Abstract

WELFARE, GENDER AND RELIGION
IN A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

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This paper presents a recently initiated research project within the field of welfare, gender and religion (2003-2006). Europe is undergoing economic, social and value related changes, which have direct influence on the organisation of social welfare provision. The aim of the project is to analyse the function of European majority churches as agents of welfare within the social economy. The starting point for the study is the Swedish situation, which will be compared with equivalent situations in seven European countries; Finland, Norway, England, Germany, France, Italy and Greece.

Gender and welfare is a well established area of research in several European countries today. The specific contribution of this project is to bring religion/theology into this discussion. The European majority churches have been of historic importance in forming European identity, also with regard to gender. Today religion appears as an interesting actor, both as welfare provider and public voice. Our aim is to identify patterns of gender and power which emerge within the majority churches in their role as agents of welfare. These patterns will be interpreted against the background of the respective countries and church traditions.

The analysis will enable different models and solutions to emerge - and eventually to critique and complement each other. In this way we hope to be able to provide relevant knowledge for forthcoming decisions concerning the role of the churches within the field of welfare.