

Editorial

While it still constitutes a modest share of the total welfare services, the extent of personal assistance has grown remarkably during the last decades. For disabled people, personal assistance is seen as a tool of liberation and a decisive instrument to realize their right to control over their own lives. Still, the ideology behind personal assistance is increasingly being debated. The arrangement has been characterized as a contradictory ideological hybrid consisting on the one hand of a social rights discourse with its roots among disabled people and on the other a consumer-based market discourse. While these discourses are regarded primarily as opposites, they have found common ground in personal assistance as a specification of a demand for more individualized provision of services. Personal assistance is today well established in all the Scandinavian countries. However, within a common welfare state model personal assistance appears with both similarities and considerable differences. The arrangement has grown and developed differently in the Scandinavian countries and relate to the ideological discourses behind personal assistance in different ways.

In this edition of the *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research*, different aspects of personal assistance in a Scandinavian context are presented and discussed. The first article ‘Personal assistance in a Scandinavian context: similarities, differences and developmental traits’ gives an overview of personal assistance in Scandinavia. As the title indicates, it presents differences and similarities of the arrangement between Denmark, Norway and Sweden. It raises questions about how the differences within a common Scandinavian welfare state model can be understood and how the personal assistance programmes develop. The second article, ‘Active social citizenship: The case of disabled peoples’ rights to personal assistance’, has as its basis how personal assistance is expressed in legislation. It presents an analysis of personal assistance legislation in the Scandinavian countries based on a theoretical framework on the variations in the concept ‘active citizenship’. From this framework, the complex balance between the strength of rights and activation requirements expressed in legislation is discussed. The third article, ‘The market of personal assistance in Scandinavia: hybridization and provider efforts to achieve legitimacy and customers’, describes how the hybridization of welfare services has resulted in the emergence of a market of service providers for personal assistance in the Scandinavian countries. The providers develop different types of organizational identities and these are analysed by studying their expressed core values. The article ‘Personal assistants – towards solidarity in working relations’ explores personal assistance from the assistants’ perspectives. The article focuses on three theoretical working-life discussions: flexibility, professionalization and co-determination (between service user and assistant). It reveals the specific and inverted form these processes are transformed into by the personal assistance scheme and suggests that they create barriers for sustainable working conditions for the assistants as well as options for developing

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solidarity between service users and assistants. The last article, ‘Empowerment and personal assistance – resistance, consumer choice, partnership or discipline?’ points out how different approaches to empowerment capture different relationships between the state and the personal assistance users. The article distinguishes between empowerment as a form of resistance, as a form of consumer choice, as co-production and as a liberal strategy of dominance in modern society. The concept of empowerment is closely linked to personal assistance. The article shows how the different approaches of the concept run alongside each other in the development of the personal assistance arrangement in Scandinavia.

While Scandinavia is the context for the articles, the knowledge and experiences here, and the tensions and dilemmas in personal assistance illustrated in the articles, are not limited to the Scandinavian welfare state model. In different ways they also have general relevance. Hopefully, this issue will therefore be of inspiration and interest for researchers and others with interests in disability studies and welfare issues.

The authors all represent academic institutions in Denmark, Norway and Sweden. Fruitful cooperation within the Nordic Network of Disability Research (NNDR) is the direct background for the articles. As such, the issue is testimony to the usefulness and significance of networks and meeting places for researchers across the national borders.

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