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ACTOR ORIENTED APPROACH IN DEVELOPING FINNISH SOCIAL WELFARE SERVICES

Abstract

Finnish social welfare services are traditionally produced and financed by the public sector. During the last 15 years also the third and private sectors have got more responsibility in delivering social welfare services. From this perspective, this paper asks whether the third and private sectors should get a more central role also in planning, implementing and assessing services. Similarly, also citizens and various service user groups might have more central role in planning, implementing and assessing services.

The actor oriented approach offers a potential developing method for getting various interest groups involved in planning, implementing and assessing social welfare services. The actor oriented approach gives space for various actors: formal and informal actors, organizations and individuals. The main point is to get all potential actors involved in developing processes. The processes are seen as learning, which has a collective base. Thus the actor oriented approach is based on dialogic of various interest groups.

Keywords: Social welfare services, action research, social policy

Аңдатпа

Финляндияда негізінен әлеуметтік тұрмыстық қамтамасыз ету мемлекеттік бюджет есебінен көрсетіледі және қаржыландырылады. Соңғы 15 жыл ішінде үшінші және жеке секторлар әлеуметтік тұрмыстық қамсыздандыру бойынша қызмет көрсету саласына аса жауапкершілікпен қарайтыны байқалады. Осыған байланысты осы мақалада үшінші және жеке сектордың қызметті жоспарлау, жүзеге асыру және бағалау процесінде маңызды рөлге айналуы мәселесі зерттеледі. Осылайша азаматтар мен қызметті тұтынушылардың әртүрлі топтары қызмет көрсетуді жоспарлау, жүзеге асыру және бағалау процесінде маңызды рөлге ие бола алар еді.

Объекті-бағдарланған тәсіл әлеуметтік тұрмыстық қамтамасыз ету бойынша қызметті жоспарлау, жүзеге асыру және бағалау процесінде әртүрлі мүдделі топтарды қатыстыру үшін қабілеттерді дамыту әдісін көздейді. Объекті-бағдарланған тәсілдің әртүрлі қатысушылар үшін аясы кең: ресми және бейресми әріптестерге, ұйымдар мен жеке тұлғаларға. Негізгі мақсаты – даму процесіне барлық әлеуетті қатысушыларды тарту. Бұл процестер ұжымдық негізде зерттеу процесі ретінде қарастырылады. Объекті-бағдарланған тәсіл әртүрлі мүдделі топтардың алаңында қалыптасады.

Тірек сөздер: әлеуметтік тұрмыстық қамсыздандыру қызметтері, қызметті зерделеу, әлеуметтік саясат.

Аннотация

В Финляндии услуги по социально-бытовому обеспечению в основном оказываются и финансируются за счет средств государственного бюджета. В последние 15 лет третий и частный секторы с большой ответственностью относятся к сфере оказания услуг по социально-бытовому обеспечению. В связи с этим в данной статье рассматриваются вопросы усиления роли третьего и частного секторов в процессе планирования, осуществления и оценивания данной деятельности. Таким образом, различные группы граждан и потребителей услуг играют важную роль в процессе планирования, осуществления и оценивания деятельности в сфере социально-бытового обеспечения.

Объектно-ориентированный подход предусматривает метод развития способностей для участия различных заинтересованных групп в процессе планирования, осуществления и оценивания деятельности по социально-бытовому обеспечению.

Объектно-ориентированный подход предоставляет широкие возможности для различных участников: официальных и неофициальных партнеров, организаций и физических лиц. Основная цель – привлечение к процессу развития всех потенциальных участников.

Этот процесс рассматривается в качестве исследовательского процесса на коллективной основе. Объектно-ориентированный подход формируется на основе диалога различных заинтересованных групп.

Ключевые слова: услуги по социально-бытовому обеспечению, осмысливание услуг, социальная политика.

Introduction to Finnish welfare state

The Finnish welfare state is a typical example of the Nordic welfare model (Esping-Andersen, 1990), which rests on the principle of universal public services (Anttonen & Sipilä, 2012). The state regulates the basic level of social welfare by law, but it is up to municipalities to decide how they operationalize actual social services in practice. It is thus the municipalities that are responsible for social welfare, as well as for producing the bulk of social services.

However, since the mid of 1990s, the market of public services has been diversified, allowing the third and private sectors more leeway to provide services. The public sector has outsourced public services to the third sector parties and the private sector. The public administration covers all costs of services, even if they are produced by third -party or private sectors providers. In this situation, the representatives of the NGOs and private companies have asked whether they should take more responsibility to plan and assess services with the representatives of the public sector.

The Nordic welfare states are based on an ideological principle, which underlines equality among citizens. Therefore, the Nordic welfare states emphasize universal public services. However, economic realities have challenged the political principle. On the other hand, a political turning point is claimed to have occurred in the 1990s when a neoliberal economic trend broke into the political debate in the Nordic countries. This case is perceived as a turning point of the political sentiment, which focuses on selectivism instead of universalism. However, the change has not been drastic; instead, it can be regarded as a smooth shift toward a more flexible interpretation of the Nordic welfare model. (E.g. Jutila 2011.)

The diversification of Finnish welfare state and its services have raised a question about who really decides and define the forms and contents of social welfare services. Various actors have interests on social welfare services. Thus it is asked, whether a new actor oriented approach should be implemented instead of centralized and bureaucratic systems of planning in social welfare services. In this paper I am going to present some basic ideas of actor oriented approach within the Finnish welfare services.

To which direction social welfare services are going to develop?

The following analysis is meant to help clarify the direction of the development of social welfare services. Cooperation between either official or unofficial actors can be considered to be one direction of development. Development of either the activities or the structure of social welfare can be considered another direction. These dimensions form the four sectors of development¹. The targets of development can be the activities and qualifications of social work professionals themselves, official cooperative structures and systems, cooperation with clients and service users, and cooperation with NGOs and other civic actors. (See Figure 1.)

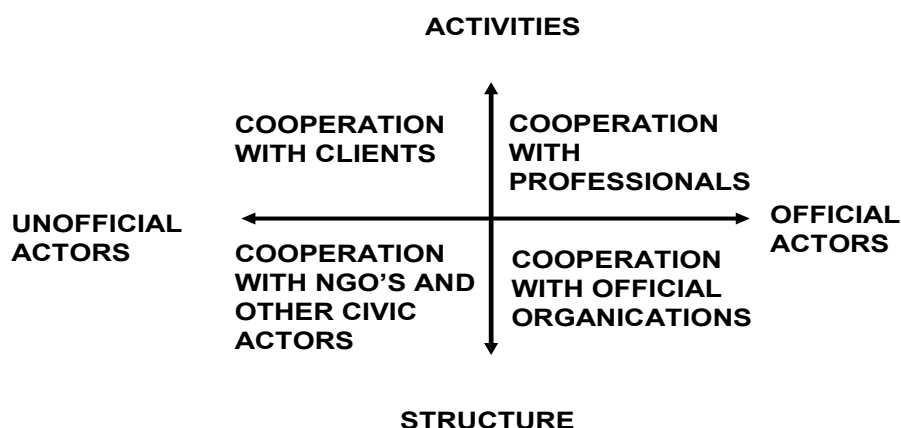


Figure 1. Sectors of social welfare development (Toikko 2006; 2007).

The development of social welfare services can be directed at the improvement of the skills and expertise of professionals from the viewpoint of official actors. The National Development Program for Health and Social Services, for instance, has strived to attain this aim by funding projects that

¹ The development is examined from the viewpoint of official services.

seek to create good working practices and well-functioning action models, such as the development of action models for early intervention in child protection in cooperation with the day care and school system. This is the type of development that means first and foremost development of the qualifications and skills of professions.

The development of social welfare services can also be directed at structural and, primarily, cross-sectional activities. The point of departure of the National Development Program for Health and Social Services has been the renovation of the official service structure. The development of the service network has progressed as a collaborative effort between professionals, administrative management and elected officials. However, the discourse has been kept strictly within the framework of the official system. This type of development is therefore primarily directed at the structures of municipal social welfare.

Even though the structural development of social welfare services could also rely on civic activities, the Finnish model has not supported this direction of development. Non-governmental organizations have not been in the centre of social welfare development. If this direction was to be emphasized, the question would mainly be of local social political solutions that would involve NGOs and other civic actors in the creation of new service structures. However, it is needed to underline, that the third sector's organizations can get support from other sources than directly from the state. The Slot Machine Association's (RAY) task is to raise funds through gaming operations to support the work of voluntary health and welfare organizations. Each year the RAY's funding enables the organizations to take care of tens of thousands of people from all walks of life.

Development of social welfare services can also be directed towards increasing client cooperation, which means that clients themselves participate in the design, implementation and assessment of social welfare. The question is of highlighting the position of service users side by side with the traditional official perspective. The principal outline of the social welfare development has always placed emphasis on the role of the official actors in the field. The participation of non-official actors in development work has been largely ignored. (Toikko 2007.)

The development of social welfare services has progressed in a very traditional direction. It has followed quite traditional models which emphasize the role of municipal social welfare and professionals in the field. It has not been able to open up alternative development channels. In practice, it is not only the social welfare NGOs that have been ignored but the clients themselves. It certainly is an object of social policy to empower the citizens to participate in political discourse, but at least in regard to social welfare recipients this demand for participation and partnership has succeeded poorly. (Toikko 2006.)

In social welfare development can be seen four different directions. The targets of development can be the qualifications of social work professionals themselves, official cooperative structures, cooperation with NGOs, and cooperation with clients and service users.

Actor oriented approach

The actor oriented approach is based on the idea of co-operation between the various interest groups and actors. The actor oriented approach combines paradigms in research methods with an orientation to democratic processes of social and organizational change. It belongs to the same family with action research, participatory action research and practice based research, which underline the following key elements of developing the actions and structures of communities. (Carr & Kemmis 2003; Toikko & Rantanen 2009.)

The first key element of these approaches is to identify the actors who bring about or prevent change in the society. An actor map or matrix can be used for checking the interactions between different types of interest groups in the public and private sectors. For instance, the actor linkage map is a useful starting point for discussing relationships and interests within the society. Key actors are shown on a map with arrows between them indicating flows of information. The intensity of these flows can be illustrated by the width of the arrows. Normally, the map gives rise to discussions of formal and informal mechanisms used to transmit and control information. It also highlights the issue of which actors and linkages are going to be in the analysis. (See Biggs & Matsuert 2004.)

Another element of the actor oriented approach is based on the idea of process. Typically it is presented as a learning process which consists of two sub-processes: individual learning and collective learning. Although the collective learning process is directly or indirectly affected by

individual learning, groups and collectives possess shared assumptions that create a new kind of learning when compared to the individual approach (cf. Brown & Lambert 2013). From this point of view, actor oriented approach underlines the significance of collective processes. On the other hand, the learning process does not necessarily follow a linear order as was presented in the previous section. If the learning process is examined as a whole, it mostly does not continue sequentially, but rather the order of the themes vary depending upon social contexts. (Toikko 2015.)

All in all, the actor oriented approach is seen as a collective learning process which is based on interaction of various interest groups and individuals. In this sense, the public, private and third sectors are responsible for social welfare services and their planning, implementation and assessment. Furthermore, citizens and various service users are seen key actors in developing social welfare services.

Challenges in the future

Finnish social welfare services are financed by the public sector, thus it also mostly controls the forms and quality of services. Until these days the public sector has been dominating the production of social welfare services. However, in the future it is obvious that also the third and private sectors are going to have more central role in delivering social welfare services. (Toikko 2012.)

In recent years also service users' participation has developed at a rapid pace. The question is no longer whether service users should have a voice in local life and services, but how this is to be achieved. It is not just the promise of greater service user involvement that's now needed, but ways of realizing it. It's time to move from rhetoric to reality. Service users' involvement can change the culture of social welfare services. Activating clients does not mean they become active only in managing their own lives and living environments, but also in participating in public management and the activities of private organizations.

Service users' participation has increasingly become a significant part of social welfare services. The core question of Finnish social welfare services concerns the border between the official and the unofficial in the development of social welfare. In what ways do the service users and unofficial organizations participate in the planning, implementation and evaluation of the services? There are a lot of good practical examples of participation, but still there are challenges to get service users involved in social welfare services.

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