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Evolving welfare services challenge service providers and users

The ongoing multi-dimensional regional and demographic polarisation development in Finland is challenging the conventional welfare services production model both institutionally and in terms of organisational management culture (Syväjärvi & Pietiläinen 2016; see also Himberg 2017). Finland is becoming polarised regionally into net migration gain regions and net migration loss regions, high-employment and low-employment regions, regions with diverse or limited opportunities for studies, regions with diverse or narrow economic structures, regions with increasing or decreasing populations as well as regions with healthier or less healthy populations. Even in the late 2010s, following the borders of the Treaty of Nöteborg (1323) and the map of where hungry Finns were forced to eat bark bread (1830s), the well-being of Finns is segregating into the healthier areas of Southern and Southwestern Finland and the less healthy areas of Northern Finland (Saari & Viinamäki 2018).

The social and welfare reform (Sote) is a continuum of the history of welfare system reform, which includes the *Valtava reform* in the 1980s and the *Paras project* in the 1990s (Viinamäki & Pohjola 2016). The welfare service system reforms have tried to achieve a welfare service production model that would be regionally and demographically cost-effective from the viewpoint of the users and producers of welfare services. *The Sote reform* strives to reduce regional and demographic welfare disparities, control cost increases by cost-effectively meeting the increasing and increasingly complex welfare-service needs of the citizens, and solve the labour shortage in welfare services. (ibid.) The achievement of the goals of the *Sote reform* is determined by the development of the employment rate and solving the labour shortage. One possible solution to both is the optimal utilisation of the labour potential of unemployed people, people with limited capacity for work, elderly people and the immigrant

population (Asplund & Koistinen 2014; Maahanmuuton tilannekatsaus 1/2018; Hetemäki 2019).

The climate change discourse, which has intensified in the 2010s, is also challenging the development of the welfare service system to comply with the operating principles of a sustainable society and to anticipate the challenges brought by immigration and climate change displacement (Helne et al. 2012; Hämäläinen 2013; Kiiski Kataja et al. 2018). When developing welfare services, it is important to consider not only knowledge management and managing an aging workforce but also cultural sensitivity in a more systematic way (Heikkilä et al. 2019). The ongoing fourth industrial revolution is bringing new kinds of ecologically sustainable technological opportunities to operate according to the principles of a sustainable society as, for example, digitalisation facilitates the provision of remote health care and social services as well as distance learning and telecommuting (Frydinger 2017; Roboter – Assistenz-Systeme – Künstliche ... 2018; World Economic Forum 2018).

The development of welfare services is important for the interests of the citizens who use welfare services and the public, private and civic organisations that provide them. The welfare mix model, which is based on multiple service providers, emphasises citizens' familiarity with the local and regional welfare service selection and their opportunities to optimally utilise the service selection available to them. The legislation on the provision of welfare services and on the qualification requirements for social welfare and health care professionals forms the foundation of the welfare mix model for producing welfare services. In addition to the legislation, the welfare services provided by the private sector are also determined by demand-based market conformity and, in the civic sector, demand for services and number of volunteers. In the Sote reform, the feasibility of the welfare mix varies between regions based on the population number, population age structure and the socioeconomic position and income level of the population. (Näätänen & Londén 2018; Peltosalmi et al. 2018; see also Klie 2014; Sotelaki ei takaa ... 2016, 149.) The welfare services produced by the public sector are steered by the social and welfare allocations in its operating budget, within whose framework services are produced, and service assignment is also prioritised, for example using urgency and non-urgency criteria for access to services. Welfare services produced by the private sector are determined by the purchasing power of the customer base, or how much of their wealth the customers can spend on purchasing private social and health care services. The service volume

produced by the civic sector is determined by the appropriations granted for operations as well as the number and commitment of volunteers.

This themed issue is dedicated to the life and work of *Erkki Saari*. Erkki worked to improve the well-being and welfare services development of unemployed people and immigrants in particular, and to develop the regional production of welfare information while operating in Lapland and Hyvinkää. I would like to thank the writer of the column, *Pirkko Vartiainen*, Professor of Social and Health Management at the University of Vaasa, and the *writers of each article* for their diverse problematisation of evolving welfare services.

I wish all of you reading this Lumen 2/2019 online magazine an enlightening and inspiring read!

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