

English summary:

European Social Policy – national EU decision-making processes and policy development in Denmark and Sweden

This Thesis concerns European social policy and two national EU decision-making processes. It focuses on how different policy forms in Denmark and Sweden create specific conditions for development of different kinds of EU policy within the area of European social policy. I show how national creation of meaning and EU decision-making processes have established specific discursive and institutional arrangements where the translation of European social policy and the development of a national interest take place. These national arrangements (which I call policy forms) are of paramount importance for the kind of EU policy that is made possible in the member states. The thesis is concerned with the relationship between a common frame of meaning within European social policy as formulated and developed at European level and two national EU decision-making processes within the same policy area.

European social policy has undergone substantial development in the last 15-20 years but it has seldom succeeded in capturing the media's attention. There has been a tendency to place European social policy on the public agenda only in connection to various referenda in Denmark. For example in 2000 with the Danish referendum about the third stage of the EMU, and the debate about increasing the areas that will be subject to majority voting in the EU. It has almost always led to confusion about what European social policy actually is and what it entails. This Thesis is primarily concerned with the national EU decision-making processes within European social policy in a comparative perspective. It focuses on the specific story of how a common frame of meaning about European social policy has been developed and articulated at the European level since 1985. How it is translated and negotiated through two different processes of meaning creation and decision-making in two different policy forms in Denmark and Sweden, and how this creates specific conditions for national development of EU policy.

I claim that we cannot take for granted that there is a one to one relationship between European and national policy development within the same policy area, due to the specific discursive and institutional arrangements in the member states. If we want to understand national development of EU policy we have to study the specific discursive and institutional arrangements in the member states. If we cannot take for granted that national policy development is an expression of simple diffusion or imitation of a European understanding of European social policy, then how can we understand how national development of EU policy is made possible and constrained? The fundamental knowledge interest of this Thesis is thus concerned with the question of translation and national interest development within European social policy. In this Thesis I focus on three problems and pose the following questions:

1. Whether and how there has been a development of a common frame of meaning about European social policy at European level, which results in a change of the creation of meaning so that it is possible to divide the development into two phases, making it possible to characterise the common frame of meaning in the period 1985-1990 as different from the frame of meaning as it looked in the period 1990-1998?

2. How the empirical space (the EU decision-making processes) in Denmark and Sweden is constructed through the establishment of a specific discursive terrain and a specific reproduction of the institutional interactions and types of institutions. That is, how do national creation of meaning about European social policy and national reproduction of the EU decision-making process happen?
3. Finally, what characterises the Danish and Swedish policy form in relation to each other (differences and similarities)? This involves answering the questions: How (through which processes and institutions) is the European common frame of meaning translated in the two member states? Through which decision-making process is the national interest developed? How does this create the conditions for development of a specific kind of EU policy?

The Thesis is placed within an institutional constructivist theoretical and methodological perspective. The three questions are answered through three different kinds of analyses and strategies of analyses:

Firstly, a diachronic institutional history of the common frame of meaning about European social policy. I focus on the European discourse on social policy and its development over time in the period 1985-1998. Empirically I concentrate on the articulation of European social policy by the European institutions (the Commission, the European Parliament, The Council of Ministers, the Economic and social Committee and various groups of experts and NGO-conferences). I study the development through four categories of observation: A regulative category, which I call the structural political discourse; the articulation of space within European social policy (e.g. the definition of social policy and the attachment to various interpretations of the future); the articulation of time and rationality within European social policy (e.g. the interpretation of past, present and future, and the definition of problems and solutions within European social policy); and finally the articulation and definition of competent actors within European social policy (including the assignment of competence to the various levels of the EU).

Secondly, a synchronic sociological analysis of the EU decision-making processes in the two member states. I focus on the articulation of meaning about European social policy (the discursive terrain) and the institutionalised interactions of the actors within the national EU decision-making processes, which I define as a social system. I study the discursive terrain of Denmark and Sweden through three categories of observation; The articulation of European social policy, the articulation of problems and solutions and the relationship between them within European social policy, and the articulation and definition of competent actors within European social policy (including the assignment of competence to the various levels in the EU and the actors' interpretations of identity). I study the institutional interactions through five categories of observation: Forms of interaction (personal, formally or informally routinised interactions), degrees of interaction (integration or involvement), strategies of interaction (go-through or by-pass strategies), rules of interaction (formal and informal), and finally types of institutions (organisation, segment or network).

Thirdly, a second order analysis of the policy form in Denmark and Sweden in a comparative perspective. I focus on the translation of European social policy through the study of discursive and institutional couplings between the European frame of meaning and the national articulations, and between the discursive terrain and the institutional interactions in each member state. I focus on the development of the national interest through the study of the decision-making process and

couplings between private and public interests, the formal and the informal levels and processes, and the central and decentral levels of the decision-making process.

The Thesis is divided into four parts:

The first part of the Thesis is concerned with the problems and the method. I state the theoretical scientific point of departure of the Thesis on the basis of a discussion and positioning of the problems of this Thesis in connection to other studies of European social policy at the European level and other studies of national EU decision-making processes. The combination of these two aspects is new in political science. European social policy has been studied at the European level from a different perspective than the one I propose in this Thesis. National EU decision-making processes have primarily been studied in connection with a specific theme (e.g. democracy or democratic control of government policy). No other studies have focused on the relationship between the European level social policy and the national articulations of social policy in the national EU decision-making processes. I state the fundamental claim of the Thesis, and I place the Thesis within an institutional historical context with the aim of studying creation of meaning and institutional action. On this basis I raise the three questions mentioned above, and I examine their empirical and theoretical background. I define a number of central conceptions that makes it possible to study the three questions; Translation, social system and policy form. Then I discuss a number of analytical problems in connection to the three problems. I focus on the problem of studying change, stability and the comparative approach. Finally, I list the three strategies of analysis that makes it possible to study the discourse of European social policy at European level 1985-1998, the national EU decision-making processes as social systems, and the policy forms as specific aspects of the discursive and institutional arrangements (the social systems) in the two member states. This makes it possible for me to form conclusions about the relationship between a European and a national creation of meaning as a question of translation and development of the national interest. At the very end of the first part I discuss the various sources (documents, papers, interviews etc.) I use in the analyses.

The second part of the Thesis is concerned with the common frame of meaning about European social policy articulated at the European level. I show how two phases can be established in the discursive development of European social policy: The social dimension of the internal market 1985-1990, and the structural political frame of meaning about European social policy 1990-1998. I show how there has been a change in the articulation of all my categories of observation, and thus it is possible to distinguish between the two phases of European social policy.

The first phase is characterised by a European social policy that spatially is ordered in relation to the internal market program as an accompanying policy to the economic policy. Unemployment is appointed status as the most important problem, and is articulated as a result of the past recession and the present technological development. Regional inequality and social dumping are appointed status as the most important problems concerning the internal market that needs to be remedied by an effective social policy. A reform of the structural funds and a social charter of employee rights are pointed out as solutions to these problems. The most important articulations of the future are the completion of the internal market by 1992 and the so-called J-curve, which represents the expected development of employment with the completion of the internal market. The most important actors are defined as the labour market organisations at European level, the member state governments and the Commission as a catalyst in the process.

The second phase is characterised by a European frame of meaning spatially ordered in relation to the structural political discourse, as an independent policy area among other EU policies, and as a part of a structural political strategy of solution. Unemployment is still perceived as the most important problem. It is articulated as a result of the lack of growth and inflexible structures at the labour market. Job creation and social marginalisation and poverty are appointed status as important complex structural problems that must be remedied by an integrated and coherent strategy, which involves all the Unions policy areas. Improvement of the labour market function and structure and adaptability of the employees are pointed out as solutions to these problems. The most important perceptions of the future are the information society and the political union with a view towards 2000. The most important actors are defined as anyone who is involved with social and labour market policy at local, regional, national or European level.

Finally, I show how different parts of the common frame of meaning about European social policy have been institutionalised in the treatises of the EU and in the establishment of various institutions and survey instruments.

The third part of my Thesis consists of the Danish and Swedish cases. I study the national EU decision-making processes as fairly stable social systems without the dimension of time and change. I show how a discursive terrain is established in Denmark. The discursive terrain is based on the principle of consensus, and I can only identify one articulation of European social policy. The articulation operates with a fundamental discursive distinction between regulation and competition, and regulation is articulated as the positive side of this distinction. The Danish articulation of European social policy consists of two different positions: The policy position and the systemic position. These positions are not in opposition to each other, but interconnected. The policy position is characterised by a clear distinction between social policy and labour market policy. European social policy is articulated in relation to this distinction and placed in the labour market political sector. Social policy is perceived as “outside” European social policy and as a national matter in relation to the principle of subsidiarity. The policy position is articulated as part of the structural political discourse. Unemployment is appointed status as the most important problem in Europe and articulated as structural unemployment. The solutions are targeted at improving the structures and function of the labour market. The main solutions are active labour market policy and education. The labour market political sector is extended by the articulation of social marginalisation as a labour market political problem mainly as a result of unemployment. The principle of subsidiarity is in the policy position used to control the distribution of competence at the different levels, and to exclude social policy from European social policy. The systemic position is characterised by the question “how to regulate the market?” In this way it is not perceived as a question of regulation or not, and implicitly articulates regulation as the positive side of the discursive distinction. The Danish labour market model based on agreements between labour market organisations is perceived as being threatened by regulation through law, which is the dominant principle of regulation at the EU level. Within the systemic position the actors try to give concrete contents to the principle of subsidiarity and protect the Danish model. It is a very important point for all the Danish actors, that regulation should be implemented according to the Danish model as agreements instead of laws.

I show how a number of forms and degrees of interaction are reproduced in the Danish EU decision-making process. This results in the establishment of a group of core actors, which consists of the labour market organisations (LO, DA, FTF, AC and KL) and the Danish ministry of labour. Their interactions are characterised by informal rutinised and personal forms of interaction and integration as the degree of interaction. I show how different, and often informal, consensus rules

are reproduced in the actors' interactions. The rules state that the Danish government always must co-ordinate and negotiate the national EU policy with the labour market organisations. This is a very important principle in the Danish EU decision-making process. At the same time there are rules on how an actor can define and talk about European social policy without being sanctioned, and rules about Danish pragmatism. I show that all the Danish actors use both kinds of strategies of interaction (go-through and by-pass) depending on the specific case in question. Finally I show that all three types of institutions are established in Denmark: Organisations (the first formal institution of the Danish EU decision-making process), segments (the so-called "cave-meetings" and "mini cave-meetings"), and networks (informal routinised interactions).

The Swedish discursive terrain is characterised by the principle of opposition. I can identify five different articulations of European social policy, which are ordered in accordance with the discursive distinction of regulation versus competition. I call them the articulation of regulation, the articulation of competition, the articulation of the working environment, the articulation of social security and the articulation of protection. The articulation of regulation in Sweden is in many ways similar to the Danish policy position, but articulates social dumping as an important problem in Europe. In this respect the articulation of competition is very different. It articulates regulation of the market as the most important problem in Europe, and the solutions are deregulation. Both articulations define European social policy as an accompanying policy to the internal market program. The Swedish articulations operate with an ideological distinction between left wing and right wing organisations and political parties. Regulation as the positive side of the discursive distinction is perceived as left wing and articulated by the Swedish social democratic government and the labour unions, while competition as the positive side of the discursive position is perceived as right wing and articulated by the right wing parties in the Swedish parliament and the employers' organisations. The ideological distinction is very important in the Swedish EU decision-making process. At the same time the Swedish actors articulate a distinction between technique and politics. This distinction is used to order the Swedish actors as either technical (expert) actors or political actors.

I show how different forms and degrees of interaction are being reproduced in the Swedish EU decision-making process. As in Denmark this results in the establishment of a group of core actors, which consists of the Swedish department of labour market policy, the Swedish department of social policy and the labour unions. Their interactions are characterised by personal and informal routinised forms of interaction, and they are an integrated part of each other's decision-making process. I show that a number of both formal and informal consensus rules are reproduced in the EU decision-making process, and how they are sanctioned in different ways. Different rules state that a social democratic government must co-ordinate its EU policy with the unions, and the government must always be co-ordinated in EU policy. I show that all the Swedish actors use both go-through and by-pass interaction strategies, but that the Swedish employer's organisation clearly favours by-pass-strategies, whereas the opposite is true for the unions. Finally I show how no institutions of the type organisation have been established in the Swedish EU decision-making process. The development of EU policy in Sweden takes place mainly through networks and a few segments of minor importance.

The fourth part of the Thesis is the conclusion and analysis of the last problem about the policy form and types of EU policy. I study the discursive and institutional couplings and the couplings between the different levels in the two national EU decision-making processes. I show how discursive couplings have been made in the creation of meaning between the national articulations

of European social policy and the European frame of meaning. In Denmark this happens primarily in connection to the rationality of the translation and the actors of the translation. However there are no couplings in connection to the spatial ordering of the Danish translation of European social policy. In Sweden couplings are established primarily in connection to the articulation of regulation as far as space, rationality and actors of the translation is concerned. However the discursive couplings in Sweden are mainly established between the Swedish articulation as it appears today and the European frame of meaning as it appeared in the first phase of development. This is surprising because Sweden was not a member of the EU in the period 1985-1990. I show that there is a clear connection between the discursive distinctions characteristic of the two discursive terrains and the institutionalised actions of the national actors. The distinction between social policy and labour market policy is clearly reproduced in the Danish EU decision-making process, and the same is true for the ideological distinction in Sweden. The distinction between technique and politics can also be found in the Swedish EU decision-making process in connection to forms and degrees of interaction. Thus there is a large number of institutional couplings between the two parts of my analysis: The discursive terrain and the institutional interactions and types of institutions.

Moreover I show how a large number of couplings have been established within the national EU decision-making processes, in the development of the national interest. The couplings between private and public interests happen on the basis of articulation of “communities of fate” – actors that share a common interest. In Denmark the “community of fate” consists of the core actors of the decision-making process (labour market organisations and the government). In Sweden the “community of fate” consists of the unions and the social democratic government. I show how a number of couplings have been established between the different levels in the national EU decision-making processes. I conclude that there are significant differences and a few similarities between the Danish and Swedish policy form. The Danish policy form is characterised by a hierarchical structure, strong couplings between the different levels, a principle of consensus both in the creation of meaning (the translation) and in the decision-making process, and a clear sector distinction between labour market policy and social policy. The Swedish policy form is characterised by a relatively informal and flat structure consisting of only two levels, relatively loose couplings between the different levels (except the couplings between private and public interests), an oppositional terrain in connection to the creation of meaning (the translation) and a principle of consensus in connection to the decision-making process and an ideological distinction in both the creation of meaning and the decision-making process. This has profound consequences for the types of EU policy that is made possible in the two member states. In Denmark the EU policy becomes reactionary (as opposed to pro-active) and highly co-ordinated. In Sweden the EU policy becomes reactionary and more fragmented.

Finally in the final chapter of the fourth part I list a number of hypotheses to answer the question: Why are there differences between the two policy forms? I offer one way of understanding this aspect with the help of two independent variables: The national administrative model and the formal EU decision-making process. This involves a radical change of perspective, and is not seen as an exhaustive excursion into the realm of explanation.

In this way the Thesis offers a way of understanding national development of EU policy as a complex process of translation and decision-making. It shows how different discursive and institutional arrangements play an important role in the translation process and the creation of meaning within a given policy area. It shows how the actors’ institutional interactions can be understood as an institutionalisation of a specific creation of meaning. Moreover it shows how

connections are established between different levels and processes in the national EU decision-making process, and how all this results in the development of specific policy forms with consequences for the type of EU policy that is made possible and constrained in the different member states. Denmark and Sweden may at first glance be perceived as relatively similar member states, but this Thesis shows that there are a significant number of differences even between two member states that appear very similar on the surface. The specific discursive and institutional arrangements (the policy forms) have significant consequences for the EU policy that is a result of the national EU decision-making processes, and this Thesis shows how.