



Review

Annette Kamp & Helge Hvid (ed.): *Elderly Care in Transition: Management, Meaning and Identity at Work. A Scandinavian Perspective.* Copenhagen Business School Press, 2012

Reviewed by: Karen Christensen, Professor, Department of Sociology, University of Bergen, Norway

Within the last two decades, Scandinavian long-term care has undergone significant changes based on New Public Management (NPM)-inspired ideas in regard to the overall public accountability and the ways of organizing, managing, and monitoring welfare services for older and disabled people. In light of the ageing population which Scandinavia shares with many other Western countries in the world, the discussion of changes and challenges related to elderly care services is of high relevance today. As these changes and challenges are also much discussed in the media, it is important that research-based contributions represent a voice in this discussion too. *Elderly Care in Transition* represents such a voice and is therefore very welcome. The book is designed as an anthology with contributions from different Scandinavian researchers—from different disciplines such as political science, education, and sociology—who joined a research network established in 2008. The shared interests of the network members were twofold, comprising elderly care and working life, the latter in terms of *Management, meaning and identity at work*, as the book's subtitle states. Based on the fact that elderly care currently and not least in the future is dependent on a sustainable workforce in terms of care workers who find it meaningful and attractive to carry out care work on a daily basis, this working life angle contributes to the book's relevance and gives it a focus that helps limit the discussion of how NPM impacts the elderly care sector.

Anthologies are often based on contributions from researchers who have not worked directly together but are selected on the basis of their specific expertise. The fact that this anthology grew out of a researcher network makes it a different kind of anthology. However, this might then also create higher expectations among its readers regarding common ground and consistence throughout the book.

Annette Kamp and Helge Hvid, both affiliated with the Centre for Working Environment and Working Life at Roskilde University in Denmark, are the book's editors, with Kamp additionally contributing two of her own chapters to the book. Kamp and Hvid give the seven chapters of the book a very satisfactory framework by presenting a thorough introduction—a requirement of an anthology—but furthermore also include an interesting concluding discussion about the future of elderly care with options for moving beyond NPM principles, this referring back to examples given in the book's chapters.

In the introductory chapter, Kamp and Hvid map out the issues related to the introduction of private sector NPM principles into the public elderly care sector and its



workforce. They present here the different types of criticism, existing in the literature in this field, on the transformation processes induced by NPM principles: the impact on professionalization of care work, on care ethics, and on the direction the work may take in regard to its welfare recipients, emphasizing in this type of critique a move from care work to bureaucratically steered service work (serving customers). These three perspectives outline the basic and underlying discussions of the book's seven following chapters, with two chapters directly (Chapters 4 and 8) and one partly (Chapter 7) discussing explicitly the issue of professionalization. This issue also becomes a strong example in the book of the ambiguity of elderly care development under the NPM era.

Chapters 2 and 3 fulfill a logic that says that the reader needs an overall understanding of the transformation of elderly care in Scandinavia followed by an introduction to the understanding of different perspectives on the meaning of work within working life. In this sense, both these chapters are ambitious, maybe a bit too ambitious. Chapter 2—assumedly because of its general character—is written by a Danish-Norwegian team: Hanne Marlene Dahl (DK) and Bente Rasmussen (N). It does not cover the Scandinavian countries systematically; it focuses in particular on Denmark and then makes some comparisons with Norway and Sweden, and it says so. However, the chapter is successful in pointing at the mismatch, called “paradoxes,” between what is at the heart of the Nordic model's principles, universalism, equality, and professionalism, and what NPM principles on the other hand are encouraging. This includes deprofessionalization in terms of the Danish “mutual language,” a standardized language for approaching and monitoring peoples' needs, the free user choice scheme (i.e., user's right to choose a public or private provider), the purchaser–provider model splitting the care unit, and the development of a care market through the use of competitive tendering, although the share of private companies is still at a low level in Denmark as well as Scandinavia in general. The chapter is also successful in pointing at the ambiguous rather than clear direction of these NPM-impacted tendencies. Regarding Kamp's chapter (Chapter 3), this gives an interesting and thorough overview of different approaches to work, starting with the classic discussions and then outlining three different perspectives: a critical one (criticizing rationalization and Taylorization), a management perspective (searching for meaning through management and individual participation), and a transformative perspective (pointing at the dynamics of conflicts and negotiations). Although this chapter gives an interesting introduction to approaches to work and also manages to include some relevant discussions from the elderly care literature, it somehow takes the discussion away from the book's main focus on elderly care—and particularly women's (care) work—when being judged in the sense of contributing to the other chapters.

The following three chapters by Andreas Fejes (S), Kamp again, and Betina Dybbroe (DK) then present empirical-based analyses relating to the discussion of professionalization (Chapter 4), the meaning of work (Chapter 5), and more specifically the meaning of work taking into account subjective as well as intersubjective perspectives (Chapter 6). Although these chapters constitute a common theme regarding type of knowledge and meaning related to care work, there are not many cross-references in these chapters. Presumably, this may also be due to the fact that the analytical perspectives and empirical cases are very different and hard to put together while reading the chapters. Fejes presents a discourse analysis of two types of knowledge (abstract scientific and concrete experience based) within a Swedish education program; Kamp presents a work-mean-

ing-analysis in terms of how care workers in Danish home-based care attribute meaning to their work; and Dybbroe goes deeper and presents a psychosocietal analysis of dilemmas for care workers in Danish hospital care, using an extreme but insightful case about a nurse having the responsibility for a dying patient with her relatives around. It is definitely a strength of these chapters, as well as of the two last chapters of the anthology, that the authors use empirical material as a basis for their discussion. But this also puts the focus on the chosen case studies and the reader may wonder why these examples are chosen, in particular the Swedish education program. However, from each of their angles, these chapters make important contributions to the anthology. Fejes questions the well-established understanding of concrete and experience-based knowledge as always being subordinated to scientific knowledge, introduced by the Norwegian sociologist Kari Wærness in the 1980s. Kamp bases the analysis on her earlier theoretical introduction (Chapter 3). She makes the very important but often neglected point that care workers perceive their work as meaningful in spite of the NPM-affected limited time pressures on their work and relationships with the elderly (although she does not mention that this may reduce the critique of NPM implications for the work). Kamp also points at how the home helpers understand themselves as professionals, using, e.g., the example of “being observant,” which means being able to “read” older peoples’ changes, socially, mentally, and physically, but this discussion is not related to the discussion in the previous chapter by Fejes. The contribution by Dybbroe is that deeper psychosocietal dilemmas should be taken into account when analyzing care work; and she criticizes another tradition in Denmark in the welfare services field led by Järvinen and Mik-Meyer for neglecting these aspects, a contradiction of which it would be interesting to know the extent.

The two last chapters of the book make up a couple of interesting final analysis contributions. While Bente Rasmussen analyses the NPM-induced change from a managerial identity based on ethical professional values to a general management identity (which means professionalizing management), Pernille Bottrup and Per Bruhn point to the sector of dementia care and dementia care work in Denmark as an example of a re-professionalization, thereby counteracting the main NPM push toward deprofessionalization, as, for example, mentioned in the chapter by Dahl and Rasmussen (Chapter 2). Rasmussen, in Chapter 7, uses Foucault-inspired ideas about governmentality to show how care worker managers in a Norwegian nursing home and in a home-based care, respectively, meet and take over the manager identity, but differently depending on the context, with the home-based services representing a much more unpredictable and challenging case (never covering the full needs of older people in their homes) compared with the nursing home. The chapter’s point is that the new (general) management identity make them feel and act responsibly—tied not least by their contracts of delivering services within the budgets allocated—and at the same time they maintain a professional management identity, which then puts a high pressure on them as managers, and in particular within the sector of (scarce) home-based services. The last chapter by Bottrup and Bruhn then, distinguishing it from Rasmussen’s chapter, and also all the other chapters in the book, stresses an area—dementia care—outside the NPM agendas such as, for example, the free user choice. The authors thereby seem to find that there are boundaries in these schemes preventing the inclusion of the most vulnerable groups of older people who do not have the resources to make free choices, for example. But one might wonder if this might be the case only for those people who are clearly



diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease (or other types of dementia), leaving behind the borderline cases of dementia. However, the chapter presents a final optimistic view on NPM as an approach to elderly care that requires—and increasingly in the future due to the ageing population—development of further professionalization in order to meet the specific and complex needs of this type of fragile older person. This way Chapter 8 prepares for the final concluding discussion of the anthology of a move beyond NPM in elderly care.

Hvid and Kamp (now in this order) make two final very important points in the last chapter (Chapter 9). One is that they (at least partly) explain the legitimization of a widespread use of NPM-inspired principles in Scandinavian elderly care by the general low status of care work. This low status, in other words, legitimates rationalization and Taylorization of work that is associated with female work rooted in unpaid family work and traditionally poorly respected. The other point is that the development of NPM principles may have reached its limits in actually working in this specific area of society, the extent to which they can actually improve quality and save money. As they say in the beginning of the book, “elderly care may not only be the first sector to become part of NPM, but also be the first to leave” (Kamp and Hvid 2012: 25).

Elderly Care in Transition may not have defeated all the challenges related to an anthology, it may not cover NPM impacts on Scandinavian countries fully, and it may also exclude analyses of some new challenges in working life impacted by the use of the relatively new for-profit care agencies included in the sector (although not widespread). But still this book makes an important contribution to the discussion of the content and challenges of transition in elderly care in Scandinavia. And the advantage of some of the limitations mentioned is that each chapter can be read on its own; and if the reader chooses to read all of them, the framework (first and last chapter) of this anthology clearly deserves the reader's attention.