

AERYC conference Barcelona 2008

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Social Cohesion and human Development

The Nordic/Scandinavian model of welfare states

There are some common features for Denmark, Norway, Finland, Iceland and Sweden. Professor Gösta Esping-Andersen has described Sweden as the most developed example of a universal welfare state.

That also means that we have sometimes seen a tendency to use Sweden without reflection as a role model for other countries. But my countrys model has a history and a background that has been the precondition for our now existing model. Until the end of the nineteenth century, Sweden was a poor agrarian country on the outskirts of Europe. Nearly one million Swedes emigrated, and the industrialisation took place after the boom in continental Europe. Then came the transformation that was exceptionally swift. What made this tremendous change possible:

-no wars

-strong homogenous tradition in terms of religion, ethnicity and language

-historical compromise politics/employers/trade unions

The concept of the Swedish model can not be understood if we just look at the social security provisions. I would say that it instead is based on three pillars:

-social security

-public service

-labour market policy

The success of the welfare state is dependent of how well the country can balance these pillars including a strong interventionist state, which manages at the same time to maintain a balance between, on the one hand, active labour market policies aiming at full employment and, at the other hand, universalistic welfare reforms.

Some characteristics of the Swedish welfare state :

-economic foundation including redistribution of growing wealth, active labour market policies, social services and gender equalisation.

About 1/3 of GDP has for many years been spent on social expenditure.

Women are gainfully working to almost the same extension as men.

Well developed child care and care of elderly

-political framework built on a historically strong relationships between central actors in politics and economics

-extensive public sector built on *expertise* and *professional organisations*

-legitimacy among the population for an expansive welfare state with high taxes. Greater support to universal programmes than to targeted programmes.

Recent trends and challenges

Most observers of Swedish welfare policies seems to agree on an overall judgement that the model has overcome its worst test in the deep economic recession in the 1990s. Despite political and economic pressure the main features of the Swedish welfare state remains, more or less, intact – extensive public social policies financed by public taxes and based on a solid foundation of public legitimacy.

Universality/selectivity. Strong universal rights for children and old people. For people in working age the decline of employment in the 1990s has demonstrated that the Swedish system here is a performance-related system where the amount of non-qualified persons or persons with insufficient levels in the public provision system has grown. Poverty and exclusion in Sweden is a question of being outside both the labour market and social insurance systems.

Will this continue to be a sunshine story even in the future? That is difficult to predict. The most optimistic observers would argue that the crisis period in the 1990s was just a “bump” in the road towards improvement of the universal welfare model. On the other hand, a more critical view might argue that the preconditions for the universal model is now undergoing a tremendous change in the transition to a post-industrial society. The present transformation of the welfare state raises the same fundamental questions of equality, efficiency and power as in earlier stages of the emerging welfare state.

Social Europe

According to the European Commission Social Europe means “*decent jobs and social justice. It is about equipping everyone to manage the challenges facing our society and about looking after the neediest*”. It is also said to be “*promotion of social cohesion, equal opportunities and solidarity between generations*”.

The policy of the Commission is based on *The Lisbon Strategy* from the year 2000. Development should be based on three pillars to achieve “*the most competitive economy in the world*” and also full employment by 2010. The strategy based on three pillars:

- economic
- environmental
- social

Commissions activities also based on the *Social Agenda 2005-2010*, a kind of action programme. The aims are to modernise labour market and social protection systems, to help people seize the new opportunities and to protect the most vulnerable in society.

The Commission has a toolbox for this containing

Open Method of Coordination

- form of policy co-ordination at the EU level, a “soft law” measure and there are no formal sanctions for non-compliance (naming-and-shaming only)
- OMC mechanisms include agreeing guidelines, setting common objectives based on indicators and benchmarks, developing national action plans and exchanging of best practice

Peer Reviews

A peer review is an event where a host country presents

- policy *or*
- institutional arrangement (good practice) *or*
- policy reform

to a selected group of decision-makers and experts from other countries (peer countries) and to stakeholders’ representatives and EC officials

The European Commission also every year organise a number of events

- thematic events (i.e. about competition rules)
- meeting of people experiencing poverty (first of half year)
- Round Table Conference on Poverty and Social Exclusion (second half of year)

Programmes and funds

- Progress
- European Social Fund

Examples of funding

- Europe-wide studies
- European observatories
- training of legal and policy practitioners
- network of national experts
- EU networks (like ESN)

European Social Network (ESN)

ESN is a network of organisations for managers of in social services (including health, education and employment). Also a wider “associate” stakeholder membership

- National associations of local government politicians
- Policy research and development institutes
- Municipalities, provinces, counties
- Government agencies (e.g. inspection, contracting)
- Non government associations

Members in 24 countries, not only EU-countries.

The role of ESN:

- promote the role of local authorities and their services at a European level

ESN has regular and well established contacts with

- EU commission
- European Parliament
- Dublin Foundation
- CEMR
- Social Platform
- EAPN
- FEANTSA

ESN way of work

- networking
- seminars and forums
- European Social Services Conference
- Policy & Practice groups
- information and data collation and distribution
- member-to-member contact/visits

ESN this year

- fokus on new member states
- Report: "Social Services in new member states. Building capacity, improving quality"
- Seminar in Ljubljana
- buildingup contacts with Romanian directors and managers
- also focus on quality questions
- November 2008: "Commissioning for Quality"
- Annual conference, next time in Prague 22-24 June 2009, theme on quality