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Introduction¹

Attention to the quality of working life has high priority in the Nordic countries. Trade unions, employer associations, and governmental authorities have throughout decades collaborated – and fought – in order to improve working conditions by securing and improving the work environment, wages, developing skills and competencies among employees, and even experimented with new and more democratic ways of organizing and managing work. The welfare state and the liberal and social democracies of the Nordic countries have codeveloped in symbiosis with local, regional, and national initiatives taken by private companies and public institutions in relation to the quality of work life. It has, likewise, been a trademark of Nordic working life studies to focus on the complexity and multifaceted nature of work life to gain insights in the factors and dynamics that bring about, afford, and constrain quality in working life. But significantly, working life researchers have not only tried to understand but also actively tried to impact working life by making research knowledge available for reform initiatives and labor market policies.

This issue of Nordic Working Life Studies is composed of four articles that continue and advance the ambition to get to grips with work life quality. From different angles, and based on different research material from three Nordic countries (Norway, Sweden, and Finland), the articles investigate aspects and dimensions of working life that are paramount for quality of work.

In the first article by Stefan Annell, Petra Lindfors, Göran Kecklund, and Magnus Sverke: ‘Sustainable Recruitment: Individual Characteristics and Psychosocial Working Conditions Among Swedish Police Officers’, we come to learn about the long-term effects of selection factors that are applied in the recruitment of police officers in Sweden. The longitudinal study examines what effects these selection factors have, and how psychosocial working conditions influence job satisfaction, organizational citizenship behavior, occupational retention, and health.

The second article ‘Health institutions, temporary work agencies and the mobility of power of nurses’ by Hege Merete Knutsen examines another aspect related to professional welfare workers situation in contemporary working life, namely the ability of nurses in the Norwegian health care sector to move between employers or leave the labor market. Specifically, Knutsen’s case study investigates the role played by temporary work agencies that are established as a response to shortages of nurses in Norwegian health institutions. Temporary work agencies have attracted nurses from Sweden and Denmark to work in the Norwegian health care sector due to better wages, but, in response, Norwegian hospitals have developed models of internal labor hire (bank nursing) that restrain the growth of temporary work agencies. This model retains and pools permanent nursing staff, and makes work more attractive and less stressful for foreign born nurses as they enter the pool at one hospital.

¹ You can find this text and its DOI at <https://tidsskrift.dk/njwls/index>.



The third article by Aleksander Å. Madsen: ‘Long-term Sickness Absence Among Professionals: Investigating Gender, Socioeconomic Position and Care Work’ also focus on health professionals. In a longitudinal study of register data about the Norwegian health professionals over 10 years, Madsen shows that long-term sickness absence is related to both low socioeconomic position and being a care worker, and he discusses the implications of the findings for social policy.

Finally, the fourth article, by Tuomo Alasoini: ‘Nordic Working Life Development Programs and the Tricky Problem of Scaling-up’ explicitly reflects on how Nordic working life studies have strived to contribute to improve quality in working life. By reviewing the work life literature in the Norwegian and Finnish traditions, he explores how development programs have fared in reforming working life. He furthermore suggests that some of the problems and failings of the reform initiatives can be remedied by attending to the experiences with Transition Management as applied in transition and innovation studies.

Anders Buch