

Narratives of Governing

Rationalization, Responsibility and Resistance in Social Work

Marcus Lauri

Akademisk avhandling

som med vederbörligt tillstånd av Rektor vid Umeå universitet för
avläggande av filosofie doktorsexamen framläggs till offentligt försvar i
Hörsal D, Lindellhallen, fredagen den 20 maj kl. 13.15.
Avhandlingen kommer att försvaras på svenska.

Fakultetsopponent: Professor Diana Mulinari, Genusvetenskapliga
institutionen, Lunds universitet.



**Department of Political Science &
Umeå Centre for Gender Studies**
Umeå University
Umeå 2016

Organization

Umeå University
Department of Political Science &
Umeå Centre for Gender Studies,
Graduate School for Gender Studies

Document type

Doctoral thesis

Date of publication

29 April 2016

Author

Marcus Lauri

Title

Narratives of Governing: Rationalization, Responsibility and Resistance in Social Work

Abstract

For many years, Sweden has had a reputation for having a comprehensive and women friendly welfare state. However, as in many other European countries during the past few decades, the organization and governing of welfare has undergone profound changes. Through interviews with social workers and the application of theories of governmentality, this thesis analyzes the expressions and consequences of such current organization and governing.

One result is that the introduction of meticulous documentation practices of social workers contact with clients, regulate their interaction and constitute a control over both client and social worker. Another result is that the current organization fragments labor and awards more authority to managers, which functions to produce loyalty to the organization and management, rather than clients. This is expressed in demands not to voice protest, as it is said to create a bad mood. It is also expressed in demands to spend as little as possible on clients; short duration of treatment, preference for outpatient treatment and by making it difficult to receive financial support. This austerity is legitimized through the intermeshing of different ideals; budget awareness, evidence that supports short and outpatient treatment and that clients in order to change their course of life should to be allowed or coerced into taking individual responsibility.

Another important finding is that the current governing and organization of social work produce distance and detachment, and thus discourage caring subjects. This is a complex process in which an assemblage of different techniques and rationalities undermines the cultivation of a relationship between social worker and client. 1) The ideal of evidence-based practice favors rigid methods over a flexible and holistic approach. 2) Ideals of rationality, closely connected to notions of masculinity and professionalism, value objectivity and devalue and deter the surfacing of emotions. 3) Meticulous practices of documentation reduce the amount of time available to meet clients. 4) Ideals and particular methods designed to promote individual responsibility in clients legitimize social workers distancing themselves from clients' dependency and needs. 5) A division of labor, in either assessment or treatment, reduces time spent with clients for those who work with assessment and ultimately engage in the rationing of resources. 6) Standardized digital templates, installed to aid in assessments, regulate and proceduralize interactions with the client. 7) Austerity, heavy workloads, individualized responsibility and stress further accentuate distance, as detachment becomes a means to cope with arduous working conditions.

The transformation of social work described above produces alienation and a fragmentation of social workers' collective subjects. Simultaneously, an ethos of caring makes some social workers work extra hard to provide for clients, which ultimately covers for flaws in the system. Although such an ethos of caring allows for the further exploitation of social workers, it is also understood as a means of resistance, which in turn also forms the basis for organized resistance.

Keywords: welfare, neoliberalism, new public management, social work governing, governmentality, gender, de-professionalization, alienation, Sweden.

Language
English

ISBN
ISBN 978-91-7601-473-8

ISSN
0349-0831

Number of pages
284