

CAPABILITY AND OLDER WOMEN in the Governance of the North



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Background

Older persons are identified as vulnerable by UN, and older women in the rural North even more. High ambitions on international level to “ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages” (SDG3) put claims on the Arctic states to form the geopolitics of the region so that individuals can live a life in dignity. The ambitions are not always reached due to a variety of reasons. Remote societies, emigration of young women and dismantling of welfare measures, are some addressed problems. International law and the Capabilities approach form a normative frame, not against but in line with the idea of the universal welfare model, for a generous and accessible infrastructure in the North.

Aim

The aim is to elaborate instruments for evaluation of and develop a normative foundation for the Governance of the Nordic Arctic, with specific focus on older women in the North.



Method

The method is to theoretically test whether the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Capabilities approach, can be used as normative references for considerations on the governance of the North/Arctic and measures taken to improve the situation for older women in the region, and, function as argumentative references to promote an inclusive and accessible welfare system for older women in the North.

Result

Given that older women in the North/Arctic have been identified as vulnerable, the questions are: **how could the situation be improved, and, who's responsibility it is to improve the situation.** The welfare system is challenged, as too generous, and at the same time as not sufficient. In the chapter it is argued that Nussbaum's Capabilities approach might be useful when analysing what can be done to improve the situation for older women in the North/Arctic. The Capabilities approach also corresponds to the ambitions of CEDAW and internationally agreed wellbeing objective for older persons in the Sustainable development goals.

The approach points at some **fundamental capabilities that ought to be guaranteed to a certain level by the nation-states in order to promote human dignity.** The approach is closely connected to legislation and nation-building, and is therefore highly relevant. It starts from a set of political principles, such as solidarity, substantive justice/equality and a level of redistribution. And, as mentioned above, the approach is closely related to human rights instruments, the list of fundamental capabilities is overlapping rights identified and given status as human rights in CEDAW.

The most relevant aspects in the approach are the focus on human dignity instead of enhancing individual freedom, the normativity (a set of fundamental capabilities are identified), and the central role of the nation-state (as the responsible political subject for the achievement of a minimum threshold of all capabilities). The aspects put light on the values of individual freedom/choice, the reluctance to define what a good life is, and the privatization of welfare measures. Marketization of publicly financed service and outsourcing of public governing bodies and institutions to other subjects, whose agendas overshadow the assurance of fundamental capabilities for all citizens, can be **questioned out of a Capabilities approach.**

Conclusion

The model for human development, or the Capabilities approach, can be used as a normative tool for the claim for improvement of the situation for older women in the Nordic Arctic.

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Capabilities approach and CEDAW can strengthen the normative base for an inclusive and accessible welfare system for older women in the North.

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