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Supranational and bilateral policy transfer

How does it impact national welfare reform?

Bjørn Hvinden & Håkan Johansson

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Contact information authors

Associate Professor Håkan Johansson, School of Health Sciences and Social Work, Växjö University, 351 95 Växjö, Sweden, + 46 470 70 80 25, Hakan.Johansson@vxu.se

Professor Bjørn Hvinden, Head of Research Norwegian Social Research (NOVA), Norwegian Social Research, P.O. Box 3223 Elisenberg, 0208 Oslo, Norway, +47 22 54 12 17, Bjorn.Hvinden@nova.no

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INTRODUCTION

Supra-national, national and local public institutions are currently seeking new ideas for achieving how citizens can become more active in discussion and decision-making, as ways of revitalizing democracy and policy development. Key actors believe that stronger involvement of civil society is necessary to combat social exclusion and mobilize citizens for full participation in society. In spite of a growing amount of practical experience with attempts to involve organized civil society (OCS), we find much uncertainty about what models of dialogue and cooperation are most fruitful, in the sense of combining practical impact and democratization ('parity of participation', Fraser 2008). Consequently we are witnessing extensive exchanges of ideas between different levels of governance and between different national contexts. Yet we have insufficient understanding of how these various flows of ideas interact in the formation of innovative models, and how ideas 'from abroad' are adapted and molded to fit with 'domestic' legacies, institutions and power disparities.

This paper asks how we can analyze such complex interactions and adaptations of ideas across levels of governance and territorial borders and especially, what role plays OCS in these transfer processes. A comparative case study of recent reforms in two Scandinavian countries serves as empirical reference for the discussion. Both cases deal with the development of new channels of dialogue between governments and civil society organizations servicing and giving voice to marginalized sections of the population.

The broader international context of the complex processes of transfer and translation of policy is first of all illustrated by the efforts of the United Nations to stimulate civil society engagement, for instance to get development programs attuned to citizens' concerns and enlist popular support. Active participation of citizens and civil society is seen as essential for achieving 'ownership' to programs and reforms. In Europe, the new Lisbon Treaty is meant to promote ideas about participatory democracy, e.g. through the Citizens' initiative and the dialogue with civil society organizations. The European Commission has opened up for formal consultation procedures with civil society organizations under the heading 'the Civil Dialogue'. Since long the Economic and Social Committee has presented policy input on behalf of OCS in Europe to the decisions of the Parliament and the Council. The Commission has even institutionalized consultation with various networks of organizations of marginalized citizens in Europe, e.g. the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), providing financial support and legitimacy to this and similar networks. The European Parliament recently installed a Citizen's Agora, bringing together citizens, civil society representatives and elected politicians in debating the Union's key challenges. We find similar experiments in establishing improved channels for participation from and dialogue with OCS in a number of national contexts. One of the major examples is the British 'Compact' that subsequently has served as a model of inspiration for number of other countries. In the paper we show how actors at national level may look to and assess the relative merits of experiments undertaken both at 'supranational' level (e.g. the EU) as well as in other national contexts ('bilateral exchange').

In analyzing the interactions and adaptations of ideas originating at supranational or national level the paper engages with the growing literature in this field. Scholars have used concepts like 'policy diffusion', 'policy transfer', 'policy learning', 'lesson-drawing' and 'policy translation' to depict flows of ideas across governance levels and national borders. Although ideas do travel across levels and borders, they are usually amended and modified, as domestic actors seek to broke new ideas, translating and packaging them to fit the national

context and their individual concerns (e.g. Evans & Davies 2003; Dolowitz & Marsh 2000). Still the processes through which the search for and selection, translation and adaptation of ideas take place are rarely described and analyzed. Similarly much of the existing literature appears to have a too narrow understanding of who are involved in these processes and what the motives of these actors might be. The literature has hardly discussed the possibility that OCS may be among the agents searching for ideas and 'domesticating' ideas for use in the national context. This paper will demonstrate how OCS may indeed be influential agents behind the travelling of ideas.

WHY DO POLICY IDEAS TRAVEL?

We may point to a number of reasons for the recent upsurge in the academic debate on the flow of policy ideas across levels and border.

First, globalization and internationalization have spurred a growing interest and awareness among policy-makers about the interrelatedness of economic, social and environmental problems across the world. Today the financial and economic crisis has affected most countries across the globe (although to different extent). Decision-makers at national level look to how other countries have dealt with similar problems and consider to what extent they can learn from their approaches and experiences (Dolowitz 2003; Banks et al 2005).

Second, interdependencies between countries have increased, for instance within the framework of the European Union (EU). The EU has gained an increasing influence of areas where member states were earlier seen as having exclusive competence, e.g. foreign policies, employment policy, pensions and social security, poverty and social exclusion, health and social services etcetera (e.g. Bulmer & Padgett 2004). In some areas, the EU can decide on binding legislation for member states to comply with, yet in several other areas one is more relying on soft law methods, trying to influence member states using peer pressure, comparisons and sharing of best practices, naming and shaming to achieve an 'open method of coordination' (OMC). Although previous studies indicate that these processes have limited direct influence on national reform processes, they illustrate how a number of new avenues for policy transfer have been established (Johansson 2007; Jacobsson & Johansson 2009). Politicians, officials, experts and representatives of OCS participate in a wide range of committees, seminars and conferences discussing and sharing information, knowledge and experience on policy development in different parts of the Union (Greenwood 2007).

Third, parallel to the changing role of the EU, large international organizations – International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), and the World Bank – have a key role in promoting certain sets of policies and are actively putting pressure on countries to adjust and conform (e.g. Dobbin et al 2007). For instance, on the basis of its 'Jobs Study' the OECD put pressure on countries to change their social protection and unemployment policies, using US policy as a reference model for others to follow. The IMF and the World Bank are exerting pressure on countries to change their public policies or cut public spending as conditions for providing loans.

Fourth, a global architecture of policy ideas is emerging thanks to technological change and the development of internet and related communication technologies. These technologies have opened up new opportunities to spread ideas and models across the world. With the necessary skills and technological devices one is able to assess policies developed in remote parts of the world, read documents from think tanks and key policy advisors, and review and summarize existing research and evaluations of programs. These technologies are not only something being heavily used by policy makers and government officials, but also by private corporations, independent researchers, students and OCS, including social movement organizations of people in marginalized positions. The amount and complexity of the available information give users wide scope to select ideas and supporting evidence according to their own interests and concerns, as illustrated by issues like climate change and medical treatment methods.

The combination of factors we have outlined here emphasizes what social and political scientists have known for a long time: the experiences made in other countries and supranational organizations can be read as a global laboratory of natural experiments. Given that the available information about these experiences is sufficiently precise, accurate and relevant policy-makers are able to use them as sources of inspirations or models for new policies in the domestic context (Rose 1991; 1993; Bennett 1991; Dolowitz 1996).

CONTRASTING UNDERSTANDINGS OF POLICY TRANSFER

Recent debates on policy transfer and diffusion appear to have been separated into two different camps. One camp analyzes *coercive forms of policy diffusion*, i.e. mainly addressing structural pressures, the use of conditions in international politics and structures of ideological hegemony (Newmark 2002; Dobbin et al 2007). The other camp is concerned with *voluntary forms of lesson-drawing*, seeing policy-makers as rational actors, making informed choices. As summarized by Stone (1999: 52), 'the transfer being a voluntary activity of the decision-making elite a specific country, who imports innovative policies from a different context under the belief that it will have the same effect in a different context' (see also Rose 1991 & 1993).

Some scholars have, however, argued that it would be an analytical mistake to construct rigid boundaries between the two camps (Dolowitz & Marsh 2000). They argue that it is more appropriate to see the concerns of the two camps as placed on a continuum of types of policy transfer. Dolowitz and Marsh define policy transfer in general as a 'process in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions etc., in one time and/or place is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements and institutions in another time and/or place' (Dolowitz & Marsh 1996: 344).

Some countries have attracted more interest than others in policy transfer studies. These countries can be depicted as 'leading' (powerful and dominant) within their region or globally. They gain this status since 'policy makers play "following the leader" and mimic countries that appear to do the best' (Dobbin et al 2007: 425). Some countries have, however, special bonds – culturally, politically, economically and geographically – which enhance the spread of policies across their borders. For instance links between the UK and

the US (as well as other liberal states) are strong, being reinforced by and reproducing similarities of political cultures and high regularity of contacts between policy-makers.

Similar historically given links and similarities exist between the Nordic countries. On the basis of these links and similarities scholars have identified what they called the 'Nordic (or "Scandinavian") model' (Erikson et al. 1987) or the 'Social Democratic welfare state regime' (e.g. Esping-Andersen 1990). Albeit the Nordic countries are not powerful or dominant in international politics; they have attracted great interest when it comes to welfare reforms, as for instance illustrated by Denmark in the current debate on 'flexicurity' and 'the Danish miracle'.

Several scholars have, however, expressed doubts whether there has been an actual increase in the amount of policy transfer, or whether we mainly have seen an increase in the potential for policy transfer (James & Lodge 2003:184ff). Others point to the non-historical account of policy innovation developed by Dolowitz and Marsh, criticizing this account for downplaying the significance of previous ideas, policies, and institutions (Evans & Davies 1999). One can also find critics that question whether one can detach policy transfer from ordinary and regular policy-making. Arguably policy-making always contains an element of learning from others or abroad. In this paper we will pursue two lines of inquiry; the role of NGOs in policy transfer and policy transfer as policy translation.

WHO ARE THE AGENTS OF POLICY TRANSFER?

Previous research has suggested that a wide range of actors might be involved in policy transfer, e.g. elected officials, political parties, bureaucrats/civil servants, pressure groups, policy entrepreneurs and experts, transnational corporations, think tanks, supra-national governmental and nongovernmental institutions and consultants (Dolowitz & Marsh 2000:10). In spite the long list of potential actors, scholars have in practice mainly studied the activities of public elites at national, regional and local level and of civil servants. There are logical reasons for this focus on 'the usual suspects' as these tend to be the most important players in the decision-making process.

It is striking that scholars have not investigated NGOs, trans-national advocacy networks, voluntary organizations and social movement organizations as agents of policy transfer to any great extent (Stone 1999:55). The UN and the EU have recognized OCS as partners in formal decision-making processes, developed new forms of consultation and dialogue. Similarly, the UN and the EU have encouraged the establishment of transnational networks of NGOs, as a way to stimulate debate and awareness on key issues and pressure on national governments to change their policies. In addition, several large NGOs have had international branches for a longer period of time and are recognized actors in their field of expertise, e.g. Amnesty, Greenpeace, Human Rights Watch and the Red Cross. They monitor policy development, examine to what extent countries are following international conventions and run large lobbying campaigns (Keck & Sikkink 1998). Technological change have also fostered the emergence of transnational networks, bringing together organizations that previously did not have an international dimension. Within the EU, the number of civil society organizations, umbrella networks of social NGOs and advocacy groups have grown

considerably. Several of these hold an office in Brussels, lobby the Commission and other EU institutions, build capacity among their constituencies and support them in influencing national governments (Greenwood 2007; Marks & McAdam 1996; Jacobsson & Johansson 2009). Key issues for future research are: What role do NGOs play as transfer agents? What constraints and opportunities are NGOs facing in policy transfer processes?

Despite an explicit interest in policy transfer as a process, the approach of Dolowitz and Marsh provides a weak analytical understanding of what actors actually are doing when they are transferring policies, and what consequences the domestic adaptation has for the original policy idea. Organizational research on policy translation has to a greater extent investigated such issues (e.g. Czarniawska-Joerges & Sevón 1996 & 2005; Sahlin-Anderson & Wedling 2008). Here the focus is not only on (formal) policies, but more ideas, concepts and beliefs more broadly. Moreover, this alternative approach question whether it is meaningful to talk about 'transfer' in a strict sense of the word; 'a thing moved from one place to another cannot emerge unchanged: to set something into a new place is to construct it anew' (Czarniawska-Joerges & Sevón 2005:8).

The spread of ideas cannot be understood and analyzed as a straightforward and linear transmission, by which ideas travel, unaffected by differing institutional contexts or the ideas, interests and activities of the actors receiving the ideas in question. For this reason, ideas will never be completely copied. Transfer of ideas must rather include a process of translation, which put and emphasis on the actors who receive ideas. Actors will search for and select ideas that resonate with their prior ideas, values and preferences, and adjust ideas originating in other contexts to fit with their own context. In this sense, 'receiving' ideas is an active, creative and innovative process.

Within this constructionist approach (Dobbins et al. 2007), scholars have outlined a step-by-step model for the translation process: [for an idea to travel] 'it must be separated from its institutional surroundings (disembedded) and translated into an object such as a text, a picture, a prototype (packaged). Such an object then travels through the relevant field of organizations to another time and place, where it is translate to fit the new context (unpacked)' (Erlingsdottir & Lindberg 2005: 48). The next steps involve the processes by which the incoming idea becomes part of 'a new practice (reembedded) ... [to] be taken for granted in its new surroundings and will, in its turn, be disembedded in order to travel through time and space again' (p. 48). In other words, to analyze the local translation or 'editing' of ideas from abroad, we need to have a thorough understanding of the national context in which an idea from abroad is to be received. We will illustrate this point by outlining how corporate aspects of the Nordic welfare model (NWM) were important conditions for the ways in which international ideas about new forms of dialogue between authorities and OCS were received and adapted in Norway and Sweden.

SOCIAL DIALOGUE AS PART OF THE NWM

When constructing their stylized pictures of the Nordic welfare societies, scholars have tended to emphasize issues of distribution, methods and rules of distribution as key aspects of the NWM (Erikson et al. 1987; Kautto et al. 2001). Many observers have pointed to traits

like the pursuit of egalitarian values, equal distribution of incomes, low poverty and the ambition to secure broad and universal access to income maintenance and services within health, care and education (e.g. Kangas & Palme 2005). The emphasis on distributional issues is also striking in the close relatives of the NWM; the Institutional-Redistributive Model (Titmuss 1972); the Social Democratic Welfare Regime (Esping-Andersen 1990) and Nordic Social Market Economy (Pontusson 2005). Several of these scholars have pointed to the strong interplay between public policies and relatively coordinated systems of wage setting, facilitated by closer tri-partite cooperation between the state, employer federations and trade unions as important factors behind equal income distributions, both before and after taxes and transfers.

This Nordic version of 'social corporativism' – the institutionalized contact, negotiation and joint decision-making between the state and organized social interests – has, however, wider implications. One of them is that many citizens have been able to influence public policies in two different ways; through voting at general elections (the 'electoral channel') and through membership in interest groups (the 'corporate channel', Rokkan 1999). As argued by Rokkan (1999: 263-264) and others, the power of organized interests depends on their ability to threaten to withdraw material inputs from the system (e.g. commodities, labour, services, investments, etc). In a late-modern and media-dominated public sphere, however, even the ability to withdraw symbolic inputs may be significant; e.g. the ability to question the legitimacy of policy-makers or discredit their decisions on the basis on their own stated goals and commitments (Lewin 1992; Rothstein 1992).

In the Nordic countries the corporate channel has rarely included organizations representing groups outside the economic sphere, with two important exceptions; organizations of the old age pensioners and of persons with disabilities. The two latter groups have for a considerable length of time been part of established consultation processes with decision-makers. The government has regarded these organizations as reliable discussion partners about adjustments in public welfare provisions, e.g. yearly upgrading of benefits and services (e.g. Feltenius 2004). Other groups of considerable size, e.g. social assistance recipients, lone mothers, homeless people, drug abusers, ex-prisoners and poor and excluded groups in general, have not been granted this kind of institutionalized access to politicians and officials (e.g. Seim 2006).

The contrast – and sometimes conflict – between social partner organizations and other parts of OCS very much concerns their role and their degree of 'representativeness'. Social partners, being used to having a privileged access to policy-makers, tend to emphasize that in contrast to social civil society organizations (SCSOs) they are 'real partners', able to assume co-responsibility in the implementation of joint decisions, and not just being 'participants' in discussions. Trade unions also tend to question the representativeness of spokespersons of SCSOs, arguing that they only represent themselves, while the trade unions, besides having high membership rates, have internal democratic structures securing representation and accountability. Trade unions tend to see themselves as representatives of all relevant interests; at least as far as labour market policy is concerned. On their side, SCSOs argue that the trade unions fail to represent people outside of – and sometimes far from – the labour market, such as the long-term ill, immigrants or persons of disabilities homeless people, who have difficulties in entering the labour market.

Due to a number of different factors and processes, this power balance started to change at the end of the 1990s. For instance in Sweden employer federations left partner discussions and arrangements (Hermansson et al 1999). This was a major set-back for the labor movement, yet also an indication for other organizations that they could start to play a role they had not previously been allowed having. Moreover, at the late 1990s a number of state committees started to show greater interest in new models for political participation, as a complement or even an alternative to the model of representative democracy (SOU 2001; SOU 2007). Even though these ideas never really left the political and academic spheres, they spurred and influenced a parallel debate on new forms of dialogue with OCS. This debate stimulated a search for innovative models of civil dialogue. Since both the EU and a number of member states had introduced innovative reforms in this area, transfer agents could find a lot of ideas and practical experiences to find inspiration from.

MODELS OF CIVIL DIALOGUE AT EU-LEVEL

There are many reasons for the long history of policy consultation and dialogue between EU-bodies and interest groups – including networks of SCSOs (Bullain & Toftisova 2005; Greenwood 2007). For instance the Commission aims to obtain information, knowledge and expertise necessary to develop substantial and trustworthy policy proposals. The involvement of OCS can also furnish EU-bodies with an ally in their negotiations with the governments of member states. The institutionalized dialogue with OCS can also provide the EU with a source of legitimacy-building in a situation with considerable uncertainty and skepticism towards the EU as a project, and a way to partially compensate for the democratic deficit (Kendall & Anheier 1999).

The ‘social dialogue’ with European networks of employers and trade unions was strongly promoted by President Delors and received a legal basis in the EC Treaty (later amended). Partly inspired by the relative success of the social dialogue, the Commission later actively supported the setting up networks of SCSOs, for instance working in the fields of poverty, homelessness, old age and disability. Several of these networks developed close working relationships with the Commission. Attempts to broaden this ‘civil dialogue’ with SCSOs led to limited practical results in the short term. Things started to change in the late 1990s (Obradovic 2005; Smismans 2003). At European Summits, political leaders were met by major protests and in Brussels part of OCS coordinated campaigns, criticizing EU’s weak decision-making structures, intransparency, weak legitimacy and the unclear role of OCS. The 2001 White paper on European Governance paid special emphasis to the role of OCS as a channel to reach out to citizens across Europe (EC 2001). In 2002, the Commission presented a set of principles – participation, openness, accountability, effectiveness and coherence – that were to guide the future consultation processes with OCS (EC 2002).

Last but not least, in the Lisbon treaty proposal of 2005 one could find a clear proposal to provide the civil dialogue with a more legal basis. Article 46 namely introduced participative democracy as a principle in EU legislation. Among other things, this included that EU institutions should maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society, carry out broad consultations with the parties concerned and that citizens could raise initiatives to the Commission directly, to form new legislation.

However, as we know the treaty was turned down by France and the Netherlands, and lacked support from several members.

Parallel to the Commission's activities, OCS has mobilized strongly in favor of a more institutionalized civil dialogue. The Civil Society Contact Group brings together the eight large European civil society platforms, i.e. in culture, environment, education, development, human rights, public health, social and women. This group coordinates the platforms' relations vis-à-vis the EU and has made civil dialogue one of its main issues. In 2006, the group presented a major report on the civil dialogue, as a way to keep the discussion going after the failure of the new treaty. In clarifying what it saw as characterizing civil dialogue, the group emphasized a reciprocal interaction public institutions and civil society organizations, covering *the whole policy-making process*, including phases such as agenda-setting, decision-making, implementation, evaluation and feed-back (Civil Society Contact Group 2006:22). So far these ambitious requirements have not been realized. The actual dialogue taking place between the EU-bodies and OCS is still dominated by consultation, information-sharing and discussion.

NEW MODELS OF CIVIL DIALOGUE AT NATIONAL LEVEL

During the last decade several countries have established closer and more institutionalized dialogue between the government and OCS have been established in a number of member states. Important examples of such institutionalized dialogue have been formal agreements specifying each partner's role, mutual obligations and the expected forms of dialogue and consultation. This kind of agreement was first established in England (1998) and Scotland (1998/2003). Later Ireland (2000), Croatia (2000), Denmark (2001), France (2001), Estonia (2002), Latvia (2005), Lithuania (2007) and Slovenia (2007) have followed up with more or less similar agreements. The exact contents, scope and focus of the different national agreements vary, i.e. what each partner is obliged to do, the number of organizations involved and the issues dealt with.

When the first and most well-known Compact was established between the UK government and the voluntary and community sector in 1998 (Plowden 2003; Osborne & McLaughlin 2003; Compact 2008), the relationship between the government and the voluntary sector had been in a flux change for a considerable time. OCS had increasingly become involved as providers of public services and contested government funding practices and the emerging 'contract culture'. Similarly, OCS criticized the government for failing to recognize the sector as a contributor to social development and the public debate in society at large. Spokespersons for the sector called for a concordat between the government and the sector, regulating future relations and guaranteeing a code of good practice between the public authorities and voluntary organizations (NCVO 1996; Deakin 2006).

These pleas found limited support from the Conservative government, yet more from the Labour party – out of office at that time. After the landslide win in April 1997, New Labour decided to enter a Compact with the voluntary sector. The Compact is considered as a general framework and as an enabling mechanism to enhance relationships between the government and the sector. However, the UK Compact is not a legally binding document. On the contrary,

its legitimacy and authority comes from being the product of a joint consultation process, in which the government and the sector prepared background documents.

The Compact covers a large number of principles, to guide the relationship between the partners. For instance, the Compact should ensure that ‘... service users, volunteers, members and supporters are informed and consulted, where appropriate, about activities and policy positions when presenting a case to Government or responding to Government consultations, and to communicate accurately the views put to them in the course of such representations’ (Article 10.4). Since the establishment of the Compact a number of delegations from other European countries – including Sweden - have visited Britain to learn about how it works practice.

Another Compact model of special interest to our study concerns the Danish agreement. Inspired by the UK the Danish government and representatives of the voluntary sector agreed on a ‘Charter’ in 2001; ‘... for interaction between Volunteer Denmark/Associations Denmark and the public sector’ (Charter 2001). As suggested by the title, the document reflects a broad involvement of voluntary organizations. The stated objectives to the Charter is to provide the individual citizen with the best conceivable framework for participating actively in community coalitions; to strengthen forces of social cohesion; to help build respect for the diversity of goals and forms of organization in the voluntary sector; to strengthen and develop the interaction between the voluntary sector and the public sector, while respecting their differences; to maintain and develop the efforts of the voluntary sector to promote the development of society, the welfare of community coalitions, and the individual's quality of life, and lastly, to promote volunteer efforts and make them more visible (ibid.).

The Danish Charter contains much of the same complexity of goals as the UK Compact, balancing the role as advocacy organizations and the service providers. As in many other European countries, Danish local authorities aim to involve voluntary organizations more strongly in the delivery of services. As a result, the voluntary sector was faced with several dilemmas. Although voluntary organizations were able to provide more personalized and responsive services, they felt the risk of becoming too strongly associated with the local authorities and be perceived as one service provider among many other public service providers.

However, the Danish Charter differs from the UK Compact in terms of building on a narrow range of representatives. Together with representatives from relevant Ministries, they form a working group meeting on regular basis to discuss the interaction between the public authorities and the voluntary sector. The working group includes five government ministers and leading figures for a large number of broad umbrella organizations (such as the Danish Red Cross, Voluntary social work, etc). Hence, the Danish charter is not to the same degree defined as an encompassing process, involving the whole sector of voluntary organizations. However, the Charter states that the working group behind the charter and the government define the charter as the starting point for a continuing dialogue on values, parameters and concrete opportunities for interaction between the voluntary sector and the public sector at all levels of society.

Interestingly, Denmark also established a ‘Council for Socially Marginalized People’ in 2002 (CSMP 2008). This council aims at developing more effective measures to improve the situation of the most disadvantaged, including facilitating the representation of

disadvantaged groups. The CSMP describes their two main strategical objectives as: 'One will be to increase the understanding in society of socially marginalized groups and the other – closely related to the first – will be to increase socially marginalized people's own chances of making themselves heard in the public debate' (ibid.). The council has had a strong participation of professional experts and providers, both public and private, and a more limited involvement of persons with experience as socially excluded and users of services. The Council has achieved a high profile in Denmark, through its numerous and thorough proposals for reforms in different areas of public provisions for disadvantaged persons. All in all, the CSMP can be interpreted as a more specialized channel for dialogue between the government and civil society than the Charter.

As we now turn to the analysis of our two cases, we can already now note that for Swedish transfer agents the idea of a Compact or Charter had a particular attraction, whereas some of the Norway transfer agents were fascinated by the idea of a CSMP-like body. These divergent sources of inspiration can largely be understood by the difference in problem definition before transfer agents started their search for ideas from abroad.

NORWAY: DOMESTIC AND SUPRA-NATIONAL INSPIRATION?

Since the first years of the millennium the Norwegian government has sought for new models for dialogue and consultation with representatives of organizations of poor, disadvantaged and marginalised citizens. We will describe the background for this search, the actors and their agendas in the process, where the actors looked for inspiration, and what considerations that influenced the choice of models.

CHANGING CONDITIONS FOR PARTICIPATION

The search for new models for dialogue and consultation with associations of poor and disadvantaged groups was in one sense a consequence of Norwegian governments' strategies to combat poverty. As a surprise for most observers, poverty and the combat of poverty had emerged as a key theme in the 2001 parliamentary election campaign. The incoming centre-right coalition government ('Bondevik II') – consisting by the Christian-Democratic Party, the Conservative Party and the Liberal Party – followed up by arranging a hearing with a great number of social researchers in the autumn of 2001. One year later the government published a 'Plan of action for combating poverty' (St.meld. nr. 6 2002-2003). According to this plan there were few 'user associations' among persons living in poverty but that a number of other associations organizing persons at risk of poverty through disability, illness, etc. (ibid., p. 26). The government pleaded to seek active cooperation with these

organizations to find appropriate and user-responsive measures within the work to combat poverty.¹

In a slightly different context, the government declared that it would establish a close dialogue with the voluntary organizations more generally to ensure that they could play an important role in combating poverty. The government argued that these organizations already made substantial efforts by speaking on behalf on and delivering services to persons living in poverty, by providing peer support and facilitating self-help. Among issues to be discussed with the organizations the Bondevik II government mentioned: yearly poverty hearings with the voluntary organizations, and the establishment of service centres for voluntary organizations and self-help groups (ibid. p. 32).

The plans for this dialogue were only partly brought to fruition. The government organized yearly poverty conferences. More significantly the government in 2003 granted the Church City Mission funding for setting up a service office as a nation-wide resource centre for organizations and self-help groups working against poverty and social exclusion. This service centre, called the 'Battery', was also meant to be a meeting place for groups and persons to establish networks and support for self-organization, advice and guidance for organizational development, etc. After a two-year pilot period, the Church City Mission has been granted yearly grants for the work of the Battery.

After the 2005 parliamentary election the incoming Centre-Left coalition government ('Stoltenberg II') – comprised by the Labour Party, the Centre Party and the Socialist Left Party – committed itself not only to reduce but to eradicate poverty in its joint policy platform (Soria Moria 2005: 3). Furthermore, in preparing a comprehensive plan for this eradication the coalition pledged that it would arrange a hearing with representatives of poor people's own organizations and relevant professional groups (ibid. p.36). In the plan the government presented in the autumn of 2006 the government stated that it would strengthen the dialogue and cooperation with voluntary organizations and representatives for disadvantaged and marginalised groups. The government also committed itself to facilitating self-organization, self-help and peer support, as well as continuing the funding of the Battery (AID 2006a: 7). Similarly, in its budget for 2007 the government pointed to the gradual increase in the financial support to voluntary organizations as a way of promoting the dialogue and cooperation with these organizations as parts of the efforts to combat poverty (AID 2006b: 189).

The government made an important further step when it in the budget for 2008 allocated 10 Mill NOK specifically to promote a good dialogue with voluntary organizations and representatives for disadvantaged and marginalised groups. Yet, at this point – in the early

¹ This statement disregarded the considerable number of associations of poor and disadvantaged groups that had existed from the mid-1990s; see Halvorsen & Hvinden 1998; Halvorsen 2005 & Hvinden 2002 for descriptions of the situation in Norway in this period. This regard is even more striking as the government already at this point had started to grant financial support for the establishment of such associations.

autumn of 2007 – it was not yet clear exactly how this dialogue was to be organized. There had been some internal discussion in the Ministry for Labour and Social Inclusion and the Ministry also engaged the Directorate for Health and Social Affairs (now: the Directorate for Health) to clarify possible models for the dialogue.

The discussion about models continued until March 2008 when the Ministry for Labour and Social Inclusion decided to introduce a model where the three main elements were:

- A Contact Committee with representatives of the government and organizations of poor and disadvantaged groups of citizens;
- A forum of organizations and groups representing the latter ('the Collaborative Forum'),
- The Battery in the role of serving as secretariat and provider of practical support, assistance and backup for this forum, promoting organizational development, capacity building and the articulation of joint policy positions and demands on the part of the associations and spokespersons of poor and disadvantaged citizens.

In the process leading up to the decision about this model we could witness an interaction between different actors, sources of learning and concerns.

OCS SEARCHING FOR NEW MODELS ABROAD

On the government side the political leadership of the Ministry was obviously an important driving force in the search for models. But the work to clarify possible models was very much in the hands of a relatively small group of civil servants. This group interacted with their colleagues in the Directorate but did also invite outside researchers to present a short review of other countries' experience with models, including the experiences made within the Commission of the European Union (Hvinden et al. 2007). The idea was to look to other countries to identify best practice and – if possible – emulate models and approaches adopted and tried out in practice that had proved workable and appropriate.

Another key set of actors, however, were the representatives of organizations and alliances of poor and disadvantaged groups. As already suggested such organizations and alliances had become more significant since the mid-1990s. Their stronger presence had been facilitated by considerable and largely sympathetic media attention and by the financial support granted by the central government and some municipalities and counties (Halvorsen 2002). Although the organizations were without the sanctions at disposal for trade unions or similar actors, they could as spokespersons of the weak and vulnerable affect the legitimacy and credibility of the government, especially a government that committed itself to eradicating poverty. An illustration of the organizations' potential impact of the government's credibility is the 'poverty camp' they organized outside the hotel where the three parties behind the Stoltenberg II government negotiated about their joint 'Soria Moria' platform in the autumn of 2005.

As part of the 2006 Norwegian national study on 'Mainstreaming social inclusion' the researchers carried out a survey including participants in organizations of poor and disadvantaged persons (Fløtten and Nuland 2006). The researchers report that the interviewees were critical to the yearly poverty hearings arranged by the government and argued that these hearings had little practical impact, apart from the symbolic value. Furthermore, the interviewees felt that the central and local government did not really understand the hardship of poor and disadvantaged people. Few interviewees felt that the organizations' views had any real impact on the government's policy. Given this, it is no surprise that the organizations were keen to see the establishment of new and better channels to influence the government's programs and priorities and that they wanted more regular and institutionalized forms of dialogue and consultation with the government, as complements to their campaigning through the media and otherwise.

In this context it is of great significance that the Welfare Alliance – an umbrella organization for and of poor and disadvantaged people in Norway – is a member of the European Anti-Poverty Network (Welfare Alliance 2008; EAPN 2008). Key members of the Welfare Alliance had worked in the Brussels Secretariat of the European Anti-Poverty Network and participated in EAPN projects. This meant that these participants had first-hand knowledge about the experience of EAPN from its dialogue and consultations with the Commission. They also had detailed knowledge about the successful models of contact and collaboration between the government and poor and disadvantaged people's organizations in Flanders (EC 2004). The Welfare Alliance were able to use the experience and knowledge they had gained in the EAPN context to substantiate their demands for more regular and closer forms of dialogue and consultation in Norway.

Professional providers of services and assistance to poor and disadvantaged groups had also an interest in the models to be adopted. Voluntary organizations like the Church City Mission and the Salvation Army have extensive experience from working for and with the most disadvantaged and were through the Battery already involved in providing support to self-organization and collective voice on the part of poor and disadvantaged citizens. The major trade union of social workers similarly expressed interest for the search for models, and, also one of the main colleges for training of social workers engaged itself in the discussion.

DIFFERENT SOURCES OF IDEAS AND EXPERIENCE

Early in the process leading up to the chosen model the Ministry was impressed by what came to be called the 'Danish model', the Council for Socially Marginalized People, and a delegation from the Ministry visited the CSMP. Key civil servants in the Ministry became gradually less convinced about the desirability of the Danish model, being concerned about what appeared to be the experts' dominance of the council. The civil servants wanted to give priority to how the model for dialogue and consultation could give representatives of poor and disadvantaged groups a more prominent role, to facilitate their voice but also to facilitate capacity-building in the organizations. The civil servants also considered other recent and on-going reforms across European countries, especially the British Compact'. Yet the civil servants did not see this 'British model' - in its different national versions - as meeting the more specific requirements for a model of dialogue and consultation between the government and poor and disadvantaged groups.

These reservations about existing national models on the part of civil servants made them also more interested in the forms of collaboration and consultation established within the European Community. As we have referred to earlier, the Commission had since the late 1970s granted financial support to what became the 'European Anti-Poverty Network' (EAPN). The Commission has enabled and recognized the EAPN as a body it regularly consults with on the formation and assessment of EC policies to combat poverty and social exclusion. This role of EAPN has later been developed further with the advent of the open method of coordination (OMC) in the area of social inclusion since early 2000s. In the guidelines for the process of development national action plans to promote inclusion the European Council has also obligated the Member States to actively involve also representatives of groups experiencing or at risk of exclusion, as an important set of stakeholders (Johansson 2007). Norway has participated in the EC action programmes on social inclusion and later in the Progress programme but has not been part of OMC process. Hence the civil servants had fairly good knowledge about the EU-level form of institutionalized civil dialogue.

Furthermore, in the process of operationalizing ideas for a 'lean' model, giving representatives of poor and disadvantaged citizens a prominent role, the civil servants were also able to draw on experience with established models for dialogue and consultation in Norway with other groups, e.g. in relation to the main organizations of the social partners and the communities of citizens with immigrant or ethnic minority background.² For instance, Norway's 'Contact Committee for Immigrants and the Authorities' (KIM 2008) was first appointed in 1984 and the committee is now in its eight four year period. KIM has seventeen representatives of immigrant communities in twelve regions of Norway, eleven representatives of government Ministries, directorates and other official bodies and seven representatives of parties represented in the Storting. KIM has widely been regarded as a success and has also met interest from the governments of other countries³.

During the early winter of 2008 the Ministry invited different stakeholders to submit views on the proposal for a model, with a contact committee or forum for direct dialogue between the government and representatives of organizations of poor and disadvantaged citizens as one of the key elements. All in all, the written submissions were largely positive although for instance the main trade union of social workers, a major research institute and a university college involved in training social workers had some reservations and evidently would have preferred something closer to the Danish model, with a council or expert standing committee that could present evidence-based knowledge and policy advice to the government.

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² Through its signing of United Nations and European human rights instruments the Norwegian government had accepted the obligation to undertake consultation with representatives of the protected groups – e.g. immigrant groups, ethnic and national minorities – and to involve them in the development of policies to strengthen the protection of the groups against discrimination and for pressures towards forced assimilation.

³ For instance, the Irish minister of Integration visited KIM in June 2008 as the Irish government is considering establishing a comparable committee to create a forum for direct dialogue between minority representatives and the authorities (KIM 2008).

representatives of the protected groups – e.g. immigrant groups, ethnic and national minorities – and to involve them in the development of policies to strengthen the protection of the groups against discrimination and for pressures towards forced assimilation. For instance, the Irish minister of Integration visited KIM in June 2008 as the Irish government is considering establishing a comparable committee to create a forum for direct dialogue between minority representatives and the authorities (KIM 2008).

As we have seen, the government in the end decided to establish a model with a Contact Committee, but with the two important additional elements of (i) the Collaborative Forum for and of organizations of poor and disadvantaged citizens, and (ii) a reinforced role for the Battery to provide practical support and training for the representatives of the organizations. The Contact Committee had its first meeting 17 April 2008, with participants from the Ministry for Labour and Inclusion, the Welfare and Labour Directorate, the Battery and ten different organizations and groups (representing poor people, survivors of child care measures, self-defined losers, ex-prisoners, drug users, tenants, and African women in Norway). The meeting was chaired by the Minister. The forum of organizations had their first two-day workshop 10-12 June 2008, with participants from twenty organizations and groups, facilitated and coordinated by the Battery. Both arrangements have been successful and encouraging from the participants' point of view.

SUMMARY OF THE NORWEGIAN CASE

Trying to summarize, it is striking that the process leading up to establishment of the model for dialogue and consultation did not in any simple and direct way build on inspiration or policy-learning from abroad, either through bilateral or supra-national influence. On the one hand, the model could be said to be inspired from the ways in which the EC had created opportunities for the participation and voice of organizations of poor and disadvantaged groups, partly by providing financial support to such organizations and their transnational networks, partly by establishing arenas and channels where the participation and voice of the poor and disadvantaged could find practical expression, partly by recognizing and legitimizing the organizations as relevant stakeholders and partners in policy-making processes, not only at the EC level but also at the national level. On the other hand, the model also incorporated learning from what appeared to be the most successful examples of forums for contact between the Norwegian government and sectorial interests, e.g. the bodies for dialogue and consultation with the social partners and with the communities of immigrants and ethnic minorities respectively. In this sense, the model can also be said to be firmly embedded in the national context, developing further some elements of established institutional patterns, while rejecting or disregarding others.

Overall, it is significant that the Norwegian government in its search for a workable model took the time to actively seek information about and assessment of relevant approaches in other countries and the EC. The government selected elements from these approaches that it saw as compatible with (i) the already stated objectives for establishing a forum for closer and more regular contact with the representatives of poor and disadvantaged citizens and (ii) the best examples of existing models of government contact with other sectors of Norwegian society. At the same time this forum also represented an important and probably original policy innovation by linking it to the new joint arena for capacity-building and policy-

articulation among organizations of poor and disadvantaged citizens, facilitated and supported by the Battery.

Finally, the Norwegian case demonstrates that a coalition of civil society organizations representing poor and disadvantaged groups played an important role as transfer agents in advocating a model of civil dialogue institutionalized at the EU-level and in a national context (Flanders). As we will see, OCS also played a key role in the search for ideas for a more institutionalized civil dialogue in Sweden, albeit in a slightly different way than in Norway.

SWEDEN: TRANSLATING THE UK COMPACT?

The following section the transfer of new models of dialogue and consultation to the Swedish welfare state. Parallel to the Norwegian case, our analysis address background for this search, the actors and their agendas in the process, where the actors looked for inspiration, and what considerations that influenced the choice of models. However, in contrast to the Norwegian case the Swedish dialogue model concerned not only organizations representing marginalized groups in society, yet a broader mix of SCSO.

AN IDEA WITHOUT A TRANSFER AGENT

At the beginning of 2000, the idea of more organized forms of consultation and dialogue between the government and SCSO started to grow. The main actor during this period was a Swedish umbrella organization – consisting of member such as Salvation Army, the Swedish temperance organization, Save the Children, Lions Club International, Swedish Red Cross and others – called National Forum for Voluntary Social Work (hereafter ‘the Forum’), was the main transfer agent. Already in 1998, one of Forum’s members had been in the UK, visiting the NCVO – the British umbrella organizations – and being impressed by its work and the newly implemented Compact with the government.

However, first after changing the profile of its organization, making it into a more lobby and advocacy oriented network, the Forum picked up the idea of a Swedish Compact and started to lobby national as well as local governments. Even though the Forum was highly curious of the UK model, its key actors were less unenthusiastic about copying the model, considering UK’s more liberal profile, market oriented social policies and charity tradition. Quite the opposite, the Forum expressed commitment to a universal welfare state and a society in which voluntary organizations mainly acted as complements to public social policies and social services. Key spokespersons expressed growing concern for the changing profile of the Swedish welfare state and – according to them – that voluntary organizations have to an increasing extent become producers of welfare services. This undermined the democratic or participatory role of the voluntary sector. Previously, organizations received financial support from the state for mobilizing people, bringing them together into formal organizations and enabling them to raise their voice of marginal groups and be partners for the government in the formation of new policy. At present, voluntary organizations were granted financial support on the basis of what they were delivering and producing.

Despite its hesitations, the Forum picked up one of the main element from the UK Compact and started to promote it in a Swedish context. This element was the need to formalize rules for the relationship between the (welfare) state and certain voluntary organizations (working with social welfare issues). Influenced by the UK Compact, one argued in favor of a broad agreement – a partnership – between the voluntary sector and the government. Such an agreement should focus on principles, specifying the respective roles of the state and the voluntary organizations, and existing conditions. Forum presented five broad principles as key elements for a new form of agreement between the government and the sector. Among other things, they argued ‘... that voluntary organizations are not to act as a service delivery partners for the state, but to be recognized as organizations with a democratic function and promoters of social solidarity and trust between citizens’ and that ‘... voluntary organizations are to be autonomous of the state, in terms of deciding by themselves on their activities, whom to cooperate with and for what purposes – such aspects of the voluntary sector that should not be hampered by financial conditions’ etcetera (Forum 2009). Each of these five principles underlined the sector’s autonomy and independence from the state. The Forum called its proposal a ‘Spelregelprocess’ – a ‘rules-of-the-game’ process.

BARRIERS IN THE NATIONAL CONTEXT

Trying to promote its idea, the Forum developed a set of lobbying strategies. One continued to develop its relationships with UK organizations. These emphasized that was naive to think one could copy or transfer the British model directly to the Swedish context. Rather the challenge was to translate the British compact to fit Swedish circumstances. UK colleagues expressed that one of the key factors for their success was not only a long term preparation work, support and close contacts with the government, but also that one had an umbrella organization gathering a large proportion of the civil society/voluntary sector into one jointly recognized organization, having the status and capacity to negotiate with the government on a possible Compact. Members of the Forum also travelled to Denmark to study the Danish Charter, however, dismissed it as less interesting because it was initiated by the Danish government. At national level, Forum used its connections with the National Board of Health and Welfare and managed to get support for the idea at top level officials.

During a few years, the discussion on the need of clear and transparent ‘rules-of-the-game’ started to emerge at national conferences organized by the National Board. These conferences were attended by key politicians, which discussed the need of such a regulation. The Forum also invited speakers from the UK to these conferences (e.g. researchers and the leader of the NCVO). In addition, the Forum arranged seminars with key politicians, being invited to discuss policy development in general and the need for more clear rules in particular. Some politicians expressed support for the idea, mainly coming from the Liberal or Christian Democrat Party. The Forum also tried to mobilize support from other organizations, yet with limited success as few joined forces with the Forum and actively promoted the idea within their own ranks.

However, the Minister in charge was directly critical to the Forum’s idea and proposal. In 2005, the Forum succeeded in setting up a meeting with the Social Democratic Prime Minister (Göran Persson). He expressed interest in the proposal, yet delegated the issue to the Ministers in charge. The Social Affairs Minister was explicitly critical to the whole idea. He

doubted the feasibility of such a formal agreement, and questioned how much support the Forum had within the sector. He was also explicitly critical from an ideological point of view. As Social Democratic Minister, he emphasized that only central and local authorities could shoulder the responsibility for the social rights of citizens. This was not a responsibility that could be left to either private companies or voluntary organizations. He was also questioning the reference to the UK and the British Compact. In his view, the UK had initiated a Compact for several reasons, one of them being an anxiety about raising taxes. Involving voluntary organizations in service delivery was one way of dealing with the situation, however not a desirable solution in Sweden. It became obvious that the Forum's idea did not match with the thinking of key politicians and decision-makers at that time, and in response Forum focused in meetings with leaders of all the opposition parties (during 2006) and contacts with local governments to try to set up local 'rules of the game' processes.

THE NEW GOVERNMENT TAKING THE LEAD

The process towards the establishment of a Swedish Compact entered a new stage as a result of the parliamentary election in the autumn 2006. The Centre- Conservative alliance coming into government in January 2007 – the Reinfeldt government – had expressed a more positive standpoint to a redefined relationship to the voluntary sector – not only for general ideological reasons, but also this could serve the government's reform plan. In summer 2007, two new Social Affairs Ministers launched the idea of a broader dialogue with the sector about each partner's rights and responsibilities in a news paper article (Sabuni and Hägglund 2007). The two Ministers criticized the previous Social-Democratic government for failing to realize what the voluntary sector actually contributed and could contribute with, in the Swedish welfare state. For these and other reasons, they expressed the ambition to increase the number of private service providers and SCSOs in service provision.

The Ministers referred explicitly to changes taking place in other countries, in particular the British Compact, but also similar agreements in Denmark, Estonia, Canada and France' (ibid.). The government mentioned a set of motives for establishing a partnership agreement with the sector covering topics like an independent voluntary sector as an important guarantee for democracy and pluralism; a greater number of actors involved in delivering and producing services to citizens provide with greater freedom of choice and result in services of better quality; voluntary organizations' commitment and idealism are important factors to bring socially excluded people into society. Hence, the formal motives for an agreement was placed in a broader framework of voluntary organizations as on the one hand being producers of welfare, working on contracts for the public sector and competing with both private and public service providers, *as well as* filling a democratic function in society, expressing the voice of citizens, that is departing from Forum's initial claim of mainly securing the independence of the sector.

The government's decision marked the start of an intensive period of government-sector contacts and the government was clearly inspired of the UK Compact and a Swedish delegation of key officials visited NCVO and organizations in charge of the Compact in the UK. One person (having a background in the voluntary sector as well as within public administration) was appointed as a senior advisor with the objective to start up the dialogue process, engage organizations and develop a proposal for a national Compact model. With

explicit reference to the UK experiences, one came to the conclusion that it was not possible to make an ordinary report on this matter, but rather to enter into direct dialogue and create something together with the sector. Something that would prove difficult since the government did not have a partner to negotiate with.

The dialogue process started in winter 2007 and lasted until autumn 2008. The process as such engaged a large number of organizations in debates on the rights and responsibilities of sector organizations and the government. A total of 80 organizations took part in workshops, meetings, seminars, hearings etcetera and most of them were nationally based umbrella organizations, or similar. The discussions and negotiations took a long time, and demonstrating the dialogue process as a 'new' way of making policies, the formal proposal was actually written by representatives of the voluntary sector, and government officials. Unsurprisingly, Forum was one of the two organizations that worked closely with government officials in developing the final proposal that could on the one hand side form the basis for the government's formal decision on the matter, as well as attract attention from the sector so that they would sign the Agreement. The government took the formal decision on the Agreement with the voluntary sector on the 23rd of October, making it possible for interested organizations to ratify the Agreement. This far the interest has been modest and until April 2009, 39 organizations have signed the Agreement.

As in the UK Compact (having five codes of conduct), the final Swedish Agreement entails a description of a certain set of values, regarding mutual values and beliefs. These are expressed in six principles, which very much is the result of the intensive discussions and negotiations between the government and the sector's representatives. Principles include *independence* (securing the sector's independence, democratic function and critical position vis-à-vis the state), *dialogue* (open and inclusive decision-making structures), *quality* (services provided by voluntary organizations should be evaluated, audited and prove accountability like public and private services), *long-term planning* (provide voluntary organizations with stable working conditions, e.g. regarding broad political support for the Agreement), *transparency* (mutual trust between the state and the sector requires exchange of information and data on planning, services and activities) and *multitude of service providers* (voluntary organizations needs to have better conditions to develop services for citizens, which is considered good in itself as a way to secure the variety of needs among citizens (Compact 2008).

In addition to these principles, the Swedish Agreement entails a set of responsibilities and measures, which each partner obliges to fulfill when signing the Agreement. These include for instance sharing of information, preparing research activities, funding exercises etcetera, i.e. if one accepts the principles in the Agreement one also needs to comply with a set of responsibilities and shoulder some measures. Albeit these have been adjusted to national conditions, they share some resemblance with general ideas in the UK Compact.

All in all, the enactment of a Compact in Sweden carries an innovative element with regard to the Swedish policy tradition. In Sweden, the welfare state has shouldered the main responsibility for providing services for citizens and voluntary organizations have played a minor role. The emphasis on voluntary organizations as service providers and the necessity of having a multitude of producers, together with the explicit reference to the UK Compact made by the Ministers, demonstrates an ambition to break with previous Social Democratic policies and delineate a new ideological positioning.

CONCLUSION

The two processes outlined here are obviously different in several respects. First of all, they deal with issues, goals and efforts that differ in some important substantial aspects. The Norwegian process searched for a workable model of dialogue and consultation between the central government and one particular kind of civil society or voluntary organizations; those representing poor and disadvantaged citizens. The Swedish process aimed at the establishment of formalized agreement between the central government and the voluntary sector more generally, and in principle, the whole voluntary sector in Sweden. Consequently, the Norwegian process was in one sense simpler and more specialized in its aims and end result than the broader and highly complex Swedish process. The Swedish process involved a much greater number of actors and organizations, even if it failed to involve one key stakeholder; the association of local and regional authorities, and only partly succeeded in involving the large organization or pensioners. However, in spite of this difference it is possible to make some observations on the following three questions: Can we find any evidence of policy transfer? Where did the good ideas come from? Who were the main or initial transfer agents? Can we find evidence of bi-lateral and/or supra-national policy learning?

In both cases key actors looked abroad for inspiration and possible policy learning. In Norway the government was initially particularly interested in and impressed by the Danish Council for Socially Marginalised People, and representatives of the Ministry visited the CSMP to gain more detailed knowledge of its operation. Second, we have also referred to how the Welfare Alliance – an umbrella for 23 organizations for / of poor and disadvantaged people in Norway -- had strong links to the EAPN and used their knowledge about the established forms of cooperation and consultation at the EU-level to promote their demands for similar model in Norway. Gradually ‘the EU model’ became a more important frame of reference in the Norwegian search for a workable model, albeit in a rather general way. In Sweden the Forum – and later the Reinfeldt government – explicitly sought inspiration from other European countries’ experience with compacts between the government and the voluntary sector, and the British compact in particular. Although all the key actors emphasized that one could not import the British model directly the proposal from March 2008 bears considerable resemblance with this model. Arguably, if one is to make a choice, Sweden has more opted for bi-lateral policy transfer, while Norway is in the end turned out to be more influenced of supra-national policy-transfer (albeit balanced against domestic preexisting institutions and models).

More generally, the spread of the Compact-inspired models across European countries, including Sweden, is an obvious example of policy transfer and for understandable reasons: both governments and OCS are trying to reduce uncertainty and create new forms of predictability (see e.g. Ballain and Toftisova 2005). They seek to create stable – at least on paper – working conditions and partnerships with reliable actors. Arguably, what has been transferred is the idea of formalizing the relationship between the state and representatives of the voluntary sector, working with social welfare issues. As a formal contract, it is signed by two parties and includes a detailed description of the actors concerned, their role regarding the Agreement and mutual responsibilities for implementing it.

However, the idea of a civil dialogue also entails a certain degree of citizen involvement and participation. This is an evident feature of the type of civil dialogues being discussed at EU-level and also nationally. During its visit to the UK, the Swedish delegation became convinced that to develop a proposal with sufficient legitimacy among organizations, it was necessary to include them and integrate them into the preparation process. This constitutes a break with the traditional way of making policies in Sweden, since government proposals are usually completed by civil servants or invited experts and not as a joint venture (ideally) between government officials and a selected group of voluntary sector representatives.

The perhaps most promising element of the model chosen in Norway is the emphasis on capacity-building, within and between the organizations participating in the Collaborative Forum. The experience so far suggests that the organizations succeed in agreeing on what are the main issues to take up with the government and let go the minor disagreements that could otherwise be a means of getting attention and distinguishing oneself from the other organizations. At the same time the organizations become more self-confident about their own identity. With the support of the Battery the organizations train actively on how to work more effectively to reach practical compromises, how to present their case clearer to outsiders, how to enlarge the circle of activists and how to achieve additional resources for both self-help work and external campaigning.

We find several, factors hampering and/or fostering transfer of ideas. We have seen how established domestic institutions and ideologies in the two countries have influenced the modeling of national solutions. In the Norwegian case positive experiences with contact committees between the central government and various organized sectorial interests contributed to the credibility of the model for dialogue and consultation with poor and disadvantaged citizens' organizations. Hence it was possible for the Norwegian government to ward off some potential objections against its proposal; one had not simply mimicked models from abroad but to a great extent built on the best of national experiences. In Sweden the changes in government had strong impact on the possibilities for a complete policy transfer above all as the previous Minister in charge was directly negative to the idea being put forward by Forum.

We also find a broader set of actors involved in the transfer process, than usually described in the literature on policy transfer. The Norwegian process involved to greater extent research-based knowledge as input in the deliberations about what model to go for. The input from researchers may have helped to widen the menu of existing or potential models under consideration, but perhaps mainly to create a firmer basis for the growing reservations towards the adoption of a broad expert-based standing committee (the 'Danish model') as a suitable answer to the objectives and tasks spelled out in both in the policy and budget documents of both the Bondevik II and the Stoltenberg II governments. In the Swedish process input in the form of research-based knowledge appears to have played a limited and subordinated role, although research-based evaluations of the UK compact obviously had more generally contributed to the compact's general reputation as a success or even 'best practice'. In both Norway and Sweden, we find evidence of NGOs operating as transfer agents and above all as initial transfer agents, promoting ideas long before politicians. They have established necessary contacts with foreign organizations, studied policies developed elsewhere, made initial analyses of appropriate models, lobbied national actors and tried to rally support among voluntary organizations. They have made the first translation of the

ideas and adjusted them to national contexts, most likely making it easier for policy-makers to continue the transfer.

These aspects of our findings suggest that also 'weaker' agents can act as important transfer agents, in contrast to what is more or less taken for granted in the policy transfer literature. We need to look more widely than only studying the regular elites, politicians and key officials in ministries. We need to include other public actors as well as voluntary organizations. It may be that a closer look will show that actors from OCS play a much more important role than we tend to assume!

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