



# ETHNOGRAPHIES OF WELFARE STATE TRANSFORMATIONS

---

## **Programme and abstracts**

Workshop hosted by 'Norden Netværket'

Wednesday, May 28 2014, 09:00-18:00 hrs.

Moesgaard Museum, Aarhus



In Denmark, as in many other European countries, politicians and welfare state institutions have since the 1990s been looking to the market and the private sector as the basis for social reform. Such processes are often referred to as New Public Management or neoliberalism. Many studies, however, fail to explore how neoliberalist policies are taken up differently in various institutions and areas of social life and in societies with different 'division of labour' between private and public institutions, state and municipal organisations, religious and secular organisations, etc.

Anthropologists have pointed out that citizen-state-market-relationships are not universal modernist formations and that people meet neoliberal policies at different scales of the community, family and household. It is important to understand how policies emerge, are made meaningful and incorporated into everyday life and have deeper implications for fundamental social concepts such as personhood, future, hope and belonging (Guyer 2007, Tsing 2005, Greenhouse 2010, Povinelli 2012, Kingfisher and Maskovsky 2008). Therefore, the workshop engages with current changes of the particular Danish welfare state.

We call for ethnographic studies of transformations in welfare state institutions (i.e. health, education, care, integration) and other domains of social life (i.e. business and management, labour market, arts, science, housing, military and security) that are affected by the reorganised relationships between state, market and citizens. How are institutional changes practiced and understood in everyday life and how do they affect relationships between generations within families, between teachers and students, doctors and patients, neighbours or competitors, etc.?

The workshop is meant as a laboratory for exploring new ways of writing ethnographies of welfare state transformations where we let 'small' cases speak to larger political debates. Anthropology has traditionally worked in the social and global margins and can be seen as a marginal perspective compared to for instance political science, sociology or economics. This marginality, however, should not prevent us from engaging in larger debates concerning welfare state transformations.

We invite papers that accommodate to the following three principles:

- Depart from an empirical case, a place, a story, a portrait of a person or similar rich ethnographic material.
- Address a general debate of relevance to the future development of Danish (or Scandinavian) society as such.
- Relate the analysis to gatekeeping concepts of the regional literature and welfare state, such as equality, sameness, community or inclusion.

Participation in the workshop is free, including coffee, lunch and a dinner in the evening. Please send register for the workshop by filling in this online registration form before 19 May:

[https://auws.au.dk/Ethnographies\\_of\\_Welfarestate\\_Transformations](https://auws.au.dk/Ethnographies_of_Welfarestate_Transformations)



## PROGRAMME

08.30-09.00 Welcome and coffee

**09.00-11.00 Session 1:**

Bjarke Nielsen: *Freedom Imaginaries and distributed responsibility: methadone treatment in Denmark*

Lisanne Wilken and Mette Ginnerskov Hansen: *"What strikes me is that Danish students don't realise how difficult it is for other students to survive in Denmark"*

Camilla Hoffmann Merrild: *The practice of health and illness in everyday life*

Julie Rahbæk Møller: *The Compass of Change*

11.30-12.30 Keynote by Steffen Jöhncke, Department of Anthropology, University of Copenhagen: *The Welfare State and the Transformations of Ethnography*

12.30-13.30 Lunch

**13.30-15.00 Session 2:**

Gritt B. Nielsen: *From 'indexical types' to 'entangled figures': students and the reform of Danish universities*

Laura Gilliam: *'The competition state' and ideals of civilized communities in a Danish school*

Katrine Schepelern Johansen: *The quest for psychiatric diagnosis in drug addiction treatment*

15.00-15.30 Coffee break

**15.30-17.00 Session 3**

Nana Vaaben: *'Working nine to five' - Fantasies of Time, Work and Enjoyment*

Alexandra Brandt Ryborg Jønsson: *Patient Participation*

Jeppe Linnet: *Towards an anthropology of welfare-state state subject formation*

**17.00-18.00 Recap of the day**

18.30 Dinner (registration is required)

**Organizers:**

Mikkel Rytter (mikkel.rytter@cas.au.dk) and Maja Hojer Bruun (mhb@learning.aau.dk)



## ABSTRACTS

### SESSION 1

**Bjarke Nielsen:** *Freedom Imaginaries and distributed responsibility: methadone treatment in Denmark*

**Centre for Alcohol and Drug Research, Aarhus University**

As in many Western countries, notions of active, free, and selfmanaging citizens have become key concerns in Danish social policies. On the one hand, the focus is on how policies envision drug users. Viewed from this perspective, drug users are articulated as autonomous, free and self-managing subjects responsible for their own health and well-being. Freedom to act is imagined as inherent qualities in individual subjects, all of whom are imagined as sovereign neoliberal subjects. This perception of freedom, however, is a negative perception; the individual is only free when he or she acts alone, that is, if they are not subject to any external forces. On the other hand, drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in substitution treatment clinics, the objective is to analyze how a "rationality of choice" appears in everyday treatment practices, with all the necessary transformations that any policy takes on when it is implemented in concrete conditions. Zooming in on a 'logic of care' instead of a 'rationality of choice' attunes us to that a 'logic of care' is not necessarily a question of individual choice, but rather a way in which care interventions are related to the specificities of drug user's daily living conditions and problems. In everyday encounters between users and social workers, freedom and choice are not enacted as inherent individual capacities, as if the circumstances in which users are situated were mute; the ethnography shows how responsibility is distributed rather than individualized.

**Lisanne Wilken and Mette Ginnerskov Hansen:** *"What strikes me is that Danish students don't realise how difficult it is for other students to survive in Denmark": an exploration of the way students experience economic inequality a Danish university and why it matters*

**Department of Culture and Society, Aarhus University**

Fee-free education and economic student support are some of the fundamental welfare rights in Denmark. They are usually considered to be part of the foundation for social equality because they make access to education depend on merit rather than money.

Not all students are however eligible to free education and/or student support in Denmark. Over the past ten years Danish universities have 'internationalised' and an increasing number of students from other countries have enrolled in Danish university programs. Some of these pay tuition fee, others receive scholarship, some are financed by family and others work to support themselves and perhaps even send money home. In this way internationalisation not only contributes to cultural and linguistic diversity but also to a new kind of economic inequality.

Drawing on ethnographic data from a research project on the internationalisation of university education in Denmark this paper explores how students make sense of this economic inequality and argues that such an exploration help us understand how the welfare system are being transformed through recontextualisation.



**Camilla Hoffmann Merrild:** *The practice of health and illness in everyday life; can structural violence help us understand how social inequality translates into health?*

**Department of Public Health, Aarhus Universitet**

In the welfare state of Denmark social differences in health and illness are increasing, a seemingly paradoxical state of affairs in an affluent society where ideologies of equality are favored, and where health care is provided free of charge by a health care system based on principles of equity. We have only sparse knowledge of the mechanisms behind the health and illness related practices leading to these social differences in health, and we know little about how these practices are embedded in the everyday life of different social groups.

Based on 12 months of fieldwork in two different social classes in opposite ends of the social spectrum, this paper explores how different social positions enable or constrain perceptions and practices of health and illness, and points out how the social context shapes the ability to and interest in enacting the obligations of health. Drawing on case material from the everyday life of key informants from lower working class and higher middle class, the paper investigates how the analytical concept of structural violence can be applied in understanding the logics of social inequality in health in a western welfare state like Denmark.

**Julie Rahbæk Møller:** *The Compass of Change – an anthropological investigation of measuring and controlling social work in the Welfare State of Denmark*

**Department of Social Work, Metropolitan University College**

Based on a long-term fieldwork amongst social workers and mentally ill residents at two psychiatric facilities, as well as amongst civil servants at the Administration of Social Affairs in Copenhagen, I wish to explore how a social order is created and maintained in the Danish Welfare State. By analyzing the social spaces of action of civil servants, social workers and mentally ill residents, I explore their varying possibilities and limitations for action, how these spaces affect and impinge on each other – and how their different attempts to create a social order challenges their different ideals of bureaucracy and welfare. It seems that civil servants feel closer to a fulfillment of the, in a sense, utopian (or heterotopian) Welfare State than social workers who have a more pragmatic approach to what needs are possible to meet. The neo-liberal quest for independence from the Welfare system, resulting in a vast number of different interventions and policies, stresses the residents and instead of moving towards independence, they uphold their legal right to *not* move out the psychiatric facilities. Thus, the system becomes a co-creator of the conditions it is attempting to cure.

The empirical case in this paper will be the development and implementation of The Compass of Change – an instrument based on the idea that making visible the development (or lack of it) of the mentally ill residents will necessarily create some sort of development towards more independence of the welfare system.

## SESSION 2

**Gritt B. Nielsen:** *From 'indexical types' to 'entangled figures': students and the reform of Danish universities*





### **Department of Education, Aarhus University**

'Social types' have long been used as a means for understanding societal transformations. Engels, for example, gave accounts of impoverished individuals and used them, as metonyms of the new proletarian urban poor, to criticise the social inequality established with the industrial revolution. Likewise, Simmel used 'the stranger' and Benjamin 'the flâneur' as windows onto more general changes in urban commodified society. These 'social types' were conjured up through mainly literary or deductive methods and, in contrast, this paper introduces the notion of 'figure/figuration' in order to explore *ethnographically* contemporary welfare state transformations. Taking the point of departure in a particular frictional event at a Danish university in which power relations were reshuffled between state, market and university, the paper shows how a figure like the 'customer', even though prominent to many welfare state reforms, is never self-identical and therefore cannot, in and by itself, be seen as an index of wider societal changes. It shows how the 'customer' in this particular Danish case, took form in relation to the 'co-owner' and argues that explorations of such processes of *entanglement* can convey a nuanced sense of reform processes as epochal in some respects and as heterogeneous and multiple in other.

### **Eva Gulløv: *Institutionalized welfare***

#### **Department of Education, Aarhus University**

As described by several researchers the idea of the welfare state has changed over the last decades. From a role as general protector of social security, the role of the state is more seen as an investor in 'human capital' in order to enable people to overcome risks and challenges by their own power. In several countries this turn has promoted the expansion of a public system of early childcare and education where the responsibility of the upbringing of children has shifted from the private sphere of the household to the public sphere of institutions for social services. This is especially so in Denmark where state-involvement in the upbringing of children is pronounced. Using the case of early childcare institutions in contemporary Denmark, the aim of the paper is to discuss the ideas and practices that constitute welfare and frame everyday life. In this regard, children are particular relevant, as they are objects of intense normative attention and are invested in as no other social group in order to ensure their enculturation. Therefore, studying the institutional arrangements set up for them and the social interactions taking place offers insight into dominant cultural priorities and social consequences.

### **Katrine Schepelern Johansen: *The quest for psychiatric diagnosis in drug addiction treatment***

#### **KORA**

During the last ten years we have witness a growing awareness in drug addiction treatment of psychiatric disorders among people with a drug addiction. Tools to screen for psychiatric disorders have been developed and implemented in addiction treatment, treatment institutions hire psychiatrist and staff at drug treatment facilities are referring to and treating a growing number of psychiatric disorders.

On a general level this can be described with the well-known concept of medicalization, but a closer look at this case of treatment in the Danish welfare state shows that there are several different things at stake under this overall umbrella.

First, it is an example of the growing role of medicine – in this case psychiatry – in the



welfare state when it comes to describing and understanding problems hitherto perceived as merely social problems. Second, it points to a quest for solid facts about problems and treatment in the social sector in Denmark where medicine with its tradition for evidence comes in handy. Third, it is an example of specialization in the welfare state, where clients – who are perceived as complex – are given specialized treatment, and where more and more groups of clients are given the label 'complex'.

**Helle Bjerg and Nana Vaaben: *'Working nine to five' - Fantasies of Time, Work and Enjoyment***

**University College Capital (UCC), Copenhagen**

In spring 2013 teachers carrying billboards with slogans like 'We want to teach!' or 'We love our job!' was a common sight all over Denmark. The slogans were part of the teachers' protest when they were collectively locked out from their work as a culmination of a conflict between the teachers' union and the association of municipalities. After three weeks of lock out, the Danish government ended the conflict by introducing a law on the regulation of time and work, based on principles very similar to the initial claim of the association of municipalities.

What interests us is the role of fantasy of the enjoyment of the Other:

*'...what really bothers us about the "other", is the peculiar way he organizes his jouissance (...) - in the racist perspective, the "other" is either a workaholic stealing our jobs or an idler living on our labor. (Zizek, 1992, 165)*

In the actual case this takes form as the fantasy of teachers enjoying long summer holidays and short working hours. This fantasy of illicit pleasure was what the teachers tried to counter with a declaration of love for work.

The case is Danish but mirrors international neoliberal attempts to increase welfare productivity.

## **SESSION 3**

**Alexandra Brandt Ryborg Jønsson: *Patient Participation: The Transformation of the Relationship between Health Professionals and Patients***

**Danske Patienter**

Patient participation has become an increasingly important concept in Danish health care (1). Patients are transformed from the former passive recipients of care to actively engaged managers of their own health. This has made a significant shift in the relation between health professionals and patients (2).

Professionals are constantly reminded that the patients should participate in decisions regarding their treatment, yet this is a largely operational definition; conceptually, the idea of participation is not well defined and this causes frustration and confusion among health professionals (3).

This paper aims to explore how patient participation is taken up by health professionals and made meaningful in their relation to the patients. I will take an onset in our recent anthropological study of how health professionals understand and meet up with the demand of patient participation, discussing how this affects the roles of health professional and patient, respectively. Thus an anthropological small-scale view on the dominant neoliberal policy of patient participation can contribute to a



larger political debate with a critical stand on sameness as a moral value when incorporated in the relation between health professional and patient.

**Jeppe Linnet: *Towards an anthropology of welfare-state state subject formation***

**Department of Marketing and Management, University of Southern Denmark**

This presentation discusses notions of subjectivity and individual-society relations from the anthropological literature on the Nordic region, suggesting ways that these could become building blocks in a framework for analyzing continuities and changes in Nordic welfare-state subject formation. Family life and kinship norms will also be invoked as examples, drawn from the author's work on families in Copenhagen, of a social formation that is impacted by the welfare-state in its normative orientation to the production or upholding of autonomy.

One idea central to the paper is Martin Thomassen's proposal that "equality as sameness is the price paid for being included as autonomous" (Thomassen 2012). A closely associated concept is that of statist individualism: That the availability of welfare-state services takes away a need for coordination and exchange that could otherwise play out between individuals and other authorities, or among individuals at an everyday face-to-face level. The welfare-state supports for example Swedes in their cultural desire "to be left alone" (Trägårdh and Berggren 2006, Berggren and Trägårdh 2011). Paying/appropriating tax effects a transformation of face-to-face social ties into exchange relations between individuals and the welfare-state. Economic flows and structures of the welfare-state are thus important facets to include in an analysis of the tense intersubjective condition of Nordic culture that Gullestad pointed to with the notion of "symbolic fences" whereby individuals in Nordic culture manage interpersonal distance (Gullestad 1992); an example of the particular Nordic "concern for sociality" (BruunJakobsen and Krøijer 2011).

**Laura Gilliam: *'The competition state' and ideals of civilized communities in a Danish school***

**Department of Education, Aarhus University**

It is treated as self-evident within much current educational research, that the Danish welfare state is eroding and on the fast track to becoming a 'competition state', giving in to Neo-liberalist policies and economic necessities. One of the main protagonist of this view, Professor Ove Kaj Pedersen (2011), exemplifies this by highlighting a decisive change within the Danish State School; namely, that since the mid 90ies the aim of the school has changed from creating 'good human beings' and a democratic society, to promoting individualism and creating workers for the national economy. In this paper, I will question this supposedly easy alteration in aims and values of the school institution. Doing fieldwork among teachers, working with children in a 0.grade class, it is apparent how ideals and practices about moulding children in school depend on a much larger complex of factors, than Pedersen's analysis of political discourses displays. While new political projects and educational policies are consequential, the ideals of civilized behaviour and equal and harmonious communities, which are reproduced in a dialectic between welfare society and the Danish State School, are upheld by institutional logics and teachers in the school, and interfere with the outcomes of the new agendas.

