main changes here concerned the making of the right to personal assistance a subjective right and strengthening the importance of individual service plans (Räty 2010; Ministry of social affairs and health 2009). Finally, in 2010 the Finnish government program, Finland's Disability Policy Programme 2010–2015, was launched. This program aims to enhance the status of people with disabilities and it is also crucial in the process of ratifying the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The programme brought with it a proposal of 122 changes to be made in the coming years. One of these changes, which came into force in 2011, was the right for disabled people living in institutions and service houses to freely choose their official residence.

The legislative changes have improved the opportunities for people with disabilities to actively participate in the decision-making concerning themselves through so-called individual service plans, which are made in co-operation between municipalities and clients. According to the renewed legislation, people with disabilities not only have now a subjective right to personal assistants, they are also primarily expected to act as employers of their assistants (Räty 2010; Ministry of social affairs and health 2009). These legislative changes can be seen as following the same pattern towards active citizenship (cf. Kotkas 2010). It begs the question, however, whether these reforms should also be seen as pathways to a more reciprocal interpretation of disability rights and whether they signal a shift in welfare provision for persons with disabilities that leads away from the public sector towards increasing the responsibility of individuals and private or third sector actors.

According to Dwyer (2004), disability policies in the Nordic countries have thus far been characterised by a low incidence of recommodification or workfare. Contrary to, for example, unemployment benefit receivers, disabled people have generally been regarded as the 'deserving poor' in that they are themselves innocent as to the fate that has befallen them (cf. van Oorshot 2006). However, when it comes to the UK, Dwyer (2004) argues that a trend towards active citizenship in relation to people with disabilities has been visible for some time. Allegedly, this trend has focussed on enabling disabled persons to be active citizens through, for example, anti-discrimination regulations and reforms concerning personal assistance. When it comes to employment, the view of the disabled as the 'deserving poor' has to some extent actually made it more difficult for them to enter the labour market. The

reforms of social benefits have therefore aimed at both enabling and encouraging employment through the use of ‘carrots’ and ‘sticks’.

On the basis of this discussion it seems relevant to ask whether recent disability policy developments in Finland represent a shift towards a paradigm characterised by active citizenship. One way of answering this question is to turn to the 2006 Government Report on Disability Policy and scrutinise the political discourse that served as foundation for these developments.

Data and method

The aim of this article is to study the political construction of disability policies in Finland through a qualitative content analysis of the parliamentary debate concerning the Government Report on Disability Policy in 2006. As discussed in the previous section, this report, together with the debate about it, can be seen as an important turning point in disability policy in Finland. Therefore, an analysis of the parliamentary discussion concerning the actual report can offer fruitful insights into the political construction of disability policies. Not only are opinions and criticisms of the MPs conveyed through the debate, it also tells something about the overall framing of disability policies. The opinions expressed in the plenary debate can thus be said to have had a strong influence on both subsequent disability policies and the everyday lives of people with disabilities.

The debate analysed in this article was held on 16th May 2006 in the Finnish parliament. 48 of the two hundred Finnish MPs participated in the debate and there were a total of 90 speeches of varying length. What is especially interesting about this debate is that disability policies were discussed from several points of view, as a question concerning society as a whole, not merely as a question concerning social and healthcare. Moreover it did not only focus on the current state of disability policies, but also on the future and on the need for legislative changes. Admittedly, there have also been subsequent debates concerning disability policies in parliament, but these later debates have been far less extensive than the debate in 2006. Similar to the report in 2006, the recent Disability Policy Programme 2010–2015 also has a broad perspective on disability policy, but there was no specific debate about this programme in parliament.

Qualitative content analysis was used for analysing the data consisting of the official transcriptions of the speeches made by the MPs in the plenary debate. The transcriptions analysed here are available on the home page of the Finnish parliament, the Eduskunta. Qualitative content analysis is a rather straightforward method and a suitable way to study what is being said, in what ways and in what context (Eskola 2007; Mayring 2000; Tuomi and Sarajärvi 2002). It should be remembered that speeches held in the parliamentary arena follow certain formal structures, like time limits, and they are likely to be influenced by the politicians’ own pre-understandings of disability and as well as their party affiliation and parliamentary position (party in office/opposition). In this debate however, there were no conspicuous differences in opinions as to gender or party affiliation to be found. Moreover, the actual political situation in the country is likely to reflect upon the debate.

The analysis was carried out during the autumn of 2009. To begin with, a number of readings were made in order to receive a sense of the whole. Then a closer reading followed as well as the actual coding of the debate. The coding process followed both

an inductive and a deductive path (Hsieh and Shannon 2005). First, the content was coded in an inductive manner as to its reference to each of the three research questions, e.g. all text fragments relating to disabled persons as a group were selected into one category. Sections in the text, i.e. identifiable meaning entities that could be whole paragraphs or only specific sentences relating to each research question, were picked out. Thereafter, these text fragments were further coded into subcategories and analysed in a deductive manner as to the presence of themes relating to a 'classical' notion of social citizenship and to a 'modern' notion of active citizenship (see Appendix 1 for closer instructions). Throughout the analysing process the transcribed debate itself was a key for checking up the contexts for each selected text fragment. In the next section of this article, the findings of the analysis are presented along with text excerpts, i.e. quotes from the MPs, in order to substantiate and illustrate our interpretations of the constructions. Since the debate was held in Finnish we have translated the quotes from the MPs' speeches into English.

Findings

The analysis focused on three questions: how were people with disabilities portrayed as a group, what social rights were seen as essential for them, and to what extent were public authorities, the private and third sector or individuals seen as responsible for fulfilling such claims. Moreover, the analysis aimed at assessing the extent to which these three aspects of disability policies were permeated by elements from the active citizenship perspective (cf Table 1). In this section we present the results from the analysis.

As to the first research question, the analysis produced two major insights. Firstly, there was a strong accentuation of equality in terms of citizenship rights and services related to these rights. Secondly, the overall construction of people with disabilities was found to be somewhat inconsistent; to some politicians this particular group was depicted as a homogenous group, to others it was considered as a group with miscellaneous types of individual needs.

This claim for equal citizenship referred to the relation between citizens in general and people with disabilities, but it also had bearing for the relations within the latter group since the capacity to face the needs of people with disabilities vary between different municipalities in Finland. Not only should all people be treated in an equal way, they should also be granted equal human and social rights. Another expression in this vein was the claim that disabled people should be guaranteed equal opportunities to participate in society, and especially to participate in the decision-making processes concerning themselves. In this respect, the rights to necessary services and support were seen as essential since this was not only seen as a way of guaranteeing equality and participation but also consequently as a way of counter-acting stigmatisation and discrimination.

As to the construction of people with disabilities, there was no general agreement on the way in which this particular group was described or delineated, although some common features were found in the way that the politicians talked about this group. By and large, the categorisations used in the debate were found to be rather arbitrary and in some cases even inconsistent. For example, although the MPs stressed that every disabled person's individual needs should be put first when deciding on disability services and support, they themselves still mostly referred to people with disabilities as one undifferentiated group. Among the different subgroups, people

with learning disabilities in particular were seen as more dependent of support from the society, and when it came to people with mental illnesses, the MPs could not agree on whether they should be considered as disabled or not. Moreover, a distinction could be found between people with disabilities that were viewed as dependent and those who were seen as active, or potentially active, citizens. An example of the latter view is presented in the following citation.

When we are talking about disability services we should remember that it is not patients we are talking about, but humans that possess capacities to lead a normal life. A weakened ability that originates from cognitive, mental or physical impairments can be strengthened by providing suitable assistance so that the majority can live independently, go to school, get vocational education and participate in working life. (Pehr Löf, Swedish People's Party)

The notion of people with disabilities as active or potentially active citizens, related most squarely to their employment. People with disabilities were not only seen as willing to work and earn their own living; they were also seen as a potential labour force resource. However, it was also pointed out that people with disabilities still have a lower educational level, a lower employment rate, and that there are many obstacles for their employment. Therefore many MPs highlighted the importance of improving the opportunities for education and employment for people with disabilities. In this regard, the greatest needs for improvement were believed to exist in the vocational education and training system as well as in the higher education system. Similarly, also the wage subsidy system for employers was seen as being in need of an update.

Regarding the social rights for people with disabilities – our second research question – we found that the right to personal assistance in particular got a lot of attention in the debate. The MPs emphasised this right as a way of improving the possibilities for people with disabilities to be more independent and to participate in society. Therefore, it was unanimously requested that this should become a so called subjective right, an operation which would cancel the means-tested element of this benefit and make it independent in relation to the funding capacity of municipalities. As we know today, the legislation on this point has changed and nowadays personal assistance is a subjective right for people with disabilities who are in repeated need of help necessary for their everyday life. Another request relating to this question was the claim that people with disabilities should primarily be the employers of their own assistants. This principle is also included in the renewed legislation.

The right to participate in society as well as in decision making relating to personal matters was highlighted by many MPs in the debate. This was expressed in the debate, for example, like this:

The only way of realising the ideal of equal opportunities for all municipal residents is to give full acknowledgement and recognition to the rights of disabled residents on all areas of life and, above all, in a way that involves disabled people in the preparation and decision-making in matters concerning themselves. (Esko Ahonen, Centre Party)

The right to choose one's assistant was seen as an important aspect of this. In addition, some MPs requested equal freedom to choose one's place of residence. This was seen as especially important for people with disabilities living in institutions or in so called service houses. At the time of the debate, such persons had to remain officially registered as residents in the municipality they came from, and they could

not be residents, or voters, in the municipality where they actually lived. In the beginning of 2011, the legislation changed on this point though. (Lagen om hemkommun, 201/1994; Socialvårdslag [en: Social Welfare Act], 710/1982). An accessible environment, free from barriers and with different forms of information available for everyone was also seen as crucial for participation in society. Many MPs mentioned that everyone should have the right to be heard and understood and to express their will. The importance of interpretation services, alongside aids and technological solutions for communication, were therefore emphasised. There were also claims demanding that service plans should be more judicially binding. This was seen as an important way of improving a disabled person's chances of taking part in personal decision-making since the plans are made in cooperation with the clients. Today we know that the renewal of the legislation has increased the importance of the service plans.

As to the third research question, the question of who should carry the responsibility for disability policies, a clear institutional legacy could be traced in the debate since all of the MPs emphasised that public sector, and the municipalities in particular, should continue to play a leading role in the future. In fact, the MPs seemed to take the leading role of the public sector more or less for granted. However, many of the MPs pointed out that most of the municipalities tend to have limited resources, which place them in unequal positions when it comes to fulfilling the principles of the disability service act. Therefore, instead of lessening state responsibility, many of the MPs required the state to take even greater responsibility.

Nowadays the responsibility of municipalities as providers of services is central. If we want to place all persons with disabilities living in the country on the same level as to services, we need to consider whether the responsibility for providing these services should be transferred to the KELA (The Finnish Social Insurance Institution). Without enough subjective rights, we can expect the provision of important and necessary services for disabled persons to vary since the financial situation of municipalities tends to vary greatly. Therefore, we should seriously consider increasing the responsibility of the state in this matter, and KELA, as an example, could be the one realising these services. (Mikko Kuoppa, Left Alliance)

Some of the MPs requested a more clarifying and binding legislation, for example through an increase of the subjective rights. They also pointed out the variations and limitations in the economical resources of the municipalities, and wanted the state to take more of the financial responsibility for disability policy. This was seen as important in terms of guaranteeing equal rights for people with disabilities in the whole country, including necessary disability services, a barrier-free environment and opportunities to education and employment.

The strong accentuation of the public sector's role indicated the presence of a social citizenship perspective. This impression was reinforced by the fact that disabled persons were implicitly portrayed simply as receivers of service and support. In addition, some of the MPs also pointed out that the service and support ought to be equally available for all in need and to remain free of charge. This means that the individual would not be obligated to take part in the financial responsibility. Financial support through social benefits was seen as necessary for covering the expenses caused by disability and for guaranteeing the livelihood for those who are unable work. This in turn would hinder people with disabilities from becoming

discriminated or stigmatised. In fact, some of the MPs reminded that a society should be measured according to how it treats its weakest members.

A few of the MPs showed some scepticism towards alternatives to the public sector as the main welfare provider by arguing that cost-effective thinking does not go well together with disability policies nor for welfare policies in general. Still, a majority of the MPs showed openness towards alternative solutions in their speeches.

...the responsibility for providing services belongs to the municipalities. Private providers of services and NGOs complement public services. However, there are regrettably many regional differences regarding the access to services. The severe financial situation of municipalities and the disparate interpretation of legislation have complicated the situation for disabled persons. In the future we need closer cooperation between different actors than now, especially between service providers. We need to be able to find new kinds of service production. (Riikka Moilanen-Savolainen, Centre Party)

The MPs brought up both the importance of cooperation between different fields of public administration, but they also wanted the clients, the private and the third sector to be a part of this cooperation. In other words, they were willing to consider alternative solutions in addition to public solutions and to involve parallel and complementary service producers for the service and support for people with disabilities such as NGOs. The MPs emphasised the bulk of knowledge and experience that NGOs possess in their role as service producers and advocates of the rights for people with disabilities. It was also seen as essential to involve NGOs, the National Council on Disability as well as local councils on disability in the continuing decision-making process relating to disability policy. The expressions of a positive attitude to a welfare-pluralistic organisation of disability policy that were found in the debate can perhaps be seen as a step towards an active interpretation of citizenship since it not only welcomes alternative solutions and cooperation, but also conveys an implicit ambition to downplay the role of the state.

Except for a willingness to accept not only the third sector, but also the private sector to produce some complementary service for people with disabilities, the MPs still most of all seemed to want to involve the private sector as employers of people with disabilities. They wanted companies to hire more people with disabilities, but at the same time they underlined that this should not be a risk for the employer. Some of the MPs brought up the role of so called social enterprises, while others argued that all enterprises should have equal opportunities to get support for employing people with disabilities. By and large, however, there was agreement on the fact that the employment of people with disabilities needs to be promoted and that the wage subsidy system ought to be renewed in order to make the private sector more willing to employ people with disabilities.

In the debate the MPs, one after another, emphasised disabled people's desire to study and to work for their living and they wanted to see everyone having equal rights and opportunities to education and employment. The strong emphasising of questions concerning employment can therefore be seen as the foremost sign of an active citizenship perspective in the debate. Many MPs argued that there is a strong will among people with disabilities to be able to study and work like everyone else. But even though the questions about employment were discussed in terms of disabled people's rights and desire to work, the MPs did not hide the fact that this would benefit society as well, which is shown in the following quote:

Labour-market integration of people with disabilities is not only fair in terms of their own sake, but it is also important for the whole society both in economic terms and in terms of values. (Leena Rauhala, Christian Democrats)

Consequently, education and employment were seen as the best form of social security and integration in society. But another beneficial outcome would be that people with disabilities would constitute an important contribution to the labour force in Finland – especially in times of fundamental demographic transformations. Not only were people with disabilities seen as an important resource in this sense, their role as future taxpayers was also implicitly accentuated. The ambition to enable people with disabilities to study and to find jobs can be seen as typical for the active citizenship perspective. Seemingly, the mere ambition to improve the chances of participation and wellbeing of persons with disabilities is not enough; this ambition also has to serve a higher purpose in order to be framed as legitimate. In this case, it is framed among the MPs as a social investment, something worth betting on today since it will pay us back tomorrow. Another interpretation is that these statements can be seen as representations of an perspective on deservingness that emphasises the choices that the individual makes and her/his possible wrongdoings, rather than a perspective that emphasises the obligation of society to help the individual regardless of what the causes for help are.

Another sign of active citizenship was found in the fact that some of the MPs suggested an introduction of some form of reciprocity when it comes to the social benefits for people with disabilities. This would mean that the granting of benefits would become dependent on the personal effort of the receiver and bound to some sort of individual responsibility and performance. The social benefits would thereby become more wage-like in terms of requiring an effort from the receiver.

... a sum corresponding to the level of pensions could be used as employment support for disabled persons. A pension is in any case to be paid out to this person, and if one earns somewhat more on top of that, then society can collect Euros in taxes – a simple and cost neutral way to assist in the process of creating employment. (Sari Essayah, Christian Democrats)

As the quote above shows, it was also suggested that social benefits could be turned into wage subsidies for the employers that hire people with disabilities. This would mean that public spending on disability pensions could be used for wage subsidies instead, and by this an increase in public spending could also be avoided. The regulations of wage subsidies and employer compensations for special arrangements caused by the hiring of disabled persons were seen to be in need of an overall update and to make them more flexible. The MPs expressed clearly that the aim for all of this was to encourage and enable people with disabilities to be active in some way, and preferably to be employed in the open labour market. Many of the MPs showed both directly and indirectly that they wanted to see wages as the premier source of income for everyone of working age, meaning that they did not see disability as an (automatic) obstacle to employment.

Another form of active participation in the labour market was also brought up since the MPs wanted to see people with disabilities as employers too, employers for their own personal assistants so to speak. By being the employers themselves they get to decide who they want to hire as assistants, i.e. they can actively participate in the decision-making in matters concerning themselves. In addition to this, and as

mentioned earlier, the MPs emphasized the rights and opportunities for people with disabilities to participate in the decision-making in society in general as well. According to the MPs all forms of service and support for people with disabilities are heading for the same aim as the efforts for employment, that is, to enable people with disabilities to more actively be part of society. All in all the debate indicated primarily the aim of equality of opportunity for people with disabilities, rather than an outcome, and it was also said out loud in the debate:

Through services and support measures, disabled persons should be ensured the opportunity of being placed on the same starting line as the rest, and to be able to function as a fully competent members of society in relation to age, level of development as well as individual capabilities. (Erkki Pulliainen, Greens)

Conclusions

In today's society, the 'classical' notion of social citizenship with the state guaranteeing social rights as a consequence of residence has been increasingly challenged by the notion of active citizenship, according to which citizens themselves are expected to be active for their own welfare and their security against social risks. Employment is an important element of active citizenship, along with being actively involved in society otherwise as well, for example in decision-making by voting.

The results of this article show, however, that although some signs of active citizenship could be found in the debate about disability policy in the Finnish parliament, people with disabilities were largely framed in a way that rests on classical foundations of social citizenship, rather than from an active citizenship perspective. This means that, instead of using an individual perspective on disability that focuses on the individual and medical impairments, the debate leaned more towards a social perspective on disability focussing on the neutralisation of the obstacles that prevent people with disabilities from being fully included in society and that hamper their participation (cf. Barnes and Mercer 2004; Calais von Stokkom and Kebbon 2000; Hughes 1998; Oliver 2004). People with disabilities have thus not been exposed to the same kind of expectations and requirements relating to activity and reciprocity as for example in the case of unemployed people (Nygård 2007), since they are considered not to be blamed for their situation and thus are seen as more 'deserving' of support from the society than some other groups in need.

Interestingly enough though, the debate analysed here suggests, that notions of active citizenship do matter for the political construction of disability policies, but in a more subtle way. It can be argued that the discursive emphasis on equal opportunities, for example in terms of barrier-free environments and different forms of service and support, represents a view according to which the state should be obligated to create such opportunities and also provide sufficient services that enable people with disabilities to fully use these opportunities. But implicitly the discourse also suggests that state responsibility should not stretch beyond this point, or put differently, the notion of disabled people as the 'deserving poor' is upheld to the point that the state can be seen to have fulfilled its obligation to create equal opportunities for all. And from that point on, the disabled people themselves are made responsible for whether or not they, for example, actually get a job.

The government report was an important impetus for the disability policy in Finland, since it framed the question of disability policy as a matter concerning the

whole of society. The recent changes in the disability legislation and the Disability Policy Programme 2010–2015 can thus be seen as a continuation of the path of disability policy as well as the principles discussed in the 2006 parliamentary debate concerning the report. In line with the social citizenship perspective, disability policy in Finland is much about the public sector guaranteeing different forms of service and support for people with disabilities. However, there are also indications of an active citizenship perspective in the disability policy, not least when it comes to the emphasis on the element of enabling through services and support.

Note

1. Public statements can be found for example by The National Council on Disability VANE, The Finnish Association of People with Physical Disabilities, The Finnish Association for Persons with Intellectual Disabilities and The Finnish Disability Forum.

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Appendix 1

Codebook for analysing the debate concerning the *Government Report on Disability Policy 2006*. The excerpts are examples of how the criteria for the two perspectives on citizenship were expressed. It should be noted that some of the excerpts may contain references to more than one criterion.

	Social citizenship	Active citizenship
The role of the individual	<p>Criterion: The individual is a (passive) receiver of, and dependent on, state guaranteed service and support, minor or no responsibility expectations on the individual.</p> <p>Example: 'The client has to have the right to the necessary services he needs due to his/her disability everywhere in Finland. The principle of equality requires that disability must not cause extra costs for the client. The society has to provide the services needed and to compensate for extra costs due to disability.' (Pekka Kuosmanen, National Coalition Party)</p>	<p>Criterion: The individual shall be given responsibility and options, be able to reach one's potential and to actively participate in decision-making in society as well as in matters concerning oneself.</p> <p>Example: '...we should turn our focus on the resources in each person, and strengthen them and provide the best possible conditions. This has to be promoted by this government, and by future governments, so that we can get all people's resources in use, so that young people can study with full potential, get a profession and participate in the labour market.' (Minister for Social Affairs and Health Tuula Haatainen, Social Democratic Party)</p>
The design of the social rights	<p>Criterion: Universal, contractual rights, subjective rights more binding legislation.</p> <p>Example: 'Like already noted, the renewal of the civil rights obligates to develop the services in the way so that the fundamental and human rights are guaranteed for every Finnish person, everyone living in Finland. All this supports that the arrangement of personal assistance should be turned into a subjective right for people with severe disabilities.' (Ulla Anttila, Greens)</p>	<p>Criterion: Conditional, 'reciprocal', rights, 'no rights without responsibilities'.</p> <p>Example: 'Instead of disability pension a disabled person could get some sort of a wage which would guarantee his/her living. The wage would also require working but the paid workers would not cause extra costs for the employer. In this way the employers would find creative solutions for employing people with disabilities. In the working age you would be working, no matter if the work would be controlling one's own daily living or performing tasks with the help of a employment assistant or whatever solutions there is to be found.' (Susanna Haapoja, Centre Party)</p>

Appendix 1 (*Continued*)

	Social citizenship	Active citizenship
The (state's) responsibility for the disability policy	<p>Criterion: The state and municipalities as service producers within the disability policies, scepticism towards alternative solutions and service producers.</p> <p>Example: 'When it comes to the Act on Public Procurement, it is necessary to note the special character of the social- and healthcare services when planning the rules for competitive procurement, because the rules of market economy are not suitable for guaranteeing people's most necessary services and the choice of service cannot be based solely on a financial evaluation but quality should be the most central criteria when getting the services.' (Satu Taiveaho, Social Democratic Party)</p>	<p>Criterion: Cooperation with and openness towards alternative solutions and service producers within disability policies.</p> <p>Example: 'We know that an increasing amount of services are produced in cooperation with for example the third sector; there are many actors, disabled people's NGOs. Still the pressure of the competition legislation is today a threat to the NGO-based service production, for example for the living-, caring- and welfare services provided by the disabled people's NGOs.' (Leena Rauhala, Christian Democrats)</p>