Editorial

Special issue on 'Collaborative Work and Social Innovation'

by

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The future welfare state is facing complex challenges (The Lancet Commissions, 2010; The Global Agenda for Social Work and Social Development Commitment to Action, 2012), which necessitate changes on various levels regarding the organization of services, as well as establishing new relationships between leaders, professionals, service users and other stakeholders.

Various forms of collaborative practices and social innovations have been proposed to address these challenges, although empirical evidence and a critical discussion of these approaches remain limited. In general, welfare systems are often fragmented due to the increased differentiation of roles, tasks and responsibilities, in addition to organizational designs that may constrain innovation. Social innovations include, *'new solutions that simultaneously meet a social need and lead to new or improved capabilities and relationships, and better use of assets and resources. In other words, social innovations are good for society and enhance society's capacity to act'* (European Commission/Caulier-Grice, Davies et al., 2012, p. 18). Different types of social innovation may serve as a means to improve collaboration and enhance effective service delivery. One such innovation is interprofessional education (IPE). According to the Centre for the Advancement of Interprofessional Education (CAIPE, 2002), *'Interprofessional education occurs when two or more professions learn with, from and about each other to improve collaboration and the quality of care.'* The WHO has highlighted the importance of IPE and interprofessional collaboration (IPC) for several decades: 'Health professionals' education and training institutions should consider implementing Inter-professional education (IPE) in both undergraduate and postgraduate programmes" (WHO, 2013, p. 44). However, in the latest Cochrane Review about IPC interventions (Zwarenstein et al. 2009), the authors conclude that evidence within the field is scarce.

Thus, there is a need for further research that explores socially innovative approaches, such as IPE and collaborative practice, demonstrating the processes by which health and welfare teams can work together to meaningfully support service users across professional and organizational boundaries, as well as creating novel actions to improve services. In particular, the interfaces between administrative levels, between

services and professionals and service users, both horizontally and vertically, are in focus when looking for fruitful solutions and change.

This special issue of the *Journal of Comparative Social Work* aims to identify contemporary and future approaches to social innovation in health and welfare services. It contains papers that inform practitioners, managers and researchers about social innovations that have been implemented effectively or proposed as solutions to inadequacies in collaborative service delivery. Both collaborative work and social innovation comprise interdisciplinary knowledge domains and practices that actually do, and potentially could, contribute to the field. The articles assembled in this special issue provide evidence and opinions that inform the practical and conceptual development of social innovation.

The first article, **Making sense, discovering what works… Cross-agency collaboration in Child Welfare and Protection in Norway and Quebec,** authored by Firbank et al. (2016), addresses the enabling and constraining factors that underpin interorganizational collaboration in Child Welfare and Protection services in Norway and Quebec. Characterized by different regulatory systems, but with a common drive to hierarchically promote cross-agency collaboration, these jurisdictions provide the basis for two instructive and contrasting case studies on the subject. The paper builds on meta-ethnography as a means to synthesize and translate results from separate qualitative research undertakings carried out in each place. It argues that although a core set of properties may be identified as necessary for collaborators to operate in a successful, sustainable manner; greater attention should be paid to how these properties interact with one another on the ground, given schemes' particular scope and scale of objectives. Moreover, regulatory provisions aimed at stimulating or mandating cross-agency networks may align themselves with collaborative capacity in various ways, occasionally in a mutually reinforcing, but sometimes antagonistic manner. The conclusions drawn have implications for research and policy.

The second paper, **Adolescents' Subjective Views about Interprofessional Team Participation: A Q-methodological Study,** is written by Sæbjørnsen and Ødegård (2016), and aims to explore adolescents' subjective views about their participation in a 'responsible team'. One common arrangement in the Norwegian child welfare system

is the interprofessional collaborating team, which is not unlike the English core group. This team is arranged when a child has needs that call for several services. Few studies of interprofessional collaboration focus views of service users and, in particular, those of child and adolescent service users. The authors use a Q-methodology to explore adolescents' subjective views about their collaboration within the responsible teams formed to support their welfare. Their findings demonstrate the varied challenges and successes as experienced by adolescents, thereby providing insight into how interprofessional innovations may be optimized.

The effective implementation of centrally initiated public service innovations to the front-lines of the service organization where the innovation is to be applied is a challenge that both practitioners and researchers struggle to solve. The third paper: **Understanding implementation in complex public service organizations – implications for practice**, authored by Høiland and Willumsen (2017), highlights the importance of analysing contextual factors at several levels of the implementation system, as well as the importance of considering how the practical everyday work situation of the front-line workers influences their application of the innovation in question. A work inclusion measure is applied as an illustration and explored, looking at its wider context and some of its implementation outcomes at a specific public agency, the Norwegian Labour and Welfare Administration (NAV). The authors identify the importance of considering the contextual complexity of the implementation system so that practitioners can take this into account in their planning and practices.

The final article, **Upcycling – a new perspective on waste in social innovation**, written by Aakjær and Wegener (2016), introduces 'upcycling' – a well-known concept within design practice – to the field of social innovation. A combination between 'upgrading' (adding value) and 'recycling' (reusing) the concept reimagines waste as being transformed into something valuable. The authors ask: "How does an upcycle mind-set and practice contribute to situated social innovation?", hence exploring the concept with insights from the fields of social innovation and co-design. They coin the term 'social upcycling', and provide five cases to illustrate what upcycling practices look like. The cases illustrate the diversity of actors, activities and materiality involved in social upcycling processes, and outline a novel and provocative area of social innovation.

Great thanks go to Dr. Chris Green, who has participated in the special issue editorial group, and ensured international scientific quality during the review process. We do hope that the articles will inspire further knowledge development and practice related to collaborative work and social innovation in connection to social work and wider contexts for health and social care.

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