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Searching for the Connection

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Welfare State Regimes and Public Sector Reforms: Searching for the Connection

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WELFARE STATE REGIMES AND PUBLIC SECTOR REFORMS

Introduction

The idea that advanced welfare states can be divided into liberal, social democratic and conservative regimes holds a much dominating position in contemporary comparative welfare state research (Esping-Andersen, 1990; 1999). Initially, the regime-theory was formulated to explain variations in welfare state expansion but recently the theory is applied in a series of studies that explain modern patterns of welfare state reform. The foundation of this prominent position of the regime-theory can however be seen as insufficient. So far, the theory has primarily been applied to analyse welfare in cash programs, such as pensions, unemployment insurances and social security arrangements (Stephens, Huber & Ray, 1999; Scharpf & Schmidt, eds., 2000; Pierson, 2001; Swank, 2002). But advanced welfare states are also providers of a variety of social services as health care, schools and education (Clayton & Pontusson, 1998; Christensen, 2004). Reform patterns of the welfare state service dimension are primarily analysed within public administration research, and almost neglected by comparative welfare state research – not least by regime-theorists. Hence, the most prominent contemporary explanation of modern welfare state development needs to demonstrate explanatory power on crucial dimensions and aspects of the welfare state. This paper investigates whether the regime theory possesses this explanatory power or not.

In the research on public sector reforms it is an often inherent premise, that these are undertaken to increase the effectiveness of the public sector and to cut the public budget. Politicians and bureaucrats are of course keen to wrap public sector reforms in this paper. However, the bureaucracy and administration of the welfare state arise as other political institutions out of political conflicts (cf. Nørgaard, 2000). Institutional choice in the public sector has consequences for the content and direction of policy, and political actors know it, which is why public sector restructuring ought to be analysed as part of a larger political struggle (Moe, 1989: 268). This analytic point of departure conforms to institutional variants of the power-resource theory that constitutes the theory of welfare state regimes (Esping-Andersen, 1985; 1990;

1999), and is the baseline for the theoretical argument presented here. Welfare state regimes are decisive for the structure of political support developing around welfare state arrangements and are expected to be decisive for the type of public sector reforms that is accepted and deemed legitimate in a democratic constituency. Hence, it is reasonable to expect welfare state regimes to have a significant impact on political decision-makers' choice of public sector reform-strategy.

The theory is empirically tested in 1980 to 2000 in an analysis of primary school-reforms in six welfare states -- two from each cluster of regimes. The United States and the United Kingdom represent the liberal regimes, Sweden and Denmark the social democratic regimes, Germany and the Netherlands the conservative regimes. Primary schools and public education in general ranked high on the public sector reform agenda during this period (OECD, 1994; 2002), and are arguably the most central service provided by modern welfare states. Primary school reforms are therefore a case as good as any. Including two countries from each regime cluster allows us to conduct a relatively hard test of the theoretical propositions. To confirm the theory, the analysis must reveal systematic variation between the different welfare regimes, but also systematic regularities between countries belonging to the same cluster. These methodological guidelines for the choice of case-area and countries are further outlined in a later section of the paper. The following two sections draw (1) the basic contours of the regime-theory and give some examples of its application in modern welfare state research, and (2) outline a theoretical framework to analyse public sector reforms enlightened by regime-theoretical expectations.

The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism

Variations between advanced welfare states in western democracies are enormous. This is highlighted in the extensive literature on the topic. Not least in Esping-Andersen's influential work on "The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism". Esping-Andersen makes a distinction between three different clusters of welfare states, characterised by specific institutional arrangements and imprinted by the main political ideology behind their development (Esping-Andersen, 1990; 1999). The welfare state regime, it is argued, has significant importance for both political conflicts and citizen attitudes developing around welfare policies.

Esping-Andersen groups Anglo-Saxon welfare states together as *liberal* regimes (i.e. US, UK, New Zealand and Australia). Liberal welfare states are characterised by means-tested assistance, modest universal transfers or social-insurance plans, and a state that encourages the market by guaranteeing only a minimum or subsidizing private welfare schemes. Liberal welfare regimes reflect political commitments to minimize the state, individualize risks, and promote market solutions to citizen welfare (Esping-Andersen, 1990: 26-27, 1999: 74-75). The universal welfare states in Scandinavia are translated into *Social Democratic* regimes (Sweden, Norway, Denmark). These welfare states are committed to universal coverage of citizens and egalitarianism (Esping-Andersen, 1999: 78). Universal welfare institutions have formed solidarity among different societal groups and founded a strong and embracing pro-welfare state coalition (Korpi, 1988; Rothstein, 1998; Pierson, 2001). The social democratic regime is furthermore distinct for expanded provision of public services as day-care, kindergarten, health, and education. Not least in respect to welfare service have Nordic countries struggled to close off the market (Esping-Andersen, 1999: 78-79). Esping-Andersen labels the welfare states in continental Europe as *conservative* regimes (Germany, Austria, France, Italy, the Netherlands and Spain). Conservative regimes are characteristic for their blend of status segmentation, and the role of the family and church for promoting welfare (Esping-Andersen, 1999: 81). These regimes were never obsessed with market efficiency. Instead, an etatist and corporatist legacy is reflected in the attachment of social rights to class and status rather than citizenship. Furthermore, Christian democratic parties' considerable role in the expansion of conservative welfare states (Kersbergen, 1995) is reflected in church and religious organisations expanded role for provision of especially social-service as day-care, kindergarten, health, and education (Esping-Andersen, 1990: 27, 1999: 83).

The Three Worlds of Welfare State Reform

Initially, the regime-theory was launched to explain why welfare state expansion during the 20th century differed between countries that after all have developed the same type of social, economic and political structures. Since specific welfare state institutions however cause certain lines of political conflict, electoral behaviour, and welfare state attitudes, the regime-configuration is also suggested to be a key variable to ex-

plain patterns of development in the new era of welfare state restructuring (Esping-Andersen, 1990; 1996; 1999).

Pierson for example, has recently argued that regimes generate varying dynamics of social policy restructuring, as they vary in support structure and confronts various pressure for adjustment. In turn, they generate different reform trajectories (Pierson, 2001: 455). Liberal regimes, marked by a moderate pressure for adjustment and relatively weak popular support, have gone for cost-containment and neo-liberal inspired restrictions for those seeking social assistance and unemployment compensation. In social democratic regimes, with their extensive political support and moderate pressure for reform, the dominant reform-strategy has been cost-containment and rationalisation to obtain more efficiency in achieving established goals. Finally, in conservative regimes, where both political support and reform-pressure is high, the politics of welfare state reform has centred on cost-containment and re-calibration of old programmes to meet new demands (Pierson, 2001: 455-56).

In a related study, Schmidt also focuses on regime-specific responses to the economic challenges of advanced welfare states. Schmidt sees however regimes as more than formal social policy structures. They are also socio-political constructs, unable to exist without support from normative arguments and moral convictions (Schmidt, 2000: 230). Such arguments and convictions are, however, institutionally induced by the welfare state itself, which is why existing welfare state structures tend to be supported during reform processes. Consequently, new policy initiatives and welfare state reforms are only possible if they accord with the moral values and mechanisms of legitimization in each type of regime (Schmidt, 2000: 231). On this background, Schmidt concludes neo-liberal inspired market-type reforms to have gone the farthest in liberal regimes, as this corresponds with the values and structure of welfare state support. On the other hand, universal welfare states have demonstrated clear resistance to the neo-liberal ideas, and have developed reform-patterns to ensure a generous universal welfare state. Finally, neo-liberal ideas did not make much headway in conservative welfare states either, because of their high levels of social insurance (Schmidt, 2000: 234-35).

Although Pierson and Schmidt apply slightly different theoretical approaches they both emphasise regime-structures as the most important factor for the content and outcomes of the politics of welfare state reform. As mentioned in the introduc-

tion however, these conclusions are reached by studying only one dimension of the welfare state – the transfer payments. In this sense, Pierson and Schmidt represent the scholars analysing through the lenses of the regime theory quite perfectly (Stephens, Huber & Ray, 1999; Bison & Esping-Andersen, 2000; Swank, 2002).

The Three Worlds of Public Sector Reforms

Reforms in provision of social services is on the other hand analysed in the extensive literature on public sector reforms. This has to do with the specific content of reforms undertaken in this area of the welfare state. It gives little meaning to analyse service reforms as retrenchment or social policy cut-backs as done in the literature on reforms in social transfer. Rather, reforms in social services are better described as re-organisation of institutional principles of management, steering and allocation of welfare benefits (Pierre, 1998; Christensen, 2004: 9-10).

Comparative research on public sector reforms also emphasises the various reform-patterns of western democracies (Premfors, 1998). Pollit & Bouckart (2004) assess the reform-records of twelve OECD-countries and observe them to follow a maintainer, moderniser, marketizer or minimal state reform-trajectory (Pollit & Bouckart, 2004: 97-98). However, if we group welfare reform analysis building on the regime-approach together with Pollit & Bouckart's empirical results, we find thought-provoking similarities. Countries on the marketizer or minimal-state route, are identical with Esping-Andersen's liberal welfare states (Australia, New Zealand, UK and USA). Social democratic welfare states are found on the moderniser route (Sweden and Finland), whereas the maintainer route has been taken by the conservative welfare state of Germany (Pollit & Bouckart, 2000: 93-94).

This should not be confused with a perception of perfect congruence between the regime-theory and the findings mentioned above. For instance, the conservative welfare state of France is also found on the moderniser route, just as Finland and Sweden have notable experiences as marketizers. Nevertheless, the general pattern indicates that we might be able to extract explanations for public sector reforms from the theory of welfare state regimes. This impression is further strengthened by a policy-centred study of the relation between welfare state regimes and trajectories of educational policies. It is concluded that welfare state regimes exhibit distinctive patterns of support for public education, and develop certain educational policy profiles

(Hega, 2002). Even if this study's prime concern is educational policy directly connected to the labour market, for example vocational training, it seems to reveal connections between welfare state regimes and public services that ought to be examined in depth. In the following section of the paper an analytic framework is developed for exactly this purpose.

Variation on Public Sector Reforms:

Political Actors and Welfare State Regime

When voters choose between politicians and political parties in general elections, they assess which candidate and party that can be trusted to satisfy their policy-preferences at best, as well as the general trustworthiness of the nominated candidates and parties. Political aspirations of political power and influence (Moe, 1989; Orren & Skowronek, 1994; Nørgaard, 1997) require consequently a majority of the electorate to endorse a specific type of public policy and institutional arrangements (Levi & Stoker, 2000: 491). As long as existing institutional arrangements promote social service and welfare benefits in accordance with the preferences of an electoral majority, the incumbent government has good chances of mobilising to continued political support and of withholding political control.

If, on the other hand, the legitimacy underlying an institutional set-up is weakened, and institutional arrangements are incongruent with voter preferences, government is pressured to initiate institutional reforms. If a government is unconcerned with illegitimate institutions, from which citizens withdraw acquiescence and compliance to consent (Levi, 1990), citizen discontent is likely to be caught up by competing political forces. Empirical studies have shown distrusting voters as more likely than trusting to vote in an anti-incumbent fashion (Levi & Stoker, 2000: 490). Hence, at this point, the opposition can mobilise political support on proposals to alternative arrangements, and thus advance an institutional set-up that fits their own interests and strategies in order to obtain political control and influence (cf. Moe 1989; Thelen, 1999).

The question of institutional legitimacy has been central in the debate about public sector reforms. The 1970s witnessed growing discontent with welfare state performance. Welfare institutions and administrative arrangements were generally

portrayed as rigid and unconcerned with citizen demands. Market-type public-sector reforms grew out of these legitimacy problems, as quasi-market arrangements for example were seen as ways of making public agencies more responsive to citizens and of ensuring that public policy reflects citizen preferences (Premfors, 1998).

Welfare Regimes and the Choice of Service Reform Strategy

The package of reform-proposals presented in the wake of the welfare states' institutional crisis contains as different elements as decentralisation, management by objectives, freedom of choice between alternative service providers, measurement of performance, contracting out and privatization. The focus of this analysis is however restricted to those parts of the reform-package where it is reasonable to expect different regimes generating different reform dynamics. For this reason, the analysis concentrates on reforms aimed at making the public sector more responsive to citizen preferences. This is a fully integrated purpose of the public sector reform movement (Hood, 1998: 206-208) and a reform-measure we can expect welfare state regimes to reach for with a systematic diversity of strategies.

Welfare state regimes vary in the degree to which they include different societal groups into the welfare state institutions and form pro-welfare coalitions. If welfare states only scarcely form these coalitions, we expect them to pursue strategies putting the individual rather than the coalition in the centre of the politics of reform. For example by furnishing individuals with extended exit-options (cf. Hirschmann, 1970: 21-29). If welfare states on the other hand do form grand pro-welfare coalitions, we expect reform-strategies to be carried through with stronger considerations for the mechanism binding the welfare state coalition together. Introduction of choice models can also be a legitimate reform-strategy here, but only to the point where the mechanisms of coalition-formation are endangered. This might hinder reforms based on exit-options to private alternatives, and lead to a development of alternative strategies based on for example decentralisation and introduction of voice-channels (Hirschmann, 1970: 30-43). Decentralisations also allows a service provision that complies more precisely with individual preferences and increases the efficiency of service allocation (Sharpe, 1970; Ostrom, 1972; De Vries, 2000). Hence, we anticipate different reform-strategies to be legitimate in different welfare states due to their different political support structures. Below I address the question of what kind of

general reform-dynamics these strategies are expected to bring about in each type of welfare state regime.

Liberal welfare states are expected to be the most receptive to ideas of a more market-based organization of the public sector, as they are characterised by the absence of comprehensive welfare coalitions and enjoy only weak political support. Political decision-makers in liberal welfare states are therefore expected to pursue reform strategies based on individual choice-models. This can be a choice between public provided services or between public and market provided services. This reform-strategy sharpens the competition between alternative service providers, and competition is normally conceived as a superior mechanism to invigorate the quality and efficiency of institutions in a market-economy (Hirschman, 1970: 3). Legitimacy giving administrative reforms in liberal welfare states are thus based on a perception of citizens as consumers that are free to choose among a range of alternative providers. Choice-oriented reform strategies turn public arrangements into quasi-markets, and are also legitimate for their expected potential of increasing the cost-efficiency of the public sector. Hence, liberal welfare state regimes are generally expected to follow an *exit*-based reform-strategy.

It is well-known from studies of voter-behaviour and public opinion studies in Scandinavia, that citizens are strongly supportive to the *social democratic welfare state*. Hard-core market-reforms are thus expected to be a less legitimate strategy. But increased options of choice might nonetheless be a legitimate reform-strategy. Unlike the liberal regimes, however, we expect these options of choice to be restricted to a choice between public services, as the permission to opt for private alternatives brings the broad pro-welfare state coalition in danger. If citizen in large numbers opt for private alternatives, it might threaten to undermine the public system (cf. Rothstein, 1998). More generally, social democratic regimes can be expected to follow a reform-strategy seeing citizens as users rather than consumers of public service (cf. Kumlin, 2002). With this approach to public sector reforms, social democratic welfare states are expected to enhance user-influence through for example decentralisations and delegation of political authority to local government. In line with this, authority can be delegated further to the users and employees at the institutional level. Decentralisation and increased user-influence can enhance service institutions' re-

sponsiveness and ability to meet with citizen preferences. Thus, Social democratic welfare state regimes are expected to develop *voice*-based reform-strategies.

Compared to the liberal and social democratic regime, *conservative welfare states* are expected to be the most foot-dragging reformers. We can suppose these welfare states to develop reform strategies that are *loyal* toward existing structures rather than to institutionalise new principles of exit or voice. This is due to two factors: (1) Citizens are also in these welfare states bound up with each other in large welfare coalitions by various social security programs, and public opinion remains broadly supportive to the basic contours of the welfare model (Schmidt, 2000; Pierson, 2001). (2) The connection between religious institutions and social service institutions prevents views on major welfare institutions as “consumer goods” to be deemed as legitimate ground for reforms. As argued by Hirschman, exit-options from religiously based institutions or organisations are rare -- its member will instead stay on longer here than they ordinarily would (Hirschman, 1970: 79). The imprint of etatism and strong corporatism in conservative regimes is also a hindrance to far-reaching institutional reforms. Reform strategies aimed at citizen-empowerment are generally difficult to conceive in conservative regimes with their distinctiveness of the state and privileged civil servants. Thus, Conservative welfare state regimes are expected to develop *loyalty*-based reform-strategies.

Summing up, welfare state regimes create different legitimacy foundations for public sector reforms. Strategic decision makers in different welfare state settings are thus inclined to pursue different reform strategies. These theoretical suggestions are mainly derived from the theory of welfare state regimes as formulated by Esping-Andersen, but also on regime theoretical approaches to restructuring studies of the cash-benefit dimension of the welfare state (cf. Schmidt, 2000: 234-5). In the following section, the choice of case-countries and school policy is further explained, and in connection with this, a set of concrete hypotheses is extracted from the expectations of general reform strategies.

How Many Worlds of Public School Reforms?

Before we move to the empirical part of the paper, the choice of public school restructuring in the US, UK, Sweden, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands for our case-material is justified. Public school restructuring is chosen as this issue has been a

main object for the public sector reform movement since the beginning of the 1980s (OECD, 1994; 2002). Compared to other welfare services such as health care, kindergartens and elder-care, public school systems are also characterised by a modest variation across welfare state regimes. Irrespective of regime structures, all welfare states have for instance established universally covering public school systems. This means, among other things, that variation in terms of for example interest composition in this policy field is relatively modest. This allows us to ignore at least one of the dominating explanations of variety of public sector reforms in western democracies: the different institutionalisation of sector-based interests, and their different possibilities of exerting an impact on the implementation of reforms (Christiansen, 1998; Christensen & Pallesen, 2001). Even between the US and Scandinavian countries, there are striking similarities in the strength and character of vested sector interests in the domain of public schools (Chubb, 2001: 25). Hence, in this policy area we have almost unique opportunities to measure the reform dynamics of varying welfare state regimes on most similar cases (Lijphart, 1971; Collier, 1993).

Public schools are arguably the service-area most integrated with the general welfare state construction. Public schools and education are central institutions in any welfare state striving for economic prosperity and making efforts to develop a well-trained work-force and to create an effective and well functioning public administration (Castles, 1998: 176-177). But public schools and general educational arrangements are also political constructions much older than the welfare state system in economically advanced nations. In contrast to other social service arrangements as public health, kindergartens and elder-care, schools and education are not established during the period of welfare state expansion in the post-war period, but many years earlier. This makes public schools a crucial case for this study (Eckstein, 1975; King, Keohane & Verba, 1994: 210), as we intuitively can expect policy-developments in this field to be determined by the institutionalised policy legacies rather than the general welfare state arrangements (Lindbom, 1995; Pierson, 2000; Rothstein & Steinmo, 2002). Hence, if the welfare state regime theory demonstrates any capacity to explain reforms even in this policy-field, it seems reasonable to generalise broadly the findings to the welfare states' service dimension. The theory is, in other words, tested on a case, where it is least likely to be supported.

The comparative study of school reforms involves two welfare states from each regime-category. This allows us to make a systematic test of the argument as well as to control for alternative explanations. To confirm the regime theory, reform strategies must (1) vary as theoretically expected between different regime clusters, and (2) be characterised by systematic regularities between welfare states from the same cluster. If the analysis reveals profound variation between similar types of welfare states or other types of non-expected variations and similarities, the theory should be revised or even rejected. Some relevant alternatives can then be considered – for example that school reforms actually do develop following a specific policy path rather than in accordance with the general welfare state regime structures.

In order to press the regime theory further, the case countries are chosen in accordance with a strategy that makes it difficult to prove correctly, as there are notable divergences between the welfare states grouped together in the same regime category. For example, compared to the Swedish school policy, the Danish school policy has traditionally been rather decentralised, just as Denmark traditionally has had a strong element of mainly publicly financed free of choice private schools (Hadenius, 1991; Lindbom, 1995; Blomqvist & Rothstein, 2000). This difference is also significant between Germany and the Netherlands. The Dutch schools have also had wide opportunities of choice between public schools and publicly financed private schools (Justesen, 2002). And the universal US school system has always been a decentralised state-matter, whereas the more selective UK school system has been controlled by the central government (Theodoulou, 2002). If the empirical analysis, even on this background, actually demonstrates the expected differences and regularities, this will strongly support the regime theoretical argument.

But we must also pay attention to the fact that our case-countries take different points of departure in their reform-processes, and formulate concrete hypotheses that are sensitive to the context. Box 1 specifies the kind of reforms the chosen welfare states are expected to advance, and screen out, in accordance with their adoption of a general strategy.

Box 1

Welfare State Regimes	General Reform Strategy	Specified Hypothesis
Liberal USA United Kingdom	<i>Exit-based reform strategy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Choice between public schools - Choice between public and private schools - Open enrolment rules
Social Democratic Sweden Denmark	<i>Voice-based reform strategy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - User boards, - Further decentralisation - Choice between public schools - No further exit-options to private schools.
Conservative The Netherlands Germany	<i>Loyalty-based reform strategy</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No further exit-options, - No further decentralisation

The empirical part of the paper begins with the following section and consists of a short analysis of the public sector reform agenda for each country, to see whether and how public schools are part of this agenda. Then the analysis focuses on the policy-output of the reform-initiatives to see whether the welfare states have reformed as expected. After this concrete empirical examination, a comparative analysis is conducted to assess the explanatory value of the regime-theory, and to discuss the value of some relevant alternatives.

Liberal Welfare State Regimes

United States

The development of a market-oriented approach to public sector restructuring is often associated with the political rise of conservatism and neo-liberalism in the early 1980s (Pierson & Smith, 1993: 487; Harrinvirta, 2000). Not least liberal welfare state regimes as

the UK and the United States have been exposed to these reform ambitions. The Reagan-administration entered office with scepticism toward the federal authority capacities in addressing social problems, and embarked upon political strategies of tax cuts, cuts in public spending and institutional re-arrangements (Pierson & Smith, 1993: 489). This administration sought to curtail central government agencies by transferring responsibilities to the states with the “New Federalism” initiatives. Although many of these initiatives were defeated by the Congress, the fiscal problems of the national government shifted the balance of policy activity back to the states (Pierson & Smith, 1993: 504).

The New Federalism was significant in school policy. Formally, American public schools are governed by the education policies of their respective states, which are responsible for public education according to the constitution (Chubb, 2001: 27). The official tasks of the federal government is gathering information, promoting research, innovation and funding, and monitoring effectiveness (Pappagiannis et.al., 1992: 9). However, the role of the federal government was expanded in the 1960s and 1970s and in line with the “New Federalism”, Reagan sought for example to dismantle the federal department of education and turn responsibility and funding for education over to state governments. There are significant connections between general public sector restructuring strategies of the 1980s, and plans of school restructuring in particular. But other factors gave an impetus for school reforms. Schools and education reached the top of the political agenda in 1983, when a national commission declared the United States a “nation at risk” because of the poor quality of the educational system (Pappagiannis et al., 1992: 12).

The American school debate involved several issues. How should for example the academic performance be improved, how should problems with racial segregation be approached, how could educational equity be ensured for disadvantaged groups, and how can the allocating efficiency and economic effectiveness of existing institutions be improved? Nevertheless, these questions were subordinated to the debate about vouchers and school choice. Those in favour of school choice see universal public vouchers as a strategy for racial de-segregation, an improvement of academic standards, and ensuring institutional effectiveness (Moe, 2001b: 27-28). Opponents of vouchers argue on the other hand that these problems are aggravated with extended

forms of school choice and opt-out options to the private sector (Ravitch, 2001; Boyd & Lugg, 1998).

In the early 1980s, the government was rather active in putting the choice and voucher issue on the political agenda (Moe, 2001: 25, 36-37), but there has been much less choice reform than theoretically expected. It was a more incremental type of reforms that progressed in the 1980s. Public schools have for instance been granted increased public funding, and the states have sought to improve academic performance through a more rigorous academic curriculum and formal test of student performance (Cooper, 1988: 285; Kirst, 1988: 321; Chubb & Moe, 1990: 194). In the beginning of the 1990s, President Bush made however another push for public vouchers. In the beginning of his first term, he presented a bill which would have provided \$1000 vouchers to children from low income families, but the bill was defeated in the Democratic Congress (Moe, 2001: 36-37).

In the shadow of conflict and political deadlocks on the national scene, notable developments occurred however regionally and locally. The first public voucher programs were introduced in Milwaukee in 1990, and designed for use by children from low-incomes families. Initially, no more than one percent could enter the program, but in 1995 it was expanded to include up to 15 percent (Mintrom, 2000: 24). Today, the program is still targeted on low income families and enrolls approx. 12,000 students (NCSPE, 2003). A similar program was subsequently established in Cleveland in 1996. The first state-wide voucher program was introduced in Florida in 1999, restricted to students from failing public schools. During the 1990s, several other states considered implementing some form of voucher program but have everywhere been defeated (Moe, 2001: 37; Mintrom, 2000). All the same, the voucher movement made some progress in the 1990s.

Another kind of school reform making significant more progress in the 1990s is the charter school movement. Charter schools are public schools of choice, supported by public funds, and enjoy a greater freedom from regulations than traditional public schools (NCSPE, 2003). The first state to adopt charter school legislation was Minnesota in 1991, and charter schools have grown rapidly since. More than thirty other states adopted charter school legislation during the 1990s, and in the year 2000, nearly 2000 charter schools were in operation with a total student enrolment of about 430,000 (Mintrom, 2000: 23; NCSPE, 2003). Charter schools have won sup-

port from various proponents and faced much less resistance than the voucher movement, as they to a lesser degree threaten to undermine the public institutions by draining them for pupils and resources (Moe, 2001: 40). Some see charter schools as providing a degree of choice while maintaining the public system intact. Others see charter schools as a step toward real voucher programs (Mintrom, 2000: 22). As much as a choice reform, charter schools should however also be seen as a decentralisation of management to the schools, going hand in hand with other forms of school-based management principles introduced during the 1990s.

Other forms of school choice models developing during this period are magnet schools and Tuition tax credits. In some cases magnet schools can be chosen only if the choice increases the level of racial integration. In other cases magnet schools offer places on a first come, first served basis (Peterson, 2001: 255). Tuition tax credits are intended to reduce the price of private education, and allow families to subtract a predetermined amount of private educational expenses from their tax liability. The first program of this sort was introduced in Iowa in 1987, followed by Arizona and Minnesota (only families with an income less than \$37,500) in 1997 and Illinois 1999 (NSCPE, 2003).

The United Kingdom

Margaret Thatcher's electoral victory in 1979 signalled a clear break with the traditional bureaucratic organisation of the public sector. Programs of privatization, deregulation and contracting out were now brought into government agencies (Savoie, 1994: 9). The reform agenda of the conservative government was clearly enlightened by ideas of replacing a politically regulated service sector with managerial forms of service provision (Munday, 2000: 264). The UK is portrayed as a country in which market-oriented public sector restructuring is undertaken in a comprehensive and coherent fashion, relying on a long-term programme. The UK programme has been based on elements such as separation of purchaser and provider, market-based competition, citizens charter and privatization (Halligan, 2001: 10). Theoretically, the reform-strategy was supported by new think tanks as the Centre for Policy Studies which countered the collectivist modes of thinking about social policy. The centre did also provide the conservative government with ideological support in school policy (Whitty & Edwards, 1998: 218).

In the first half of the 20th century, schools and education was a decentralized policy-matter with the Local Education Authorities (LEA) as the important unit. LEA's were established with the enactment of the Education Act of 1902, and formed as regionally based authorities with responsibility for providing schools and education in their locality. The major education reform of 1944 established a far more centralised universal school system, providing free and compulsory education up to age fifteen (increased to age sixteen in 1973). With this reform, the overall political control was placed in the hands of the central Ministry of Education, while day-to-day administration was placed in the LEA (Theodoulou, 2002: 185).

School reforms became a central part of the general public sector reform agenda in UK, but contrary to the US, school reforms were not initially connected to a decentralization strategy as the New Federalism. There were no intentions of delegating political control and competences to local political authorities. The strategies to reform the British school bureaucracy aimed instead at reducing the role of democratic politics in general, and to advance a market-driven school system in which schools compete for students and financial resources (Theodoulou, 2002: 188).

School choice has been at the centre of school reform strategies since the early 1980s, but political efforts have gone in the direction of improving choice within the public sector. Public financial support for independent private schools of choice has only scarcely been allowed (OECD, 1994: 61). The Assisted Places Scheme was, for example, introduced in 1981 to help children from low income families to pay school fees in independent private schools, but this program was abolished by the incoming Labour government in 1997 (OECD, 2002: 10).

The most significant element of British school reform strategies has been the efforts of re-structuring the public school system from a traditional bureaucracy to a quasi-market characterised by choice and competition. One way of stimulating school choice within the public sector has been to liberalise the rules of enrolment. Open enrolment to public schools was underway in the early 1980s, and comprehensive reforms were enacted with the Education Reform Act of 1988 (Brighouse, 2000: 166). With this, any child is allowed to apply to any school within the local school authorities, and may not be refused unless the preferred school is oversubscribed. This has been attended by more close links between school funding and enrolment. Local Education Authorities have been required to devolve the financial management

to schools. At least 90 per cent of their schooling expenditure must be delegated to the administrative bodies that control individual schools, and at least 80 per cent of this school budget must be determined by the number of pupils enrolled (OECD, 1994: 62-63). In practice, this can be seen as implementation of a voucher model, but a voucher that is usable only within the public sector.

Two new school forms evolved during the reform process. The first is the so-called Grant Maintained schools, established by having existing schools opt out of the control of the local authority. Grant Maintained schools would be run by a governing body without any local government control, and funded directly by the central government (Brighouse, 2000: 166; OECD; 2002: 14). The government recommended schools to opt out of the local political control structures, and also gave them economic incentives to do so. Independent private schools were recommended to opt into the grant maintaining system, and the number of Grant Maintained schools increased dramatically during the 1990s. From 50 secondary schools in 1991 to 1199 primary and secondary schools in 1999. These schools serviced 787,000 pupils of a total of approx. 7m. (Statistics of Education, 2001: 14, 47).

The other new school form that developed from the late 1980s and during the 1990s were the City Technology Colleges (CTC). CTC's were established as a new form of public-private partnerships, allowing for private capital in the publicly-funded school system. CTC's would be sponsored by local businesses and run by independent trusts. The sponsors constitute the trust and will own or lease the college and appoint their representatives to the board of governors (Brighouse, 2000: 166; Statistics of Education, 2001: 9). CTC's are meant to innovate in especially science and technology, and have a strong emphasis on the use of information technology within the national curriculum (OECD, 1994: 62; Whitty & Edwards, 1998: 213).

Some of the Conservative government's reforms were, however, undone by the Labour government that came to power in 1997. The Labour government abolished, as mentioned, The Assisted Places Scheme (OECD, 2002: 10), and some analysts have detected a withdrawal of choice and variety within the public sector, as the grant-maintained status was ended in the late 1990s. But grant maintained schools have preserved their autonomy in many areas, including deciding their own admission policies and which pupils to admit (OECD, 2002: 15). Open enrolment rules have also been regulated as the government legislated that all LEA's must operate a

co-ordinated admission system to ensure that all children in all areas receive an acceptable school place. Although there are some signs of a backlash for the market-orientation of British schools, this should not be confused with a general shift in the direction of school policy. By and large, the incoming labour government from 1997 continued the school and education policies developed by the Conservative government in the 1980s (Theodoulou, 2002: 188-189).

Social Democratic Regimes

Sweden

Political discussions about a public sector restructuring in Sweden were initiated in the wake of a break in the general post-war political consensus about the welfare state. From the political left as well as from the right, the Swedish welfare state was increasingly criticised for stiff regulation and bureaucratic red-tape during the 1970s and 1980s. However, even if some similarities in the left and right's diagnosis of the problem can be observed, they endorsed different solutions to the problem. The Conservative party adapted to neo-liberal political orthodoxies and claimed that the public sector caused budget deficits, high taxes and a lack of freedom in choosing services, whereas the left based their reform strategies on decentralisation and more direct democracy (Premfors, 1991: 85-86).

In 1982 the Social Democrats came back to power after six years in opposition. The new Social democratic government soon launched a comprehensive reform programme for the public sector, and created a new department, *Civildepartementet*, to take charge of it. During their six years in opposition, the Social Democrats realised that the public sector had to be decentralised, less uniform, allow for direct participation and choice among a range of available alternatives (Mellbourn, 1986; Premfors, 1991: 85). This paved the way for a swarm of initiatives in the first half of the 1980s, which were implemented throughout the 1990s (SOU 2000:38: 238). Some of these reform initiatives did not differ much from proposals launched by the Conservative party, but they were differently framed. The Conservative party's attack on the public sector was associated with a general attack on the social democratic welfare state. The Social Democratic government on the other hand saw and presented public sector restructuring in the frame of a welfare state modernisation programme (Green-Pedersen, 2002).

The administrative framework of the public school was a main object in the on-going political debates. All Social Democratic party programmes during the 1980s embarked upon a reform-strategy for public schools, and the school issue ranked high on the political agenda throughout the decade. Among the many Social Democratic policy proposals were for example that public schools should respond more precisely to individual preferences, allow for direct citizen-participation and optional choice between public schools (Socialdemokratiska Arbetar Partiet (SAP), 1984: 68-69, 1988:68).

These programmatic proposals entered on the decision-making arena in 1988, and sparked off a process that fundamentally altered the administrative structures of the Swedish school system. In the period between 1988 and 1991, the administration of Swedish schools was decentralised to municipalities, and freedom of choice between public as well as between public and private schools was introduced with a sort of universal public voucher. It was also discussed that parents should have a formalised channel of influence in the public school, but this were never implemented (Lindbom, 1995).

The reform process was initiated in 1988, where the administration and planning of public schools were delegated to municipalities. With this reform, the role of central state authorities was reduced to formulating general political goals, financial funding, and securing the quality of public schools through evaluations (Prop. 1988/89:4:9). This first element of the reform process also introduced a new element in Swedish school policy. Decentralisation was attended by the principle that schools should have an opportunity to develop special academic or pedagogical profiles, and be allowed to conduct education in accordance with the needs and demands of their local settings (Prop. 1988/89:4: 53-56).

In the autumn of 1989, municipalities took over the employment responsibility of the school personnel from the state (Prop. 1989/90:41: 12), and a new funding system was introduced in 1990/1991 (Prop. 1990/91:18: 25). State funding of local schools has traditionally been attended by detailed prescriptions of how municipalities should allocate the resources to the different areas of the school system (DsU 1987:1:119-125). After municipalities were constituted as employers of teachers and principals, it was decided to allocate financial resources as an unspecified block grant,

though earmarked for schools and educational purposes. With this, municipalities were given more freedom to dispose of resources and organise public schooling.

New forms of school choice also evolved. Since schools were given an opportunity to develop special profiles, they were also obliged to meet individual preferences of school choice as far as practical and economic possible (Prop. 1988/89:4: 53-57). But in contrast to the regime theoretical expectations, school-choice was not kept within the public sector. Due to the new funding system, private schools were given the possibility of attaining public funding on equal conditions with public schools. The Social Democrats had strongly opposed public funding of private schools during the 1980s, as they feared this could undermine the principles of the universal welfare state (Klitgaard, 2005). But their political alliance during the reform-process, the small bourgeois party the Center Party, took a different stance on the issue. As the government bill proposing a new funding system was debated in a parliamentary committee, the Center Party proposed that municipalities should allocate resources in accordance with a principle of needs to each individual school, whether it was public or private (1990/91:UbU17:23). Hence, the Social Democratic government enacted in practice a voucher model allowing parents and pupils to choose between public and private but publicly financed private schools.

The Conservative-led government coalition that came to power in 1991, and stayed there until 1994, decided however that private schools no longer should be needs tested in order to be granted with public funding, but have the right to receive an amount per pupil of 85 per cent of the average costs of a pupil in public schools. When the Social Democrats returned to office in 1994, they reduced this to 75 per cent due to the economic crisis, but decided in 1996 that private schools should be granted with public funding per pupil corresponding to the costs per pupil in public schools. And, in connection with this, private schools were not allowed to charge parents for an additional school fee (Klitgaard, 2005). This institutional overhaul of the Swedish schools caused a dramatic increase in the number of private schools during the 1990s. From 166 in 1993 to 488 in 2002 (Skolverket, 2001; Blomqvist & Rothstein, 2000; Svensson, 2001; Klitgaard, 2004: chp. 7).

Denmark

The Conservative – Liberal government that came to power in Denmark in 1982 launched a major programme for public sector modernisation and marked a political and ideological break with the public sector growth that had characterised Danish developments during the 1960s and 1970s. Throughout 1980s shifting bourgeois governments committed themselves to the so-called “Modernization Plan” of 1983. The content of the plan was a series of reform proposals associated with the New Public Management philosophy, such as devolution of budgets, governance by the market, free choice, new modes of financing public services, increased responsiveness towards consumers and deregulation (Christiansen, 1998: 273). It is clear that the new Danish government found itself related with the contemporary conservative governments in the US and UK. But in contrast to what was going on in the liberal welfare states, clear cut market solutions to public sector restructuring never had the same public appeal in Denmark. And in contrast to the other social democratic welfare states, public sector reforms in Denmark were never really tied up with welfare state issues, but seen in a perspective of economic restructuring. At the beginning of the 1980s, Denmark stood at the economic “brink of the abyss”, and side by side with unemployment, macro-economic issues ranked at the top of the political agenda.

The structure and governance of schools also held a prominent place on the public sector restructuring agenda in Denmark, but the school choice debate was never a dominant part of it, as Denmark has a long tradition of allowing for choice of private schools. Since the Free School Act of 1855, parents and organisations have been entitled to set up their own school, and the free school movement has ever since been an integrated part of the system. The universal and unitary public school remains to be the dominant institution, although free schools increased their pupil share in the 1980s. While just above 7 per cent of the pupils attended free schools in 1980/81, the share stabilised on approx. 12 per cent in the 1990s. Danish private schools are highly dependent of public funding, which covers approx. 85 per cent of the costs, whereas user fees cover the rest (Christiansen, 1998; Green-Pedersen, 2002).

Until the mid-1980s, Danish school debates were concerned about cost-containment, as average costs per pupil in Denmark were relatively high by comparative standards. In the late 1980s, the minister of education called however for far

more comprehensive institutional changes in the steering and administration of Danish schools. He launched a plan for “perestrojka in Danish schools” (Haarder, 1988). Political steering of schools and education should be relaxed and detailed regulation from above replaced by management by objectives. Citizens should furthermore have an optional choice within the public sector, and authority should be delegated to municipalities, schools and parents (Lindbom, 1995: 109; Andersen, 2000).

In 1989 a bill was enacted, stipulating that each school should establish a mandatory school board, consisting of elected representatives of parents, pupils and employees. With this, parental influence on the activities in the individual school was strengthened, as parents were given a majority of the seats. Since school boards by law have to lay down the principles of all activities in each school, this initiative delegated to a remarkable high degree the responsibility for local schools to users. The principal’s authority was however also increased with the abolishment of former collective bodies consisting of school personnel. In addition, principals were given a good opportunity to act as gate-keepers in relation to the school board, since all proposals for decision-making had to come from the principals’ office (Folketingstidende, register, 1988/89: 167).

A year after the establishment of school boards, the minister of education presented his bill for de-bureaucratization and de-regulation, passing the parliamentary process with some slight modifications. This caused a good part of the central ministry’s regulating power to be transferred to municipalities and school boards. The law also introduced a principle of school choice within the public school system. Municipalities could, if they wanted to, allow for school choice within the local school district, although pupils should still be guaranteed a place in the school nearest to their home. Furthermore, if accepted by the school in another district than the one in which the parents and pupils were situated, they were given the right to opt for this school (Folketingstidende, tillæg A: 5189-5202). It accords with our theoretical expectations, that Social Democratic welfare states open for school choice within the public sector, but this reform initiative have however shown to be devoid of any real content, as local authorities have set up very strict regulations for school choice (Christensen & Pallesen, 2001: 186).

The process of decentralisation was continued when a Social Democratic-led government coalition came to power in 1993 and enacted a new school law in 1994.

One element of the 1994 school reform might associate with a strengthening of the market-philosophy, as teachers became obliged to individualise their teaching to the individual pupil. They should, however, not individualise on the basis of special preferences expressed by parents, but on the basis of the skills of the pupils (Klitgaard, 2005).

Conservative Regimes

Germany

In 1982, a coalition government consisting of the Christian Democrats and the small liberal party came to power in Germany. The government's first programme bore some resemblance to the contemporary neo-liberal programmes in operation in the USA and the UK. The changes occurring in Germany in matters of public sector restructuring were however modest in character (Clark, 2000). It is a significant difference between Germany and for example the UK, Sweden and Denmark that there has not been developed any comprehensive reform-program directly addressing the organisation of the public sector.

This is not to say that nothing happened with the organisation of the German welfare state. The welfare associations linked to the churches have increasingly lost an almost monopolistic status in some areas of social service provision, whereas self-help groups and private providers have increased their market share (Clark, 2000: 34). Some trends of marketisation, of for example public housing and health care arrangements, are also reported (Bönker & Wollmann, 2000). But generally, the legalistic administrative system and bureaucratic state have not been challenged by the market prescriptions. The only changes adding up to revolutionary characteristics occurred with the re-unification of West and East Germany in the early 1990s. But even this did not lead to a wave of privatization and market-type reforms in the public sector. Rather, the East German system adapted to the pre-existing West German model of public administration (Clark, 2000: 34).

The German school that evolved after World War II parallels in many instances the American school system. The role of the federal state is to oversee some specialised parts of education, provide some financial funding and to promote educational research. Schools and education are primarily a regional matter for the *Länder*, responsible for the main part of financial funding, maintaining schools, teacher train-

ing, educational standards and the curricula (Theodoulou, 2002). The Länder enjoy considerable freedom to organise their own school system, which allows for variations within Germany. Historically it has for instance been clear that Social Democratic governed Länder have put more efforts into establishing comprehensive and universal school-systems compared to the more conservative Christian Democratic Länder's strive for selective school systems (Manning, 1998).

The role of private schooling is relatively limited in Germany. Private schools, which normally receive public financial resources are only attended by a minority of approx. 6 per cent of the pupils (Manning, 1998: 87). In conformity with the traditional features of conservative welfare states, the church and religious institutions have a considerable impact on school and education policy. The Länder normally take the interests of both the Catholic and Protestant churches into account in their school policy considerations, although their role are most widespread in the pre-school field.

The efforts of marketising the public sector in Germany were generally weak, but this reform trend was even weaker in the public school system. Considerations of replacing the existing bureaucratic and politically controlled schools with quasi-market arrangements, and competition between schools about pupils and financial resources, have not reached the level of serious political debate. In Germany, such considerations have been restricted to the theoretical and academic level, and have in practice had no policy impact (Manning, 1998: 92). Indeed, since the beginning of the 1980s, the school policy in the conservative welfare state of Germany has been conservative and incremental in nature. It has, so to speak, been two decades of non-reform, and the reforms occurring in the wake of the collapse of East-germany, resulted in structures rather close to those that are dominating in West Germany (Wilde, 2002).

The Netherlands

The early 1980s was a turbulent period in Dutch politics. No less than three unstable governments were in office in the period from 1980 to 1982. In spite of this turbulence, public administration reforms entered the political agenda due to the so-called Reconsideration operation. The working groups of Reconsideration consisted of civil servants from the Ministry of Finance, who advocated a variety of reforms associated

with the New Public Management movement (Yesilkagit & De Vries, 2004: 965). After 1982, Dutch politics became more stable with the entrance of Ruud Lubbers and a centre-right government consisting of the Christian Democrats and Conservative Liberals. Lubbers presented his government as a “business government” and called for deregulation, decentralisation and privatisation policies, and created a political room for governmental actions with the so-called Wassenaar-agreement. Strong corporatism is one of the central “pillars” in Dutch politics, which means that the policy capacity of any government has traditionally depended on cooperation with the labour market organisations. The new Lubbers cabinet announced however its intentions of governing with or without the social partners, and in the shadow of the hierarchy, the organisations were forced into the Wassenaar-agreement and cooperation with the government on a series of reform-measures in social policy (Hemerijck, Unger & Visser, 2000).

The Dutch economy was in dire straits in the 1980s and the Lubbers-government was more committed to economic and fiscal recovery than public sector restructuring (Hemerijck, Unger & Visser, 2000: 215). The political attention that nevertheless was paid to the organisation of the public sector was therefore closely associated with an agenda dominated by the economy (Kickert, 1997; Torres, 2004). Political questions about the economy and structural reforms in the public sector can, of course, be highly interrelated on the political agenda, which they were in for example the US, UK and Denmark. In the Netherlands however, political debates about the economy were more associated with labour market problems and the pressure on social transfer benefits. In the early 1980s, unemployment reached the double digit, 14 per cent of the working age population received disability or early retirement benefits, and 6 per cent were on sick leave (Hemerijck, Unger & Visser, 2000: 215).

In contrast to the situation in for example the US, Sweden and Denmark, the Dutch school never really caught the decision-makers attention in connection with economic and public sector restructuring. As in Denmark, the Dutch school system has for generations allowed for choice between public schools and public funded private schools (Justesen, 2002). This is the result of a 40-year-long political conflict, which ended with a compromise in 1917, to achieve financial equality between public and private education. The content of the compromise was that the mainly de-

nominal private education sector achieved the same right to public funding as the public sector. In exchange, the Social Democrats' appeal for universal suffrage was granted. In the aftermath of this compromise, the Dutch school system developed from an almost public monopoly, and into a "pillarised" system dominated by private schools with strong bonds to either the Catholic or Protestant society (Karsten, 1999: 304; Justesen, 2002).

In the Dutch school system today, each family is allowed to choose the school they want for their children, and the state pays whether they choose public or private schools. Funding follows pupils, and each school receives for each pupil a sum equivalent to the per capita cost of public schooling – a system comparable to the one introduced in Sweden in the early 1990s. Private schools have a market share on approx. 70 per cent of the pupils in primary and secondary schools. Of these, approx. 7 per cent attend secular private schools while the rest attend religious and denominational schools (OECD, 1994: 68).

Recent political measures have not changed these characteristic features in any fundamental way. Some general deregulating initiatives have nevertheless increased the administrative and financial autonomy of Dutch schools, in order to achieve more diversification among schools – the main condition for school choice to be beneficial (Teelken, 1999: 285). This accords with what is the most significant change – tendencies off de-pillarisation. These are not caused by policy decisions but by an altered pattern in the way schools are chosen. Religion is no longer the only, but just one of several factors determining school choice. A substantial minority of the population chooses school across the traditional pillars (OECD, 1994: 70). However, it remains tendencies – religious pillars of the Dutch society continue to be a dominant reason for choice of school.

Generally, the issue as to whether it was desirable to increase the market-mechanisms in Dutch school-policy, for example by encouraging enhanced competition within the public system and between public and private schools, has not ranked high on the political agenda in the Netherlands (Karsten, 1999: 308). A likely explanation is of course that compared with other countries, parents have for generations enjoyed a good deal of freedom in choosing a school (Karsten, 1999: 308). What was discussed, and what did happen in the 1990s, was a rise of views linked up with a "back to basics movement". More emphasis on core subjects like reading, writing and

arithmetic was advocated, as well as on so-called traditional values of the school system.

Comparative Analysis:

Assessing the Value of the Welfare State Regime Theory

We expected certain patterns of variations and regularities on school reform strategies between the welfare state regimes. In this section, the empirical findings are discussed in a comparative analysis to assess whether welfare state regimes have reformed as expected. Box 2 summarises the reform pattern for each country.

Box 2.

Welfare State Regimes		Dominating Reforms
Liberal	<i>USA</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Charter Schools - Decentralisation - Limited experiences with public vouchers
	<i>UK</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Grant Maintained Schools - Open Enrolment - Choice within the public sector
Social Democratic	<i>Sweden</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Decentralisation - Public voucher – opt out possibility to private schools - Choice within the public sector
	<i>Denmark</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Further Decentralisation - Governing board - Choice within the public sector*
Conservative	<i>Germany</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Adaptation of former East German schools - “Two decades of non-reform”
	<i>NL</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - No dominant reform pattern - De-pillarisation (not caused by reform-initiatives) - “Back to basics”

* Strongly regulated by municipalities – without any real content

We expected *liberal welfare states* to implement comprehensive choice reforms, and allow for choice between public schools as well as between public and private schools.

This expectation is partly confirmed with the political focus on school choice in both countries during the period, and with the variety of choice reforms developing during the 1990s. Choice reforms seem to have made the strongest progress in the UK with grant maintained schools and rules of open enrolment. Charter schools in the US are comparable to the grant maintained UK schools, and made a significant progress in the 1990s. However notable traits of school reforms in liberal welfare states do not fit with the regime-theoretical expectations, but must be ascribed to the impact from institutional structures and pre-existing policy legacies.

Schools are welfare programmes provided on universal principles in both the US and the UK, and the obstacles confronting especially the voucher-movement in the US are due to this institutional structure. Schools are open to all and enjoy strong popular support. It is furthermore the workplace for a trained, professional and well-organised interest group, with strong incentives to preserve the system and prevent competition for students and public resources from private alternatives. This is the reason why the voucher movement made so little real progress compared to the public charter schools in the US. The universal structures of a comprehensive public school have also hindered certain types of reform in the UK. However, it must also be noted that the tradition of comprehensive and universal public schooling is less institutionalised in the UK, and have developed as late as in the second half of the 20th century. Instead, the UK has a long tradition for selective independent private schools, and there has been no intention from the shifting governments to threaten this system by mixing it up with public resources and political control. Private is private and public is public.

These differences in policy-legacies are also reflected by the fact that concerns about the effects of school choice with regard to social and racial segregation, and whether exit-options to private alternatives undermine the public institutions, have been much more pronounced in the US compared to the UK. What we have observed as obstacles to the US voucher-movement and public resources in private institutions are components in the welfare state conflict that are well-known from the universal welfare states of Scandinavia. There are, all in all, strong similarities regarding the type of reforms that made the strongest progress in the liberal welfare states, and focus has to a large degree been put on extending the exit-options. However, if we do not take the limited voucher-experiments in the US into account, school

choice is primarily allowed within the public system. Liberal welfare states have by and large followed a common reform-trajectory, but they have refrained from institutionalising the exit-option to the private sector.

We expected *social democratic welfare states* to develop voice-based reform strategies based on further decentralisation, strengthened roles for the users, choice within the public sector, and no further exit-options to the private sector. The empirical analysis of Sweden and Denmark revealed however surprising and highly unexpected reform patterns. The social democratic welfare state of Sweden conducted reforms that clearly break with the theoretical expectations. The Swedish school became strongly decentralised during the reform-process, with the aim of making it more responsive toward citizens. But Sweden did not strengthen the role of users by giving them a formal voice-option as did Denmark. Sweden also institutionalised principles of choice within the public sector, but has allowed for an extended exit-option to the private sector due to the public voucher model. It was expected that social democratic welfare states would prevent especially this reform-element as it potentially drains the public system for pupils and resources. Denmark has allowed for public financed private schools of choice since the 19th century, but has not, as expected, opened for new exit options to private schools. This should come as no surprise, as Danish rules can hardly be more liberal in this aspect of school policy.

Danish reform-patterns correspond closer with what was expected. In the late 1980s Denmark introduced a formal voice-channel for the users, as all schools were obliged to establish a governing board controlled by parents. Danish school reforms have also resulted in further decentralisation and a strengthening of the municipalities, and school choice within the public sector has, in principle, been extended. Thus, while Denmark reformed as expected of a social democratic welfare state regime, the Swedish reform-process contains highly unexpected elements. Indeed, if US policy debates, and school reform patterns, were marked by Scandinavian and social democratic features, the character of Swedish school reforms is close to what we would expect from liberal welfare states. In spite of the fact that Sweden and Denmark both followed a reform line strongly based on decentralisation, and thus have demonstrated some regularities in their approach to reform public schools, there are also strong variations in the kind of reform-measures Sweden and Denmark have conducted. The content of Swedish reforms qualifies to be characterised as an exit-

strategy, whereas the Danish reforms can be characterised as a voice-based decentralisation strategy.

The *conservative welfare states* of Germany and the Netherlands are probably those who come closest to support the theoretical expectations. School reforms in these two welfare states are all in all loyal towards existing structures. Reform activities in Germany have been limited -- the period is characterised as two decades of non-reform. Major reform-initiatives were certainly taken in the wake of the reunification of the two Germanies in the beginning of the 1990s, but the goal of these reforms was to adapt the East German school to the school system of West Germany. This corresponds closely with the general trend of the public sector reforms in Germany, which has been incremental in character, and which has introduced some forms of flexibility into a legalistic public sector, in order to maintain the existing system (Clark, 2000).

The Netherlands were committed to economic recovery and labour market reforms during the period, and even if there were sporadic signs of a public sector restructuring agenda, public schools were not a part of it. As in the Danish case, the institutional structure of Dutch schools has not been disposed to reform proposals of for example choice and decentralisation. Since the beginning of the 20th century, Dutch citizens have been allowed to opt for publicly financed private schools. Indeed, private schooling is the dominating pattern in the Netherlands, and in spite of some signs of de-pillarization, pupils continue to attend denominational private schools in accordance with their religious beliefs. This is, as suggested by Hirschmann, a reason for staying loyal.

Public Sector Reforms: The Regime Theory and Beyond

This analysis has investigated whether the theory of welfare state regimes can explain structural reforms in the administrative framework of public welfare services. The overall impression left by the analysis is that the theory has demonstrated some, although not convincing qualities in this respect. Reform measures in the liberal welfare states aimed at extending the possibilities of exiting within (!) the public sector. The conservative regimes were, as expected, foot-dragging reformers that stayed loyal to the pre-existing institutions. The theory of welfare state regimes has the most pronounced difficulties when it comes to explain developments in social democratic re-

gimes. Danish school reforms are in good keeping with the hypothesis, whereas Swedish developments clearly deviate from what was expected. Sweden has also decentralised the regulation and political control of schools to municipalities, but Sweden has not institutionalised a formal voice channel for the users, but introduced an exit option to private schools. Generally, however, five of the six welfare states adopted the general reform strategies we expected them to do.

Some of the concrete reform measures in the US, the UK, Denmark, Germany and the Netherlands are also supportive to the theory. Still, we are far from a home run. The Swedish findings deviate strongly as do some of the findings, or non-findings, in the liberal welfare states. The welfare state regime theory provides some answers regarding the superior strategies adopted by the welfare states in public sector restructuring. But when focus is directed at the policy level, the regime theory runs into significant problems. As we conduct detailed policy studies, the broad perspective of the regime theory must be modified, or even replaced with the insights from for example institutional theories of policy legacies. For instance, the legacy of US school policy prevented far-reaching voucher reforms. The legacy in Denmark and the Netherlands is one of the reasons why school policy in these countries has been little receptive to market-inspired reform strategies. And the policy legacy of the centralised Swedish school can be argued as extremely receptive to such reform prescriptions, which is why institutional change became so far-reaching (Klitgaard, 2005). This finding is not surprising considering other policy studies of welfare state development. Studies in for example pension policy, labour market policy, and unemployment insurance schemes have revealed patterns that also are unexplainable within the regime-theoretical approach (Klitgaard, 2002; Hede, 2004; Larsen & Goul-Andersen, 2004).

In sum, the theory of welfare state regimes delivered fertile hypotheses about the politics of welfare state reforms on social services, but it is difficult to substantiate the theory with strong empirical evidence. This study points to institutional theories as a more relevant alternative in this respect. There are on the other hand no reasons for rejecting the idea that public sector restructuring is more than instrumental reorganisation and a search for economic efficiency. Public sector reforms are ultimately political processes about the content and direction of social policy that include questions about equality, solidarity, and legitimacy foundations of the welfare state.

This impression is not least stimulated by public sector and school policy restructuring in the US and Sweden. The remarkable finding is, however, that the Americans appeared to be just as social democratic as the Swedes appeared liberal. There are obvious reasons for exploring such counter-theoretical developments in subsequent research – not least because they are so different from what we would expect from conventional welfare state theory.

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