Department of Sociology
Umeå University

Institutional Fragmentation and Social Service Variations

A Scandinavian Comparison

Dietmar Rauch

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ABSTRACT

The Scandinavian welfare states – Denmark, Norway, and Sweden – are usually assumed to constitute a coherent and unique social service model, characterized among other things by a high level of universalism. This thesis questions the existence of such a model. It presents cross-country data, which demonstrate that only Denmark complies with the image of the Scandinavian social service model, while Norway and Sweden deviate significantly. Norwegian childcare services and Swedish elderlycare services do not stand out as particularly universalistic in comparison with other Western European countries. Altogether it seems that the Scandinavian countries in terms of social service universalism form a less coherent group than often believed.

The main aim of this thesis is to explain this lack of coherence among the Scandinavian social service systems and to understand variations between different service fields. Two main questions are raised: First, why do the Scandinavian countries display different levels of social service universalism? Second, why are there different developments in the Swedish welfare state as to the level of social service universalism between the two major social service fields of childcare and elderlycare? In order to answer these questions, an institutionalist approach is chosen, focusing on the impact of institutional fragmentation in the implementation process between the central government level on one hand and local governments and NGOs on the other. It is hypothesized that a low level of institutional fragmentation implying a concentration of policy-specific authority on the central state level is a positive precondition for the achievement of social service universalism, whereas a high level of institutional fragmentation providing municipalities and/or NGOs with veto points against universalistic social service policies instead has a detrimental impact on the prospects of social service universalism.

Empirical data drawing on public documents and national statistics support this hypothesis: In those countries and in those social service fields where a strong concentration of implementative decision making exists, a stronger level of social service universalism has been accomplished than in those where the implementative decision making is heavily fragmented between the central government on one hand and municipalities and/or NGOs on the other. This finding tentatively indicates that the intra-Scandinavian variations of social service universalism across countries and across policy fields are indeed related to different levels of institutional fragmentation in the implementation process.

Keywords: Institutional fragmentation, Veto points, Intergovernmental relations, Social services, Childcare, Elderlycare, Welfare regimes, Retrenchment politics

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The Attached Articles

Article I – Rauch, Dietmar (2005) 'Is There Really a Scandinavian Social Service Model? A Comparison of Childcare and Elderlycare in Six European Countries'. Submitted to *Acta Sociologica*.

Article II – Rauch, Dietmar (2005) 'Institutional Fragmentation and Scandinavian Childcare Variations'. Accepted for publication in *Journal of Public Policy*.

Article III – Rauch, Dietmar (2005) 'Central versus Local Service Regulation: Accounting for Diverging Elderlycare Developments in Sweden and Denmark'. Submitted to *Social Policy & Administration*.

Article IV – Rauch, Dietmar (2005) 'Institutional Fragmentation, Institutional Engineering and the Development of Elderlycare and Childcare in Sweden'. Re-submitted to *Scandinavian Political Studies*.

Introduction

One of the main questions of comparative welfare state research is why welfare states vary across countries. In this thesis I will focus on the particular question of why the *Scandinavian* welfare states – Denmark, Norway, and Sweden – vary when it comes to *social service universalism*. As will be shown, only Denmark currently displays a high level of universalism in both of the major social service fields of childcare and elderlycare. By contrast, in Norway and Sweden a high level of universalism is only achieved in one of the two fields.

This aspect of intra-Scandinavian welfare state variation cannot fully be understood from the three traditional approaches of comparative social policy, i.e. the *functionalist* approach, the *power resources* approach, and the *polity-centered* approach. Each of these approaches would predict a similarly high degree of social service universalism for all Scandinavian welfare states – the functionalist approach because of a similarly high care-related problem pressure; the power resources approach because of similarly favorable power balances; and the traditional polity-centered approach because of similarly conducive conditions of legislative authority concentration in all Scandinavian countries.

In this thesis an *extended* polity-centered approach will be developed and applied to understanding the puzzle of Scandinavian social service variations. This approach will focus on the role of what I will call *implementative* institutional fragmentation.

The argument of *institutional fragmentation* is one of the major arguments of the polity-centered approach. It claims that a fragmentation of authority between the central government and alternative bodies is a negative precondition for the realization of universal welfare state benefits, as under this constellation governmental initiatives to set up universal benefits can be blocked

by alternative bodies (see e.g. Immergut 1992; Steinmo 1993; Pierson 1995). In the traditional version of the polity-centered approach, this argument has only been applied to constellations of *legislative* institutional fragmentation. In terms of legislative institutional fragmentation, the Scandinavian countries can be regarded as very similar; all these countries lack significant structures of legislative authority fragmentation such as divided government or federalism (see Lijphart 1999). At first sight, this similarity seems to ensure that all Scandinavian countries enjoy similarly positive institutional preconditions for the setup of universal welfare state benefits.

However, as I will argue here, the situation looks different when we extend the polity-centered approach to also take into account *implementative* institutional fragmentation. As will be shown, *implementative* institutional fragmentation varies significantly among the Scandinavian countries when it comes to social service politics. In some Scandinavian countries (and some social service fields) but not in others, the implementation authority for social services is strongly fragmented between the central state on the one hand and municipalities and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) on the other. When this is the case, municipalities and NGOs enjoy considerable veto opportunities to block the implementation of universally-oriented governmental social service policies. I will take the position here that variations concerning this aspect of institutional fragmentation across countries and across policy fields might be the missing key to understanding the Scandinavian variations of social service universalism.

To sum up, this thesis seeks to account for intra-Scandinavian variations of the development and level of social service universalism. For this purpose, a novel *extended polity-centered* approach will be developed and applied. This approach stresses the

role of *implementative* institutional fragmentation, with a particular focus on *municipalities* and *NGOs* as potential veto players.

In this introduction I first illustrate the major dependent variable of the thesis: *social service universalism*. I then discuss the possible contributions of the previously mentioned traditional approaches of welfare state research to account for social service variations as a background to the development of my own approach. Following this theoretical discussion, I construct a synthetic explanatory framework that puts implementative institutional fragmentation at the center of analysis. This framework is subsequently applied towards an understanding of Scandinavian social service variations. In this context I summarize the main findings of the thesis and draw a conclusion about the possible contributions of these findings for future welfare state research.

The main dependent variable: Social service universalism

The main dependent variable in this thesis is *social service universalism*. In this section I will address the following questions: What is social service universalism? How is it conceptualized and operationalized in this thesis? And in what way do Scandinavian countries vary as to their level and development of social service universalism? First, I will briefly define and delimit the kind of social services studied in the thesis.

Social services can be defined as a particular category of welfare state benefits in the form of publicly regulated *formal care provisions*. As such they can be contrasted with the second major benefit form, cash benefits. Social services substantially comprise such benefits as health services, childcare services, elderlycare services, and other so-called personal social services. This thesis concentrates on the two major social service fields of *childcare* and *elderlycare*. More specifically, it focuses on childcare services in the form of day care, formal family day care and nursery education,

and elderlycare services in the form of home help services and semi-residential and residential care services (see *Article I* for a closer description of the covered service forms).

What then is *social service universalism*? Universalism is a complex, multidimensional concept. In the welfare state literature several distinct features are highlighted in order to define universalism and to contrast it with its antipode *selectivism*. In a recent article Anneli Antonnen (2002: 77) has attempted to compile the most important traits of universal welfare state benefits. In her view, universal benefits should be characterized by universal coverage, an institutionalization in the form of legal rights, universal accessibility, uniformity, and tax financing.

The four articles of this thesis do not consider all these features of universalism. Instead I have mainly focused on the most frequently discussed aspect: that of *universal coverage*. In addition, the closely interrelated aspect of *universal accessibility* is discussed. On this basis, *universal social service*s are defined and contrasted here with selective services as follows: *Universal* social services are regarded as those services which in principle cover (and are accessible by) the whole population in need of the corresponding service. By contrast, *selective* social services are understood as those that only cover (or are accessible by) a limited group of those who would need them.

It should be noted that this is a *hypothetical* definition, which only serves analytical purposes. In real life there are *gradual* variations as to the *level* of social service universalism among social service systems. In order to grasp these gradual differences, I will focus on coverage and accessibility *levels*. In doing so the assumption is: the higher the coverage and accessibility level of a given social service system, the higher is its level of universalism.

In principle, *coverage levels* are relatively easy to measure with the help of a simple quantitative indicator: the share of potential

service recipients covered by the service in question, or in short the *coverage rate*.

In this thesis the main indicator to assess the level of *childcare* universalism is the rate (proportion) of children covered by childcare services among pre-school children. If we accept the basic assumption that all pre-school children are in need of care, hypothetically a coverage rate of 100 percent indicates a fully universal childcare provision. Lower levels indicate lower levels of universalism.

When it comes to *elderlycare* the situation is somewhat more complicated. In contrast with the case of children and childcare, realistically not all elderly but only those who are too frail to manage their daily lives independently can be regarded as in need of care. Therefore, hypothetically, the best coverage measure to assess elderlycare universalism would be the coverage rate among only those with a certain degree of care needs. Unfortunately, we cannot use such an indicator because reliable standardized data about the care needs of the elderly are lacking. As a second-best measure, we have to resort to the coverage rate among all elderly as a proxy to estimate the level of elderlycare universalism.

One might object that this indicator is not useful for reasonable comparisons of elderlycare universalism because of differences in elderlycare needs across countries and over time, due to variations in health status and age composition. Certainly, there are health status differences among countries and over time. However, these differences only to a limited extent bring about varying care needs. Differences in regard to elderlycare needs seem to be relatively small between the countries analyzed here (see e.g. Börsch-Supan *et al.* 2005; Szebehely *et al.* 1997). Hence, one may conclude that the elderlycare coverage rate among the total elderly population nonetheless is a useful indicator for our purpose.

According to common conventions, in this thesis the coverage rate among elderly over the age of 65 (or, if available, over the age

of 80) is used as the main indicator to assess elderlycare universalism. As many elderly are not in need of care services, a high level of elderlycare universalism does not require a coverage rate close to 100 percent of all the elderly. By current international standards, coverage rates above 20 percent among the elderly over 65 (or above 50 percent among the elderly over 80) seem to indicate a comparatively high level of universalism (see *Article I*).

Also the aspect of service *accessibility* is considered in this thesis. Service accessibility and coverage are closely related to each other. High coverage levels necessarily presuppose a high service accessibility. Conversely, it also seems fair to say that a high service accessibility should be expressed in high coverage levels.

In contrast to service coverage, service accessibility cannot be studied with the help of a simple quantitative indicator. However, one can use certain qualitative indicators that provide information on the existence and rigorousness of access restrictions in order to estimate accessibility levels. More specifically, one can assess the accessibility of social service systems by examining whether the services in question are linked to certain *restriction rules* such as rules stipulating user fees or needs tests. *User fees* have an access restriction capacity as they financially discourage certain potential service clients from service access. Needs tests in the form of *economic means tests* and "*family tests*" (see *Article I*) have an even stronger access restriction capacity, as they per se disqualify certain potential users from service admission because of their economic situation or the availability of potential familial caregivers. In this thesis the existence and rigorousness of restriction rules prescribing user fees, means tests, or family tests will be used to assess the overall level of social service accessibility. A high prevalence and a high rigorousness of these rules indicate a low level of social service accessibility, whereas the opposite situation suggests a high level of accessibility.

The focus on universalism as the major dependent variable also has implications for the conceptualization and operationalization of social service *expansion* and *retrenchment* in this thesis. In the welfare state literature, welfare state retrenchment is conceptualized in at least two basically different ways (see e.g. Pierson 1996; Green-Pedersen 2004): in terms of welfare *expenditure cutbacks* on one hand and in terms of *shifts of the institutional structure* of the welfare state on the other. In this thesis a structural conception will be employed, focusing on *changes* of the level of universalism. Accordingly, *retrenchment* is conceptualized here as a *decrease of the level of universalism* while the opposite of service retrenchment, *service expansion*, is regarded as an *increase of the level of universalism*.

Given these conceptualizations and the foregoing general operationalization of universalism, it will be assumed that social service expansion is expressed by a rising coverage rate as well as by a declining prevalence or rigorousness of means tests and family tests, whereas retrenchment is signaled by the opposite.

Summary of Article I

What kind of *cross-country variations* can we find then as regards childcare and elderlycare universalism? This question is in particular answered in *Article I* of this thesis. This article draws on data from official documents and national statistics and carries out a cross-country comparison of childcare and elderlycare services including the three Scandinavian countries plus three continental European countries.

The data presented suggest that the Scandinavian countries do not always stand out as comparatively universalistic relative to other Western European countries and that there are significant intra-Scandinavian variations in both service fields. This finding questions the common claim of a coherent and particularly

universalistic Scandinavian social service model (see e.g. Antonnen and Sipilä 1996; Sipilä 1997; Rostgaard and Lehto 2001).

More specifically, the data indicate that only Denmark currently corresponds to the image of a universalistic Scandinavian social service model, as only in this country are coverage levels comparatively high and access-restricting means tests and family tests insignificant in both childcare and elderlycare (see Table 1). In Norway, childcare coverage levels are only average and some degree of access-restricting "family tests" can be found. In Sweden, the elderlycare coverage is not particularly high, and there is a strong prevalence of access-restricting family tests.

As will be shown in the other articles, the relatively poor Norwegian childcare provision is due to retarded service expansion, whereas the relatively low universalism of Swedish elderlycare seems to be the result of considerable retrenchments taken place in the 1980s and 1990s.

TABLE 1: Childcare and elderlycare coverage levels in Denmark, Norway, and Sweden, 2003 (as a percentage of children aged 1-5 and of elderly above 65)

	Denmark	Norway	Sweden
Childcare (fulltime)	82	50	87
Elderlycare	29	27	16

Sources: see Article I, Tables 2 and 3; Article II, Table 4.

Alternative explanatory approaches

How then can we understand variations of the degree and the development of social service universalism such as those among the Scandinavian countries? As mentioned earlier, there are three major approaches to accounting for social policy variations: the functionalist approach (also called *industrialism* approach), the power resources approach, and the polity-centered approach. In this thesis I have concentrated on an extended version of the polity-

centered approach. In order to put this approach into a wider context, it is necessary first to briefly discuss the other two approaches and their capacity to account for social service variations.

The *functionalist approach* basically regards welfare state expansion as an adaptation to social needs emerging in the wake of the modernization process. According to the so-called *logic of industrialism* argument (see e.g. Cutright 1965; Wilensky and Lebeaux 1958; Wilensky 1975), the transition from agrarian to industrialized society implies the demise of traditional support networks. As a result, an increasing problem of social insecurity is assumed to arise, which eventually triggers the introduction and later expansion of welfare state measures. In addition, industrialization is also regarded as creating favorable financial preconditions for the setup of encompassing welfare state schemes.

In its narrower, traditional form, the functionalist approach in particular stresses the emergence of an *income-related* problem pressure, calling for the introduction of cash benefits. A broadened functionalist approach, which also takes into consideration other and later secular change processes such as the transition from single-breadwinner families to double-earner families or the dissolution of three-generation households, also might identify a rising *care-related* problem pressure, which calls for the expansion of formal social services.

In more recent times we also can speak of a *new logic of industrialism* (Pierson 1996: 147) according to which globalization and dwindling economic growth pose an increasing economic cost containment pressure, which calls for a containment or even a reversal of welfare state expansion.

In the end, according to functionalist reasoning, the level of social service universalism in a given welfare state (and a given service field) can be expected to depend on the summarized impact of the social problem pressure calling for an expansion of services

on one hand and the economic cost containment pressure which calls for the opposite on the other.

An alternative explanation for welfare state variations is offered by the *power resources approach* (see e.g. Korpi 1983; Stephens 1979). This approach puts a particular stress on varying *political pressures* in order to account for welfare state variations. According to the traditional, simple form of the power resources approach, the power balance between the working class, seen as a proponent of universal welfare state measures, on one hand and capital, which is assumed to oppose universalistic welfare solutions, on the other hand is the crucial factor for the question as to whether a universal welfare state will be established or not. Only if the working class manages to mobilize sufficient power resources with the help of strong Left parties and labor unions is the political pressure to enforce universal welfare state schemes assumed to suffice (see e.g. Korpi 1983; Stephens 1979; Esping-Andersen 1985).

When social services are concerned, class-political power balances are not the only ones to play an important role. Social services also touch gender and normative questions (see e.g. Rauhala *et al.* 1997; Sainsbury 1999; Korpi 2000). The gender dimension comes into play as women in their role of main familial caregivers can be assumed to gain most from social care services' capacity to "defamilialize" care. Moreover a considerable number of women, i.e. those employed in the social service sector, have the additional motive to support service expansion for their own job's sake. On the side of the opponents of (further) service expansion, normative motives seem to be predominant. Above all, religious forces often seek to retain the traditional family model, to the disfavor of an expansionist social service policy (see e.g. van Kersbergen 1995).

Altogether an extended power resources approach might come to the conclusion that the power balance between the working class

and politically mobilized women on one hand and traditional primarily religious forces on the other plays an important role in the expansion of social services (see e.g. Sainsbury 1999). What this power balance will actually look like strongly depends on how supporters on both sides manage to organize their interests. On the side of expansion supporters, effective interest organization might be pursued in union organizations, Left parties, and through female parliamentary and governmental representation; on the opposite side, the interests might be organized in Christian democratic parties, religious associations, and churches.

Towards an extended polity-centered approach

Problem pressure and political pressure are basic causal factors behind welfare state variations. However, these factors cannot offer a sufficient explanation of welfare state variations as their effect is mediated by state or polity structures (see e.g. Skocpol 1992). This is where the so-called state-centered or *polity-centered approach* comes into play. The polity-centered approach acknowledges that socioeconomic and sociopolitical factors influence the willingness of governments to enforce welfare state reforms to either expand or retrench welfare state schemes. Yet, it stresses that the success of envisaged governmental reform plans hinges on the degree of state capacity. State capacity, in turn, is assumed to depend on the degree of concentration or fragmentation of financial and administrative resources within the polity (see e.g. Skocpol and Amenta 1986).

In an ideal situation, resources are concentrated in the hands of the government, both vertically due to a unitary structure and horizontally due to the absence of a "divided government" structure. If the polity is concentrated in both respects, it provides few institutionalized *veto points* (Immergut 1992; Bonoli 2000; 2001; Tsebelis 2002) against governmental initiatives; and

consequently the government faces few obstacles to enforce its pursued reforms. If, by contrast, the decision-making authority is fragmented between the government and other bodies, there is a certain likelihood that certain veto players will have an opportunity to block envisaged governmental reforms. This latter constellation can briefly be called "institutional fragmentation."

Provided that a sufficient problem pressure and/or political pressure to prompt the government to advocate welfare state *expansion* is given, a straightforward hypothesis on the relationship between institutional fragmentation and social service expansion can be formulated: In a concentrated polity the government can enforce reforms of welfare state expansion after its wishes. The same is not true in fragmented polities. In the latter case, the government is confronted with certain veto players, who can exploit institutionalized veto points to obstruct expansion reforms if they have an interest in doing so. In sum, we can conclude that the polity-centered approach assumes a potentially negative relationship between institutional fragmentation and the likelihood of reforms of welfare state expansion.

Legislative and implementative institutional fragmentation

So far, I have discussed institutional fragmentation and its possible impacts on welfare state expansion in a quite abstract manner. More concretely, what kinds of institutional fragmentation can we think of? I will attempt to distinguish here two distinct forms of institutional fragmentation: *legislative* and *implementative.* Legislative forms of institutional fragmentation are defined as those, which imply a fragmentation of authority in the *legislation process*. Implementative forms are regarded as those, which entail authority fragmentation in the *implementation process*.

As yet, advocates of the polity-centered approach have mostly focused on the impact of *legislative* institutional fragmentation (and thus *legislative* veto points). In doing so, they have focused on

institutional fragmentation in the context of divided government, judicial review, referenda, or bicameralism (see e.g. Pierson 2001a). All these constellations of institutional fragmentation have a capacity to hamper the legislation of expansionist welfare state reforms. Conversely, the absence of these constellations can be regarded to be a positive precondition for the realization of expansive welfare state policies as it enables the government to legislate reforms of welfare state expansion according to its wishes.

Legislative institutional fragmentation is certainly a very important aspect in the understanding of welfare state variations. Focusing on this form of institutional fragmentation, several researchers have succeeded in accounting for welfare state variations in such diverse fields as health services (Immergut 1992), old age pensions (Bonoli 2000), and taxation (Steinmo 1993).

However, in my view, there is a significant gap in the research about institutional fragmentation. Most accounts constantly overlook a second form of institutional fragmentation: *implementative* institutional fragmentation. I will argue here that this second form is also of central significance since envisaged welfare state reforms can be vetoed, not only in the legislation process but also in the subsequent implementation process if authority is fragmented there.

In the particular welfare field considered here, i.e., the field of social services, implementative institutional fragmentation plays a particularly important role. This is because in many countries the authority for the implementation of social services is fragmented between the central state and lower level unities such as municipalities and NGOs. Usually the central state issues overarching implementation guidelines, while municipalities are important implementation agencies on the local level (see e.g. Dente and Kjellberg 1988).

In my view, the significance of *local* implementation authority implies at least two necessities for an extended polity-centered analysis of social services. First, the relationship between the central state and municipalities requires consideration. The central government's capacity to enforce reforms of social service expansion depends not only on its ability to *legislate* reforms after its wishes but also on its capacity to make sure that its political will is actually going to be *implemented* by municipalities in their role as local service implementers. This capacity can be weakened if municipalities enjoy a considerable degree of discretion. Thus, one hypothesis of a widened perspective on institutional fragmentation is that the likelihood of social service expansion also depends on the *degree of municipal discretion* in the implementation process.

A second implication of the significance of the local level in social service politics is that the horizontal polity integration (in other words, the "state capacity") on the local level matters. Municipalities usually bear the prime responsibility for the local implementation of social services. However, the actual provision of formal social services is often carried out not only by municipalities themselves but also by alternative nongovernmental providers. One can argue that a strong fragmentation of local service provision may impair the ability of municipalities to successfully fulfil their task to ensure service expansion. Thus, the second hypothesis resulting from a widened polity-centered approach is that the likelihood of social service expansion also depends on horizontal polity integration on the local level. In this context the question of *provider pluralism* is of central importance.

In conclusion, I will assume here that a successful implementation of expansive service policies is negatively related to both the degree of legislative institutional fragmentation and to the degree of institutional fragmentation in the implementation process. As regards the latter, the discretion of autonomous

municipalities and of non-governmental service providers deserves particular attention.

Institutional fragmentation and welfare state retrenchment

So far, we have discussed the relationship between institutional fragmentation and social service outcomes under the conditions of expansive social service politics. But what happens under converse socioeconomic and/or political preconditions, i.e. under conditions that prompt the government to advocate retrenchments? There is no doubt that the relationship between polity structures and the politics of *retrenchment* is more complex.

As several researchers (e.g. Weaver 1986; Pal and Weaver 2003; Pierson 1994; 2001b; Huber and Stephens 2001) have convincingly argued, the politics of retrenchment are fundamentally different from politics of expansion in one crucial way: retrenchment politics always have to cope with the status quo of already existing welfare state benefits. To retract these benefits can be a very risky political undertaking for two main reasons. First, very basically, retrenchment politics (in contrast to politics of expansion) implies taking away something. As there usually is a "negativity bias" (Weaver 1986) in the general public, meaning that voters are more sensitive toward losses than toward gains, these politics might often have painful political consequences for governments' chances of re-election. Second, in mature welfare states, governments are – as a result of "earlier rounds of welfare state expansion" (Pierson 1994) – usually confronted with a particularly large constituency of welfare state supporters in the form of (a) beneficiaries of welfare state benefits and (b) welfare state employees eager to defend "their" schemes. Also, because of this so-called "policy-feedback" effect (Pierson 1994), retrenchments are difficult to enforce without putting "political survival" at stake.

Given this character of retrenchment politics, which role does institutional fragmentation play as regards the likelihood of retrenchment reforms? In principle, there are two contradictory lines of reasoning. The first one stresses the general argument of institutional fragmentation, according to which any change of the status quo is easier to achieve in constellations of concentrated decision making where opportunities to veto policy changes are absent. Consequently, it assumes that a high concentration of authority is a positive precondition, not only for the politics of welfare state expansion but also for the politics of retrenchments when these are on the political agenda (see e.g. Pierson and Weaver 1993; Bonoli 2000).

In contrast, the second line of reasoning stresses the particular features of retrenchment politics. It argues that *concentrated* decision-making structures also imply concentrated governmental *accountability* (see e.g. Ross 1997; Pierson 2001b). Clear governmental accountability does, however, increase the chances of electoral backlash against the government if it enforces unpopular policies. Therefore, under this constellation most governments can be expected to shy away from retrenchments. On the other hand, a constellation of *fragmented* decision-making enables a dispersion or concealment of accountability and thus allows governments to conduct *blame avoidant* politics. The possibility of using blame avoidance strategies usually increases the willingness of governments to introduce unpopular measures such as retrenchments (see e.g. Weaver 1986; Pierson 1996). Therefore, according to this second argument, institutional fragmentation can be regarded as a positive precondition for a realization of retrenchments.

In sum, we have two contradictory hypotheses about the relationship between institutional fragmentation and the likelihood of retrenchments. The first hypothesis stresses the *veto effect* of institutional fragmentation and consequently assumes a negative

relationship between institutional fragmentation and the likelihood of retrenchments. The second one instead predicts a positive relationship by stressing the *blame avoidance effect* of institutional fragmentation. Ultimately, it seems to be an empirical question whether the veto effect or blame avoidance effect prevails. Yet, the available empirical findings are contradictory. Some researchers have found that the veto effect seems to be dominant (e.g. Pierson and Weaver 1993; Bonoli 2001); others stress the prevalence of the blame avoidance effect (e.g. Ross 1997). Given these contradictory empirical findings, a general conclusion about the relationship between institutional fragmentation and the likelihood of retrenchments seems out of place. Instead, it seems more accurate to assume that the relationship between institutional fragmentation and retrenchments is contingent on particular country- and policy-specific circumstances. I will argue in the following section that, in the case of Scandinavian social service politics, the blame avoidance effect is dominant. In consequence, institutional fragmentation in these countries is a negative precondition for social service universalism, not only since it hampers social service expansion but also because it eases social service retrenchments.

A synthetic explanatory framework

On the basis of the foregoing discussion, a simple synthetic framework for the explanation of social service variations can be constructed. According to this framework, social service outcomes are ultimately influenced both by socioeconomic problem pressures and by political pressures resulting from specific power balances. However, the influence of these pressures on service outcomes is mediated by polity structures. In this context both legislative and implementative institutional fragmentation play major roles. In this thesis, I mainly focus on the *implementative* aspect in attempting to account for Scandinavian variations in the level of social service universalism.

Institutional fragmentation and social service variations among Scandinavian countries

In what way then can differing levels of implementative institutional fragmentation contribute to an understanding of the differing levels of social service universalism among Scandinavian countries? In this section I will first briefly discuss the capacity of socioeconomic and sociopolitical factors to account for these variations, before concentrating on institutional fragmentation as the main explanatory factor used in this thesis.

Spontaneously, one might assume that the varying success of Scandinavian countries to provide universal childcare and elderlycare services is related to different levels of *socioeconomic* and/or *political pressure*. However, as Table 2 shows, differences in socioeconomic and sociopolitical preconditions can hardly fully explain the variations in service outcomes. On the whole, intra-Scandinavian variations related to both factors are small.

TABLE 2: Socio-economic and political context factors

	Denmark	Norway	Sweden
I. Socioeconomic factors			
Female employment rate (%, average 1975–2000)	72	67	74
Net public savings (% of GDP, average 1980–2000)	- 1,7	6,3	- 0,4
II. Sociopolitical factors			
Social Democrats in government (number of years, 1975–2000)	14	17	16
Share of women in Parliament (%, average 1975–2000)	27	33	33
Christian Democrats in government (number of years, 1975–2000)	2	6	3

Sources: GEP 2001; OECD 2001; 2005; Blom-Hansen 1998a.

All Scandinavian countries display comparatively high average female employment rates for the period 1975–2000, indicating a high social problem pressure to provide formal social services on a universal scale. Certainly the Norwegian female employment rate is somewhat lower than in the other two Scandinavian countries, but the differences are not large enough to fully explain the considerably lower Norwegian childcare provision, in particular when we also take into account that, among the Scandinavian countries, Norway had the least economic pressure to refrain from service expansion, given its positive average public savings rate.

Also as regards sociopolitical factors, one can conclude that for all Scandinavian countries positive preconditions for a universal service provision have prevailed, bearing in mind the relatively high prevalence of Social Democratic governments and of female MPs and the supposedly fairly low influence of Christian Democratic parties.

Since in all Scandinavian countries the socioeconomic and political preconditions have been similarly favorable for a universalistic service provision, it is worthwhile to take a closer look at the *role of institutional fragmentation* as a crucial explanatory factor. At first sight, this factor does not seem to offer much towards understanding the partial deviation of Scandinavian countries from the path of social service universalism because the major constitutional preconditions of *legislative* institutional fragmentation are quite similar among the Scandinavian countries (see Table 3). In all three countries we note the absence of those kinds of constitutional provisions commonly associated with institutional fragmentation: for example, federalism, bicameralism, presidentialism, judicial review, and mandatory referenda (see e.g. Bonoli 2001; Immergut 1992). All these countries have unitary parliamentary systems. Thus, on the surface, institutional fragmentation should not be an obstructing factor for social service universalism in any Scandinavian country either.

TABLE 3: Similarities and differences in institutional fragmentation among Scandinavian countries

Similarities	Differences
Legislative institutional fragmentation	*Implementative institutional fragmentation*
• Unitarism	• Municipal discretion
• Unicameralism	• Role of NGOs
• Parliamentary government	
• No formal judicial review system	
• No mandatory referenda	

Sources: Lijphart 1984; 1999; Article II.

However, all the previously mentioned features mainly refer to institutional fragmentation in the *legislation* process. As for social services, the situation doubtlessly looks different in the *implementation* process. First, in all Scandinavian countries, municipalities are offered a role as implementation agencies for social services (see e.g. Kröger 1997; Hanssen 1997). To the extent that the corresponding implementation competences grant municipalities considerable autonomous discretion, we can speak of sector-specific municipal veto points in the implementation process. Second, in some Scandinavian countries, NGOs in their role as service providers also have partial access to veto points (see *Article II*).

As stated earlier, one can in principle assume a negative relationship between institutional fragmentation and service *expansion* in constellations where the government advocates expansion reforms at the same time as potential veto players have an interest in obstructing expansion. In my view, such a constellation was clearly evident in Scandinavian social service politics in the 1980s and 1990s.

Because of the previously mentioned socioeconomic and sociopolitical conditions, we can assume that governments in the Scandinavian countries for the most part advocated an expansionist, universalistic social service policy. At least for the field of childcare, such a governmental policy orientation is well documented: From the mid-1970s all Scandinavian governments declared the official goal of fully meeting the childcare demands of all parents (Blom-Hansen 1998b). As for elderlycare, there seems to be a consensus among major experts that Scandinavian governments pursued a universalistic policy (see Sipilä 1997).

At the same time, both municipal authorities and certain NGOs can be assumed to have held vested interests in blocking social service expansion. In all Scandinavian countries the municipalities have to bear the majority of the costs of social service provision. Given these costs and facing a situation of general "permanent austerity" (Pierson 2001b) and of municipality-specific financial scarcity (see e.g. Blom-Hansen 1998a), Scandinavian municipalities can be assumed to have developed a *cost containment interest* in slowing down or obstructing service expansion in their jurisdiction (albeit this interest certainly varied to some extent among the three countries; see *Article II*). In addition, certain NGOs that were responsible for the provision of social services can be assumed to have held an *ideological interest* in obstructing the setup of a full-scale, universalistic social service system. This is in particular true for Christian NGOs, which tend to resent the provision of services for certain groups, preferring to retain traditional familial care-giving (see *Article II*).

Given this constellation, it seems fair to assume that implementative institutional fragmentation, providing local governments or NGOs with veto opportunities, indeed can be regarded as a negative precondition for an expansion of social services in the Scandinavian context of the 1980s and 1990s.

Furthermore, I will argue here that institutional fragmentation in the particular constellation of Scandinavian welfare states also has a *positive* impact on the chances of *retrenchments*. For Scandinavian retrenchment politics the veto effect of institutional fragmentation seems to be negligible since Scandinavian municipalities in their role as potential veto players cannot be assumed to hold an interest in obstructing retrenchment reforms because of their financial interest constellation outlined above. Also, an exploitation of veto points by external interest groups aiming to defend the welfare state seems to be very unlikely for two reasons (see Kangas 2004 and *Article IV* on this point). First, the closed administrative structure of Scandinavian welfare programs does not offer any veto opportunities to external interest groups. Second, the broadness of Scandinavian social service programs implies a very heterogeneous constituency of benefit supporters. Heterogeneous constituencies usually find it hard to form effective interest organizations, which would be needed to exert an effective veto influence.

At the same time, constellations of institutional fragmentation should ease *blame avoidant* politics. The prospect of blame avoidance is of particular importance in the case of Scandinavian retrenchment politics, just because of the broadness of Scandinavian welfare state schemes. Broad welfare schemes with a large constituency bear the potential of a particularly strong *electoral* backlash against open retrenchment reforms. Constellations of institutional fragmentation, such as those providing municipalities or NGOs with veto points, may help to disperse and conceal accountabilities and thus help to encourage the carrying through of blame avoidant retrenchment reforms.

Based on this reasoning, it will be hypothesized here that in the Scandinavian countries institutional fragmentation implying veto opportunities for municipalities and NGOs both negatively influences social service expansion and positively influences social

service retrenchments. Both effects together should imply that institutional fragmentation is negatively related to the level of service universalism in these countries.

As we will see, the degree of implementative institutional fragmentation, or to be more precise, the degree to which municipalities and NGOs can be said to have access to implementative veto opportunities varies among the Scandinavian countries and in part also among social service fields in the same country. These variations of the degree of implementative institutional fragmentation can in turn help us to understand the variations in social service outcomes. To a certain degree also variations in the degree of *veto incentives* of potential veto players among the Scandinavian countries contribute to understand the varying levels of social service universalism (see *Article II*).

Main findings

The explanatory articles of this thesis provide cross-country comparisons of childcare and elderlycare in the Scandinavian countries as well as a cross-policy comparison between childcare and elderlycare in Sweden. In these articles the main dependent variable is the level (and the change in terms of expansion or retrenchment) of social service universalism. This variable varies across Scandinavian countries and across service fields. At the same time, the Scandinavian countries are very similar with regard to certain potential explanatory factors.

With this constellation, a so-called *most similar* or *comparable cases* design (see e.g. Przeworski and Teune 1970, Lijphart 1975) is made possible. In general, this kind of research design is applicable in any small-N comparison in which the dependent variable varies across cases at the same time as there are many similarities regarding potential explanatory variables among the cases studied. The main advantage of this design is that it

eliminates factors of similarity as valid explanatory factors at the same time as directing the focus at factors of variation, which then can be regarded as key explanatory factors if they systematically co-vary with the dependent variable.

Given the logic of the most similar cases design, the factors of similarity I have described, i.e. problem pressures, political pressures, and legislative institutional fragmentation, most probably are not responsible for the cross-country and cross-policy variations of social service universalism. Instead systematic co-variations between the remaining explanatory factor – *implementative* institutional fragmentation – and social service universalism can be regarded as indicating a causal relationship between both variables.

The relationship between sector-specific implementative institutional fragmentation on one hand and the level of service universalism, as expressed in coverage levels, on the other is empirically analyzed in Articles II–IV of this thesis. Each of these articles is based mainly on data from national statistics as regards the dependent variable. As to the independent variable, data from document analyses are drawn on in order to grasp the rules of social service implementation.

In the following article summaries, I will only summarize the findings of Articles II–IV, as the findings of *Article I* on variations of the dependent variable have already been discussed earlier in this introduction.

Summary of Articles II–IV

Article II attempts to analyze the role of implementative institutional fragmentation behind the different childcare coverage levels in the Scandinavian countries. In particular, it tries to understand the comparatively low childcare coverage in Norway. For that purpose a document analysis of "the rules of the game of childcare implementation" in all three countries was undertaken, covering the period 1975-2000. The analysis reveals that only in

Norway municipalities and NGOs – in their role as local childcare implementers – were provided with significant veto opportunities *and* veto incentives against the governmental policy of full childcare coverage. As a consequence, only in Norway (but not in Denmark and Sweden) municipalities and NGOs could and did partially obstruct governmental initiatives to expand fulltime childcare services in the past thirty years. The article comes to the conclusion that probably for this reason Norway did not succeed to set up a universal childcare system on fulltime terms, while Denmark and Sweden did.

Article III tries to explain why the provision of home help services for the elderly sharply declined in Sweden in the 1980s and 1990s, whereas it slightly increased in Denmark. It is argued that local governments in both countries would have had considerable financial interests in a retrenchment of elderlycare services. But as the empirical findings reveal, only Swedish municipalities enjoyed sufficient autonomous discretion to actually exert retrenchments on the local level. Further results indicate that the Swedish municipalities indeed have used their discretion to carry out local elderlycare retrenchments. Based on these findings, the article concludes that varying levels of municipal discretion most likely played a significant role for the different developments of home help services in the two countries.

Finally, *Article IV* undertakes a cross-policy comparison of childcare and elderlycare in Sweden. In Sweden, childcare services continuously expanded in the 1980s and 1990s at the same time as elderlycare services declined tremendously. The article traces the different developments in both fields back to different governmental institutional choices in the regulation of childcare and elderlycare, respectively. As regards childcare, the government made possible a continuous service expansion, by means of tight centralized regulations, which provided municipalities with few opportunities to obstruct an expansion of services. By contrast, in

the field of elderlycare the government granted municipalities considerable discretion as regards service expansion and admission procedures, which the municipalities used to exert retrenchment measures. In conclusion, it seems that different sector specific levels of institutional fragmentation also can account for cross-policy variations in the development of social service universalism.

Taken as a whole, Articles II–IV come to the conclusion that sector-specific institutional fragmentation in the implementation process – implying institutionalized veto opportunities of municipalities and NGOs – is indeed an important factor in understanding the different levels of social service universalism among Scandinavian countries and across policy fields. It is certainly hard to come up with an exact statement about how important this factor is. Nevertheless, at the very least, the findings of this study suggest that implementative institutional fragmentation has a relatively higher relevance to the understanding of Scandinavian social service variations than the common alternative approaches mentioned earlier, as only this factor (and not the alternative ones) significantly co-varies with differing levels of social service universalism.

Contributions to future welfare state research

In this conclusion I would like to point out two possible contributions of this thesis for future welfare state research: one concerning welfare regime research, the other concerning explanatory welfare state research.

Welfare regime research is mostly preoccupied with the empirical identification of country clusters of similar welfare states in order to construct welfare regime typologies. In most welfare regime typologies, the Scandinavian countries are claimed to make up a coherent and unique regime type, often called the *social democratic welfare regime* (see e.g. Esping-Andersen 1990, 1999).

This regime type is assumed to be distinguished by a comparatively high degree of *universalism* and *equality promotion*.

Empirically, this regime classification is predominantly based on the study of cash benefits, which gives rise to the critical question of whether the same classification is also accurate with regard to social services. So far, only very few cross-country analyses of social services have contributed to the welfare regime discussion (e.g. Antonnen and Sipilä 1996; Esping-Andersen 1999; Korpi 2000). These few analyses mostly came to the conclusion that also in the field of social services a particularly universalistic and equality-promoting Scandinavian welfare regime could be found. Some researchers have even come up with the far-reaching supposition that social services would be "the key to the Scandinavian welfare model" (Sipilä 1997).

In my view, the problem with these conclusions is that they are for the most part based on outdated and in part inadequate data (see the discussion in *Article I*). Several studies with more adequate data concentrating on the single service fields of childcare or elderlycare suggest a different conclusion. In particular, the work of Arnlaug Leira on childcare and Martha Szebehely on elderlycare should be considered in this context.

Leira (e.g. 1992, 2002) has repeatedly pointed out that Norway, as one of the three Scandinavian countries, does not really fit into the image of a particularly universalistic and equality-promoting Scandinavian social service model when it comes to childcare. Szebehely's findings on Swedish elderlycare indicate that Sweden does not fully fit into the Scandinavian social service model either. Although stressing many similarities among the Scandinavian countries, Szebehely discovered a significant shift of the Swedish elderlycare system away from universalism and equality promotion towards more selectivism and segmentation (e.g. Szebehely 2000, 2003). Taken together, these findings should have raised warning flags against the assumption of the existence of a coherent,

universalistic Scandinavian social service regime. However, they have not attracted as yet very much attention in the welfare regime discussions of comparative welfare state research, probably because they are not based on wider cross-country comparisons beyond the Scandinavian cases and because they only cover single service fields.

This thesis has presented cross-country data, covering Scandinavian *and* other Western European countries, and comprising *both* the major service fields of childcare and elderlycare. The objective has been to bring to the attention of comparative welfare state research that it is indeed inadequate to assume a coherent and particularly universalistic and equality-promoting Scandinavian social service model. The data presented has clearly revealed that among Scandinavian countries today, with regard to social services, only Denmark is clearly discernible from a number of continental European countries in terms of universalism and defamilialization levels. It is to be hoped that this finding can help to replace the common but faulty image of an all-encompassing Scandinavian welfare model with a more realistic one. Certainly, there may be a particular Scandinavian welfare regime in the field of cash benefits, but in the field of social services it currently seems out of place to speak of such a regime type.

This conclusion about the existence of a Scandinavian social service model also may have repercussions for the general discussion of welfare regimes. As the example of the Scandinavian country group indicates, the well-known mainstream welfare regime typologies developed by Esping-Andersen and others are not as easily transferable to the field of social services as one might think. Apparently, social services need to be studied cautiously in their own right if we want to make conclusions about social service regimes.

This thesis also may provide some valuable insights for *explanatory welfare state research*. As the example of Scandinavian social service variations suggests, institutional fragmentation in the implementation process may be a significant but so far overlooked factor to account for welfare state variations.

Nevertheless, how important is this potential explanatory factor for welfare state research? The answer certainly depends on the extent to which the findings discussed in this thesis are deemed to be transferable to other countries and other fields of the welfare state. Here either a "minimalist" or "maximalist" view can be advocated.

According to a *minimalist view*, the findings of this thesis at best establish that varying levels of implementative institutional fragmentation can account for Scandinavian social service variations in the fields of childcare and elderlycare, but not for any other welfare state variations. On the surface, this view seems to be most accurate because the data presented here for the most part only cover childcare and elderlycare in the Scandinavian countries.

On the other hand, a more far-reaching *maximalist view* might question why implementative institutional fragmentation should only play a role in the countries and welfare state fields analyzed here. The purported argument about the social policy impacts of *implementative* institutional argumentation almost exactly parallels the logic of the commonly accepted argument about *legislative* institutional fragmentation. Initially also this argument was empirically only based on small-N comparisons of single policy fields (see e.g. Immergut 1992; Steinmo 1993). Later it has been successfully put to the test in several large-N comparisons (see e.g. Huber and Stephens 2001; Swank 2001; Hicks and Swank 2002). As a result, *legislative* institutional fragmentation is nowadays commonly acknowledged as a crucial explanatory factor to understand welfare state variations. So why should the situation be so different for *implementative* institutional fragmentation?

In my view, at least the foregoing *expansion hypothesis*, i.e. the hypothesis claiming a negative relationship between implementative institutional fragmentation and welfare state *expansion*, might also be valid for other countries and welfare state fields. One can argue that in many other countries outside Scandinavia, autonomous local unities such as municipalities and NGOs also play important roles in the implementation of social services. Therefore it may very well be the case that the argument is also applicable to social service variations outside Scandinavia. The same reasoning can be applied to the question of applicability in other fields of the welfare state. Autonomous local implementation agencies often play an important role not only in the fields of childcare and elderlycare but also in health care and education as well as in fields beyond social services such as social assistance and housing. It could follow that even in these fields the autonomous influence of municipal or non-governmental veto players might make a difference for benefit expansion and consequently for benefit universalism.

The situation is more challenging as regards the *retrenchment hypothesis*, i.e. the hypothesis about a positive relationship between implementative institutional fragmentation and the likelihood of retrenchments. In some countries and welfare state fields we might find that the veto effect of institutional fragmentation in retrenchment politics overweighs the blame avoidance effect. Under such constellations we will probably even find a negative instead of a positive relationship between institutional fragmentation and retrenchments. However, with regard to welfare state schemes with a similar basic architecture as the Scandinavian social service programs, there might be a general tendency that retrenchments are easier to enforce in those schemes where the local level is strongly and autonomously involved in the implementation process than in those where it is not.

Certainly, the results of the small-N studies of this thesis cannot prove a broader validity of either the expansion or the retrenchment hypothesis purported here. Small-N studies always only can *generate* but never *test* general hypotheses. Additional data covering more cases are required to confront the hypotheses developed here. It is to be hoped that future research will come up with these data. Not until large-N data are available will more light be shed on the hitherto unanswered question: Is *implementative* institutional fragmentation only a minor explanatory factor, bound to very specific circumstances, or is it (as I tend to believe) a key factor to account for previously unexplained puzzles of welfare state variation?

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