

Niels Rosendal Jensen

DPU, Aarhus University

nrj@dpu.dk

SOCIAL WORK AND SOCIAL PEDAGOGY AS PUBLIC ENTREPRENEURSHIP? A DISCUSSION OF THE IDEA AND ITS IMPLICATIONS

The aim of the presentation is to establish a few further steps in the discussion on the issue of this year.

The overall idea of the Annual Conference 2011 is to understand the situation of social work.

When discussing social work and social pedagogy we need to set it a broader societal context. Since the beginning of the 1980'es changes of the national welfare state have been on the political agenda. In our country the kick-off was made 1983 by a program for "modernizing the public sector". Embedded into that program was a new way of regulation – so called New Public Management. This part of the story has been increasing ever since. Partly as an impact of global trends – the change of the nation states into enterprises or companies competing at a global market. Participants at the Annual Conference know all about this, so we shorten our remarks by pointing to the new image of the state – the state as competitive state.

If we take this concept for granted, then we can better grasp the idea of the economization of the social. The ongoing entrepreneurialisation of society – via enterprise discourse's productivity in the economy – is performed in the name of dealing with the problems of the welfare state. What was once thought by Adam Smith to be a framework for the social administration of capitalism (economics in the sense of a political economy) has gradually become a framework for the management of society. The enterprise discourse makes this substitution of administration for management and society for economy pass unnoticed. Perhaps we have thereby lost sight of the social: rather than being constituted by the relational ethics of the public, of the idea that there is food and prosperity enough to cover all the populace and of the idea that means should be equally shared among citizens, it is now understood as an epiphenomenon of the economy. Maybe the social is lost to the economy? This would in turn mean that the public has gradually become synonymous with 'audience' or 'consumers in general'. When, in the name of management-entrepreneurship (for example, NPM or social entrepreneurship), one tries to instigate market mechanisms as a solution to problems attributed to bureaucracy, the effect is that of a further economization of the social and subsequent pushing back of the citizen and an enlargement of the domain of the customer.

We understand 'public entrepreneurship' as an attempt to channel the creative force of entrepreneurship into the building of a society with greater possibilities for living for citizens. Stressing the relational ethics of a responsibility for the public, we opt for 'public entrepreneurship' as better describing how new forms of sociality can be created.

Our idea is to understand social work and social pedagogy as a part of public entrepreneurship. If we're correct in these considerations, then we are facing a very important problem, which cannot be solved within our common conference, of course. But we may hope to come to influence the important discussion of how we may imagine new, sustainable forms of sociality.

Key words: social work/social pedagogy, entrepreneurship, NPM