Collaborative Efforts for Labour Market Integration?
Implementation of Introduction Programmes in Sweden

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Introduction

Employment has become one of the most important goals of integration policy in the European Union and its Member States. As a response to high unemployment rates and welfare dependency among immigrants there has been an increased emphasis on immigrants becoming ‘self-sufficient’ (Joppke 2007). In line with the wider EU strategy for employment and focus on ‘workfare’ this policy orientation involves a shift of responsibility to the individual for gaining the necessary skills to become ‘employable’. It is, however, also a matter of providing the necessary services for labour market integration in the form of introduction programmes and similar efforts. The aim of introduction programmes is primarily to enhance socioeconomic integration through employment but the scope and organization of these services still vary in different welfare systems (cf. Korac 2003). A widespread trend in Europe today is to make introduction programmes compulsory, indicating that there is confidence in the benefits of immigrants participating in these programmes (see Carrera 2006).

Providing introduction programmes that are effective in modern, highly specialized labour markets is, however, a difficult task. The targeted group of these efforts is likely to be quite heterogeneous in terms of skill, educational level, personal aspirations and health status. In order to be effective individual programmes need to be adjusted to these circumstances. The implementation of integration policy often requires input from a range of service providers and the policy area has a cross-sectoral or ‘horizontal’ nature, spanning over
several sectors of administration. This makes programme implementation a matter of interorganizational coordination and creating networks for service provision (cf. Peters 1998; Provan & Milward 1991; Mandell 1994). There is, more generally, an increased emphasis on horizontal coordination and ‘joining up’ government in western countries after the last decades of market model reform that have rendered public administrations more fragmented (Peters 2001; Perri 6 2004). This sometimes involves merges between different agencies (e.g. Christensen et al. 2007) but also the creation of partnerships and various collaborative arrangements such as ‘one-stop-shops’ on the level of service delivery (Perri 6 2004).

In the Swedish case of introduction programme implementation discussed in this paper, the governance efforts of promoting network engagement at the level of service provision are based on more informal means of dialogue, negotiation and norm building processes. A ‘softer’, corporatist style of governance has, traditionally, dominated the area of integration policy in Sweden, which involves a relatively large amount of discretion at the municipal level for local policy making within the framework of the general integration policy. At the same time, coordination problems have been debated in this area for decades. In 2001 the central governmental agencies involved in integration policy implementation initiated a cooperation strategy of creating ‘agreements’ between the actors involved at different administrative levels. This is a form of negotiated policy based on the regional and local conditions. It also involves formalizing collaboration at the different levels. The idea has been that horizontal coordination at upper levels creates guidance for policymaking at levels below. This can be described as a form of metagovernance aiming at providing a normative framework for the local implementation of introduction programmes (Sørensen & Torfing 2007; Sørensen 2006; Jessop 1997).

The paper focuses on how organizations at the local level of service provision respond to these external pressures to engage in collaborative efforts and make service provision more orientated towards employment. Previous research has indicated the importance of organizations’ service orientation for the adaptation of institutional-level norms favouring network engagement (Provan & Milward 1991). Network structures are hold together by a common ‘mind set’ and commitment to a programme rationale that guides appropriate action and serves as a ‘motivational glue’ (Mandell 1994; 1999; see also Hjern & Porter 1981). If there are different institutional logics guiding behaviour in the organizations involved in service provision, horizontal coordination can be hampered (Peters 1998; Jessop 1998). By applying the concept of decoupling (Brunsson & Olsen 1993; Meyer & Rowan 1977), usually associated with the single organization, in the context of networks it is possible
to distinguish networks as a means for formal adaptation from actual forms of inter-organizational collaboration. For governing efforts to be effective, they must have an impact on this second level of adaptation and provide a programme rationale that is acceptable for the participating organizations.

The paper is based on a qualitative study of the governing efforts by central governmental agencies within the strategy of ‘agreements’ in Sweden and the organizational responses to these efforts on the level of service provision in two municipalities. The empirical data consists of 45 semi-structured interviews with representatives from the public agencies involved at these two levels.

**Metagovernance and Institutionalized Organizations**

The theoretical perspective is based on a distinction between networks as formal organized efforts and as informal patterns of social relations, elaborated below. This distinction is of importance for studying efforts of metagovernance and the organizational responses at the local level of service provision. The perspective draws on normative and sociological conceptions of institutions. Institutions do not only refer to the formal structure of organizations. It refers to a collection of norms, rules and routines guiding individual behaviour and determining appropriate action in various situations (March & Olsen 1989, pp. 21-26).

The concept of metagovernance is used here to denote indirect means of governance aiming at initiating and facilitating interaction and cooperation between interdependent actors:

> Metagovernance is a way of enhancing coordinated governance in a fragmented political system based on a high degree of autonomy for a plurality of self-governing networks and institutions. Although sovereign rule indicates total top-down control over all aspects of societal governance, including process and outcome, metagovernance is an indirect form of governing that is exercised by influencing various processes of self-governance (Sørensen 2006, p. 100).

Sørensen and Torfing (2007) argue that the term has different meanings depending on the institutional perspective. From the rational actor perspective on ‘network management’ focus is more on the ‘rules of the game’, played by interdependent and strategic actors (e.g. Klijn & Koppenjan 2000). From a sociological institutional point of view it is argued that metagovernance is about governing identities by shaping institutional rules and norms, ‘storytelling’ about ‘best practices’ and the creation of symbols and rituals. It also involves governing capacities by distribution of various resources (Sørensen & Torfing, pp. 175-7; see also Jessop 1997).
Networks as Formal Structures and Informal Relations

In implementation and inter-organizational research concepts such as service implementation networks (Provan & Milward 1991), programme structures (Mandell 1994) and implementation structures have been used to highlight that public programmes are often implemented by several organizations, or parts of several organizations, rather than the ‘single lonely organization’ (Hjern & Porter 1981). These different actors and the relations between them form a relevant analytical unit for studying programme implementation. Networks are primarily seen as an organizational structure, that describes more accurately how programmes are implemented (Mandell 1994) and even as an organizational response to normative or coercive pressures (Provan et al. 2004; cf. DiMaggio & Powell 1983). Mandell (1994, p. 99.) focuses explicitly on ‘networks as formal organized efforts rather than as informal relations and/or linkages’.

Within the theoretical debate on policy networks the concept of networks has, to some extent, gained a wider meaning. Networks are not just engaged in processes of implementation; the policy process in general is often an interplay between multiple actors, sometimes both public and private (Kickert et al. 1997; Klijn & Koppenjan 2000). Networks can be seen as a distinctive form of governing, intermediate to hierarchies and markets (Kickert et al. 1997; Sørensen & Torfing 2007; see also Börzel 1998). Kickert et al. (1997, p. 30) define policy networks as ‘more or less stable patterns of social relations between interdependent actors, which take shape around policy problems and/or policy programmes’. Strategic interaction between interdependent actors is an important focus of this research (Klijn & Koppenjan 2000). The importance of actual relations and interactions is also highlighted by Kooiman (2003), explicitly linking the character of interaction (in terms of interventions, interplays and interferences) to different modes of governance.

These definitions indicate a possible distinction between networks as formal structures and informal relations. The adoption of an organizational form, such as a ‘partnership’ or ‘agreement’ can be seen as a response to external norms in the institutional environment (Meyer & Rowan 1977; cf. Provan et al. 2004). The adoption of such a form is to create a ‘formal organized effort’ but it does not necessarily involve changes in the ‘patterns of social relations’. Organizational forms have a symbolical value, reflecting the prevailing rationalized myths of purposive and effective organization in the institutional environment. Adapting formal organizational structures serves the purpose of gaining legitimacy for the own organization (Meyer & Rowan 1977).
Institutionalized Organizations

When it comes to the behaviour of organizations and actual forms of inter-organizational interaction the prospects of change, due to external pressures for adaptation, are limited according to Brunsson and Olsen (1993). Over time organizations become institutionalized; their behaviour is structured by culturally conditioned rules and ‘they reflect relatively stable values, interests, opinions, expectations and resources’ (Brunsson & Olsen 1993, p. 4). External efforts of changing behaviour, such as initiatives for reform are often based on a basic set of principles that are confronted with a more complex reality. They do not necessarily harmonize with an organizations institutional identity; its basic values, interests and opinions that have evolved over time in processes of learning from practical experience:

Organizational responses to external reform efforts are affected by the degree of consistency between the value basis and beliefs underlying a proposed reform and the value basis and beliefs of an organization (Brunsson & Olsen 1993, p. 22).

Organizations facing conflicting demands for change and continuity can develop two different versions of the organization which is captured by the concept of decoupling. One is the formal organization that is used to present the organization to the outside. The other is the informal organization used to coordinate internal activities. It is the formal organization that is the most important to adapt to external pressures, thereby gaining legitimacy. The informal organization on the other hand can maintain another set of principles guiding behaviour if this is required for effective action (Brunsson & Olsen 1993; Meyer & Rowan 1977).

Organizations that are exposed to the same external pressures of engaging in collaborative efforts can quite easily adapt on the formal level of organization. However, the prospects of changing actual service provision procedures are conditioned by potentially conflicting institutional identities (cf. Peters 1998; Jessop 1998). Interdependent actors are likely to come from different administrative sectors and institutional contexts. Bureaucracy, for instance, can be viewed as an institution with a set of normative principles such as the rule of law, impartiality and codes of appropriate behaviour (Olsen 2006). Correspondingly, organizations based on market model management have often adopted values of efficiency, contractualism and a view of citizens as ‘customers’. These differences may also concern different professional norms or service orientation (cf. Provan et al. 2004; Provan & Milward 1991). It is, however, possible that, over time, through repeated interaction and processes of mutual learning, shared identities can be created and inter-organizational relations shifted towards joint efforts (Sørensen & Torfing 2007, pp. 35-6).
Metagovernance and Organizational Responses

Metagovernance aims at creating and supporting collaborative efforts in networks of interdependent actors. Providing a normative framework or a programme rationale that is accepted by network actors can be a forceful and effective form of metagovernance in fragmented contexts and in complex and cross-cutting policy areas (Sørensen & Torfing 2007; Sørensen 2006). These norms can be promoted by strong professional groups or leading actors in the field such as funders and regulators (Provan & Milward 1991). If these external pressures are viewed as legitimate, organizations at the level of service provision are likely to respond (cf. Røvik 2000, pp. 46-7).

Responding to metagoverning efforts at the local level of service provision can be done by adapting on the formal level of organization. Such adjustments are guided by the aim of gaining legitimacy for the own organization. A widespread formal adaptation does not necessarily lead to substantial changes in organizational behaviour but it does indicate the legitimacy of the metagoverning effort. A formal collaboration that is decoupled from actual service delivery procedures would be the ‘talk shop’.

To have an impact on the actual patterns of interactions and the way services are provided the governing efforts must provide a programme rationale that is acceptable to the organizations involved. Responses at this level are based on the institutional identity. These identities might, however, not harmonize between organizations and hamper the prospects of collaboration. The effects and developments on these two levels should be viewed separately. For example, organizations might be inclined to respond quickly by creating a formal collaboration, but if this specific form turns out to be a fad, interest will drop accordingly (Røvik 2000, pp. 21-4). If it is a more enduring concept, effects on organizational behaviour might come much later as a result of repeated interaction, mutual learning and the development of trust. Another possibility is that some organizations have similar views on service provision and modes of coordination and will collaborate successfully, while others remain committed only on the formal level.

In the empirical case of introduction programme implementation in Sweden the strategy of ‘agreements’ was adopted in a fairly large number of regions and municipalities.¹ In the beginning there was considerable interest in adopting this strategy, but there has been a

¹ The strategy had in 2006 been adopted in 17 of 21 regions and about 100 of 291 municipalities with varying degrees of activity. It should be noted that a fairly large number of municipalities have a small or even no refugee reception which makes this form of collaboration more or less irrelevant.
decreasing interest in many municipalities for revising local documents and actively adhering to the strategy. The empirical study deals with the governing efforts of central governmental agencies and the responses to these efforts in two municipalities. The local collaborations selected for the study were among the most active in working with the formal document and updating it (i.e. adaptive on the formal level of collaboration). However, we would expect that actual forms of collaboration are dependent on the characteristics of the participating organizations. Some agencies like the Swedish Integration Board\(^2\) work with these issues as their main task, whereas for other organizations this is only one of many issues at hand. Sectors are organized according to different principles ranging from traditional top-down bureaucracy to NPM influenced management by objectives and results. The latter is a consequence of the NPM reforms during the 80s and 90s. These principles have been adopted for example in the Labour market sector and many local governments reformed their administration with purchaser – provider models during this period (Montin 2000). The aim was to find different actor constellations in order to highlight the impact of different institutional identities. This was, however, difficult since most of the actors were the same and in almost no municipality had non public actors been involved despite this being an explicit aim in almost all of the collaborations. The largest organizational variance was found in the local government organization. Of the two municipalities that were selected, one had a traditional bureaucratically organized administration and one was an ‘innovative’, market model organization with a purchaser – provider model. The municipalities were selected to be as similar as possible in other aspects such as size, type of region, size of immigration, type of immigration and political majority.

**Governing Local Introduction Policies in Sweden**

In this section the governing efforts of the central governmental agencies within the framework of ‘agreements’ as well as the norms underlying these efforts are described. First a short background to this system is given.

*Governance Traditions and Past Reforms*

The area of integration policy in Sweden has a long tradition of the type of governing associated with ‘governance’. However, the area has also been influenced by market model

\(^2\) This agency was recently terminated in 2007. The paper is based on empirical data from before this occurred, and the system has not (yet) changed much because of this, primarily because its tasks were transferred to other agencies.
reforms in the 80s and 90s. In the reform of 1997 when the Swedish Integration Board was created, the suggestion put forward by the immigrant policy committee was a contracting system where the state purchased individual introduction programmes and exercised control through the contracts (SOU 1996:55). This system was never realized but would have been in line with some of the reforms during the 80s and 90s. From the 70s and onward, immigration in Sweden shifted from labour immigration, primarily from the Nordic countries, to refugees. Immigrant policy implementation was organized under the National Labour Market Administration (AMV), working with these issues from a labour market perspective. After a reform in 1985 the responsibility was transferred to the Swedish Immigration Board (SIV) and directly to the municipalities, thereby decentralizing refugee reception and relieving central administration. It was perceived that refugees had more and different needs compared to labour immigrants. In the municipalities these issues were mainly organised within social service and during this period refugee policy was to embody a social service rationale (Soininen 1999). During the 90s the subsidiary system for the municipalities was reformed in order to create incentives for efficiency measures. This also gave local governments more discretion in organizing refugee policy. Another important policy change was a deregulation of resettlement in 1994 through subsidising own housing for asylum seekers. If a residence permit is given, the refugee is registered in the municipality where he has been staying during the asylum process, often with relatives in urban areas with large immigrant populations.

SIV had existed since 1969, mainly working with quota refugees and migration control. This agency had a history of working with information and norm building as a mean of influencing other agencies and the government. Their main task became that of signing agreements with municipalities on refugee reception and because they lacked strong policy instruments in terms of legislation or economic incentives they built on this tradition of using information, dialogue, negotiations and arguments of solidarity – also playing off municipalities against each other with this argument. This type of governance is still dominating the area. The Integration Board was formed through a separation of SIV into two different agencies, the other being the Migration Board. Coordination problems had been apparent for a long time and the Integration Board addressed these problems by initiating the voluntary cooperation at different administrative levels. They built this strategy on the existing networks created in the negotiation and dialogue on the quantity of reception. They also used the same term, ‘agreements’, but this time concerning quality improvement of introduction through coordination.
**Governing the Local Networks**

In 2001 the Integration Board initiated their cooperation strategy by forming an agreement with the public agencies concerned on the central administrative level. This was a formal document stating the overall goals for the introduction of newly arrived immigrants that was to provide a general framework for the creation of agreements on regional and local (municipal) levels based on the specific characteristics of the region. The aim has been to stimulate inclusion of non-public actors such as business organizations, unions and other NGOs. However, in 2005 this type of actors (one or more) had only been included in 6 of 100 agreements at the local level (Swedish Integration Board 2005). Civil servants at the Integration Board describe that NGOs are active but at the side of the more formal structures for service provision.

This is a sort of trauma for us, I believe, because it has been written in documents for God knows how long that the Swedish NGOs should be active, they are important. But in reality we have never seen this in any considerable proportions (Interview Integration Board).

The participating organizations at the central level, besides the Integration Board, were the Migration Board, AMV, the Agency for Education, the Agency for School Improvement and the Association of Local Authorities and Regions. In the beginning the aim was to create a common goal or a general picture of how the introduction should be organized. When the interviews of this study were conducted the ambitions had been lowered. The activities at the central level had been low for a couple of years but with the increase of immigration in 2006 the issue was high on the agenda. The central agreement was revised in 2006, but this revision clearly indicated the coordination problems. Instead of trying to reach a common goal the agencies simply defined their assignments and areas of responsibility, respectively. There had also been a shift in representatives, now coming from lower echelons of the organizations and not having the same mandate to represent their organization. The general perception of these representatives is that there is often a common understanding or consensus within the group, but the problem starts when they turn to their own organizations. This statement from a coordinator at AMV refers to the efforts of involving the employment offices in an earlier stage of the process:

It is like turning an oil tanker to make things happen. […] It is structures. This has been a way of working that has been routine for a long time and there has been a classic labour market policy where you have to be ready when you come to the employment office, ‘there is no use coming if you are not ready to take a job’.
Few changes occur in the individual organizations which have contributed to a lowering of expectations and ambitions. The term agreement also signals the fact that the document is not binding; it is a declaration of intent.

The agreement aimed at providing guidance for the local networks and legitimacy for engaging in inter-organizational arrangements. For the Integration Board it was also an arena for influencing the other governmental agencies that are involved in the practical provision of services such as the local employment offices of AMV. Beside this indirect form of influencing local organizations, the board has also used information, dialogue, examples of best practices and guidelines aimed directly to the local and regional levels. The work is often described as horizontal or even cross-sectoral. The experiences are that this way of working does not harmonize with the hierarchical organizations:

> We feel, most of us feel, that it is difficult to work cross-sectoral. The people you meet, in other agencies or in local governments do not see themselves as having cross-sectoral assignments. There you work in a ‘downpipe’, either with labour market issues, social service or something else. Then we come around and think horizontally; there is obviously some sort of collision here (Interview Integration Board).

Within the Integration Board they identify the organization as being a form of coordinator in the area of integration policy. Another recurring expression is that the organization is an ‘information agency’ referring to the means at hand for influencing others. This view is supported by the other organizations, often adding that it is a ‘weak’ agency in terms of being formally able to steer others.

AMV is a hierarchical organization managed by objectives and results. Their approach to cooperation with others is very much guided by thinking in terms of objectives. If in line with the organizations objectives it is possible to participate in collaborative arrangements. If not, and the cause seems just, the aim is to work internally to alter the objectives in order to be able to work with the issue. This can be a slow process and as late as in 2006 objectives were set for the target group of newly arrived immigrants.

The Migration Board is also hierarchically organized. The boards’ main activities concern the asylum process which is of a highly juridical nature. Representatives perceive integration policy as an area that only concerns them marginally. There are aspects of this in the organized activities for asylum seekers and there are administrative linkages concerning the resettlement of people granted residence permits and the transference of information. The strategy for the Migration Board in horizontal collaboration is to promote the definition of clear responsibilities and boundaries to other organizations. In the case of immigrant integration it also involves promoting minimum responsibilities for the own
organization. This agency was the main advocate behind the agreement form of the 2006 revision.

*The ‘Employment Line’ as Guiding Norm*

The problems of reaching a common understanding at the central level have resulted in goals that are quite vague. There are however some clear normative messages concerning some overall aspects of the process, especially in the earlier and more ambitious versions of the policy document. The guiding norm for integration policy in general and introduction programmes in particular has been the ‘employment line’. This concept has been present in social- and labour market policy and in the general political debate in Sweden since the beginning of the 20th century. Its meaning has varied over time and with the user but it is related to such notions as ‘workfare’ and ‘welfare-to-work’, emphasizing employment and activation over welfare contributions. In the case of immigrant integration this strategy was primarily adopted in the beginning of the 90s as a consequence of the increasing rates of unemployment among refugees. It seemed that the reform in 1985 had gone too far in emphasising the social service aspects and ‘care taking’; leading to passivity instead of putting people into jobs (Soininen 1999). This strategy of focusing on making people ‘employable’, ‘self-sufficient’ and having a job as the main criteria for integration is further emphasised in recent years. It is part of the wider European trend in immigrant integration policy of emphasizing employment, which has also introduced measures of compulsory introduction and tests for newcomers. It is based on the idea of social inclusion through employment with the underlying rationale of promoting social stability (Joppke 2007).

The primary aim of employment is dominating in the policy documents and agreements. Another dominating feature is ‘individualization’ which is a prerequisite in this approach. Individualization involves adapting the individual programmes for the needs and qualifications of the individual. A metaphor used by the Integration Board is that there should be a ‘menu’ of efforts available at the local level provided by various actors with different specialities. Individualization also involves individual responsibility and the active participation of the individual that is expected to make informed choices from this ‘menu’. There should also be ‘parallel efforts’ where the individual participate in different activities simultaneously such as language training and work practice. These services need to be provided by several organizations. A widespread perception is that a stepwise procedure has resulted in ‘lock-ins’ of individuals in government programmes. Therefore there have to be intensive parallel efforts during the first couple of years for the newly arrived.
The interviews indicate that the employment line is the dominating norm for introduction programmes but there have been some dissonance regarding this, primarily on the role of education and the courses in Swedish for immigrants (SFI). The Association of Local Authorities and Regions, a special interest organization for the local governments, have been lobbying for a stricter labour market introduction and more occupationally orientated courses. Another view is held by the Agency for Education and the Agency for School Improvement that emphasizes ‘individual development’. A civil servant working with SFI at the Agency for Education argues for this view:

They pursue a policy of integrating SFI in the employment line, and that is good but it is not good enough, because there are so many roles that you have to fill, like any other person. You are the parent of a child. You have to talk with school and child care, with Health services, and then, vocational Swedish is not enough. And well, you have to be honest when we talk about learning Swedish at work. That depends on the work place in question.

The last phrase refers to the fact that many immigrants are working with fellow countrymen or with other immigrants. The idea here is that language is also about equality, democracy and being able to participate in social life.

**Summary**

The Swedish system draws on a tradition of the type of governing associated with ‘governance’. It is characterized by a relatively large amount of discretion at the local governmental level. The local actors are not primarily governed by rules or objectives. The form of governance involved here can be described as a form of metagovernance, aiming at facilitating a coordinated service provision at the local level based on the local conditions. It is about creating arenas for interaction, having dialogue, educating and transferring the norms of the central agencies to this level. The agreements have been an important framework for this purpose, although there have been difficulties in reaching a common understanding.

The governance efforts aim at providing a programme rationale primarily based on the normative assumptions of the ‘employment line’ where a ‘menu’ of parallel activities should be offered and then adjusted to the individual requirements in order to become self-sufficient. These efforts should be intensive and restricted to a short period of time. There are, however, also organizations emphasizing individual development which have dominated the language training. Next we turn to the organizations at the local level of service provision in the two municipalities.
Municipality A: Separate Structures for Service Provision

Municipality A is a town of 80,000 inhabitants in southern Sweden with a relatively large refugee reception primarily through the system of own housing, i.e. asylum seekers settling in the municipality on their own. Municipality A and the other municipalities in this county have all adopted the strategy of agreements and are still revising the document and working within this strategy. The county Labour Market Administration has been a driving force at the regional level using the hierarchical structure of AMV to ensure that the local employment offices play a similar, active, role at the local level. Hence, there is some degree of top down control involved in keeping the local networks going. The participating actors in Municipality A are primarily three, the introduction unit of the local government administration, the employment office and the local reception unit of the Migration Board. Recently, the Health Services also joined in. The local government administration can be described as traditional. Introduction programmes are primarily provided by the introduction unit which is part of the social service administration.

Adjusting to the Norm

In the local agreement document the aim of collaboration has been defined as:

> Strengthening and clarifying cooperation between public agencies and other organizations at the local level in the work with early introduction efforts for the newly arrived. The employment objectives should aim at a quick [etablering?], increased levels of employment and occupations in line with individual qualifications. An individual perspective should be applied to the efforts and every individual’s experiences, aspirations and needs should be considered.

This captures the central elements of the programme rationale promoted by the central agencies of employment, individualization and collaborative efforts. The form of the agreement has also been adjusted according to the central agreement. In the latest revision from 2007 the different organizations stated their individual responsibilities in an appendix, despite the revised central agreement being described as a disappointment. The response to the central agreement has been to formalize and rephrase inter-organizational relations that already existed. Existing inter-organizational relations were ‘repackaged’ on the form of a local agreement. A representative from the local employment office describes the function of the agreement like this:

> It gave legitimacy to our work that did already exist on a paper but with no real status. But when it was transferred to a local agreement it all of a sudden gained more weight to the words. Even if we couldn’t

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3 These names are provisional.
see that our way of working in day-to-day activities was changed very much, it gained more value. The way we worked was sanctioned, approved and documented and all of this is important.

The ‘employment line’ has been the guiding norm for the formal collaboration but there have been difficulties in reaching a common understanding in the actual service provision procedures.

**Conflicting Views and Separate Efforts**

In practice especially the work of the local government administration is much more dominated by the social service rationale, often dismissed as ‘care taking’ in the general political discourse, than the agreement would indicate. Experiences from the practical service provision have resulted in a different view of the needs of individuals, which are the pressing problems and how the work should be done. A manager at the introduction unit describes a lack of guidance in important social issues; what to do with people that are ill, alienated or live under poor conditions? The statement below refers to a case of complicated legal status and expired temporary resident permits:

Nobody tells us what to do, we ask but no one knows. We solve the problems on our own and somewhere, as we go along, we have to stand there and say that we did wrong but there was nothing to do that was right. […] These are really complicated questions, ethical questions that really needed to be… this probably concerns the whole of EU, how this should be dealt with, but at least in the whole of Sweden. We sit like this in every municipality, solving our own problems.

The experiences expressed here are that there are many people that do not fit the normative frame of the ’employment line’ and that its optimistic assumptions clashes with a more complex reality. The same person continues:

Up there, they think that people come here in their working clothes with the hammer in their back pocket and ready for work, but it isn’t like that with refugees.

The policies and guidance from above do not deal with these social aspects as much as they do with labour market policy. Instead other channels of information are used, such as networks of refugee coordinators from different municipalities. Here ideas, solutions and methods are exchanged and mimicking others is common.

There are conflicting views on how services should be provided between the organizations. The employment office is not involved until the immigrant has finished most of the SFI. Work practice during this period is provided by the introduction unit. Much of this practice does not aim directly at employment but at practical language training. Some immigrants have participated in a pilot project initiated from the top of AMV where the employment office enters the process at an earlier stage. The result of this is telling. The
employment office has now developed similar efforts as the introduction unit because they have learned that it is difficult to provide employment when language skills are low. Hence, instead of having different functions, similar services are provided in separate structures for service provision. The directions from the top often alter the prioritized objectives for the employment office which make inter-organizational commitments difficult. There is also a clash between the goal orientated view with focus on employment and a more social service orientated view on service provision. One comment from the introduction unit is that entering the process earlier may be a learning experience for the employment office.

**Shared Norms in Municipality B**

Municipality B has a population of 130,000 inhabitants and is located in the middle of Sweden. The size of refugee reception is similar to Municipality A. Almost all of the municipalities in the county have adopted the strategy of agreements. The participating actors are identical to Municipality A but here the Health Services have been more active. The local government organization is different as well. The local government reformed their administration with a purchaser–provider model in the beginning of the 90s. Private competition is common in some areas, not so much within the area of introduction, but there are plans of contracting out SFI. The model, however, is also used for managing public providers of which the introduction unit is one.

*Harmonizing Identities and Shared Norms*

The goals of the local agreement emphasize individualization and efforts for employment. It also mentions ‘equal opportunities, rights and obligations’ in all areas of society. The central agreement is described by a manager at the introduction unit as ‘clarifying the expectations’ on the local organizations, especially the ones under direct control of central government such as the employment office. Hence, the local agreement is a reaction to these expectations and has been a tool for engaging the public organizations concerned.

In this municipality a shared understanding has developed, primarily in the group of representatives but serious efforts of tackling the difficult issue of transferring this understanding to the rest of the organizations have been made by organizing different joint events to initiate interaction at different levels of organization. Both the local government administration and the employment office are managed by objectives and results and this has been a uniting factor. Therefore, it is easy to understand why creating shared quantifiable
objectives have become an important area of development. The reasons behind the shared understanding are further elaborated by the representative from the employment office:

We have devoted time for dialogue and informing each other and I believe very much in setting common objectives. We have always talked about the goal of providing the best introduction for the individual as possible so that he or she can become self-sufficient as soon as possible. This has been the guiding star all along. Also, we have been very open and honest when explaining to each other what we want to do and what we can do. Want and can are not always the same, but it is the ‘wanting’ that is the most important. When intentions are good there can be acceptance and understanding for not always being able.

Developing a shared understanding is facilitated by similar norms in the organizations on how the work should be done. The organizations display similar identities which have facilitated cooperation and they have grown closer over the years. This statement by a manager at the Migration Board also makes reference to why it is difficult to involve non-public actors:

The people in the group can easily understand each others roles. It’s much easier when public organizations cooperate. It becomes more difficult with NGOs or private actors. They don’t have the type of rules and assignments that we do. We had a project here with the Health Services, the Red Cross, school, and local government administration; a private company was also involved. It was a wide mixture and especially the Migration Board was difficult to understand and the premises for our work. During the first two years I had to explain our role: we can’t always go with our heart, we have to follow asylum legislation, no matter what we think of it. We can’t exceed our limits; we have rules stating what we can do and cannot do with our money. It took a while for them to understand that we have to be who we are. […] These problems are not that common when you work with the public organizations, although there have been some issues. Sometimes they don’t understand why we have to be so strict, that we reject people that are so well adjusted and so on. But this has been solved in this group because there has been openness and understanding for each others roles and the right personal chemistry.

An open climate has facilitated the development of a common understanding, primarily based on the employment line, between these public organizations.

Traces of Joint Efforts
The distinction between ‘want’ and ‘can’ indicates that a common understanding and shared norms do not necessarily lead to joint efforts. As in Municipality A the employment office has difficulties in making long-term commitments due to sudden changes in priorities, objectives and financial resources. The Migration Board is suffering from ambivalent directives concerning how much they should be involved in integration policy implementation.

The collaboration has resulted in some joint efforts. One of the shared ideas about how introduction should be organized is a firm belief in creating a ‘one-stop-shop’, i.e. sharing the same building and organizing service provision around the needs of the client. There have been attempts at creating this type of service, notably called ‘the employment line’, but it has been hampered by organizational and budgetary changes for the employment office and put on ice. Another joint effort has been the creation of Health facilities serving the
newly arrived refugees with various specialists on common health problems among the group. On a more general level, both in Municipality B and, to some extent, in Municipality A, the agreements have increased interaction and cooperation between civil servants from the different organizations concerning individual cases. The differences in service provision should not be exaggerated between the two. Most of the activities and programmes are similar. Many of the activities in Municipality B are social service orientated. Ideas on efforts for activating homebound women, rehabilitation, social interaction, practicing language and so on are diffused through the semi-formal networks of refugee coordinators, ‘we compare, take some here and give some there’. There is a general openness to new ideas concerning these areas and, not surprisingly, many adopt similar services of this kind.

**Concluding Remarks**

The strategy of agreements in Swedish integration policy has been a form of indirect governance, or metagovernance, aiming at initiating and facilitating collaborative efforts in introduction programme implementation. In line with the wider European trend of emphasizing employment and ‘self-sufficiency’ in integration policy, the central governmental agencies has promoted a normative framework primarily based on the ‘employment line’. The aim has been that local organizations adopt this as their programme rationale and organize their efforts around the collective goal of labour market integration. In the beginning the ambitions were high and the initiative enjoyed a substantial status, which is reflected in a widespread creation of formal collaborations early on. By time, the ambitions have been lowered at the central level because of the difficulties in forming common goals and more precise guidelines, which is reflected in a decreased activity in many municipalities.

Both of the local networks studied here have created a formal collaboration based on the ‘employment line’ aiming at ‘individualization’, ‘parallel efforts’ and ‘self-sufficiency’. When adjusting to the demands from outside it is more important to adjust the formal collaboration, thereby gaining legitimacy. Without a shared understanding and norms for service provision the collaboration is likely to become a ‘talk shop’. Developing shared norms can be difficult if organizations’ institutional identities are not harmonizing, such as in Municipality A where there are conflicting views on service provision. In Municipality B shared norms have developed primarily based on the employment line. Harmonizing identities, similarities in market model management and focus on objectives has facilitated this process. A reaction by public organizations, either bureaucratically governed or managed
by objectives, is to preserve traditional and institutionalized lines of accountability. This reaction is characteristic for AMV and the Migration Board in this context. The exclusion of non-public actors is also symptomatic. It should be noted that even if a shared understanding has developed this might not be in line with the demands from outside. Hence, even here the formal collaboration can be decoupled from the actual collaborative efforts. An existing collaboration of this kind can easily be ‘repackaged’ to fit with changing demands.

To the outside the employment line is in full practice in the Swedish municipalities. Beyond this formal appearance a more social service orientated programme is provided. The narrow frame of the employment line and the often simplistic assumptions of the guiding principles advocated at the top are difficult to accommodate at the local level. Working at this level means dealing with fundamental problems such as physical and mental illness, poor standards of living, alienation, segregation and labour market discrimination. To deal with these conflicting demands the formal collaboration, consisting of formal statements, meetings and declarations of intent can be more or less decoupled from the actual coordination of service provision, resulting in a ‘talk shop’. This informal collaboration, if at all existent, is conditioned by the institutional norms guiding behaviour in the different organizations. If not provided from central administration, guidance in the important issues at hand is sought elsewhere such as in networks of similar organizations facing similar problems. Also, to be able to move from shared understanding to joint efforts there has to be actual capacities for realizing the intentions.

References


