

# Social problems and development in the concept inequality in a Danish context

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**Abstract:**

The paper studies how the concept of inequality has developed in Danish political context, and poses thesis on the interconnection between this development and changes in social problems (poverty is used as example). The point of departure for this study is growth of inequality now also found in Denmark, which as a universal welfare state hitherto seems to have prevented this development. This situation actualizes search for changes that traditional studies of inequality and poverty do not seem to capture. The more specific choice has been to study the development of the concept of inequality in the programmes for the Danish Social Democratic Party. The analyse shows that inequality is created as a central and partly independent concept in the so-called middle period, but loses this status in the late period (the present situation and about 2 decades back), where “equal opportunities” becomes central. Inequality refers – among other things – to justification and different conceptions of inequality to different premises for justification. Especially the change in these premises leads to important thesis about changes in poverty as a social problem and the possible disappearance of central premises for the universal welfare state.

**Preface:**

Inequality can be measured as growing in large parts of the world (Callinicos, 2000, Förster et al., 2005) including the Nordic countries, where universal welfare states hitherto seems to have been able to prevent growth of inequality (Goul Andersen, 2003). Denmark is still at the bottom of the scale measured in gini-coefficient (Förster et al., 2005). This may change: Several recent studies shows that inequality as well as poverty is growing in the period after 2000 (AE-rådet, 2008, Dansk Økonomi, 2006). Inequality and poverty have changed remarkable in the biggest cities (municipalities), where e.g. poverty have risen about 50% from 1996-2005 (Rasmussen et al, 2008). The study also shows that low income and poverty is systematically concentrated in certain areas in the city of Aarhus (op.cit.) – a development with the same pattern as showed in other cities (van Kempen et al. 2005).

This development could indicate that social polarisation, inequality and poverty are central concepts in the scientific field as well as in the political field. In the scientific field it is obviously important to study the social problems in connection to polarisation and inequality and as a consequence of poverty, which in itself can be called a social problem. Poverty and especially inequality<sup>1</sup> – though – do not seem to be hot political subjects, at least not in Denmark.

The differences between social problems as e.g. poverty as measured scientifically and political as well as broader societal perceptions of social problems, indicates the need to develop a more comprehensive framework in order to analyse development in social problems in connection to the present development.

In this paper I shall present a short study of the development of the concept – inequality – in a Danish context. It is a thesis, that the meaning of inequality as well as its essentiality is connected to different social problems as e.g. poverty.

**Inequality – as it is measured scientifically and as a political and an every-day concept.**

The concept of inequality is widespread in the scientific world. Inequality is often understood as a socioeconomic concept and is regularly measured as income inequality (e.g. OECD<sup>2</sup>). Inequality as a socioeconomic concept is connected to “living conditions”, of which inequality also can be measured. Equality or inequality between genders is a newer question, which is also measured. The concept of poverty is connected to inequality by the widespread definition as 50% (OECD) or 60% (EUstat) of the equivalized medium net income.

In Denmark the framework for studying inequality and living conditions were developed primarily in the 1960 - 70<sup>th</sup> with Erik Jørgen Hansen at The Danish National Institute of Social Research as a central figure. Living conditions in different areas were studied in relation to social stratification, and the studies clearly showed unequal distribution of good and bad conditions depending on the social strata (Hansen, 1976, Rasmussen, 2002).

There were – though – main focus on groups suffering from severe bad conditions.

In this tradition inequality seems to be a rather neutral concept. It can be measured in slightly different ways, but the differences seem to be technical rather than qualitative differences, and there can be argued for including different areas (e.g. political involvement, leisure activities a.s.o.).

This – however – is only true, if inequality as a rather technical concept is kept technical. If it is understood as an operational definition, which have become a doxa - and not connected to change of the meaning and connotation it is part of.

The societal development – or perhaps especially the development in the political field<sup>3</sup> - seems to question the relevance and/or meaning of inequality.

From a phenomenological point of view, this development makes it even more important to study if there can be found important changes in the concept of inequality outside the scientific field. Stating this question it is not the assumption, that scientific concepts as such should be directly connected to concepts outside the scientific field – the assumption is rather, that some concepts used in the scientific field – as e.g. inequality and poverty - more directly were meant to mirror<sup>4</sup> the phenomenon's as understood outside the scientific field. If we – and here I can include my own recent study of the development of social polarisation, inequality and poverty – wants to study the development of these phenomenon's it is necessarily also to study the development of the concepts.

### **Social problems and inequality**

It is my assumption, that social problems – or the construction of social problems<sup>5</sup>- are closely related to focus on and the specific meaning of inequality in society and in the political field. Poverty as an example of what is traditionally called a social problem can be understood as quite different phenomena depending on the dominating inequality understanding – and the policy combating inequality.

Looking at social problems – not just as describing real change – but also different discourses and dominant interests is a starting point for questioning how the development can be understood. An example of analysing the “real” development in poverty in United States can be found at Mead: “The poverty of today’s underclass differs appreciably from poverty in the past: underclass poverty stems less from the absence of opportunity than from inability or reluctance to take advantage of opportunity ... The changing nature of poverty has also ushered in a fundamental change in our politics, which formerly focused on class but now emphasizes conduct” (Mead, 2006:107)

Is Mead only showing that the discourse about as well as politics combating poverty has changed in United States? – or can he “prove” a real change?

Other studies suggest that the discourse in social work – at least in Denmark - have changed. One way of expressing the change of discourse in social work is the following polemic table:

| <b>The passive social policy (past)</b>                 | <b>The active social policy (future)</b>         |
|---|--|
| Making the client incapable, taking away responsibility | Making the client capable, giving responsibility |
| Categorising the client                                 | Meeting the human, as he or she is               |
| Theorising as knowing best                              | Respect for the clients knowledge and experience |
| Social worker as the active part                        | Social worker as consultant                      |
| Passive help  | Active help                                      |
| Focus on problems                                       | Focus on resources                               |
| Powerless   | Empowerment                                      |
| Not activated resources                                 | Help to self help                                |
| Dependency  | Independency                                     |
| Stigmatised and self -contempt                          | Self-esteem and self-confidence                  |
| Being in a deadlock                                     | Self transcendent                                |
| External material poverty                               | Internal spiritual poverty                       |
| Invisible power   | Visible power                                    |

(Villadsen, 2004:210)

In a less polemic description the study shows a development from a welfare planning society building on public experts working as diagnosticians towards the help-needing client to the present situation, which is characterised as philanthropic view, where poverty is understood as spiritual, help to help one self becomes primarily and the important dividing lines changes from help needing to help willing and capable (Villadsen, 2004)

Another study (Åkerstrøm Andersen, 2006) deals with a new and quickly growing phenomenon: to make contracts between the “client” and the social assistance system<sup>67</sup>. The study describes a development in social work from treating “the client” from the point of view of individual needs<sup>8</sup>, which have to be met to that of contracting between help system and “user” or “citizen” in order to empower the user to help him or herself to develop and cope with own problems.

The direction of the changes seems similar to those described in UK and other English speaking countries ( Howe, Clarke and Newmann 1997, Skehill, Fook, Healy).

What in this kind of studies is described as a change in discourse – from the constructivist point of view, that it is only possible to study the social phenomena using the second order position<sup>9</sup> - is by Mead described as a “real” change in the phenomenon of poverty. It is thought-provoking, that Meads description so easily can be seen as captured in “banal” first order thinking, but the different descriptions cannot – on the other side – be compared because of the quiet different epistemological positions.

Studying inequality – though – also points at the weaknesses in many constructivist positions. The phenomena: income, capital, prices etc. are ascribed another – more constant – meaning, than most other social phenomena, - and looking at these phenomena as dynamic relations, they do express important – and access able - information about the “conditions” of social life.

It is of importance to the relations in the society, that inequality and poverty – as measures of relations between groups in the population – is growing.

It is – I believe – an important theoretical insight from constructivist positions, that social problems are related to different discourses and that the traditional clear distinction between social problems and social policy cannot be upheld. At the same time – though – it is possible to show – and measure - important changes in the relations between different groups or parts of the population.

It is necessarily to capture the interplay between these two aspects of development to be able to understand both inequality and social problems/social policy.

In this paper I shall primarily address the first of the two mentioned aspects and only deal with the other part by posing questions at the end.

Based on the premises described it seems fruitful to study development in the concept of inequality instead of more broad changes in discourses.

### **Studying development in the concept of inequality**

Why study the concept of inequality and not equality?

The choice of the concept of inequality is the obvious choice, because it is the concept used in many studies – including a study of my own.

Looking at inequality as a concept – though - it seems impossible not to start with it’s most important counter concept: equality. Historically equality is without doubt the dominant part of the two concepts.

I shall shortly address equality in the modern world, because different aspects and possible interpretations of inequality will be lost, if it is not related to equality.

Without doubt a more developed study of equality could still contribute, but I shall also argue, that inequality develops into a concept, which cannot be seen as just a counter-concept to equality.

The idea was broadly to look at the development of the concept as an every-day concept and as a political concept. There are strong arguments for concentrating on inequality primarily as a political concept, which then can be seen as drawing on – as well as affecting – the every-day concept. Inequality has been a central concept in the political arena in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the social democratic party has been the main proponent for combating inequality. In this study I have used the party programmes of the Danish social democratic party (from 1876 to 2004) as empirical material. These programmes appear with very different time intervals. Especially there is a large time-interval between the second (1913) and third (1961) programme. The material cannot be used to follow the exact time for changes in the concept. Even though this could have been interesting the main purpose is to study how meaning of the concept changes.

In the study I am inspired by Koselleck's view on history of concepts (Koselleck, 2007).

Apart from looking at the history of a concept in its relation to the change in social and political history, Koselleck points at the semasiological perspective – where one is looking for change in meaning – as well as the onomasiological perspective, where one is looking for different words for the “same” subject matter (Koselleck, 2007:72 ff).

In a semasiological perspective it is clear, that inequality has a close relation to equality. Equality though is an older concept, than inequality – and inequality seems to be a more narrow concept.

### **A few remarks on equality in the modern world**

The following remarks are restricted to main aspects of equality in the modern society<sup>10</sup>, where formulations about equality especially have been clear in the American Declaration of Independency from 1776:

“We hold these Truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed, by their CREATOR, with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness”<sup>11</sup>

and the French revolutions statements: *liberté, égalité, fraternité* and the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen from 1789:

“Men are born and remain free and equal in rights. Social distinctions may be based only on considerations of the common good” and “All citizens, being equal in its eyes, shall be equally eligible to all high offices, public positions and employments, according to their ability, and without other distinction than that of their virtues and talents.”<sup>12</sup>

Equality as it was formulated - by primarily white men - up against the ancient society's feudal order with “divine” privileges for chosen groups of people. The opposite of equality in this sense, seems to be: making distinctions and treat people differently.

As well known the meaning of equality have been widely discussed and different positions have developed. One of the main differences of importance in this connection is between the liberal and the critical or socialist lines of interpretations. In this distinction the different interpretations is very near connected to how the nature of society is understood.

In a critical or Marxist understanding of society both liberty and equality are seen as only formal rights<sup>13</sup> – as opposite to values which can be realised by (most) people – upon which the capitalist society builds, but at the same time this society imply another more important distinction between exploiters and exploited. Both liberty and equality becomes less important (and widely misunderstood) concepts.

Among various liberal interpretations Rawls<sup>14</sup> – as building on classical liberalism and the marked economy as given condition<sup>15</sup> – can be taken as an example.

Rawls formulates two principles:

”Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberties for all” and

”Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both:

- (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged .... and
  - (b) attached to offices and positions open all under conditions of fair equality and opportunity”
- (Rawls, 1972:302, cited from Callinicos, 2000: 45-46)

The perhaps most remarkable – and disputed - in Rawls position could be said to be the “difference principle”, where

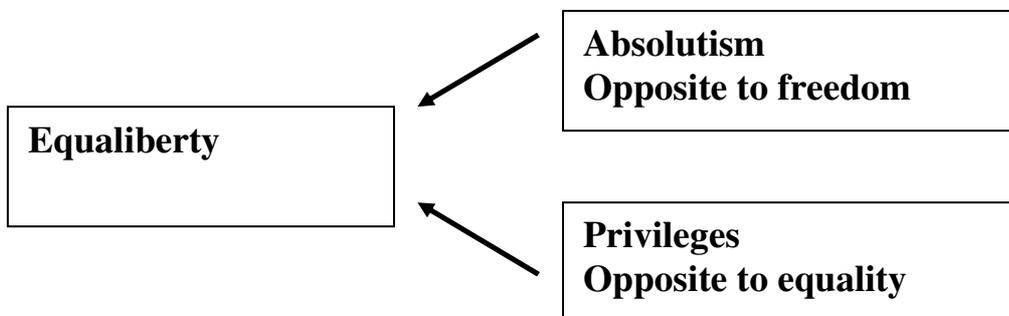
“Those who have been favoured by nature, whoever they are, may gain from their good fortune only on terms that improve the situation of those who have lost out”(op.cit., 47)

Equality – which also here are closely discussed in relation to liberty – is here (in the 1970<sup>th</sup>) understood more extensive than liberty and equality as fundamental rights in the declarations. The term “inequality” is mentioned and specified to the social and economic inequalities.

A concept opens up for a room of meaning, which can be interpreted (Koselleck, 2007). In this case equality can – as formulated by Balibar (1994) – open up for a more radical interpretation, than that of the time. He creates the term “equaliberty” as a unity of equality and liberty and argues that the French Declaration involves that equality and freedom must be understood as each others prerequisites.

Freedom and equality are not to be understood on the basis of essentialist thinking as in the ancient society<sup>16</sup>, but as created on practical experiences.

Equaliberty can be illustrated by the figure:



Freedom and equality in the sense used in the French Declaration are formulated up against both absolutism (“the royal will is law” (op.cit. 47)) and privileges to different groups. In this sense Freedom and equality are not each others opposites – as often argued from liberal positions, but each others prerequisites.

The concept of equaliberty also involves the equation of “men” and “citizen” and this leads to the more radical interpretations, than foreseen in the formulation:

“the Declaration opens an indefinite sphere of “politicization” of rights-claims, (...) the right-claims of salaried workers or dependents, as well as those of woman or slaves, and later of the colonized” (op.cit:49)

And also a situation, where freedom and equality is bound to each other:

“If it is absolutely true that equality is practically identical with freedom, this means that they are necessarily always contradicted together” (op.cit. 48)

### **Inequality in the Danish social democracy programmes**

#### **The early period: The concept of inequality is insignificant**

The term of inequality is only used a few times in the first social democratic programmes from 1876 and 1913

In the 1876 programme<sup>17</sup> the party will fight for

“Abolition of the wages-earning system and any kind of exploitation, no matter which forms it appears in. Eradication of all social and political inequalities”  
(Socialdemokratiske partiprogrammer, København, 1932:5)

And in 1913<sup>18</sup> the party declares:

“The hegemony of the upper-class of the means of production leads to lack of political freedom<sup>19</sup>, social inequality, strife between nations and creates misery for the productive members of the nation” (Protokol, Århus, 1913)

The term is used as a broad counter term to equality in these two programmes.

It is mentioned in connection with exploitation, class, hegemony and generally bad conditions.

The term inequality seems insignificant compared with e.g. exploitation. One could say that it is used more to catch the broader picture of the situation, than to point out more specific phenomenon's.

In addition to the main goals in the programmes they mention concrete demands in different areas. Among these are progressive taxation, demands of the state to support organised alternative production, buy or expropriate certain peaces of land, take responsibility for education and the sick, old and work invalids. The term of inequality is not mentioned e.g. in connection to progressive taxation or education.

Looked upon as counter term or concept to equality it refers to the justification, which can be connected with equality in its more radical interpretation. Inequality is unjust.

The “we” or the group who are in an unjust situation is “the productive members of society” or “the working class”

#### **The middle period: The concept of inequality is flourishing**

The next programmes are from a far later period (1961 and 1977), where the party often has taken and takes part in government.

In the 1961 programme and especially the 1977 programme the term of inequality is used far more often<sup>20</sup> and in different connections:

Most general and to some extent in line with the earlier programmes::

“The inequality of the capitalist system and the unrestrained economic exercise of power is the real danger, which threatens a free society”  
(1961-programme, Bille, 1970:29 and 1977 programme, Solidaritet, 1977:3)

”For the continued fight against inequality and injustice is direct intervention in productions apparatus therefore inescapable” (Solidaritet, 1977:5)

There is a line back to the earlier understanding, but inequality clearly has become a more central concept. The concept of exploitation has disappeared and it can be argued, that inequality has substituted exploitation as the main expression of injustice.

In this most general meaning of inequality it is – as in the earlier programmes – used as a counter concept to equality in its radical claims and referring to the unjust situation.

A new aspect related to inequality has turned up. The economic exercise of power is now called unrestrained. The belief in progress as a result of science, technological development and “societal planning” (op.cit 30) is very clear in 1961-programme, and this unrestrained exercise of power leads to more precise ideas of planning and political intervention in the economic relations.

The “we” or group who will suffer from this unjust situation is properly most people in the society. People who of moral grounds do not want to live with injustice and the dangers or insecurities of capitalism/unrestrained market economy.

### Economic inequality

Inequality also gets a more specific meaning in its link to “economic”

“The capitalist system leads to an economic inequality far beyond, what the single persons efforts determine” (Bille, 1970: 29)

In connection to wish for progress for low paid groups, the party wants

“a levelling of economic inequalities” (op.cit.:30)

And the tax must

“lead to a levelling of inequalities in income and fortune” (op.cit 31)

When inequality is connected to “economic” there seems to be no direct link to inequality used generally:

- 1) The inequality is related to the overall distribution (not production relations) of the capitalist society.
- 2) Inequality is related to a scale rather than being in a dichotomy- relation to equality.
- 3) A new criteria for the unjust situation have turned up: “what a single persons efforts determine”

Equality in its radical claims is not a relevant counter-concept. Rather it is a very specific creation of equality – a creation in which one can argue that it is inequality in its specific relation to other phenomenon’s rather than equality, which plays the creative part. This could be an expression of the birth of a new concept: inequality or economic inequality as a partly independent concept.

The “we” or the ones suffering from this inequality are those who are in the bottom of the income hierarchy and otherwise unjust treated: A group different from the one, who suffers from the unrestrained economy.

The new criteria of the unjust situation can only be understood in relation to an interpretation of the distributional logic of the capitalist or – with another may be more relevant term – the market economy. The premises for discussion of what is just have moved to be close to Rawls. In the “difference principle” though, Rawls is far more “radical” because he questions the premise that it is just for the gifted person automatically to gain from this gift.

Inequality in conditions and their consequences.

In 1977 where different means for combating inequality have been used, there are still demands for the elimination of

“unequal wage- and working conditions” (Solidaritet, 1977:13)

There is also a tendency to go beyond economic inequality – and look at the pattern and consequences of this inequality, - and completing the new concept of economic inequality by inequality of conditions.

“Inequality is a network of interrelated connections. The probability of the social background of the individual to determine education and earnings is high. Low pay is connected to physical and psychological harmful work, poor situation, risk of diseases and poor safety in employment” (op.cit:12)

Prevention is important:

“Already at the start of the school age it will demand an exorbitant big effort to right the inequalities in small children’s development, which are created by bad functioning and lack of contact. Because of that there must be direct initiatives to combat children’s unequal starting conditions” (op.cit.p 13)

Inequality going beyond economical inequality is connected to 3 important different phenomenon’s:

- 1) To be at the bottom of the income hierarchy is related to other bad and unhealthy conditions and inequality is understood as inequality of conditions.
- 2) There is assumed and claimed to be an social inheritance of inequality
- 3) (Consequences of) inequality can be dealt with – but there are expenses

Inequality of conditions is – of course- broader than the economic inequality, but shares the character of being measured on a scale and having the ones in the bottom of this scale as the group suffering.

Inequality of conditions can – to some extent – draw on the radical interpretation of equality, especially referring to the social inheritance of inequality. Inequality in conditions cannot be justified, if it is clear, that individuals systematically do have very different chances.

Inequality of condition is also related to “health” and health is connected to a (very strong) type of justification. The society does have a moral obligation to prevent and treat the groups who are suffering from the consequences of inequality of conditions.

The argument for prevention seems on the one side to draw on moral obligations connected to the different forms of justification, but on the other side: it also points at the effectiveness and indirectly the pay off of early intervention.

It is in the 1960<sup>th</sup> and 1970<sup>th</sup> – as noted in the start – that the development of the scientific framework is developed. There seems to be close connections – and the social democratic program also mentions the need of scientific research in the area.

### **The late period: The concept of inequality is fading out**

In the late period there are two programmes, one in 1992 and another in 2004

The concept of inequality is mentioned considerable less, than in the middle period<sup>21</sup>

In 1992 we can still find inequality in the more general sense:

“Democratic socialism is the counterpart to any form of dictatorship and to the inequality of capitalism” (Socialdemokratiets principprogram, 1992)

The meaning of inequality become more vague connected to dictatorship – a phenomenon in the political sphere – and more distant, because the reference seems to be other parts of the world, than that of Denmark.

In the earlier programmes inequality has also been mentioned in connection to the international or global level, but here it seems that the focus – when inequality is the theme – is the global situation and not the local situation.

Planning or intervention in the economic relations is not mentioned or made relevant by the context in which inequality in its general sense is used.

#### Liberty and equality:

The new in formulations about inequality reflects that the relation between freedom and equality has become a central theme:

“The social democracy rejects the right wing<sup>22</sup> philosophy of inequality” (op.cit:20)

And

“Our freedom is for everybody, not only the few. That’s why the fight against inequality, injustice and the negative social inheritance, which keeps people freedom less<sup>23</sup>, is a key issue for the social democrats” (2004 program:3)

In the 1992 program the relation between freedom and equality is directly addressed:

“Freedom and equality are not each others oppositions, but each others prerequisites because reel freedom require that all are given equal opportunities” (1992 programme:5)

And

“For the social democrats equality is about creating freedom for people”(2004-program:4)

It is difficult to study any development in the concept of inequality, simply because inequality does not seem to be a central concept. The focus has clearly changed from inequality to the relation between freedom and equality, where the somewhat defensive formulations seeks to establish the position, where freedom and equality are not seen as each others opposites.

One could argue that the concept is less in focus, because it has become well established and because of that need no further explanation.

It is –though – interesting that the expression “equal opportunities” is given a very central position. “Equal opportunities” is mentioned often especially in the 2004-programme<sup>24</sup>. The equal opportunities are directly connected to the increased individualism in society.

In the change of focus from inequality to equal opportunities the group suffering tends to be children and young people rather than the ones in the bottom of the income scale. The unjust situation becomes (more) restricted to the ones, who are not given a faire chance to develop their potentials. Living conditions in the low part of the income hierarchy are not as such a problem or focussed on as unjust.

The position do have similarities to what Balibar calls equaliberty in the strong argument for freedom and equality as each others prerequisites. In equaliberty – though – the equality could be seen as opening for other horizons of expectation than the rather restricted “equal opportunities”.

#### **The main changes in the development in the concept**

From a concept of inequality based on a critical interpretation of the society, over a specific development of an independent concept of inequality to a liberal interpretation of society with freedom and equality as main focus. This can be summarised in the following figure:

|   | Early period  | Middle period   | Late period   |
|---|---|---|---|
| Orientation in interpretation   | Critical  | Critical elements<br>Liberal  | Liberal   |
| Focus on inequality   | Not the central concept                               | The central concept   | Not the central concept   |
| Development in relation to the inequality theme                                 | Exploitation  | Economic inequality<br>Inequality of conditions   | Equal opportunities   |
| The group suffering from <u>injustice</u> in the general meaning of inequality  | Productive members of society or<br>The working class | All in society  | Groups on the global level or<br>Poor countries                               |
| The group suffering from <u>injustice</u> in the specific meaning of inequality |   | The ones at the bottom of the income hierarchy or otherwise unjust treated<br>Groups with “bad” Living conditions | Groups suffering from unequal opportunities<br>E.g. children and young people |

Inequality as an – at least partly – independent concept seems to be created in the middle period<sup>25</sup> and to disappear again as a central concept. This could be considered interesting in relation to several different areas and questions about the development.

In relation to the scientific field or sphere it can be noted, that a large part of research in the area seems to relate to the concept of inequality from the middle period. From a standpoint, where one does not assume that any direct links between ether concepts or themes in the different fields is<sup>26</sup> or should be the normal situation; this at least could call for reflections in the scientific world. If some of the common definitions and measures have been related to the political conception of inequality and become doxa, - how is it relevant to legitimize and develop concepts and measures? It is – of course – not relevant to plead for the idea, that measures of inequality should be abolished (in fact on the contrary), but how could concepts and measurements within the area of macro social relations be qualified – if one of the reasons for the actual used concepts have disappeared?

### **Changes in the concept of inequality and social problems and social policy**

I shall argue that the conception of inequality is a fruitful key element in the study of change in social problems in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Key issues in the construction of social problems are justification and normalization – and perhaps increasingly also economization<sup>27</sup>. These concepts are in this connection understood as social

created phenomena in distinction to the – in some theories of social problem - often essentialist understanding (Rubington, 2003)

Analysing the development in the concept of inequality especially allows looking at the justification – aspect and to some extent the normalization-aspect.

Poverty can be used as an example.

As illustrated the change in focus and meaning of inequality from the middle period to the late period also implies a change in the perception of the group of people suffering from injustice. In the middle period economic redistribution to those bad off, but also to some extent the population as a whole, is justified by the inequality-argument. In contrast – the justification connected to “equal opportunity” - seems to draw a more narrow line for redistribution. The scale –thinking (equalising social differences) of the middle period is focusing on and justifying good an relative equal conditions for all in contrast to the late periods “equal opportunity”, where the freedom and responsibility argument tends towards establishing a line for redistribution negatively determined by freedom and responsibility.

One of the questions actualized is: Is poverty a “new”<sup>28</sup> social problem related to the late period?

The possible argument is as follows: the phenomenon – poverty – only becomes relevant as a social problem, when a more narrow line for justification of redistribution is drawn. In the middle period the ideals and the justification of redistribution aims at a higher level of “compensation”, than that of poverty. Or – to put it differently - when it becomes necessarily to draw a more clear line between the “normal situations” the social problem situation poverty occurs as a social problem.

Another question actualized is: Has poverty – as a new construction of a social problem – become a new phenomenon? The argument could be: The change from inequality in the middle period to focus on equal opportunities in the late period involves not only the change in justification in relation to redistribution, but also much more focus on the aspect of freedom. The figure of freedom and responsibility involves the governance of this freedom Foucault (1991), Åkerstrøm Andersen (2004) Villadsen (2005)). The logic is that poverty changes from being looked upon as a living condition to that of freedom and the individual responsibility (where remedies have to focus on individual phenomena such as will, motivation, capability ect)

In relation to the welfare state development – and especially the universal welfare state – it seems crucial, that the groups suffering from injustice from the middle period to the late period changes from “all in society” and “the ones in the bottom of the income hierarchy and with bad conditions” to global level and groups suffering from unequal opportunities.

1) One could ask if the justification of the universal welfare state disappears with the disappearance of the general and specific meaning of inequality in this period.

2) The central question may concentrate more on the change in inequality in the general meaning, than in the specific – because universalism relates to the population as a whole.

### **Concluding remarks**

On the one side it is – in my opinion –crucial to analyse and understand how social problems – which only analytical can be treated dissociated from their “answers” in social policy – are articulated in the political as well as the broader public sphere. The theoretical perspectives supporting analyses of this aspect – constructivist perspectives – tends on the other side to deny or lack framework for analysing e.g. economic relations and studies using quantitative data<sup>29</sup>.

In order to understand what could be called the consequences of inequality and poverty it is of course crucial to develop framework and concepts which allows a far more sophisticated combination of the factors which are measured and the concepts which in the non-scientific field are ascribes a certain meaning at certain time, than that of making operational.

It is also crucial to be able to work with the possible dynamics of the relations between different parts of the population – and here especially between those at the bottom at the hierarchies in different senses and other parts of the population – as e.g. analysed in the literature of social polarisation.

The concept of inequality – developed further as a scientific concept including theoretical development of the relational aspect – could be a fruitful further development.

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<sup>1</sup> A former minister of social affairs (Eva Kjer Hansen) in the liberal government stated, “it is a fact that inequality is increasing in Denmark. It is all right because it will increase dynamics in society” Jyllands Posten, September 18, 2005) Given her position it was clearly an “ubs” and she got a reprimand from the prime minister. The reprimand could refer more to what can be said of whom, than the actual political trends

<sup>2</sup> As one of the social indicators

<sup>3</sup> Goul Andersen (2003) has shown that the population in Denmark supports the welfare State and the efforts to combat inequality

<sup>4</sup> When – as common in some of the realistic scientific perspectives – an every day concept is “operationalized” or when different measures are looked upon as indicators for real development

<sup>5</sup> E.g. Best 1994, 2007, Spector and Kitsuse 1987

<sup>6</sup> This kind of contract cannot be called a contract in a normal juridical sense, because it would require 2 free contractors.

<sup>7</sup> The use of contracts in social work (and in education<sup>7</sup>) has become widespread in the years after 2000. The contract is used to activate and/or make the user responsible for changes in own life. In a family-contract the mother/father could have “agreed”, that they should eat one meal together with the children every day, that the mother should use preventive means, that the children should be put to bed at a certain time etc.

<sup>8</sup> This “type” of social work is showed as dominant 1980-83. It is properly also dominant earlier – the study only covers the period from 1980 and the years after.

<sup>9</sup> Esmark et al (2005)

<sup>10</sup> Equality do have a much longer history, e.g. in the ancient Greece society

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.kidport.com/RefLib/usaHistory/AmericanRevolution/DecInd.htm>

<sup>12</sup> [Http://www.elysee.fr/elysee/anglais/the\\_institutions/founding\\_texts/the\\_declaration\\_of\\_the\\_human\\_rights/the\\_declaration\\_of\\_the\\_human\\_rights.20240.html](http://www.elysee.fr/elysee/anglais/the_institutions/founding_texts/the_declaration_of_the_human_rights/the_declaration_of_the_human_rights.20240.html)

<sup>13</sup> Das Kapital, p

<sup>14</sup> J. Rawls: Theory of Justice, Oxford 1972

<sup>15</sup> See Callinicos, 2000

<sup>16</sup> “The Declaration does not posit any “human nature” before society and political order, as an underlying foundation or exterior guarantee” (Balibar, 1994:45)

<sup>17</sup> The term is used only once in this programme

<sup>18</sup> The term is used twice in this programme

<sup>19</sup> The Danish word is “ufrihed” – short for the opposite of freedom

<sup>20</sup> In 1961 6 times in a 5 pages programme, in 1977 16 times on 16 pages

<sup>21</sup> In 1992 programme inequality is mentioned 3 times in 17 pages and in 2004 3 times in 13 pages.

<sup>22</sup> The Danish expression (borgerlig) could be translated both to right wing and liberal

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<sup>23</sup> The term may be imprecise, but is chosen catch that the Danish word used “ufrihed” is the negation to freedom

<sup>24</sup> In the 2004 programme it is mentioned 6-7 times (one time there is a little variation : ”same” is used instead of ”equal”)

<sup>25</sup> As earlier mentioned the conclusion is not, that ”economic inequality” can be dated to the 1960th – only that this concept appears in the 1961-programme. The concept is properly older.

<sup>26</sup> I would rather see the political and scientific fields as governed by different capitals and logics as e.g. described by Bourdieu – but still there are dependencies and interdependencies.

<sup>27</sup> This aspect has not yet been analysed

<sup>28</sup> The quotation marks are meant to reflect the relativity: of course poverty is no new phenomenon, but in the middle period in Denmark it may not have been a relevant concept.

<sup>29</sup> There are exceptions as e.g. Bourdieu