

# Preface

Who should operate our social services, and how are service contracts to be distributed and managed? These are among the most important social issues today. In Scandinavia, there is little disagreement that the public should pay for the most important services in education, health, and social services. However, there is considerable variation in how welfare is delivered and managed among the Scandinavian countries. Sweden has gone further in terms of the introduction of user choice and vouchers, reducing barriers to establishment of new service institutions, and allowing distribution of profits. This has created a strong growth incentive in the profit-oriented enterprises offering welfare services. Denmark, and to some extent Norway, have by comparison a stronger element of nonprofit providers.

In our opinion, the welfare mix is too important to be left to chance. The public, nonprofit and for-profit welfare providers each have advantages as well as disadvantages. The composition of the welfare mix should, therefore, be deliberately designed in order to maximise these advantages. There may be political disagreement about the goals of welfare policies, but we nevertheless need knowledge about the consequences of the welfare mix to get a fruitful political discussion.

This was the starting point for our research project *Outsourcing of Scandinavian Welfare Societies? Consequences of Private and Nonprofit Service Provision for Active Citizenship*—which led to the publication of this book. The project was funded by the Research Council of Norway’s programme on *Welfare, Working Life and Migration* (VAM) and directed by Karl Henrik Sivesind at the Institute for Social Research (ISF) in Oslo, Norway. However, the project has been a truly Scandinavian comparative effort. An extensive data collection has been carried out in selected case municipalities in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden. We would like to thank Malene Thøgersen (Denmark), Håkon Solbu Trætteberg (Norway), and David Feltenius (Sweden) for their work with data collection and documentation. This work also constitutes the basis for Trætteberg’s Ph.D. dissertation, *Does Welfare Mix Matter? Active Citizenship in Public, For-Profit and Nonprofit Schools and Nursing Homes in Scandinavia* (2016).

Many individuals and institutions have provided valuable help and comments during the process. We wish to thank the contributors to the book for all the work they have done in writing their chapters, as well as their valuable comments at project meetings. We would also like to thank Prof. Lars Skov Henriksen at the Department of Sociology and Social Work, Aalborg University, for his contributions to the coordination of the Danish part of the project.

We were lucky with the timing of this project. All the Scandinavian countries had to implement a new EU directive for public procurement in 2016. We therefore got many invitations to present findings about changes in the mix of welfare service providers and about why there are differences between the Scandinavian countries. The Enterprise Federation of Norway, *Virke*, with a department for nonprofit service providers, arranged a large conference in January 2016 together with Nordic sister organisations. A panel of Scandinavian Ministers and MPs responded to Sivesind’s presentation of new findings from this project. Later there were meetings with the Red–Green government parties and then the opposition parties in Sweden; in August there were meetings with the Norwegian conservative government parties and their parliamentary support parties at a ‘Perspective Conference’. We also met with experts writing public investigations about nonprofit welfare providers in

Norway (NOU 2016:12) and Sweden (SOU 2016:78), just to mention some examples. It was a great experience to see that our research could inform debates about issues high on the political agenda.

Earlier versions of several of the book chapters have been presented at international conferences, including the 24th Nordic Local Government Research Conference, Gothenburg, 26–28 November 2015, and the 12th ISTR (International Society for Third-Sector Research) Conference, Stockholm, 28 June–1 July 2016. We thank the participants at these and other conferences and seminars for valuable comments.

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