

Preface

Jan Sundin

This volume deals with health and social change in different countries and periods of time. The aim is to put every case into its specific context while at the same time give a basis for reflections on patterns that tend to reappear. The hope is that the book can serve as an inspiration for further research, in higher academic education and as an introduction to the theme for those who are engaged in health policy or being mediators of knowledge in a question of importance for contemporary societies. The introduction does not cover all potential aspects, but points at some of these patterns and theoretical pathways towards generalisation. All criticism concerning the conclusions in the introduction should be directed towards the author of this preface, without any shared responsibility by the authors of the case studies. These authors are recruited from different disciplinary milieus, which partly explains the way they tell their stories. A great variation in the availability of specific sets of comparable data and previous research explains why the comparative perspectives must often be based on the synthesis of every narrative rather than on single factors. This is an unavoidable effect of realities, but does not prevent the authors from believing that interesting patterns can be discerned that could stimulate further attempts within the same field.

The idea of producing the volume was born and developed during spontaneous, unplanned discussions with my fellow authors and, in later stages, at two workshops. The decision to start the concrete work was taken at a workshop in Linköping 2002 with colleagues from Sweden, the Czech Republic and South Africa. The brainstorming stage has been highly fertilised by *Daniel Fox*, president of the *Milbank Memorial Fund*. He has participated in workshops and electronic discussions with enthusiasm, stringency and creativity, when identifying the foci of our theme. His foundation, which is communicating results of health research to a wider audience, contributed with financial support to the workshops.

The decision to increase the number of case histories was taken because the theme and questions of the project are central to the activities of PhoenixTN European Thematic Network on Health and Social Welfare Policy. PhoenixTN has since then been engaged financially and actively by several of its members in all

stages, including the printing of the report. The network has been very valuable in helping the project to its end and provides important channels for the dissemination of results to scholars and stakeholders in Europe. The project received financial support from the Bank of Sweden Tercentenary Foundation and the Swedish Research Council. The Swedish National Institute of Public Health, which has a responsibility for the communication of scientific knowledge for policy making and implementation in public health issues, joined us with support and inspiring interest during the final stage of the production process. We are very pleased by this link to practise.

Personally, I am very grateful for all the inspiring and fruitful discussions within a group of scholars from so many disciplinary backgrounds and parts of the world. It has cross-fertilised our understanding of the theme. I am also sending a wholehearted thanks to professor *Laurinda Abreu*, coordinator of PhoenixTN, its scientific board and secretariat. They became an almost daily backup and feedback. Assistant professor *Sam Willner* has been my co-writer of the Swedish case, and partner in logistical matters, both jobs handled with great enthusiasm and forbearance. Senior lecturer *Mickey Chopra* has, besides with working on the South African case, improved the linguistic standards of the texts. He has also made valuable contributions in order to check and suggest improvements of their logical clarity. Our diligent administrative assistants *Yvonne Blixt* and *Maria Antonsson* made many tasks easier and PhD student *Victoria Nygren* helped us to standardise the layout. Research engineer *Peter Berkesand* has, with his usual expedient manners, inserted the files into their complete electronic and paper based versions. Thanks to all of you!

November 2004

Jan Sundin