From punishment to participation: The history of Nordic welfare policies for children

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• Childhood sociology- childhood studies

• Comparative welfare research and the child perspective

• Nordic welfare policies for children

• Future challenges
Child research - Childhood sociology

• Philippe Ariés: *History of childhood* (1962) “...in medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist” (Ariés, 1979:125)

• Ariés pointed out that children had been viewed as little grown ups and that childhood was a modern phenomena

• Critizised, but “what Ariés offered…was a taste of cultural relativity across time. This alerted researchers to the diverse, rather than universal, nature of conceptions of childhood” (James & James, 2004)
Child research- child perspective

• **Social construction of childhood**: Has been described as complex interweaving of different social forces and actors (structures, institutions, laws, policies, everyday actions of children and grown ups etc.)

• Children are regarded to have a value as **individuals in their own right** and not mainly as future adults (or ´investment´ or ´the future´) most often described with reference to Jens Qourtrup (1994) “Children are viewed as human **beings** rather than human **becomings**”.

• The child is the **statistical unit** and not just one part of the family
Comparative policy research on children and childhood?

• Therborn: “In the general comparative public policy literature, one searches in vain for policy on children or childhood” (G.T. 1993;242 The politics of Childhood; The Rights of Children in Modern Times in Castles, 1993)

• Child policies are often grouped under the rubric of family policy (also on the sidelines of comparative policy research)
Equal individuals: Women and children last?

• Adult males gained right as equal individuals
• From the second half of the nineteenth century women slowly gained same rights

• And children came last; freeing a legitimate space for children beneath the weight of parental power began to occur about half a century after the first significant advances of women (Therborn, 1993:254)
Definers of childhood

- T: “...the two most important definers of childhood have been legislation concerning compulsory education and labour. A child has become someone who is too young to work and someone who has not finished his/her elementary education” (Therborn, 1993:247-48)

- He also discusses the importance of criminal and penal laws, laws that regulate sexuality, the age of marriage and the laws on child protection
Compares laws that ensured

1) **Child centred families**: Explicit legal formulation of equal parental obligations and that children’s best interests were considered when deciding custody after divorce.

2) **Equality** between children of married and non-married children with regard to both paternity and inheritance.
Development of children’s rights
Results from Therborn + Iceland added

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Child centered family</th>
<th>Equality</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>By end of WW I</td>
<td>Norway, Sweden</td>
<td>Norway (Sweden)</td>
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<td>By end of WW II</td>
<td>Denmark, Finland,</td>
<td>Denmark (Finland) Iceland</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Iceland, England,</td>
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<td></td>
<td>N. Zealand, Scotland, (US)</td>
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<tr>
<td>1970 and after</td>
<td>Other western nations</td>
<td>Other western nations</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(except Swiss and Belgium)</td>
<td>(except Swiss and Belgium)</td>
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History of welfare policies for children

• A research projected conducted by GBE and Mirja Satka in the NORFA network NordBarn from 2000-2004 (*Beyond the competent child -Exploring contemporary childhoods in the Nordic welfare societies*, 2004)

• The term *welfare policies for children* chosen to encompass the various policies that are aimed at children and formed within the framework of the Nordic welfare state, usually by law

• Examined legislation on child protection, child care services and family benefits and children’s rights
The aim of the project

• To examine the Nordic welfare policies for children by applying a comparative historical perspective

• To investigate how the social construction of Nordic childhoods and the definitions of children's needs had changed during the last century
First law on children’s education - Icelandic example

- New law from the middle of the 18th century included stipulations on that children should be educated in “fear of god, obedience and hard work”, obligation of parents or the husband of the household.

- The laws recommended corporal punishment if needed, to discipline the child. It was the role of the district governor to see to that the parents did fulfill their parental obligations.

- Two possible risks was defined: the parents could neglect to teach the child to read or to work. If a 10-12 year old had not yet learned these skills the district governor’s obligation was to send the child to a “trustworthy and hard working” farmer in the district for a period of one year (Guttormsson, 1983).
The 19th century dawn of industrialization: Protection from social ills

- Children’s protection from various social ills became a social issue and even priority in political debate.
- Scandinavian countries made laws on child protection: Norway in 1900; Sweden in 1902 and Denmark in 1905.
- Finland and Iceland implemented articles in various laws but first single acts in 1936 (F) and 1932 (I).
- The Nordic legislation was a part of the international ‘child saving’ movements but it also has independent legal roots (e.g. Dahl, 1985).
The Nordic welfare state and children after WWII:

• Policies based on the belief that the welfare state had the capacity to **undo wrongs and create equality** among its citizens
• Children were considered an **essential future investment** for the state
• Children’s living conditions were supported by various state **benefits**
• Emphasis on **services** child protection, health care and education for all children - and later universal day care (Satka and Eydal 2004; 2006)
• **Universalism** to ensure social security for all citizens
A few legislative milestones

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>First law on family benefits</th>
<th>Universal state guaranteed maintenance</th>
<th>Law on public day care</th>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>1946</td>
<td>1964 (1950)</td>
<td>1964</td>
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<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>1948</td>
<td>1964</td>
<td>1973</td>
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<td>I</td>
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<td>1948</td>
<td>1946</td>
<td>1973</td>
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Emphasis on participation

- E.g. child protection laws gradually provided the right for children to have a say in their own matters (when major decisions were made by authorities)
- Usually such rights were limited to children older than 12, but the recent development has followed the directives of the CCR that states that these rights should be enforced based on the child’s maturity rather than age
- Increased emphasize of the importance of capturing children’s voice, the children’s right to participation, including political participation
## A few legislative milestones

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Children have a say according to Child Protection Act</th>
<th>Law on Ombudsman for children</th>
<th>Ratification of the CCR</th>
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<td>Denmark</td>
<td>n.a.</td>
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<td>Finland</td>
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<td>Iceland</td>
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<td>Sweden</td>
<td>1980</td>
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Nordic countries: Similar policies but on somewhat different points in time

- Norway has been the leading country in implementing measures for child protection and participation
- Denmark and Sweden have been pioneers in providing generous resources and services
- Finland and Iceland have followed the forerunners
### Phases of Nordic child welfare policies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Laws on child protection</th>
<th>Laws on child care policies</th>
<th>Laws on children’s rights</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I: Origin of the welfare state</td>
<td>Protection (Punishment)</td>
<td>Protection (Punishment)</td>
<td>Not a theme</td>
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<tr>
<td>II: The Nordic welfare state</td>
<td>Provision Protection</td>
<td>Provision Protection</td>
<td>Protection</td>
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<td>III: Post industrial welfare state</td>
<td>Protection Provision and Participation</td>
<td>Protection Provision and Participation</td>
<td>Protection Provision and Participation</td>
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Nordic countries:
High level of children’s rights

• Nordic children have never before been ensured such **high levels of legal rights** in regards to protection, provision and participation as they do today (Satka et al. 2004)

• But the task to ensure children’s welfare is not completed and new risks are providing new challenges for the Nordic welfare states...
Examples of new challenges for NWS

- Family relations have become increasingly complicated - ensuring children's rights takes on new forms
- New risks e.g. via electronic media - new tasks in protecting children
- Multi-cultural society - new tasks
- New knowledge- new needs e.g. dyslexia
- The greater role that market forces - consumerism - plays the danger of children, who do not have access to same goods as other children, becoming socially isolated increases (e.g. Brembeck et al. 2005; Harju 2005; Ridge 2002; Sandbæk 2004)
Is the child perspective a challenge for REASSESS?

Different importance in different strands - but still a challenge to consider:

- Welfare policies for children
- Children as statistical unit
- Children as informants