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Guaranteeing Positive Destinations for Youth in a Danish Municipality

The Transfer, Translation, and Transformation of a Policy Instrument

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Introduction – The Transnational Movement Of A Youth Strategy

We copied this concept ‘positive destination’ (...). It was wonderfully unblemished; it tasted of something; it was a new expression. Perhaps, it is not the most exciting expression to youngsters, but it works in the organization.¹

This opening quote stems from an interview with an official in the Administration for Children, Leisure and Education in the Municipality of Hjørring in northern Denmark. The concept of positive destination originates in Scotland, from Developing the Young Workforce (DYW), part of the Scottish Youth Employment Strategy launched in 2014 (Scottish Government, 2014). In 2018, the Labour Market and Education Committee in Hjørring, including a selection of local business leaders, went on a study trip to Edinburgh to seek inspiration for the development of their own municipal youth strategy (Author, 2020). Almost precisely one year later, the municipality launched its new youth strategy. A core feature of the strategy is the guarantee of positive destinations for the municipality’s youth. The terms *guarantee* and *positive destination* have been distinctly borrowed and transferred from Scotland to Denmark. The concept of youth guarantee is, however, not new in Denmark.

Due to increased youth unemployment following the oil crisis, a youth guarantee scheme was proposed and tested in the late 1970s and early 1980s (Hummeluhr, 1997). During the 1970s, it became evident for the Nordic countries, including Denmark, that youth unemployment was not just a cyclical phenomenon, but, instead, closely linked to fundamental industrial developments affecting the labour market, leaving less room for the unskilled and the untrained (Hummeluhr, 1997). The potential of a youth guarantee concept was debated at the political level, and, in 1980, the Social Democratic government launched a pilot project that guaranteed the unemployed under 25 years of age an offer of education, training, or work. An evaluation in 1982 concluded that the guarantee pilot project was a moderate success. The best results were obtained for persons under 20 years of age (*Arbejdsministeriet, Indenrigsministeriet and Undervisningsministeriet*, 1982). A main finding was that most of the participants wanted more education. The obstacles in this respect were the economy, lack of capacity in education, and, for young women, the need to provide for small children.

However, the planned general youth guarantee was never realized (Hummeluhr, 1997, p. 9). In autumn 1982, a new conservative-liberal government came into power that found the guarantee concept had unwanted side effects, such as creating unrealistic expectations among young people and preventing them from obtaining work under regular (market) conditions. Furthermore, the government found that the concept was too complicated and costly, compared to its benefits. Today, the concept of a youth guarantee mainly refers to the European Union (EU) initiative and

¹ Interview with a municipal official, conducted by the author, March 2020. All translations into English are by the authors unless stated otherwise.

policy. The EU initiative is not a legally binding policy instrument member states must implement, but it offers financial support for countries implementing measures related to a youth guarantee, ensuring all young people receive a qualified offer of education, employment, or training (Tosun, Treib, and De Francesco, 2019). Denmark has opted out of the EU youth guarantee initiative (Rasmussen and Juul, 2020, p. 370).

The opening example with the Hjørring Youth Strategy is a reflection that contemporary education policies are often associated with international policy trends rather than historical experiences in the national context. In the case of the Hjørring Municipality Youth Guarantee, there are no references to the history of working with the concept of a youth guarantee in Denmark. Although education systems deliver different responses due to contextual conditions, a core trait of global education today is that education policies are generally introduced in reference to specific foreign national contexts or international developments, standards, and priorities, often – but not always – facilitated by international organizations (Lindblad, Petterson, and Popkewitz, 2015; Rappleye, 2012; x and Author, 2020). Even at the local government level, policies are often touched by – or even the reflective of – ideas, practices, or programmes of international provenance. These opening observations serve as an entry point for investigating some of the workings and mechanisms associated with policy transfer and the shaping of education globally. In this respect, the aim of this article is to analyse the development and communication of the youth strategy in Hjørring Municipality and the role played by the Scottish Youth Employment Strategy, to understand what motivated a Danish municipality to look beyond its own borders and national policy history for policy solutions.

Configuring an analytical lens and structuring the article

Scholarly interest in the workings of policy development and policy enactment across international, national, and local levels has produced a variety of insights and theoretical concepts (Mundy, et al., 2016). Policy research, for instance, has coined the concept of reference societies (Sellar and Lingard, 2013; Waldow and Steiner-Khamsi, 2019). In comparative education, the transfer of policy has traditionally been defined as ‘the movement of educational ideas, institutions, or practices across international borders’ (Beech 2006, p. 2). A neighbouring concept in the field is that of ‘borrowing’. Phillips and Ochs (2004, p. 774) define this term as the ‘conscious adoption in one context of policy observed in another’ and list its four stages as ‘1) cross-national attraction, 2) decision, 3) implementation, and 4) internalization/indigenization’.

Nevertheless, the different, but often overlapping, research fields adding to our understanding of the workings of global policy in education – comparative education, sociology of education, and policy research – often engage in critical debates and offer competing perspectives and concepts in their approach to the internationalization of education policy (Rappleye, 2012; Robertson and Dale, 2017; Silova, 2012). As pointed out by Robertson (2018), the research of transnational interactions in education policy is not a straightforward task, because it involves careful reflection on the

intermeshing between the global, national, and local levels, in addition to the complex assemblages between a host of agents and organizations, as well as agendas and technologies.

This article adds to this literature by exploring the connections, inspirations, travels, and enactments of the Scottish policy of 'guaranteeing positive destinations' in the Danish context of Hjørring Municipality. Our analytical lens for approaching this question consists of concepts drawn from both policy research and comparative education, which allows us to connect with the state of the art in these fields. Additionally, the concept of policy instrument allows us to make the phenomenon of the youth strategy tangible and bring the two contexts under one analytical lens. Lascoumes and Le Galès (2007, p. 5) define a policy instrument as

A device that is both technical and social, that organizes specific social relations between the state and those it is addressed to, according to the representations and meanings it carries. It is a particular type of institution, a technical device with the generic purpose of carrying a concrete concept of the politics/society relationship and sustained by a concept of regulation.

Simons and Voß (2018, p. 31), who find that policy instruments can develop a 'life of their own' through their constituencies, have conducted an important addition to this line of policy research:

Policy instruments, it turns out, are not only 'active' or 'alive' because they contain scripts for reordering society ... but also because they gather a constituency comprised of practices and actors oriented towards developing, maintaining and expanding a specific instrumental model of governing. Through such constituencies, policy instruments can develop a life of their own, partly determining preferences and actively enrolling allies. The concept thereby helps to explain the often-observed paradox that solutions sometimes chase—or even make—problems, although the former are meant to emerge as answers to the latter.

The developments to the concept of instrument constituency allows us to understand the mobilization and anchoring of the Youth Guarantee into the municipal organization and, in a wider sense, the stakeholder community, especially by questioning the notion of rational and linear policy problematizations and developments. We further use this concept to clearly illustrate the actors and practices associated with the youth guarantee (Simons & Voß 2018).

Looking to the field of comparative education, we find concepts particularly dedicated to understanding processes of movement across borders and between contexts. Cowen (2006, p. 566) has developed the concepts of transfer, translation, and transformation as follows:

a) Transfer is the movement of an educational idea or practice in supra-national or trans-national or inter-national space: the 'space-gate' moment, with its politics of attraction and so on;

b) Translation is the shape-shifting of educational institutions or the re-interpretation of educational ideas which routinely occurs with the transfer in space: ‘the chameleon process’; and

c) Transformations are the metamorphoses which the compression of social and economic power into education in the new context imposes on the initial translation: that is, a range of transformations which cover both the indigenisation and the extinction of the translated form.

These concepts allow us to identify and understand how the Scottish youth strategy as a policy instrument travelled to Hjørring, enabled by a policy constituency. They also serve to structure our analysis, since these theoretical underpinnings enable us to develop the following operationalized research question: Why and how has the Scottish policy of guaranteeing positive destinations been transferred, translated, and transformed in the Hjørring municipal context?

The article is structured accordingly. The first section presents the methodology and data, that is, the recipe for conducting the analytical endeavour, including the case description and the description of the policy of guaranteeing positive destinations. Then follows the first analytical portion, investigating the transfer dimension of the policy instrument. Here we investigate the cross-national attraction of the policy approach of guaranteeing positive destinations. This is followed by an analytical section on translation, tracing the shape shifting and initial domestication of the policy instrument in Hjørring Municipality. Lastly, we analyse the transformations in the new context, focusing on the wider contextual indigenization of the policy instrument, including its implications for stakeholders in the Hjørring municipal context. In this portion of the analysis, we draw on the notion of public management paradigms from political science to understand the workings of the transformation process in Hjørring (Torfing et al., 2020). The concluding discussion presents an application of the concepts and the relation to public management paradigms and clarifies the article’s contribution to the research literature.

Research Design and Methodology

To be able to answer the research question, we draw on an instrumental case study design. An instrumental case study is the study of a case (e.g., a municipality) ‘to provide insight into a specific issue, redraw generalizations, or build theory. In instrumental case research, the case facilitates understanding of something else’ (Grandy, 2010, p. 2). Thus, for this instrumental case, researching the case itself is secondary to understanding the phenomenon of policy transfer, translation, and transformation, which is the main research contribution of this article. However, Stake (1995) also points out that the key, in instrumental case study, is the opportunity to learn and to offer thorough descriptions of an entity, such as a place or a group of people (Grandy, 2010). Therefore, this article also contributes to knowledge about the workings of the policy field in Hjørring Municipality in particular, as well as knowledge about policy implementation in Denmark at a national level in

general. The instrumental case of this article is selected using purposive sampling to ensure that the case will yield fruitful findings pertaining to all three of these knowledge creation ambitions.

The instrumental case study research is conducted using a qualitative methodological approach. According to Grandy (2010, p. 2), a qualitative approach is one that 'is best aligned with the philosophical underpinnings of the instrumental case where researcher and participants play a significant role in reconstructing experience'. In qualitative case studies in general, triangulation (i.e. drawing upon multiple perceptions/sources of data) is a common means through which the trustworthiness of the case representation can be increased. In this case, the study of different sources and materials contributes to triangulation. Thus, policy documents and websites are supplemented by a research interview with two officials from Hjørring Municipality.

This study covers a total of 17 policy documents in Danish for Hjørring Municipality, ranging from official documents openly available from the Youth Guarantee website² to internal documents containing arguments for the policy presented to the municipal board and administrative considerations about concrete job positions in the policy implementation phase. The Edinburgh Youth Guarantee documents consist of publicly available documents in English in combination with the Edinburgh Youth Guarantee website³, with a distinct focus on documents concerned with dissemination to the guarantee's potential clients, that is, young people, employers, and parents. Out of the documents from Hjørring Municipality, Draft for the framework [*Udkast til rammesætningen*] and Analysis & budget [*Analyser og budget*] have particularly yielded fruitful insights, while the Edinburgh Guarantee website have been equally important.

The research interview was conducted in March 2020 and was based on a semi-structured interview guide, focusing on the local policy process (past, present, and future decision making and implementation process) in Hjørring Municipality in general, and the inspiration from the Scottish Youth Guarantee in particular. The semi-structured interview guide allowed us to ask explorative and open-ended questions to obtain a rich and detailed description of the entire policy process. The officials selected for the interview were employees at the recently established Municipal Youth Secretariat in Hjørring. These primary officials worked on the design, goals, content, and stakeholder involvement from the beginning of the policy process in the implementation of the local Youth Guarantee (Author, 2020). In other words, the interviewees were key drivers of the Youth Guarantee programme at the civil servant level and were thus also arbiters in the construction of the constituency for the Youth Guarantee in Hjørring Municipality.

The data analysis of the documents and the transcribed interview is inspired by Carol Bacchi's WPR approach to policy analysis by focusing on how the perceived problem is constructed and sought relieved (Bacchi & Goodwin 2018). This aligns well with our notion of instrument constituencies sometimes 'chasing' problems. Our analysis further relies upon careful coding, with a focus on

² <https://www.ungegarantien.dk>

³ <https://www.edinburghguarantee.org>

identifying patterns and themes directly related to policy transfer, translation, and transformation in both the document and interview material. We are thus seeking to explore the meanings *within* the instrumental case to explore in depth the specific phenomena of policy transfer, translation, and transformation of a policy instrument through instrument constituencies (Bacchi & Goodwin 2018).

The Danish Municipal Context – Governance and the role of Youth Unemployment

Danish public sector governance is characterized by strong decentralization, enabling municipalities to raise taxes and wield great power in how to organize and prioritize public services within their jurisdiction (Christensen, 2009). The role, position, and responsibility of municipalities in the Danish public education system vary within different education tiers. While the public primary and lower secondary schools (*Folkeskole*) fall under municipal responsibility and are divided into school districts, upper secondary schools and institutions are often self-governing and act more as partners and stakeholders with regards to the municipality. In terms of higher education, the institutions are independent.

Although initially steered by state legislation in the form of white papers, the gradual introduction of new public management principles from the 1980s eliminated many of these regulations, leaving it to the municipalities to manage resource allocation and local school structures within framework budgets. Later, in the early 1990s, the Danish education system experienced a shift towards market mechanisms of governance through the implementation policies of free school choice and ‘taximeter regulation’, which meant that school funding followed the student (Author, 2021).

The municipalities are responsible for youth guidance, which, in many cases, covers those below the age of 30. These efforts are often combined with the work of municipal job centres, since guidance and the allocation of unemployment benefits also fall under municipal authority (Rasmussen and Juul, 2020, p. 378). Municipalities are therefore responsible at the critical junction when young people leave compulsory school, after either ninth or 10th grade, or following upper secondary education. At that time, young people are supposed to transition into other activities such as further education, employment, or training of some sort. The journey of transitions between education tiers in Denmark is thus largely administered and funded by the municipalities. This organization provides municipalities with incentives to optimize their programs through strategic initiatives, often based on the projection of future trends in terms of demographics and the labour force.

This case study’s municipality has a population of 65,000 citizens (the national average municipal population being 59,000) and is situated in a peripheral area comprising mainly rural and smaller towns. The main town has about 26,000 citizens and is located in one of the sparsest regions (in terms of population) in Denmark. With regards to education, the municipality has undergone a very significant centralization process. In 2011 the number of school districts was reduced from 27 to 10, closing seven schools, and in 2015 the number of school districts was further reduced to six, closing an additional five schools, leaving a total of 14 branches (Koch, 2017).

As reflected in the Ministry of Education's (1978) seminal analysis of Danish education in the 1970s, *U90: Danish Educational Planning and Policy in a Social Context at the End of the Twentieth Century*, the so-called residual group was already a concern back then. The economic consequences of the oil crisis led to rampant youth unemployment. To mitigate this, a nine-month job guarantee was introduced for those who had been unemployed for four years or more, and special courses for unskilled youngsters was created, all in 1978 (Rasmussen and Juul, 2020). Today the unemployed youth group is considered relatively small, at the national level, which could explain why the EU Youth Guarantee has not gained notable attention in Denmark⁴ (Rasmussen and Juul, 2020). While the newest policies, introduced in 2013, aimed at the unemployed youth group focus on activation, private employers are not involved, as is the case with the Hjørring Municipality Youth Guarantee. Private employers are, according to municipal officials, the enterprises that most critically lack qualified labour.⁵

The Pursuit of Positive Destinations through Youth Strategies – A Comparative Glance

We start the analysis with a short description of the key elements of Hjørring's Youth Strategy, that is, the Youth Guarantee itself and its purpose, goals, design, and organization, as well as an outline of the Edinburgh Guarantee, to establish a basis for analysing the transfer, translation, and transformation of the policy instrument.

The Hjørring Youth Guarantee is based on three strategic goals, concerning the following (Hjørring Municipality, 2019a, p. 1):

- *Perspective: Each young person must achieve a broader perspective that promotes reflection, inspiration and a vision of 'my meaningful life'.*
- *Insight: Each young person must achieve insight into their own competences and potential paths leading to the realisation of their vision of 'my meaningful life'.*
- *Competence: Given their starting point each young person must discover and develop their potential and achieve the required competences in order to realise their vision of 'my meaningful life'.*

Together, these three goals constitute a *positive destination* for every young person. As presented to the Hjørring City Council during the political adoption of the strategy (Hjørring Municipality, 2019c, p. 2),

The Youth Strategy must ensure that each and every young person form a vision of 'my meaningful life', and that the youth – regarding the part of the vision concerning job and education – knows the next steps to take in order to set them on the right path. In

⁴ The EU Youth Guarantee stipulates that member states must offer a quality choice between employment, education, traineeship, and apprenticeship for unemployed people under the age of 25.

⁵ In their interview, the officials in Hjørring Municipality talked about a business that relocated to the nearest larger city due to its inability to attract adequate qualified labour (interview by Nanna Friche, March 2020).

the wording of the strategy: each and every young person must have a 'positive destination'.

The Youth Strategy is designed along four tracks: 1) an elementary and lower secondary schooling track,⁶ 2) a business track, 3) a support track, and 4) a guidance track. Within and across these four tracks, initiatives and efforts are formulated and designed to fulfil the three strategic goals. Furthermore, the implementation of the strategy follows these four tracks.

The organization and implementation of the Youth Strategy are centred on a steering board and a Youth Secretary, established in 2019, to lead the implementation process. The members of the steering board consist of politicians and official representatives from the Committee for Labour and Education, the Labour Market Administration, and the Children, the Committee for Leisure and Teaching, as well as affiliated administration. These two branches, involving the labour market and education working together on the Youth Strategy at the municipal political level, each represent – or are both dominated by – different norms and ideas about how to govern, organize, and lead a public administration (Torfing et al., 2020, p. 2). We will discuss this governance perspective later in this article, along with the policy instrument perspective and empirical findings.

The Hjørring Youth Guarantee constitutes a guarantee that every young person who reaches out for support or guidance at a public or private guarantee partner will be greeted and helped. Guarantee partners are local stakeholders who have signed a guarantee agreement with the municipality, committing the partners to help young people who show up on their doorstep. By the fall of 2020, the guarantee agreement has been signed by 80 local stakeholders, primarily private businesses.

By comparison, the Edinburgh Guarantee springs from a national strategy on DYW, 2014–2021, which aims to prepare Scotland's youth for the labour market and to reduce the 2014 levels of youth unemployment by 40% by 2021 (Scottish Government, 2014). The Edinburgh Guarantee has amassed more than 550 employers (City of Edinburgh, 2020). On the Edinburgh Guarantee website's homepage, the aspirations and aim of the programme are stated to be as follows:

The public, private, voluntary and education sectors will work in partnership to ensure that every young person in Edinburgh will leave school with the choice of a job, Modern Apprenticeship, Graduate Apprenticeship, training programme or further education place available to them.⁷

The Edinburgh Guarantee programme is part of the DYW Regional Group, managed and led by programme director Michelle Fenwick. Fenwick reports to the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce. The target group of the Edinburgh Guarantee consists of school leavers and adolescents, termed senior-phase school pupils. According to Fenwick (2018), successes of the Edinburgh Guarantee include the following:

⁶ In Denmark, comprehensive school covers ages six to 16, from kindergarten until the end of ninth grade.

⁷ See www.EdinburghGuarantee.org (accessed August 25, 2020).

- More young people employed.
- A 40% reduction in youth unemployment.
- More employers recruiting young people.
- A broader range of opportunities for young people, to better prepare them for work.
- Permanent behavioural changes among the employer and education communities to underpin the delivery of vocational education.
- A sustainable industry-led network that improves collaboration between employers and education professionals.

These successes reflect the vision of a partnership across the region that will ensure a positive destination for every young person and transformation of the relation between business, the third sector, and education for the benefit of all three and of the wider regional economy. The slogan of the Edinburgh Guarantee, 'Informed – Inspired – Hired', also addresses that part of the vision regarding the target group of youngsters (Fenwick, 2018).

The two guarantees both offer young people help in the transition between school and employment and aim to ensure no pupil leaves school without knowing where to go next. However, while the Edinburgh Guarantee is a local interpretation of a national policy instrument, Hjørring Municipality developed their instrument independently inspired from the Edinburgh approach.

The Transfer of a Youth Guarantee as a policy instrument

To understand *why* Hjørring borrowed specific policy from Edinburgh, in this section we analyse the transfer process. What is striking about the case of Hjørring Municipality is the officials' vocal expression of everyone 'being contaminated by the virus' of positive feelings and enthusiasm upon discovering the Edinburgh Guarantee (Author, 2020). Initially, the Finance and Labour Market director of Hjørring Municipality had learned of the Edinburgh Guarantee while vacationing in Edinburgh and simply considered it a relevant theme for the municipality's elected city council to visit on a study trip (Author, 2020). Therefore, while the rather coincidental study trip was for the newly elected city council to become socially acquainted, it advantageously also included local business leaders to build alliances. Fenwick's programme captured the visitors from Hjørring. The trip was a success, and an official describes the council as becoming 'contaminated by the massive excitement over "hey, there's something awesome!"' (Author, 2020). The council began assigning tasks, and a number of local businesses enthusiastically joined. The policy started being developed by primarily two officials from, respectively, the Labour Market Office and the Education Office. These two officials relied on the enthusiastic momentum of the Edinburgh trip, as evident in the framing of their arguments for the policy. As a policy instrument, the Youth Guarantee was therefore initially driven by an instrument constituency of optimistic officials and council members.

The Edinburgh Guarantee was launched in 2011, when it became apparent that 'over 500 of Edinburgh's young people, almost 17% of the city's school leavers, left school into unemployment, unable to secure work or a place in further or higher education' ('About Us', City of Edinburgh,

2020). Asked how Hjørring Municipality related to the Edinburgh Guarantee, the officials who created the Hjørring Youth Guarantee described that they considered the two places to have the same ‘burning platform’ (Author, 2020). For Edinburgh, this burning platform was the number of school leavers entering unemployment rather than transitioning into further education or a job. Hjørring Municipality has the risk of the same burning platform, since, compared to the rest of Denmark, they have a higher rate of inhabitants under 35 with a 10th-grade education or below.⁸ This group has no formal qualifications and is vulnerable in the labour market. However, the officials only briefly mention youth unemployment in the interview. Instead, they focus primarily on the fear of a disproportionate local tax burden, since businesses lacking qualified labour forces could decide to relocate to more populous areas, following the trend of young people moving to more populous municipalities and urban areas (Author, 2020). Whereas Edinburgh’s burning platform is a general lack of work for youngsters, Hjørring Municipality’s burning platform relates to the lack of skilled labour for local businesses due to demographic changes and urbanization. Whereas Edinburgh was struggling from a lack of work positions and job openings for youngsters, Hjørring is struggling from a lack of skilled work forces. The future risks of these challenges include the survival of local businesses, the sustainability of the local economy, and the social cohesion of the community.

Presenting the Youth Guarantee to partner businesses, Thomas Klimek (2020), politician (Social Democrat) and chairperson of the Labour and Education Committee, argued for the youth guarantee by using statistics that portrayed the decrease in the expected population and how the eldest people in the labour force have the most relevant qualifications. This development was attributed to an increase in young people entering the academic upper secondary track, as well as pursuing further education and jobs in larger, more populous municipalities (Klimek, 2020). The trend means fewer young people enter vocational education and training, leading to local businesses increasingly lacking qualified labour. Therefore, while many elderly workers will soon retire, only few young people will be able to replace them. Furthermore, on the political side, there was a fear of insufficient qualified labour for regional businesses, which became Hjørring Municipality’s main argument for the guarantee when communicating with stakeholders and potential guarantee partners. The rate of youth unemployment is not mentioned in any Hjørring Municipality policy documents or in the narrative of the two officials.

The two officials and local politicians perceive Edinburgh and Hjørring as suffering from the same burning platform, though the level of youth unemployment does not seem to be the main concern in Hjørring Municipality. Rather, an aging qualified labour force, a decrease in population, and an increase in young people moving away from the municipality seem to lead to a fear of insufficient qualified labour to local businesses. In this sense, with no mention of youth unemployment in the local argumentation, the Hjørring Municipality Youth Guarantee differs from both previous guarantee efforts in Denmark (in the 1980s) and the Edinburgh Youth Guarantee. Viewed through

⁸ Statistics Denmark shows that the highest completed level of education of 27% of those in the age group 20–34 years in Hjørring is below the 11th grade, compared to the nationwide average of 19%.

the lens of the concept of a reference society, Hjørring Municipality thus looked beyond its own borders to solve local issues through borrowing a policy instrument from a different context (Sellar and Lingard, 2013; Waldow and Steiner-Khamsi, 2019). It is perhaps surprising that the municipality did not seek a reference in a more local or similar context. However, as we have seen, there seems to have been a strong element of serendipity behind the decision following the Finance and Labour Market director's vacation in Edinburgh. While the policy borrowing depends on Edinburgh as the reference society, it did not need the same burning platform. Hjørring Municipality's issues are discursively portrayed as similar enough, despite the actual differences, to provide a call to action by an enthusiastic instrument constituency.

The Translation of a Youth Guarantee as a policy instrument

To address the question of *how* the policy transfer has taken place, we now analyse the policy translation and transformation. The different structures of the national educational systems between Scotland and Denmark determine the possible range of translation. The senior phase in Scotland extends over six grades, making it difficult to translate into the Danish context, where secondary education is divided between lower and upper secondary in the ninth grade⁹ (typically at age 16). The Edinburgh Youth Guarantee's focus on the senior phase and those leaving school seems to be translated in the Danish context through Hjørring Municipality's focus on the last three years of compulsory school, grades 7 through 9 (approximately ages 13 to 17).

The Edinburgh Guarantee is based on a national policy that Edinburgh enacted in a unique way. This led to several of its programmes being based on different policies, where, for example, '[the digital platform] Marketplace is delivered by Skills Development Scotland and Developing the Young Workforce (DYW)' and the Job, Education and Training Academy programme is the 'Edinburgh model for the implementation of Developing the Young Workforce National Work Placements Standards' ('Employers', City of Edinburgh, 2020). Edinburgh has thus taken already existing programmes and policies and moulded them into a unified Edinburgh Guarantee. Hjørring Municipality officials instead feel their bottom-up approach has inspired national policy (on the increased introduction of vocational schooling and guidance in elementary schooling), joking that the government must have spies in the municipality (Author, 2020). Hjørring Municipality's youth guarantee has a broader scope and target group than Edinburgh's. Thus, the Hjørring Municipality Youth Guarantee corresponds to recent reforms of elementary schooling in Denmark focusing on vocational skills and crafting experiences throughout the entire schooling period, from grades 1 to 9, aimed at familiarizing and motivating more young people for vocational education in the future (Ministry of Education, 2018). This has allowed the Hjørring officials to explicitly speculate that their municipality acts as a national front runner, by translating a youth guarantee into the Danish context and extending its aim and scope to the entire elementary school programme (Author, 2020).

⁹ In Denmark, 10th grade is optional.

While the literature provides clues on the previous experiences of municipalities with similar programmes (Hummeluhr, 1997; Rasmussen and Juul, 2020), Hjørring's policy borrowing is surprisingly decoupled from past policy experiences regarding youth guarantee conceptualizations at the national level in Denmark. For instance, experiences documented by the evaluation of the Danish guarantee pilot project in 1982 showed that it was complicated to establish and maintain contact with the target group, personal guidance was important, counselling and guidance were important to continue during the entire guarantee period, new types of education and training suited for the less gifted young people had to be established, and cooperation and coordination between the various authorities was crucial but difficult to establish (Hummeluhr, 1997). These findings could have been deemed relevant for the policy borrowing, transfer, and translation into the Danish context of Hjørring.

A point of translation is both policies' development of partnerships with businesses. It is described how both bodies are in a *partnership* with businesses, and the policies outline how the municipality/city can support businesses. The Edinburgh Youth Guarantee offers free support and help with recruitment, as well as the hiring process. The Hjørring Municipality Youth Guarantee considers it necessary for the municipality to act as a facilitator for businesses (Hjørring Municipality, 2019b). Hjørring Municipality has directly translated the role of facilitator, enabling businesses to more easily partner with the guarantee. Hjørring's municipal officials describe how they wanted businesses in the partnership that were 'tireless and passionate enthusiasts' (*ildsjæle*; see Author, 2020), such as the business partners they met in Edinburgh (Author, 2020), and how they actively encouraged businesses, employers, and other actors to provide input to the policy.

The interviewed officials readily admit to adopting the mantra of a positive destination directly (Author, 2020). This is an example of a translation that was possible because of the lack of connotations suited to the needs of Hjørring Municipality. It was not a phrase that, to the municipality's knowledge, had been previously used in Danish policy. The Edinburgh Youth Guarantee specifically defines a positive destination as a job, education, or training. Hjørring's Youth Guarantee instead defines a positive destination as 'the individual young person achieving their vision of "my meaningful life"' ('Om Ungegarantien', Hjørring Municipality, 2020). Hjørring implicitly links a meaningful life to job and education, since a positive destination is seemingly defined as the *path* to a job or education, although not specifically a job or education. The officials also emphasize this, with one of them stating, 'Maybe there are also some who need a reason to get up in the morning. That is also a path toward the meaningful life, instead of digging yourself down in the world, right?' (Author, 2020). The emphasis here is on providing young people meaning to their lives and the values of a meaningful life. While the Hjørring Municipality's Youth Guarantee claims to have adopted the mantra of a positive destination, Hjørring has transformed the mantra into a more holistic – and less results based (in economic terms) – approach to young people, which is also reflected in the key values and goals of the Youth Guarantee ('Insight, Perspective, Competence'). The officials do state that it is not important to them whether their version of a youth guarantee

policy is comparable to the Edinburgh Guarantee: 'It is not important at all. The contexts are very different legally' (Author, 2020).

The actors of the policy instrument constituency's argument for the Youth Guarantee were first and foremost centred on how it would benefit the individual young person. The Edinburgh Guarantee was framed as a necessary framework for young people to make or prepare to make the choice between a job, education, and a combination of the two. Emphasis was on *making* the choice and obtaining access to either a job or an education. The Youth Guarantee in Hjørring Municipality instead fixated on the issue of choice. This also included receiving help if issues outside the school (related to family, physical, and mental health, etc.) interfered with the ability to make an informed choice. Hjørring Municipality has subsequently included a wider selection of actors, including substance abuse workers and non-governmental mental health organizations. Along these lines, the Edinburgh Guarantee website states, 'This issue could not be tackled by any one agency or organization alone and it is for this reason that the City of Edinburgh Council developed a city-wide partnership – the Edinburgh Guarantee' ('About Us', City of Edinburgh, 2020). However, the agency and organizations included were aimed at the labour market and education system, and there was no mention of organizations outside that scope. Instead, the officials in Hjørring Municipality comparatively state, 'We simply need a lot of those around us to help out with this' (Author, 2020, ll. 294–295). Their explicit focus on making not just a choice, but also an informed one, means that they engaged a different array of organizations and agencies. The organizations they have invited to participate have historically collaborated with municipalities and schools within the Danish tradition of decentralized local governance and corporatism (Christensen, 2009), so this effort can be construed as a way of translating the Youth Guarantee further into the Hjørring Municipality context.

Policy transformation and the rise of public value management

The transformation of the Edinburgh Guarantee into the Hjørring Municipality Youth Guarantee reflects an emerging public governance paradigm titled public value management (Torfing et al., 2020, p. 105). According to political scientists, public governance is increasingly based on values and more holistic approaches to public service; they term this governance paradigm public value management, defining it as another layer in the mixed governance paradigms of new public management, new public governance, and the classical paradigm of bureaucracy (Torfing et al., 2020).

The cross-sector and holistic focus on the individual young person of the Hjørring Youth Guarantee is mirrored in the combination of officials dedicated to developing the policy and the shift in dominating governance paradigms. The two officials interviewed were the driving force behind the Hjørring Municipality Youth Guarantee and are vocal about how their bottom-up approach to the policy transformation has been instrumental in fast-tracking it. They describe how they constructed the different deadlines based on wanting to initiate the policy in the coming school year, in August

2019 (Author, 2020). When asked to define at the political level the key values of the strategy, the two officials 'dug themselves in a meeting room for a few days' (Author, 2020) and emerged with a holistic approach containing the three values of insight, perspective, and competence. These values and this approach are unique to the Hjørring Municipality Youth Guarantee and a means of shape-shifting the policy into a Danish value-based governance context.

Throughout the interview, the officials enthusiastically describe themselves as coming from two different professional cultures (Author, 2020): one works in the Department of Labour; has a vocational degree, a political science degree, and military experience; and is painted as the opposite of the other official, who has a background in a creative field and a degree in the humanities. One of the officials notes, '[The other official] and I, we have completely different backgrounds in all kinds of ways. We just click very well together' (Author, 2020). Their story goes to show how policy instruments can gather a constituency and develop a life of its own. The policy instrument gains momentum, and the constituency drives it forward, as seen when the officials describe how they illustrate to politicians the dichotomy between action and non-action: developing and implementing the Youth Guarantee would be doing something for young people, whereas not implementing the Youth Guarantee equated to doing nothing. According to the officials, such policy transformation is based on value-based arguments, rather than (cynical) manipulation (Author, 2020). This value-based argumentation constitutes an example of policy transformation.

An extensive strategy such as the Youth Guarantee can be costly for a municipality. The two officials argue that redirecting young people from dependency on benefits towards education and employment easily made the strategy worthwhile (Author, 2020; Hjørring Municipality, 2019c). Therefore, they framed the strategy as an investment 'in the municipality's own economy' domesticating the policy into a local political context (Author, 2020). Instead of including a concrete budget, the officials presented the strategy without the usual indicators and, instead, relied on what they denoted to be value-based arguments (Hjørring Municipality, 2019d).

Both the Edinburgh Youth Guarantee and the Hjørring Municipality Youth Guarantee particularly target those who are unsure of their path following the transition from school to new options. The Edinburgh Guarantee markets itself to supposed school leavers who are not in education, employment, or training immediately after a supposed transition. The Edinburgh Youth Guarantee website further distinguishes between seniors and school leavers, indicating the target group is considered identifiable within either of the two categories (City of Edinburgh, 2020). The City of Edinburgh does not explicitly market the guarantee to adolescents who have dropped out of further education or lost the job they acquired upon leaving school, although the city's Activity Agreement programme is suited towards those who are not ready for school or employment. School leavers consequently seem to refer to those who will soon or have recently completed compulsory schooling, while seniors refer to students in the last grades of compulsory schooling, although both terms refer to older adolescents.

The Hjørring Municipality Youth Guarantee is more fluid in terms of the target group, since initiatives begin at the kindergarten level and continue until well into adulthood. It also offers everyone the opportunity to have a youth guide, which is a consistent municipal employee (or other adult selected by the adolescent) who aids the adolescent by ensuring unity and consistency in the effort aimed at the individual, no matter the age of the young person or the agencies involved. Although the Hjørring Youth Guarantee is supposed to follow the child throughout schooling and possibly even until they turn 30 (Hjørring Municipality, 2020a), most of its material is aimed at the final grades of lower secondary school (Hjørring Municipality, 2019e).

To make the Guarantee 'their own', the Hjørring officials describes how they searched for their own values in the material they gathered from Edinburgh. The officials had to consider 'what it is that we go with, what are our values' (Author, 2020) when creating the Youth Guarantee. The importance of values is also evident when the officials talk about recruiting the right kind of business partners in the Guarantee: 'We need some business owners or business managers or production managers or someone who can see the value of entering development work' (Author, 2020). These perceptions and ambitions indicate both an increased public value orientation in terms of policy and new public governance based on public-private partnerships, where values, responsibilities, and obligations are shared between local businesses and the Hjørring Municipality. These partnerships have the common purpose of – by ensuring a positive destination for every young person – ensuring the survival of local businesses, the sustainability of the local economy, and the social cohesion of the community. They are at the core of policy translation in Hjørring Municipality.

Concluding Discussion

The use of Hjørring Municipality's Youth Guarantee as an instrumental case to investigate transfer, translation, and transformation shines a light on how policy instruments can serve as a vehicle for creating constituencies of actors, stakeholders, and practices that push the policy forward. The case demonstrates how building alliances across departments within the municipal organization and with key stakeholders outside the municipal organization served to create a platform where common enthusiasm and meaning-making would secure leverage and momentum for the development and implementation of the Youth Guarantee.

A remarkable finding is that the policy borrowing inspiration for finding a suitable reference society seems to hinge on a highly coincidental background based on the Finance and Labour Market director's vacation to Edinburgh. In other words, there was a distinct element of serendipity in the process that does not add up with the 'conscious adoption in one context of policy observed in another' highlighted in Phillips and Ochs' (2004) definition of policy borrowing. From its outset, the process of finding a reference society in the Hjørring case was not a rational one. Hjørring Municipality did not conduct a review of historical or parallel Danish experiences with youth guarantees. The process was, essentially, much more opportunistic, such that it struck a chord with the shared notion of a burning platform among the Hjørring constituency of politicians, leading

municipal officials, and business leaders. At the same time, the timing was right (a new municipal council had just been formed) and the material conditions were in place (with funding available for a study trip).

Once the reference society and appropriate policy instrument had been identified, the policy borrowing process went through thorough translation and transformation phases as it entered the local context. The key aspects here, compared to the Scottish original, were the translation into a more holistic and less result based (in economic terms) approach to the young people and the transformation into a more rounded and interdepartmental policy centred on the public value management governance paradigm. This observation fits with the normative and value-based dimension of the Youth Guarantee that seems to be at the centre of the contagious appeal of the policy, as reflected in the description of the Youth Guarantee as a virus.

The case serves as an example of how the transfer, translation, and transformation processes of a policy instrument into a foreign legal context can play out, as well as how dominating forms of governance centred on values, alliances, and common enthusiasm in the constituency – and even the contours of a governance paradigm – can be teased out through such an endeavour.

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