



GÖTEBORGS
UNIVERSITET

PROFESSIONALIZED, HYBRID, AND LAYPERSON DECISION-MAKING MODELS IN NORDIC CHILD PROTECTION

– THE PRESENT PRACTICE IN SWEDEN COMPARED WITH THE SYSTEMS IN FINLAND, NORWAY AND DENMARK

ELIN HULTMAN, TORBJÖRN FORKBY & STAFFAN HÖJER

THE RESEARCH WAS FOUNDED BY SWEDISH ASSOCIATION OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND REGIONS, 2016.

Aim and research questions

To describe the present decision-making practice in Sweden and discuss the commonalities and differences with the child protection decision-making systems in Finland, Norway and Denmark when deciding on out-of-home placements, both on voluntary and coercive grounds.

1. What actors are given the formal authority to decide?
2. What are the reasons for the composition of the actors involved?
3. Whose interests are well supported/badly threatened by the present systems?

Material

- official reports, legislation, government bills, guidelines, and information about organizations and governmental and administrative authorities.
- We conducted 12 interviews with key informants from Norway, Finland, and Denmark (we drew on our previous research when it came to Swedish child protection (Forkby and Höjer 2011; Forkby, Höjer and Liljegren 2015; Hultman, Forkby, and Höjer 2017; Liljegren, Höjer, and Forkby 2014).

Actors given the formal authority to decide	Sweden	Norway	Denmark	Finland
<p>Out-of-home placements</p> <p>On voluntary ground</p>	<p>Laypersons at local Child Protection Boards*</p>	<p>Head of child protection</p>	<p>Varies, often delegated to professionals</p> <p>Two judges and two laypersons in the appeals court</p>	<p>Head of child protection or appointed professional</p>
<p>Out- of-home placements</p> <p>On coercive ground</p>	<p>One judge, three laypersons in the administrative courts</p>	<p>One judge, one expert on children, one layperson on the county social welfare boards</p>	<p>One judge, two experts on children, two laypersons on municipal boards for child protection</p> <p>Two judges and two laypersons in the appeals court</p>	<p>Two judges, one expert on children in the administrative courts</p>

Findings

Reforms of the decision- making systems in Finland, Denmark and Norway

Issues of importance for the reforms

a) to ensure that decisions are in compliance with the rule of law and

b) to support children's (and parents) rights to participate in these decisions

In Sweden it has (so far) not been considered necessary to change the layperson model

Professionalized, hybrid, and layperson decision-making models

- Four countries – three decision making models
- Professionalized (Finland)
- Hybrid (Norway, Denmark)
- Layperson (Sweden)

Findings

External experts

- The influence of external experts has in different ways expanded in all countries
 - judges (as decision-makers)
 - experts with knowledge about children´s need and development (as decision-makers and/or contributors to child protection assessments)

Sweden is the deviant case, in which experts, apart from a judge, are not present as decision-makers

Findings

Laypersons and their role

- To ensure
- insight, democratic control, influence decision-making with common sense



- Strengthen the rule of law as they balance between different knowledge perspective
- Give legitimacy to the decision in relation to clients and the public
- Develop the local welfare

Discussion

Consequences for social workers?

- The influence of external experts could be seen as a way to control, complement or compensate in areas where social workers lack necessary knowledge

Discussion

Consequences for children?

- Attention to children and their needs from different perspectives with different knowledge perspectives
- No evidence that a particular constellation of actors ensures that children are more involved or guarantee children's own perspectives
- How `child friendly` are child protection proceedings?

before we can say something
about potential consequences of the organisation of the decision-making bodies and the
actors involved for children's participation this need to be studied further.

Concluding remarks

- All countries balance between different knowledge perspective and do not give one single actor the full power to decide.
- None of the models seems to be perfect and free from potential difficulties and problems
- Potential consequences for children's participation need to be studied further
- How can we make child protection proceedings child-friendly?