



Peer reviewed article

‘The customer in focus!’ The municipal home-care provider's presentation of activities in marketized eldercare

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Abstract

Just over half of Sweden's municipalities have introduced freedom of choice for users of home-care services, based on the Swedish Act on System of Choice in the Public Sector (LOV). The system of choice results in a 'welfare mix' in the municipalities, where public and private providers compete. This article investigates how the public provider of home-care services presents its activities in the context of LOV and marketization. Are approaches to 'convergence' or 'divergence' applied in relation to the idea of the private company? Convergence means that the public provider attempts to imitate the private company in the presentation of its activities, whereas 'divergence' refers to the public provider's efforts to highlight the differences. The empirical study comprises directed content analysis and includes the 106 municipalities with LOV that have presented the public home-care provider on the municipality's website. The study concludes that the dominant approach represents divergence, supplemented with several elements of convergence. The public provider's presentations emphasize, for example, municipal ownership and the municipality's long-term experience providing home-care services. At the same time, there are company-inspired elements, such as the use of the term 'customer'. The results of the study are situated in a discussion of how public providers develop in the context of marketization. The situation that public providers uncritically 'import' courses of action from private companies may challenge central values in public administration, such as transparency, objectivity, universalism, and adherence to the democratic chain of delegation.

Keywords: System of choice, marketization, companyization, home-care services, eldercare, public provider, New Public Management



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