



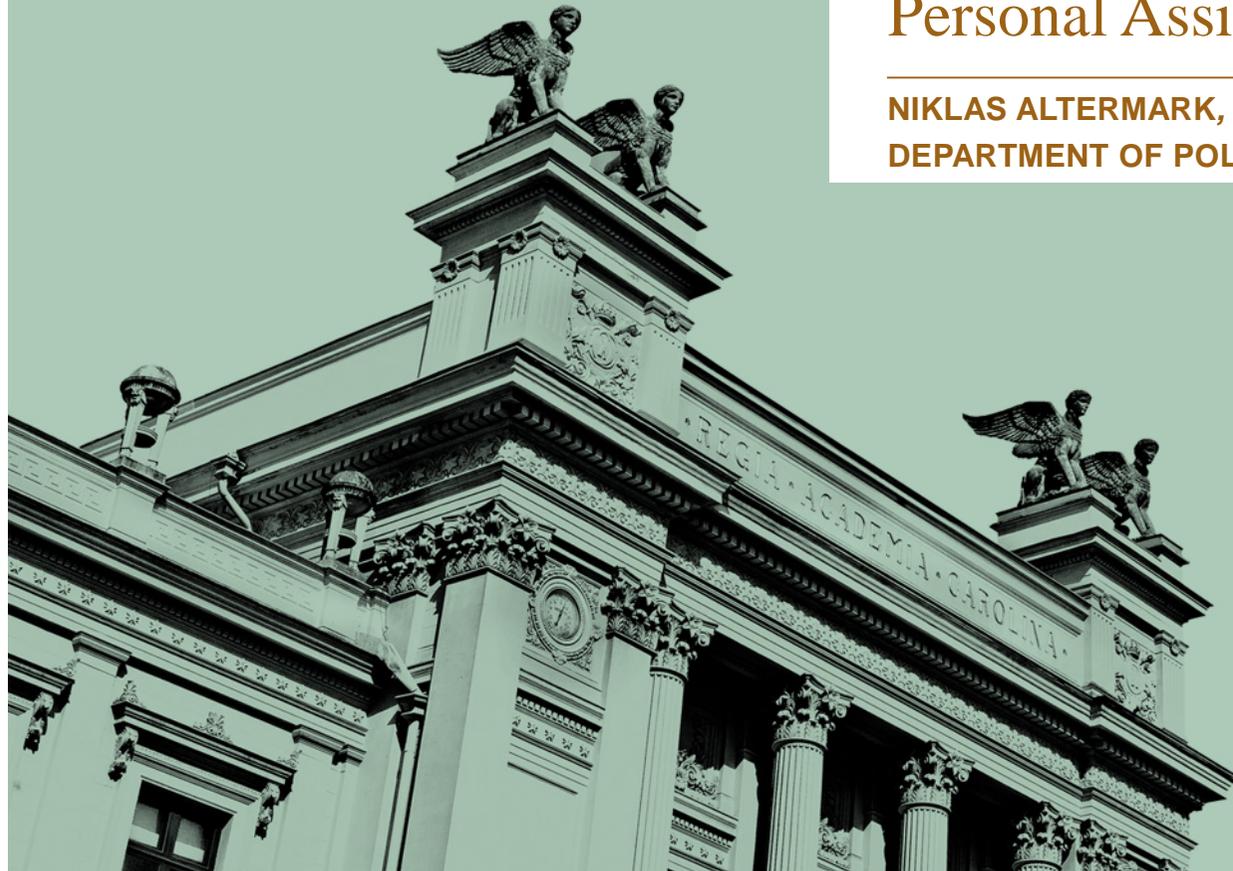
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The Swedish Version of Austerity

Personal Assistance as a ‘cost problem’

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“This class of people [‘idiots’] is always a burden upon the public. [...] There are at least a thousand persons of this class who not only contribute nothing to the common stock, but who are ravenous consumers; who are idle and often mischievous, and who are dead weights upon the material prosperity of the state.”

S.G Howe, 1848, *Report made to the Legislature of Massachusetts*

Personal assistance in Sweden - the current situation

- Personal assistance, a service where assistance users are free to decide who will provide assistance and how the hours are used. PA is designed to contribute to independent living and participation in society.
- Ten years of concerns about costs
 - » Numerous public commissions
 - » General switch in how welfare is viewed – concerns about “incentives to work” and dependency traps
- General perception that personal assistance has changed
- Last three years
 - » About 2 000 have lost their assistance. Many are granted fewer hours
 - » Re-institutionalisation? Municipalities are building orphanages and more group homes

First characteristic: The Accountability gap

- Everybody is defending personal assistance...
- ...and nobody is responsible for the current situation
- No legislative changes or parliamentary decisions



- *How come the scaling down of a service that everybody seems to like and that has not been subjected to any legislative decisions?*



2nd characteristic: Government and the ‘cost problem’

- “This government has not acted to restrict the legal right to personal assistance”
- However...
 - » Discursive focus on “over-users” and fraudsters
 - » Public commissions as a tool of government
 - » “at least 10 of all assistance payments are incorrect”
 - » Steering of the SSIA
- General cutbacks and the cost problem as source of legitimation
 - » Mismatch between the problems focused on by government communication and measures taken
- Reducing or moving costs?
 - » Freeing costs in state budget, increasing costs for local government

Third characteristic: The SSIA as branch of government

- “The agency act on the existing law and is prohibited from being involved in policy development”
- However...
 - » Perpetuates the discourse of cheaters and and over-users
 - » Act on letter of regulation from the government
 - » The 2012 court case – reinterpreted in 2016
 - » Strict interpretations of High court cases – regularly criticised by legal scholars
 - » Reports about organisation culture where rejected applications are being encouraged

In conclusion

- Government through networks
- Discourse as a means of politics
- 'Cost effectiveness' as a means of resistance?





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5th characteristic: PA in the media

- Media reports
 - » On the one hand, focus on personal assistance
 - » On the other hand, focus on eye-catching cases; independent living is sometimes lost sight of
 - » Appeals to pity, rather than solidarity
- Resistance
 - » Impressive work by some organisations and activists of the Swedish disability movement
 - » Signs of emerging alliances – for example between disability activists and welfare activists fighting cutbacks on sick insurance
 - » However, risk that resistance is parsed in the same discourse that underpins austerity
 - » Assistance as economic net-gain
 - » But is this a sound justification? Strategic dilemma!
 - » The right to independent living as tied to ability to work