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From Institutionalisation to Citizenship: Lessons Learned from Studying Diaconal Practice in a Norwegian Context

Abstract: This article is based upon a historical study of a Norwegian diaconal foundation working in the field of disability care and welfare services. The article discusses how the foundation understood their mission and responded to emerging integration policies in the context of a Scandinavian welfare state. The article starts out by positioning disability as a human rights concept, both internationally and in the Norwegian context. Martha Nussbaum's theory of justice – the *capabilities approach* – is introduced and offered as a theoretical perspective for studying diaconal practice. Next, the historical study involving a Norwegian diaconal service provider working in the field of disability and deaf culture is introduced. The study is situated in both a disability and deaf culture context, since for the most part the service users are deaf and deafblind persons with impairment(s). User involvement and citizenship have emerged as important factors in the context of disability; the article therefore discusses how social justice can be integrated into this kind of diaconal practice.

Keywords: disability, deafness, welfare services, CRPD, social justice, capabilities approach, Norway

1. Introduction

This article focuses on the role of care and welfare services in the promotion of equal citizenship for care and welfare service users. In the context of this paper, diaconia is seen as a faith-based care and welfare practice.¹ In the Nordic welfare states, such services were developed in cooperation between private diaconal institutions and foundations and the emerging state. The private diaconal institutions and foundations were innovative in shaping the welfare state and in turn were themselves shaped by the policy, for example, via economic

¹ This article draws on a study of the Christian diaconal foundation Signo, which has provided services to and measures for meeting the needs of deaf and deafblind persons with disabilities over a period of 120 years, that is, from 1898 to the present day. The study is part of an anthology edited by the author (Lid 2018).

funds from the state. This paper discusses how a diaconal foundation, working in the field of disability care and welfare services understood their mission and responded to growing integration policies in a Scandinavian welfare state in the 1970–1980s. I begin by positioning disability as a human rights concept, both internationally and in the Norwegian context. I then introduce Martha Nussbaum's theory of justice – the *capabilities approach* – and offer this as a productive theory for studying diaconal practice. Next, I introduce a case study involving a Norwegian diaconal service provider working in the field of disability and deaf culture. I then situate this case in both a disability and a deaf culture context, since for the most part the service users are deaf and deafblind persons with impairment(s). Because user involvement and citizenship have emerged as important factors in the field of disability, I conclude by discussing how social justice can be integrated into this kind of diaconal practice. Persons with disabilities have often been excluded from citizenship because of their dependency.² The term *citizenship* is comprehensive, and includes social, political, and cultural aspects.³ In this article, I predominantly focus on citizenship as inclusive toward all humans.

2. Disability as a Human Rights Concept

The political, legal and theoretical understanding of disability has changed, establishing an analytical nuance between impairment and disability. Impairment as a specific medical condition is part of human diversity, whereas disability is the social and relational dimension of impairment, for example, being unable to do certain things, enter certain places, or take on certain social roles because of environmental barriers.⁴ The UN focused on disability as a political issue when launching the International Year of Disabled Persons in 1981 and naming 1983–1992 the Decade for Disabled Persons. In 1993, the UN passed its Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities, which indicated a paradigmatic shift, from disability rights to human rights.⁵

2 Martha C. Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice: Disability, Nationality, Species Membership* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 52–53.

3 Thomas Humphrey Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class and Other Essays* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1950); and Birte Siim, *Gender and Citizenship: Politics and Agency in France, Britain and Denmark* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000).

4 Tom Shakespeare, "Disability Rights and Wrongs Revisited," *Disability & Society* 29, no. 4 (2014): 659–661. Wolfensberg, 2011.

5 United Nations, *Standard Rules on the Equalization of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities* (New York City 1994) and *The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities* (New York City: United Nations, 2008).

The UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD) entered into force in 2008 and was ratified by Norway in 2013.⁶ The understanding of disability in the CRPD is as an interaction and as relational.⁷

The CRPD states that persons with disabilities have the same rights and duties as other citizens. Throughout the articles of the Convention, the duties of the state are also detailed, specifically focusing on the provision of welfare services and care, which is acknowledged as a human rights issue. Among the state duties included in the Convention are the education and training of professionals and staff working with persons with disabilities to better provide the assistance and services guaranteed by the rights recognized in the Convention.⁸ Thus, the Convention brings to the fore a paradigm shift in the understanding of welfare services as a human-rights issue. Following the intention of this Convention, welfare and care services should be provided in a way that supports each person's citizenship rather than segregating the service users from places where they can practice their citizenship, such as in local communities.⁹

This international political shift was guided by the commonly used phrase “nothing about us without us.” Persons with disabilities have assumed new roles and have become involved in matters concerning their own living conditions. For example, Norwegian activists and scholars have engaged in human rights issues, both nationally and internationally. The white paper inaugurating Norway's transition toward a human rights paradigm in the field of disability was entitled *From Service User to Citizen* and was published in 2001.¹⁰ This was followed by a report issued by the government, and in 2009 the Discrimination and Accessibility Act was finally adopted.¹¹

This article discusses the implications of this paradigm shift for services provided in a diaconal context. The human rights turn in the provision of services to persons with disabilities is of profound importance, as persons with disabilities have long been excluded from citizenship and equal status precisely because of their need for care and welfare services.¹² Research has documented

6 Norway was among the first to sign the Convention, and it signed the CRPD in 2007.

7 United Nations, CRPD, Article 1; Jerome Bickenbach, *Ethics, Law, and Policy* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2012); see also Lid (2014).

8 United Nations, CRPD, Article 4.

9 United Nations, CRPD, Article 24, 26.

10 Norges offentlige utredninger (NOU), “Fra Bruker til borger,” White Paper (Oslo: 2001), 22. In Norwegian.

11 Discrimination and Accessibility Act, DDA. By the passing of this act, the political shift from service user to citizen was adopted politically and legally, and the paradigm shift was enacted in policy. In 2018, this act was included in a revised Equal Status and Discrimination Act.

12 Martha C. Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 304; see also Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, 2007.

that, since the 19th century, people with disabilities in most Western countries were typically segregated in institutions, some of which were diaconal, and for some persons, this continued until only quite recently.¹³ The living conditions for the inhabitants of such institutions were often poor, with few opportunities for them to flourish and experience self-determination.¹⁴

There has been a similar – albeit less comprehensive – shift in the understanding of disability in Christian contexts, as reflected in recent key documents from the World Council of Churches (WCC).¹⁵ In 2016, *The Gift of Being* was adopted at the WCC meeting in Trondheim. This document provides a theological understanding of disability as part of human plurality – and thus the human condition – and establishes a link to the UN CRPD. *The Gift of Being* expresses a perspective in which human diversity is valued. In this document, disability and impairments are not reduced to being problems or discussed using negative terminology, and vulnerability is recognized and valued as a human condition.

Some persons with disabilities need care and welfare services in order to be able to live good and meaningful lives. Having an impairment, however, does not mean that one cannot experience a high quality of life and happiness.¹⁶ In recent years, the welfare service user has taken a more prominent role in the development of welfare practices. This incorporation of user perspectives is of specific relevance in the field of disability.¹⁷

Below I introduce Nussbaum's theory of justice, the *capabilities approach*. This theoretical perspective focuses on justice for persons with disabilities who have need of care and welfare services, which makes it specific relevant for diaconia scholarship and practitioners. The theory can help identify issues from everyday life and professional practice as relevant for justice.

3. Nussbaum's Theory of Justice – the Capabilities Approach

The American philosopher Martha Nussbaum provides an account of justice that conceives of disability as a human condition.¹⁸ According to Nussbaum,

13 Lid (2018), Chapter 4.

14 Henri-Jacques Stiker, *A History of Disability* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002).

15 The first was the following interim document: World Council of Churches, *A Church of All and For All: An Interim Statement* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2003).

16 Jerome E. Bickenbach, "Disability and the Well-Being Agenda," in *Disability and the Good Human Life*, ed. Jerome E. Bickenbach (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 168–198.

17 Fred Pelka, *What We Have Done: An Oral History of the Disability Rights Movement* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012).

18 Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, 2007.

most Western accounts of justice are based on an understanding of the person as someone who contributes to society throughout the lifespan. Disability and vulnerability as human conditions therefore were not fully included in Western theories of justice.¹⁹ Therefore, persons who are in need of care throughout their lifespan challenge theories of justice.

According to the CRPD conceptualization, disability emerges as a result – or as a product – of a person–environment interaction.²⁰ For example, wheelchair users living in an environment that has not been made accessible for wheelchairs directly experience their disability, while wheelchair users living in a wheelchair-accessible environment do not. A person with hearing loss and using sign language experiences accessible communication when living in an environment where sign language is used. Yet if this person is refrained from using sign language, communication is hampered, and disability may emerge in various situations involving communication.

When a person needs care or welfare services, the provision of these services, or the lack thereof, may support or hamper their opportunity to live as a citizen in a community. For example, a student in need of assistance in order to get dressed in the morning must be able to rely on his/her service providers in order to be able to attend a lecture or taking an exam. Impairments and differences in abilities are thus aspects of human plurality, and this plurality is what Nussbaum argues society should attend to when planning social and spatial arrangements, such as public transportation, and when designing services.

In her political theory of justice, Nussbaum starts by establishing a conception of the dignity of the human being and a life that is worthy of that dignity²¹ – an “intuitive idea,” according to Nussbaum.²² Next, she offers a detailed list of ten capabilities central to a life with dignity, which details to the more abstract idea of dignity.²³ Nussbaum argues that a just society should guarantee these capabilities for all citizens, without exception. These capabilities are listed as follows²⁴:

1. Life
2. Bodily health
3. Bodily integrity
4. Senses, imagination, and thought
5. Emotions

19 Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, 2007.

20 United Nations, CRPD, Article 1.

21 Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, 74.

22 Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice* 72.

23 Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, 75

24 The list is based on that presented in Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, 76–77. Nussbaum specifies each of these capabilities in more detail.

6. Practical reason
7. AffiliationA: Being able to live with and toward othersB: Having the social bases of self-respect and nonhumiliation
8. Other species
9. Play
10. Having political and material control over one's environment

According to Nussbaum, these capabilities are best understood as constituting a human-rights approach, as both the capabilities and the human rights corpus are linked to an idea of human dignity.²⁵ This, together with the understanding of justice as related to quality of life, make the theory valuable for diaconia and care and welfare practices.

I will now briefly discuss the relevance of the capabilities approach for diaconia, both in theory and practice. Because a discussion of the fundamental structure and content of Nussbaum's theory of justice lies beyond the scope of this article, I discuss primarily the relevance of her contributions for diaconal theory and practice – one basic condition of which is their shared value base. Both, diaconal theory and practice and Nussbaum's theory both have values as their foundational bases, of which justice is perhaps the most fundamental.

Nussbaum's theory is one of justice and is thus a normative theory. It is therefore necessary to be aware of the challenges of applying a normative evaluative dimension to an empirical study. However, as Kleiven argues, normativity can be productive in diaconal scholarship when the research aims at improving practice and is guided by constructive questions.²⁶ The study this article is based upon stems from a quest for improved practice motivated by the shift in paradigm toward service users every day citizenship.

4. The Capabilities Approach as Diaconal Theory

The guiding question for the purpose of this article is whether and how care and welfare services in a diaconal context can support and realize universal citizenship by supporting affiliation and control over one's environment. Diaconal institutions are part of the mix of care and welfare providers and belong to what is often referred to as the *third sector*.²⁷ Third-sector research is a growing field

25 Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, 78; see also Lid, 2015.

26 Tormod Kleiven, "Empirical Diaconal Research and Normativity: A Discussion About Methodology in Diaconal Science Illustrated by the Term 'Phronesis' and the Understanding of Power," *Diaconia: Journal for the Study of Christian Social Practice* 6 (2015): 43–60.

27 Johannes Eurich, "Diaconia under Mission Drift: Problems with Its Theological Legitimation and Its Welfare State Partnership," *Diaconia: Journal for the Study of Christian Social Practice* 3, no. 1 (2012): 58–65.

in research on welfare practices.²⁸ Such practice relates to social justice, both internal and external. The practice can have promoting justice as an aim, and it can be carried out in such a way that the practice itself creates or establishes a sound condition for justice. Nussbaum's capabilities is of relevance for this practice, for example, health, bodily integrity, affiliation, and political and material control over one's environment. The guiding question for the purpose of this article is whether and how care and welfare services in a diaconal context can support and realize equal citizenship by supporting affiliation and control over one's environment.

Nussbaum expands on *affiliation* by focusing on two different dimensions of this capability: being able to live with others and having the social bases of self-respect and nonhumiliation.²⁹ The first dimension can be interpreted as a horizontal dimension, whereas the second involves the values of a context and a society, so that this latter aspect can be closely related to care and welfare services. Such services are provided in contexts in which the user's self-respect is either limited or promoted. One strategy for promoting self-determination and citizenship among service users is to pay particular attention to their perspectives and to the role care and welfare services play regarding their opportunity to live a good life as dignified human beings.

The second dimension can be approached on a microlevel as attentiveness toward the person's own interests, for example, by asking where they want to live and what friends they want to relate to. On a societal level, this dimension relates to what services may support equal citizenship and how such services should be provided. The paradigm shift endorsed by the CRPD is illustrated here by the implementation of the idea that services should not be reduced to measures to sustain life, but rather understood as basic conditions for equal citizenship for those in need of care and welfare services.

The next capability I will focus on is *having control over one's political and material environment*, which relates to the political dimension of citizenship.³⁰ Persons with disabilities have long been neglected as political subjects and have enjoyed only limited opportunities to engage in politics at both the local and national level. The design and formation of our common spaces and places thus lacked any perspectives and insights from persons with disabilities. Only recently has it been ethically and politically acknowledged that the lack of accessibility to goods and resources (e.g., education) is best understood as disability-based discrimination. Consequently, disability-based discrimination

28 Evers & Laville, 2004.

29 Nussbaum, *Frontiers of Justice*, 77.

30 Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class*, 1950; and Siim, *Gender and Citizenship*, 2000.

is a rather new topic in human-rights contexts and in the context of national discrimination acts.³¹

The capabilities are of inherent value for all citizens. By discussing what a just society should provide for its citizens, Nussbaum offers a theory that can be applied in multiple contexts. The ability to affiliate with other persons and not to be humiliated, but instead to be treated as a dignified human being with equal worth is of inherent value for anyone, in any situation. The opportunity to flourish and to be met with positive expectations regarding one's contributions is similarly valuable for all individuals.³² In the next section, I describe the Norwegian context and present a case from a diaconal care and welfare context that I base my discussion on. This is a kind of diaconal practice often referred to as "specialized diaconia," motivated by the needs of persons belonging to certain social groups or affiliated with specific medical and social categories such as deafness or deafblindness. This specific care and welfare practice presented occurs in a semisegregated institution, which are public and located in a geographical and political context. Thus, care and service institutions – such as those often referred to as "residential" – are also to some extent public spaces.

5. The Norwegian Context

Norway is predominantly Lutheran, with a Lutheran "folk church."³³ The synod of the Church of Norway adopted an understanding of diaconia at its meeting in 2008.³⁴ In 2010, the Plan for Diaconia was adopted by the Church of Norway. In this plan and other documents, social justice is related to global issues, poverty, and violence. The UN CRPD was signed by Norway in March of 2007. However, this Convention is not reflected in the Plan for Diaconia documents. Moreover, justice for persons with disabilities is overlooked as a site of the relevance for justice. This is surprising, as persons with disabilities often face discrimination.³⁵

Diaconia is embedded in religious theory and practice, both within the Church of Norway and in other religious contexts. The Church of Norway's Plan for Diaconia clarifies some perspectives proposed as being transverse

31 The United States adopted the Americans With Disabilities Act in 1991; Norway adopted the Disability and Accessibility Act in 2009.

32 Lid, 2015.

33 In 2017, 77% of the Norwegian citizens were members of the Norwegian Lutheran Church, which is called the Church of Norway.

34 Kirkerådet, Plan for diakoni (udatert). https://kirken.no/globalassets/kirken.no/om-kirken/slik-styres-kirken/planer-visjonsdokument-og-strategier/plan_diakoni_institusjoner2.pdf

35 Nussbaum, 2004.

throughout the plan and thus fundamental for diaconal work. Among these are human rights and dignity, gender and equality status, and inclusion of persons with disabilities.³⁶ The main focus of this plan lies with the congregations. In addition, a resource document on diaconal practice in institutions widens the scope for justice by focusing on justice as a value and an attitude.³⁷

The diaconal foundation in the historical study this paper is based upon provides services to persons with hearing loss and/or deaf blindness in combination with cognitive, mental, or physical impairments; the foundation has been providing such services since 1898. The diaconal aspect of the practice carried out by the diaconal actor is understood as work carried out on behalf of and within the church.³⁸ This specific practice can be characterized historically as male diaconia, predominantly headed by men, as it addresses both spiritual and bodily needs, and it was founded of a church minister. From the first years and up until the turn of the millennium, the leaders were church ministers.³⁹ The practice can further be understood as diaconal welfare practice dealing with “otherness.”⁴⁰ In this specific case, the otherness aspect relates to the diaconal practice being geared toward deaf and deafblind persons with impairments, most often carried out by hearing persons. Because the leaders and most of the employees of the foundation were neither deaf nor deafblind themselves, the internal relations among the persons involved in this work were characterized by a certain asymmetry: hearing persons offering help to deaf people.

The specific characteristic of this kind of practice is that the service provider offers services at an individual level, often throughout the person’s whole life. It is therefore crucial that the services do not impede the person’s opportunity to live a good human life in a community with others. However, the consensus of what constitutes a good human life constantly changes over the lifespan. Today, the ability to live as a citizen and control one’s own living conditions is highly valued, so welfare services are a basic condition for self-determination for those who are in need of such services.

As noted earlier, there exist different perspectives on disability. Proposed models of disability have changed from cultural, medical, and social models toward today’s relational or social-relational models.⁴¹ Deafness and hearing loss are contested as belonging to a wider disability category, as many deaf

36 Church of Norway, *Plan for Diaconia* (Oslo: Church of Norway National Council, 2010), p. 15.

37 Kirkerådet, *Plan for Diakoni: Aktualisert for Diakonale Institusjoner. Et Ressursdokument* (Oslo: Kirkerådet, udatert). In Norwegian.

38 Signo, *Statutter*, 2017.

39 Lid, 2018, Chapter 2.

40 Beate Hofmann, “New Diaconal Professionalism—Theology, Spirituality, Values and Practice,” *Diaconia: Journal for the Study of Christian Social Practice* 8, no. 2 (2017): 138–151.

41 Shakespeare, 2013; Goodley, 2011.

persons are sign-language users and have a self-understanding as belonging to a cultural and linguistic minority of sign-language users. However, this specific diaconal foundation – Signo – provides services to persons with hearing loss and deafblindness *in combination with* cognitive, mental, and/or physical impairment. As such, the individuals identified by the foundation as their user groups are individuals with hearing loss or deafblindness in combination with other impairments. Disability and sign language thus characterize this diaconal practice, and both deafness and disability are relevant social categories. Another specific characteristic is that the persons Signo provides services for are often in need of care and services throughout their lifespan, which differentiates the diaconal work that occurs among, say, substance abusers and prison inmates.

In general, diaconal practices are often directed toward vulnerable or precarious individuals and groups, such as migrants, persons with disabilities, or alcohol or substance abusers. Asymmetric relations between the helper and the helped characterize this kind of work. However, this specific kind of practice is also characterized by vulnerability at the institutional level: The institution, the social worker, and the health worker are all vulnerable. Failure to recognize vulnerability at the institutional level and vulnerability as a shared condition may put the practice risk in terms of recognition and misrecognition of persons.⁴²

6. Segregation and misrecognition

A critical part in the history of service users and service providers was the time when institutions for people with disabilities changed from being large institutions to smaller group homes. The reason for this change lay in the critique of the lack of resources in institutions for persons with disabilities.⁴³ One of the institutions owned by the diaconal foundation at that time named “The Home of the Deaf” was situated in southern Norway. Up to the late 1980s this institution, like similar institutions, was characterized by radical segregation. Within the same small geographical area, on a farm with a farmhouse and outbuildings, the deaf persons with impairments lived in one building referred to as “the dormitory” and the head of the institution lived with his family in a very nice building referred to as the “administrator’s residence.”⁴⁴ The living conditions in the dormitory were poor: the inhabitants had only cold running water in their room and did not have access to any personal clothes, nor were they allowed to cook their own food. They lived in small rooms – two persons in

42 Judith Butler, *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* (London: Verso, 2009), 13.

43 Tøssebro, 2010.

44 Lid, 2018, Chapter 4.

each room – and worked on the farm on a daily basis. The contrast between the dormitory, the school in a nearby building, and the administrator's residence was evident.⁴⁵

The failure at this time of history to support social justice, solidarity, and citizenship indicates that diaconal practice is not infallible. Indeed, there was little awareness in the diaconal foundation that the persons living in the institution should be recognized as equals citizens. The workers did their best to accommodate the inhabitants, but the system did not sustain dignity at the individual level.

Living in an diaconal lead institution was thus not enough to ensure a good life. In the late 1980s, as in many Western countries, Norway reformed its care and welfare services for persons with intellectual disabilities,⁴⁶ implementing a reform of the living conditions of persons with disabilities from institutional living to more ordinary living conditions in smaller houses, group homes and apartments. It had become evident to politicians that the institutional living conditions for people with disabilities hindered their ability to live dignified lives. This reform of life conditions was implemented as a political reform from outside the institution in the present study. The reform thus represented a radical change in the practice to which the diaconal foundation struggled to adjust.

Against this backdrop, it is interesting to reflect upon why the diaconal foundation itself failed to identify its practice as not sufficiently being in agreement with the individuals' dignity and not providing as good living conditions as possible for the service users.

7. Care and Welfare Services as Locus for Social Justice

Diaconal practice is situated within the lives of citizens and, in this case, of services users. The *raison d'être* for such practice is that some persons need the services provided. According to the foundation's statutes, representatives for deaf and deafblind organizations are members of the board. Representation on the board, which is not always the case for diaconal foundations, may be a safeguard against practices at risk for misrecognition. Such representation also serves to promote health and welfare services as subject–subject relations rather than subject–object ones.

45 This is described more fully in Lid, 2018, Chapter 4.

46 Magnus Tideman and Jan Tøssebro, "A Comparison of Living Conditions for Intellectually Disabled People in Norway and Sweden: Present Situation and Changes Following the National Reforms in the 1990s," *Scandinavian Journal of Disability Research* 4, no. 1 (2002), 23–42.

The UN CRPD includes topics of relevance for sign-language users (i.e., in Article 2). However, the Convention takes a critical stance toward segregational practices. For example, Article 19 underscores that persons with disabilities should not be obliged to live in specific living arrangements and focuses on the need to prevent isolation. Article 24 is dedicated to education, aiming at providing persons with disabilities access to inclusive primary and secondary education.

One reason for practicing segregational diaconal work in the last century and even today concerns the importance of sign language. However, the need for communication and a robust environment for language users must be linked closely to justice as a value and a practice. According to Nussbaum, the use of sign language and alternative communication might be understood as an example of the service user's control over his/her environment. When sign-language users and deaf or deafblind persons with disabilities also are employed by the service provider, justice as a value, practice and an attitude might even be strengthened in a service-providing diaconal institution like Signo.

Justice in the Norwegian diaconal context is often associated with international perspectives and a "fight for justice." The term "justice" is mentioned several times in the Plan for Diaconia,⁴⁷ and the "fight" metaphor is often used. This metaphor may perhaps hamper the recognition of welfare practices as sites for justice and hinder the identification of services for people with disabilities as being relevant for justice. Moreover, without a historical acknowledgment of how services in institutions led to injustice for persons with disabilities, it might be hard to realize that health and welfare services in these contexts are fundamental conditions for justice for individuals.⁴⁸

Nussbaum's theory of justice – the capabilities approach – is therefore valuable by offering a specific interpretation of what it means to be able to live a life that is worthy of the dignity of human beings. Justice, in the context of this theory, is understood as social, political, and cultural. Promoting justice as integrated dimensions of care and welfare services may thus promote justice as a practice in the lives of persons with disabilities who use such services.

8. Shared Vulnerability

As noted above, scholars propose an understanding of diaconia as a practice dealing with otherness. Is this, however, an adequate description today? Ac-

47 Church of Norway, *Plan for Diaconia*, 2010.

48 Several books have documented this part of history; see, for example, Pelka, *What We Have Done*, 2012.

ording to contemporary policy, a diaconal actor, such as Signo, who provides welfare services to deaf persons with disabilities, provides better services when persons with hearing loss and impairments are employed by the foundation. In this context, the “other” could also be a “self” and an “insider,” insofar as the organizational structure includes deaf persons and persons with disabilities, i.e., as board members or as employees. The demarcation of the “other” then, is thus blurred.

So, what is the role of diaconia in working for a more just society? According to Nussbaum, a detailed and comprehensive understanding of justice can help to identify welfare practice as a site of relevance for justice. This historically informed study indicated that, when a person is in need of social care and welfare services, it is important both how such services are provided and under which conditions. A workable concept of justice must respect the inherent dignity of the person in need of services. Thus, justice is both a practical and theoretical concept. The CRPD and “The Gift of Being” suggest perspectives on topic from two different angles – a political angle and a theological/diaconal angle, respectively.

According to the WCC documents “The Gift of Being”⁴⁹ and “A Church of All and For All,”⁵⁰ the church is not one and whole unless all people are included. The relationship between service user and the service provider is therefore intertwined, for example, through user involvement in service innovation and by integrating the user perspective in the work of the diaconal foundation in developing and practicing its basic values. This provides several implications for diaconal theory and practice, one of which could be a call to blur the demarcation between “us” and “them” in diaconal practice. An implication for future diaconal research could be to develop research questions from users’ perspectives by including service users in diaconal research. User involvement in knowledge production is a growing field in health and welfare research.⁵¹

9. Equal Citizenship Supported by Diaconal Practice

The transition from institutional, often paternalistic practices toward promoting citizenship for service users should be supported by developing a theory relevant for such changes in policy and practice. As illustrated by the case study discussed above, it may be challenging, but not impossible for a diaconal foundation to

49 World Council of Churches, *The Gift of Being: Called to be a Church of All and For All* (Geneva: Bossey Ecumenical Institute, 2016).

50 World Council of Churches, *Interim Statement*, 2004.

51 Banks and Brydon-Miller, 2019.

adjust their way of work to be more in line with a policy promoting equal citizenship. The foundation Signo was geared toward providing services to persons living in an institution and had to shift the practice toward providing services under different conditions where the service users played a stronger role in shaping the practice.

Further, it is crucial that diaconal practice avoid an “us” and “them” dichotomy between diaconal actors and service users. An awareness of the justice dimension of care and welfare service both internal and external can help avoid this kind of dichotomy. However, in this kind of specialized diaconia, justice must be understood as something integrated in the practice rather than as something to be “fought for” or accomplished in some “other place.” Justice in this context mean that the service provided by diaconal foundations are carried out in such a way that the service users can live lives of full value and can flourish as equal citizens.

I have presented Nussbaum’s theory of justice as a promising theoretical basis for developing good care and welfare practice aiming at supporting citizenship. However, it is also crucial to explore how such diaconal practices can promote citizenship by blurring the demarcation between “us” and “them” in diaconal practice. Learning from history can be helpful if we are to raise awareness that misrecognition of equal citizenship must be avoided in contemporary and future care and welfare practice, and that this specific kind of practice especially needs to align to social justice perspectives.

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