

Social Work at the Street-Level of Employment Policy – Institutional vs. Professional Challenges

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A reform of Danish local government in 2007 reduced the number of municipalities from 279 to 98. After the reform the state employment service became integrated in municipal employment and welfare administration. This has led to comprehensive reforms of social and employment administration including social work and the role of social work has been problematised. In this paper I focus on the role and the challenges of social work at municipal jobcentres. Empirically the paper is based on a major recent mixed methods study of the practice at Danish jobcentres. The study combines survey data with interviews, observations and sound-recordings of authentic practice situations (Baadsgaard et al. 2012). The policy discourse as well as the management discourse and the professional discourse is mapped. Similarities and differences between selected jobcentres and at the street-level are analysed leading to discussions of professional challenges and dilemmas. Theoretically the paper is based on a combination of policy implementation (Lipsky 1980; Goodsell 1981) and institutional interaction (Sarangi & Roberts 1999; Hall et al. 2006). Among the findings and conclusions of the study are that the tasks and the qualifications needed at the street-level of employment policy have a professional social work character. It is argued that although in some respects street-level work at the jobcentres are at a boundary of social work and although it has undergone thorough-going and comprehensive reforms, it still bears a number of central characteristics of social work.

Bibliography

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