TSFEPS Project
Changing Family Structures and Social Policy: Child Care Services in Europe and Social Cohesion

Case Study
Sweden

Victor Pestoff
Peter Strandbrink
with the assistance of Joachim Andersson, Nina Seger and Johan Vamstad

Small children in a big system. A case study of childcare in Stockholm and Östersund

Swedish case study for the 5th framework research EU-project TSFEPS
Final revised version, March 29 2004

* * * * *

Victor Pestoff
Department of political science
Mid-Sweden university
SE-831 25 Östersund, SWEDEN

email: victor.pestoff@mh.se
phone: +46-63-165763

Peter Strandbrink
Department of political science
Södertörn University College
SE-141 89 Huddinge, SWEDEN

email: peter.strandbrink@sh.se
phone: +46-8-6084581

Research assistant, Östersund
Nina Seger

Research assistants, Stockholm
Joachim Andersson
Johan Vamstad

Contents

1	Introduction	5
2	Methodology	10
3	Empirical analysis	20
3.1	Stockholm: city-wide level	20
3.2	Stockholm: the Maria-Gamla Stan ward	38
3.2.1	User experience of municipal childcare in Maria-Gamla Stan	47
3.2.2	User experience of co-operative childcare in Maria-Gamla Stan	50
3.2.3	User experience of corporate childcare in Maria-Gamla Stan	52
3.3	Stockholm: the Skärholmen ward	56
3.3.1	Local managerial level in municipal childcare in Skärholmen	63
3.3.2	User experience of municipal childcare in Skärholmen	68
3.3.3	Local managerial level in co-operative childcare in Skärholmen	70
3.3.4	User experience of co-operative childcare in Skärholmen	77
3.3.5	Local managerial level in for-profit childcare in Skärholmen	79
3.3.6	User experience of for-profit childcare in Skärholmen	85
3.4	Stockholm: the Bromma ward	87
3.5	Östersund	92
4	Conclusion: social cohesion and Swedish childcare	100
	References	107
	Interviews	107

Tables

Table 1. Demographic and childcare facility data for the local units of analysis (2002) 12
Table 2. Set-up and structure of the studied childcare facilities 16
Table 3. Set of interviews conducted for the study 18
Table 4. User satisfaction with Stockholm's childcare conditions 1996 & 1999 22
Table 5. User satisfaction with levels of information and ability to influence 1996 & 1999 24
Table 6. Welfare budget 2003, Skärholmen ward, million SEK [million €] 58

1 Introduction

This study has four sections. In the first, some features of the Swedish political and childcare systems are introduced. The second addresses methodological issues: the logic behind our choice of local units of analysis, practical methodology, the study's analytical structure and some theoretical considerations. The actual case study is found in section three and the study's results and conclusions in section four.

Let us begin by noting that the topic of Swedish family policy and childcare gained much acclaim at the "Progressive Politicians" meeting in London in July 2003. A few weeks later the Swedish prime minister, Göran Persson, pleaded for a yes vote in the September 2003 referendum on Swedish membership in the EMU. In a "Debate" article in the leading daily newspaper, he made clear reference to the need to broadly address issues of family policy in Europe. He also presented a Social Democratic eight-point programme for the future of Europe. His main argument for a yes-vote was that Sweden must forcefully participate in the modernisation of the European Union in a number of areas – like full employment, development of the welfare state model and the extension of childcare. Under the heading "increased equality" he wrote:

> Sweden will forcefully promote the development of childcare [in the European Union]: at least 90 % of children three years and older should be enrolled in preschool facilities by 2010 and one-third of the children under three years age should have access to childcare. More women must get the possibility to participate in work life. The desire of both men and women to be able to combine an active family life with an active professional career will promote a modern family policy. Greater participation in work life will be decisive for Europe's possibility to deal with the challenges that an aging population creates.[1]

In this case study of Swedish childcare, provision of this social service in two cities is analysed: Stockholm and Östersund. The study both conducts independent empirical work and takes advantage of the large amount of academic and public evaluation and analysis available in Sweden.

To choose to study childcare policy in two Swedish cities, Stockholm and Östersund, is by definition to include a number of geographical, demographic and social dimensions in the analytical structure. However, given the universal and highly developed character

[1] *Dagens Nyheter*, August 3, 2003.

of the Swedish childcare system, structural variations between the cases will not be as large as that found in most other countries participating in the TSFEPS project. The Swedish childcare system distinguishes itself by its high levels of system coherence and national uniformity. The national legislative framework governs childcare (as well as most other welfare) services provided at the local level. Such services tend therefore to be more homogenous than where left to local or regional initiatives. But even so, the system should not be interpreted as too uniform. As will become apparent below, the local landscapes of childcare in Östersund and the three wards investigated in Stockholm each have a number of specific traits, unlike those exhibited by the other cases. It is useful, we therefore suggest, to approach the "big" Swedish childcare system using two different sets of glasses. One focusing structural uniformity and large-scale coherence; one taking local style varieties into account.

In Sweden municipalities are ultimately responsible for the provision of childcare, and thus have some margin for particular solutions in line with local needs, but always within the boundaries of the broader, state-controlled and financed, system. Most basic ideological, justice-related, financial or institutional issues concerning how childcare should be organized are not local matters. Childcare services in Stockholm will thus to a large extent structurally resemble those found in Östersund, as too will the nature of provision across and between Stockholm's sub-municipal wards. (The existence, however, of alternative childcare provision for more than 30 years begs the question why parents and staff continue to support non-municipal daycare services.)

On the one hand, this implies that the policy distance between Stockholm and Östersund (some 600 km north) is bound to be modest. On the other, we consider it a challenge to systematically reflect on variations against and in spite of this institutional and socio-political background. This is necessarily a study conducted from "the inside" of a comprehensive system. In Sweden, the debates on what type of childcare system should be adopted have been all but finished. Discussions today deal with fine-tuning rather than major change in the field. Swedish society in a sense seems to have passed through the phases of formulating and adopting comprehensive universal childcare policies and

made the corresponding sacrifices in terms of alternative social values[2]. The overall consensus about the direction and future of public financed childcare is, of course, probably unique to Sweden. Our contribution to this European analytical effort will thus be in the direction of *reflecting on childcare from within a universal system*. However, it may be worth noting that day care services were often included in the broader public debate about privatisation of social services during the 1990s. Some proponents went so far as to argue that there were no relevant differences between running a day care centre and managing a McDonalds fast-food restaurant.

Each Swedish municipality (there are 289 at present) organises childcare in accordance with the national structural norms. In this respect, the centralised tradition in Swedish political life comes across quite clearly.[3] It should be kept in mind that Sweden is a unitary, not a federal state. Regional or county governments play no role in providing childcare services in Sweden. Therefore, a concept such as *governance* works differently in Sweden, than, for instance, in contemporary Germany or France. From a conventional point of view, the concept of governance implies that the powers of political decision-making have become less centred in one set of hands, i.e. the public sector. In countries with more fragmented and complex historical conditions it follows that new ways and means for controlling policy structures may develop. The process of Europeanisation is often considered illustrative of this thesis. On a general note, higher levels of Europeanisation can indeed make more sense to approach in terms of the subjectivity-weaker concept of governance. But as will become apparent below, in the field of Swedish childcare policy, the relevance of this concept is perhaps less direct than in other policy fields, or in other political contexts. The Swedish childcare system is apparently still to a substantial degree subjected to *government* in a rather subjectivity-strong and uniform sense. Our investigation indicates that Swedish social policy allows for some institutional variety, but not, for instance, in terms of financing

[2] Note, however, the Christian Democratic Party still promotes the idea of a "parental allowance" (*vårdnadsbidrag*) for those parents (read: women) who prefer to stay home and care for their own children, rather than send them to municipal or private day care facilities or a nearby childminder service.

[3] It is worth noting here that there are other publicly supported forms of childcare apart from institutional day care. The main alternative is the institution of childminding [*familjedaghem*], which amounts to the solution that a parent (almost invariably a mother) minds other children together with her own in her private home. The prevalence of this solution is marginal, however, and a recent article in a major Swedish daily newspaper puts forth the view that it ought to be phased-out within five years. *Dagens Nyheter*, August 11, 2003.

or other decisive "hard" policy issues. Here, the *maxtaxa* reforms that limit parent fees for day care services[4] illustrate the point. The policy structure is clearly comprehensive and the system only modestly influenced by different non-public stakeholders or by any other political or administrative levels than central and municipal government.

Until the 1990s, local governments wielded relatively little influence over the nature and development of childcare solutions in Sweden. Their role was to implement national goals rather than to reform or challenge established policy structures. As seen elsewhere, there is a spectrum of local providers of childcare, but the services offered by non-municipal providers of various kinds do not radically differ in their basic structures from those provided by most Swedish municipalities in terms of patterns of financing, professional and educational standards, staff recruitment, security and insurance legislation and educational and social goals.[5] Main childcare staff categories are thus the same in every Swedish region, regardless of local social variations, pedagogical programmes and so forth. The leading staff category has the same academic background (to which complementary training is often added).

Variations in the Swedish landscape of childcare service thus have to do with the adaptation of the system to local demographic and social patterns and with local ideological differences in terms of public/private provision of personal social services. Today, legislation is indeed comprehensive, but of a "softer" kind than in the 1970s-80s. There are no legal obstacles to childcare initiatives from outside the public sector. The possibilities for this are, as will become apparent in the study, fairly good. In this sense, the unified and strict character of traditional Swedish childcare politics, even at the level of practice, has changed. There is a connection here, we suggest, to the larger Swedish trend during the 1980s-90s to move from detailed policy-regulation to more overriding framework legislation, particularly in the social welfare sector. The state is now far less involved than before in how, for instance, elder care, schools, preschools and other welfare institutions and solutions are organized. Instead, municipalities are charged with the full responsibility to provide these services under certain structural formats.

Another element that needs to be mentioned is the fact that in Sweden, preschool childcare is designed to provide full-day care for children between 1-5 years old.

[4] See Pestoff & Strandbrink, 2002 for details.

Generally speaking, the Swedish childcare norm is thus full-day attendance. This means that most children are at their facilities from the morning (7-9 AM) to the afternoon (3-6 PM), including meals, rest after lunch and a snack in the afternoon. Breakfast is also provided, if required by families with early schedules. Parents have the right to part-time care if they so desire, but in practice, the great majority of children in day care arrive in the morning and leave in the afternoon. There is thus no equivalent in Sweden to the part-time childcare structures without meals, as found elsewhere in the European childcare sector.

One important point in need of stress in this context is that children normally remain in the same facility throughout their preschool years, i.e. 1 to 5 years old. Larger childcare facilities tend to be organized in two or three different age groups, whereas smaller facilities normally use the "sibling principle", i.e. run an integrated group for all the children. To our knowledge, there are no childcare centres that only admit preschool children of a certain age span, such as 1-2, 2-3 or 4-5 years old. Continuity in terms of children's social and personal relationships is in this sense a defining mark of Swedish childcare, as too is the lack of institutional seams.

In addition, childcare in Sweden comes under the auspices of the National Board of Education (*Skolverket*), rather than being divided into age categories and supervised by two or more different public authorities, like health and sanitation authorities for the 0-3 year olds and education authorities for the 3-6 year olds, as in most other TSFEPS countries. Neither do county or regional authorities have any substantial say in Swedish childcare policy nor service provision, as is often the case in other TSFEPS countries.

[5] Pestoff & Strandbrink 2002.

2 Methodology

Differences between Stockholm and Östersund

The comparison between Stockholm and Östersund touches on a range of differences in the Swedish political and social landscape. Stockholm is the country's major urban and population area, Östersund is a medium-size municipality in the sparsely populated central part of the country. Whereas Östersund is close to the geographical centre, Stockholm epitomises the national centre in terms of politics, culture, administration and economy. For Stockholm, being the centre of social and economical power is a real condition of public life as well as part of the identity. Stockholm's problems and issues are thus often confused in local minds with those of Sweden. The municipality as well as the local economy are by far the largest in the country. The distance to the state and government is relatively short. In Östersund, the distance to the state is in most respects much greater and local issues are rarely able to achieve perceived levels of national importance or general interest. Being part of the political periphery, a local notion of defiance is sometimes understood as being cultivated there.

The Stockholm polity also has to cope with the difference between meeting high-status inner city needs and more diverse suburban needs. The social and cultural fabric is more complex. Gentrification is increasing in the city as well as in parts of the more affluent outer departments and municipalities, whereas problems having to do with integration, unemployment, welfare and social needs seem to vary within the greater Stockholm area. In Östersund, there are relatively few equivalences to these structural patterns and challenges, qualitatively or quantitatively. Neither issues having to do with housing nor integration nor education, for instance, pose similar problems here. For cities in the central and northern parts of the country, the traditionally most pressing political cause is to stem the tide of depopulation and centralisation – in economical, industrial, social, political, cultural and demographic regards.

The labour market also differs between the two cases but the main general point to be made here is that the sheer size of Stockholm gives many social and political issues a quite different momentum. Stockholm is a more cosmopolitan and politically complex part of Swedish society, compared to Östersund's slower pace and lesser scale. In terms of size, as can be surmised from table 1 below, Östersund equals one of Stockholm's 18

sub-municipal wards.

Stockholm is thus the capital of the country and the main population centre of Sweden. Approximately 1.7 million of the country's nearly 9 million residents live in the greater Stockholm area; about 750.000 in the city of Stockholm. The city is administratively divided into 18 (originally 24) wards or departments, responsible, among other things, for meeting and administering local welfare needs, including preschool care. However, given the size of the city and lack of political independence for the wards (there are no elections to this sub-municipal level), there is also a central educational administration [*utbildningsförvaltningen*] dealing both with non-municipal and, to a limited extent, municipal childcare and schooling. Matters and needs concerning municipal facilities tend to be evenly spread and can thus be attended to at the sub-municipal ward level. But non-municipal childcare is more sparsely and unevenly distributed across the city, making possibilities for equal consideration of the needs of non-municipal facilities for childcare and schooling harder to achieve, the argument goes, in the absence of a central function of this kind.

The political structure of the city of Stockholm thus influences the logic of this part of the case study. In Stockholm, we have for this reason followed the city's structure and adopted a three-tier model, compared to the two-tier structure characteristic of cities the size of Östersund. In Stockholm, we have opted to interview public officials responsible for childcare provision and supervision both at the city-wide educational administration and at three sub-municipal wards [*stadsdelsnämnder*]: Bromma, Skärholmen and Maria-Gamla Stan.

For the Stockholm part of the study, we have chosen to study three facilities in two of the wards: Maria-Gamla Stan and Skärholmen. In each of these wards we describe and analyse one municipal facility, one non-municipal parent co-operative facility and one non-municipal facility run on a for-profit basis. For each of these, interviews have been conducted with one user family. In the ward of Skärholmen, interviews have also been conducted with the managers of the same three facilities. One difficulty in this respect is the fact that single-facility managers are becoming exceptions in the municipal world of childcare. Instead, intermediate unit or area managers are increasingly assuming the managing responsibility for greater numbers of facilities. Following this development,

the management function in municipal childcare is today rather dealt with directly from the central ward level. The ability for municipally run facilities to make autonomous and individual practice-based decisions regarding the way things are done has in this sense decreased. As shown in the study this is partly acknowledged at the service level, giving some providers an argument for leaving the municipal fold.

From the level of the sub-municipal administrative ward down, the structure of the Stockholm study thus mirrors the Östersund study, with the important exception that the ward level in Stockholm merely is an administrative function, indeed branch, of the city level, whereas in Östersund, the corresponding level is identical to the political level of the municipality. In Stockholm, the ward level largely lacks independent capability for political action. In this context, it ought mainly be interpreted as a tool for administrative implementation. A primary purpose of the reform on the city level was to decentralise power and decision making. In the field of childcare, this aim seems not to have been fulfilled, which could have to do with the character of the Swedish childcare system. Legal parameters for provision of this welfare service are rather distinct.[6]

The three Stockholm wards differ from each other in several regards. An introduction to the socio-economical, demographical and welfare character of each unit is provided in the following. In table 1, some basic data are supplied.[7] For easy comparison, Östersund is also included in the table.

Table 1. Demographic and childcare facility data for the local units of analysis (2002)

	Total population	1-5 year-olds[8]		Childcare facilities	Non-municipal	Co-ops
		total number	*percent of population*	*total number*	*percent of all*	*percent of all*
Bromma	59.059	3433	5.8	110	26	10
Skärholmen	31.410	1914	6.1	43	19	2
Maria-Gamla Stan	64.048	2512	3.9	69	68	26
Östersund	58.000	2626	4.5	55	18	18

[6] Cf Almqvist 2001, p 42-43.
[7] Most official municipal data is available at www.stockholm.se.

Table 1 shows the population, number of children and number of child care facilities in the three administrative wards chosen for study in Stockholm and in Östersund. It also includes the percentage of the population that is between 0-5 years old as well as the percentage of all childcare facilities that are either non-municipal or cooperative. Here we can note that the Stockholm ward of Maria-Gamla Stan has the smallest proportion of 0-5 year olds, only 3.9 %, and Skärholmen has the highest, 6.1 %, while Bromma and Östersund fall in between these two. On the whole, the proportion of 0-5 year olds is greater in both Stockholm City and Greater Stockholm, where it reaches 6.4 % and 7.0 % respectively. In terms of the proportion of non-municipal childcare facilities Maria-Gamla Stan leads with 68 % while both Skärholmen and Östersund are at the low end, with under 20 % each. In terms of the proportion of parent co-ops Maria-Gamla Stan leads again with 26 %, while Skärholmen has barely 2 %, but all of Östersund's non-municipal facilities are run as parent co-operatives.

Of the investigated Stockholm cases, the Bromma ward is situated on the western brink of the inner city. It is the most central and most socially and economically well-to-do of the five wards to the west of the central city. The ward rates relatively low in terms of social and cultural heterogeneity. Skärholmen is a southern suburb, some distance from the central city, nesting up against the municipal boundaries. This part of Stockholm was incorporated into the municipality relatively recently and contains numerous large housing projects from the expansive 1960s-70s. It scores relatively high in terms of social and cultural heterogeneity, but below average levels in terms of affluence. Maria-Gamla Stan, lastly, is one of the inner city's five wards, mostly made up of half of the large island of Södermalm, but also of the smaller and in this context less significant historical old town district. Södermalm was only populated on a massive scale during the beginning of the 20th century, making this one of the most recent of the inner city additions. When it urbanised, the island predominantly received poorer sections of the population and industrial expansion/overflow from the then more central, northern parts of the city as these had begun to fill up.

The topography of Stockholm does not provide conditions for the city to sprawl. The main city is built on 14 islands at the spot where the great lake to the west, *Mälaren*, has

[8] For Stockholm city and Greater Stockholm, the age span in this column is 0-5.

a narrow outlet into the Baltic Sea and the extensive archipelago eastwards.[9] For this reason, urbanisation on any scale has to be suburban and occur towards the north or the south. In neither case is a seamless continuity with inner city structural, urban or social landscapes possible. Urban expansion therefore – particularly during the 20th century – took place in what could be described as planned leaps, rather than organically and incrementally. Today, the working-class heritage of the island of Södermalm, however, is mythologized, and (as in the rest of the inner city) gentrification is moving fast. Its two wards are reasonably affluent, with fair levels of socio-cultural heterogeneity, for the inner city. The most recent figures indicate that the rate of childcare enrolment in the entire city of Stockholm today is 93 % of all 1-5 years olds.

Östersund, on the other hand, is the regional centre of the county of Jämtland and has about 58.000 inhabitants. The municipality is geographically quite large, and covers the city and a number of small surrounding villages. Most people work in the city and the main working areas are care, trade and communication, manufacturing and extraction, as well as generating electric power. About 25.000 people are employed by different municipal branches, out of the total number of 35.000 gainfully employed in Östersund.

There are about 45 different childcare centres run by the municipality of Östersund and about 10 parent co-operative facilities. These are the only two kinds of childcare centres in this area for parents to choose between; there are no private, for-profit, facilities. The childcare centres are evenly distributed throughout the municipality, but with a larger concentration in the city area. The reason could be that many parents work in the central city and the facilities are placed nearby for their convenience. The total number of children between 1-5 years old who have access to childcare centres, is 2626 and out of these about 2200 (i.e. 84 %) children are enrolled at a childcare centre.[10]

There are about 150 children enrolled citywide in official childminding homes, usually run by a mother with children of her own [*dagmamma*] who cares for a few (not more than five) children in her home. These facilities usually operate longer hours and often have a higher level of flexibility, giving parents with longer or more irregular working hours a possibility to use the city's childcare. As one of the underlying aims of childcare is to make the combination of work and family responsibilities easier, the introduction

[9] This is often considered the primary reason for the original city location in the 13th century.

of the *maxtaxa* enables more parents to work full-time. This means more children are present in the childcare system, which in turn requires more staff. Another consequence is that pedagogical groups are getting larger. The usual staff-to-child ratio is about 18 children in a group with three preschool teachers. 89 % of all Östersund children 1-5 years old attend childcare in one form or another.

While the mother, or the father, stays at home with a sibling the older child is entitled to 15 hours/week at a childcare centre. This is a way to let the children keep their place in the centre and a possibility for them to stay in the group of children that they are used to. In addition to this reform, the local Swedish church in Östersund has for the last 30 years provided something that is called *Kyrkis* or *Kyrkans barntimmar* – "the church's children hours". This is a way for 3-5 year-olds to spend some time at the church for a few hours every week (the amount of time differs between churches but is on average about four hours/week) with other children. There is also an employee from the church present. Parents are not required to remain with the children during the sessions and there is no fee. In Östersund, about 50 children are enrolled in this activity each term.

In Sweden it is normal for both parents to work, after having children.[11] When a child is born parents are eligible for 480 days of parent leave [*föräldraledighet*] between them. Currently, these 16 months can be shared in any way the parents choose (except for one month/parent) and the most common solution chosen by families is to stay at home with the baby until it is about one years old. After that the parental insurance can be used for reducing either the mother's or the father's working hours, while the baby stays in childcare. Even if one of the parents is unemployed, they still have the right to use the service for 15 hours a week.

An introduction to five of the local childcare facilities in both cities investigated in the study is given in table 2 below.

[10] Most official figures are available at www.ostersund.se.
[11] Cf Pestoff & Strandbrink 2002.

Table 2. Set-up and structure of the studied childcare facilities

	Number of children	Number of children's groups	Full-time pedagogic staff	Children / pedagogic staff	Full-time kitchen staff	Parent resource
Municipal, Östersund	90	5	15	6	1,25	-
Co-op (1), Östersund	18	1	3,15	5,7	-	1
Co-op (2), Östersund	35	2	6,25	5,6	1,75	1
Municipal, Maria-Gamla Stan	54	3	3	6	-	-
Co-op, Maria-Gamla Stan	15	1	3	5	-	1

Table 2 describes in greater detail the set-up and structure of some of the investigated childcare facilities. Normally, a facility with more than a certain number of children will be divided into a number of sections, with about 15-18 children in each of them. Of the facilities in the table we see that the municipal one in Östersund is the largest, with 90 children divided into five sections, while the parent co-op in Stockholm is the smallest with only 15 children, followed closely by the parent co-op in Östersund, with only 18 children. It is common for parent co-operatives to be small, normally only comprised of one section or 15 to 18 children, while municipal day care centres are often made up of four or five sections, or up to 100 children. There are separate rooms for each section in the municipal day care centres, but they may share playgrounds and cooking facilities. The child/staff ratio is slightly greater in the municipal facilities compared with the co-ops. Information on the set-up has neither been available to us for the remaining for-profit facility in Maria-Gamla Stan, nor for the three facilities we study in Skärholmen.

As we have discussed elsewhere, the logic of the Swedish childcare system is today not generally challenged. There is a universal childcare system in place that enjoys very high levels of support and legitimacy amongst the Swedish population. The state of research in the field is also fairly satisfactory. Particularly for the city of Stockholm, that runs its own Office for Research and Statistics [*Utrednings- och Statistikkontoret, USK*] that is continually producing and analysing data on the municipality's responsibilities.

This work is conducted both by in-office analysts and commissioned out to academic institutes and social scientists in disciplines such as public economy, political science, cultural geography, statistics, demography and sociology.

In the field of childcare implementation, two major city-wide survey studies have been conducted by this Office during the late 1990s that tie in well with the empirical agenda of this effort (i.e. Ivarsson 1996, "What parents think of childcare in Stockholm" [USK-report 1996:3] and Ivarsson 1999, "Preschool care in Stockholm 1999 – what parents think, a comparison with 1996" [USK-report 1999:2]). Still another study of a similar nature is under preparation. The aim of the 1999 report is to analyse changes in user views of the field, particularly in the light of the 1990s ward reform. We will lean heavily on the most recent one of these surveys below. The main reason is that these investigations (and other analyses conducted nationally) provide more elaborate and quantitatively more extensive results than we're able to accomplish within the present TSFEPS-framework. The Stockholm section of the study will draw on this research.

The logic of Stockholm's childcare system makes it reasonable to divide the analysis in the following parts. In part 3.1 we will concentrate on the city level. In parts 3.2-4 we focus on childcare on the ward level. Interviews have thus been conducted both with the municipal officer responsible for the central coordination of childcare city-wide and with the responsible administrative officers at the studied wards: this means four in-depth interviews with Stockholm administrators, one at the central city-level and three at the different wards. At the intermediate local managerial level (a phenomenon that seems to be in the process of being abandoned – as individual childcare facilities in Stockholm today do not necessarily sport local managers responsible only for that one particular facility), three interviews have also been performed in the Skärholmen ward. A set of personal interviews have, additionally, been conducted both in Maria-Gamla Stan and Skärholmen wards with parents of children enrolled in municipal, co-operative and for-profit childcare, respectively. All interviews are compiled in table 3 below.

We would like to point out, however, that in Stockholm as well as in most other larger cities that have for-profit childcare, there are two main varieties of the this kind of childcare. One is *corporate* (which is also the term we have chosen for it here). This means that childcare is provided by a large corporation that is often active in this as well

as other social welfare fields, like primary and secondary education and care for the elderly. To this sub-category belongs the pioneer private company *Pysslingen*, but also other corporate players today like *Ask & Embla* and *Vittra*.[12]

The second for-profit service type bears little resemblance to these corporations except in terms of having the same legal company-form. Individual facilities of this kind were typically earlier run municipally, but then taken over by the staff and converted to small private firms, often on the initiative of local politicians. The resemblance is marginal between care of this kind and corporate childcare. These small, one-facility firms often work very much along the same lines and with the same goals and aspirations as regular municipal facilities. The non-municipal, for-profit facility included in the Skärholmen section of the study belongs to this category.

Part 3.5 contains the Östersund study. Here, interviews have been conducted with the Social Democratic head of the municipal Committee for Children and Education on the local level. On the service level, with a manager of a municipal childcare centre just outside the centre of the city; a manager of a parent co-operative centre situated in a small village outside Östersund; and a manager of a *Reggio Emilia*-inspired parent co-op in the central city. Additionally, one parent of a child at each of these three facilities is interviewed.[13] Seven interviews have thus in the context of the study been conducted in Östersund and thirteen in Stockholm.

Table 3. Set of interviews conducted for the study

	City level	Ward level	Managers	Parents	Σ	*Section in text*
Stockholm	1				1	*3.1*
- Maria-Gamla Stan		1		3	4	*3.2*
- Skärholmen		1	3	3	7	*3.3*
- Bromma		1			1	*3.4*
Östersund	1		3	3	7	*3.5*
Total number	2	3	6	9	**20**	

[12] We discuss the first of these companies in Pestoff & Strandbrink 2002. The parent of a child in for-profit care interviewed in the Maria-Gamla Stan section below has, however, been a user of the childcare services of the latter one of these companies.

[13] All Östersund interviews were recorded and transcribed. In Stockholm, notes were taken.

All interviewed parents in both cities were promised anonymity. In the empirical section below, the Stockholm parents in Maria-Gamla Stan will be referred to as parents A, B and C; the ones in Skärholmen as G, H, I; and the Östersund parents as D, E and F. In this way, the integrity of these childcare users is not compromised.[14] We believe that this makes the conditions more favourable to receive a frank view of the services used.

[14] A listing of all interviews is appended after the text.

3 Empirical analysis

As indicated above, the empirical part of the investigation is divided into five sub-sections: one for treatment of Stockholm at the city-wide level, one for each of the three Stockholm wards and one for Östersund, respectively. All empirical cases are organised and analysed under the following headings: goals, diversity, financing, access, service quality, integration and participation. For the city of Stockholm and its three wards, the logic of the field implies that even though all of these headings are present at the outset of the analysis, their presence further down the road is partly irregular. This is caused by the fact that in a universal childcare system like Sweden's, the conditions in terms, for instance, of goals, financing or professional set-up are all but identical across the field. It would therefore – unless there be obvious local variations – be meaningless to repeat the same circumstantial observations under each heading over and over again. This aspect of the study should thus be interpreted as cumulative.

3.1 Stockholm: City-wide level

Goals

As a major public evaluation of the state of the Swedish welfare state during the last decade writes, the primary national goals for Swedish childcare policy have for a long time been: to stimulate children's development through pedagogical work; to counter and equalise social differences in family and upbringing conditions between different segments of the population; and to ease the combination of work/educational and family responsibilities.[15]

Besides these overriding childcare goals, a new activity plan for Stockholm's childcare has been adopted in the fall of 2003, specifying local goals and other parameters. The main legal bases for childcare in Stockholm (and in the country) are the School law, the United Nations' children's convention and the regulations laid out by the *National Agency for Education* [LPFÖ 98; *Läroplan för förskolan*] adopted in 1998, in conjunction with the shift of responsibility for the sector from the Ministry of social affairs to that of education. An overview of municipal regulations and policy is expected to be completed

[15] SOU 2001:79, p 96.

in the spring of 2004 by the Stockholm council. The city's main policy goals are:[16]

- decrease the size of pedagogical groups by an average of two children
- provide good possibilities for language development for all children
- ensure stable staff provision and provide good possibilities for skill development for all employees
- provide good possibilities for parents to influence activities

According to the city audit, the most pressing, main problems for Stockholm's childcare provision today are (a) maintaining quality standards in economically less affluent times and (b) coping with shortage of trained staff, in particular staff with an academic degree, i.e. *förskolepedagog* (preschool teacher/educator). Over the last decade, our interviewee estimates that childcare funding on the average has decreased by 25 % in real prices, among other things raising the ratio of staff per child proportionally.[17] There is a consensus in the city, however, that children's pedagogical groups should not be allowed to grow. Instead, efforts should be made to return to the average ratio levels of the early 1990s.

Both in Ivarsson's 1996 and 1999 USK-reports, participating parents'/users' satisfaction with the size of their children's pedagogical groups rates far lower than all other aspects of childcare, except two: too high fee levels and insufficient staff density. Of these two other exceptional low-raters, the introduction of the *maxtaxa*-reform [national universal childcare fee limit] in 2002 has possibly removed much discontent with the first. As the second question basically amounts to another semantic version of the same theme – i.e. staff per child ratio – it is conceivable and plausible that this issue today is the main source of user discontent with Stockholm childcare provision, regardless of whether it is formulated in terms of too large children's groups or too few (trained) staff.

In 1996, the relative level of dissatisfaction with staff density in Stockholm's childcare system over all was 33 %, in 1999 36 %. Levels of user satisfaction regarding even this aspect were, however, reported to be substantially greater. In 1996 51 % of users were happy with staff density, in 1999 47 %. As indicated in table 2 below, ratings were

[16] Budget och verksamhetsplan för Skärholmens SDN 2003 [*Budget and activity plan 2003, Skärholmen ward*], p 16.

similar both investigated years regarding the size of pedagogical groups: 36-37 % dissatisfied and 53 % satisfied or very satisfied.

Table 4. User satisfaction with Stockholm's childcare conditions 1996 & 1999 [percent; ranked according to degree of dissatisfaction]

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	No opinion
	1996 / 1999	1996 / 1999	1996 / 1999	1996 / 1999
Professional competence of staff	49 / 52	34 / 33	4 / 3	13 / 12
Nutrition and meals	44 / 47	38 / 38	5 / 5	13 / 10
Opening hours	61 / 65	27 / 26	6 / 4	6 / 15
Attention given own child	42 / 45	38 / 37	6 / 4	14 / 14
Pedagogical materials and play things	34 / 36	44 / 43	8 / 8	14 / 13
Children's safety	22 / 28	41 / 45	9 / 7	31 / 20
Group constellations	27 / 27	43 / 45	11 / 12	19 / 16
Internal space	24 / 28	44 / 46	15 / 14	17 / 12
External surroundings	31 / 36	40 / 38	15 / 15	14 / 11
Level of staff turnover	33 / 40	29 / 30	17 / 12	21 / 18
Fee levels	14 / 13	24 / 24	34 / 38	28 / 25
Staff density (ratio staff/child)	18 / 20	29 / 31	35 / 33	18 / 16
Size of childrens's groups	21 / 19	32 / 34	36 / 37	11 / 10

Table adapted from Ivarsson 1999, tables 16-17

It is clear from table 2 that user attitudes towards childcare in Stockholm are fairly stable between the two years. As mentioned above, the major point of dissatisfaction or worry amongst users has to do with decreasing funding possibilities, resulting in larger pedagogical groups and fewer staff. No other preconditions for, parts or aspects of

[17] Cf Ivarsson 1999, p 7.

childcare seem to generate comparable levels of dissatisfaction. The issue of service quality is, however, notoriously hard to approach directly. Parents' views of the service they're using is oftentimes used as a indirect tool to assess levels of service quality. Two interesting perspectives in connection to the extreme levels of user satisfaction above, though, are that the deterioration of childcare standards (a) has not been as radical as is generally assumed, or (b) has a spurious causal relationship to the funding issue. A third critical interpretation is that parents have other reasons than those naturally expected to give the answers they come up with.

One interesting psychological issue to pursue here could be the hypothetical proposition that parents may be unable or unwilling to admit, even to themselves (let alone to social researchers trying to evaluate the childcare they use), that their children attend badly functioning, ill-planned or poorly organised care. This connects to the image of good parenthood in contemporary society. What kind of a parent am I, if I willingly allow my child to spend so much of her or his (early, formative) time in a place where standards are not the highest conceivable? A psychological mechanism of this kind could go some way towards explaining the very high levels of satisfaction with childcare in Stockholm, as indicated above. Under this interpretation, the corresponding very low levels would be all but impossible to gauge. We have no time to address the question here, but if this is a reasonable psychological theory of the social cognition-process and views-formation of parents and other welfare users, it would be very intriguing to use it as an interpretative framework to analyse the similarly very high and stable support levels for the universal welfare state in Sweden. As we have shown elsewhere, Swedes seem to take pride in this structure. Being a good Swede in a certain sense seems to imply taking pride in this structure, just as good parenthood implies taking pride in purportedly high childcare quality levels.

There are thus built-in theoretical problems in this mode of thinking. The prospects of getting an accurate image of service quality at a local facility in this way are not always promising. If parents are indifferent to the issue *per se*, or have modest, even negative, expectations scores may be high, but have no meaning. For new-coming families with no experience of the Swedish kind of comprehensive welfare solutions, another possibility would be uncertain levels of truthfulness in the replies that are given. The "real" service quality levels should thus maybe be assessed using other instruments. But

it is difficult in this context to be specific regarding this. We will partly return to this topic in the following.

Another side of childcare analysed in the same investigation(s) is the ability of service providers over all to meet demands for parental participation. In table 5 below, this part of Stockholm's childcare is described.

Table 5. User satisfaction with levels of information and ability to influence 1996 & 1999 [percent; ranked according to degree of dissatisfaction]

	Very satisfied	Satisfied	Dissatisfied	No opinion
	1996 / 1999	1996 / 1999	1996 / 1999	1996 / 1999
Info about excursions and plans ahead	51 / 54	36 / 35	5 / 4	8 / 7
Meetings between parents and staff	41 / 43	37 / 36	7 / 7	15 / 14
Staff's ability to meet personal demands	39 / 40	37 / 37	7 / 8	17 / 15
Parent's abilities to influence care	29 / 28	34 / 33	10 / 11	27 / 28
Daily info concerning your child	35 / 36	40 / 40	13 / 13	12 / 11

Table adapted from Ivarsson 1999, table 18

As indicated in table 4, user dissatisfaction with Stockholm childcare appears somewhat marginal; satisfaction levels score very high both years. Read at face value, this is partly surprising, considering the often heard critique that Swedish childcare suffered heavily during the 1990s. One possibility is that these blows hit around 1996, making it possible that user critique had gathered insufficient momentum at that point in time. In 1999, 15 % of all parents taking part in the survey, however, reported that preschool childcare, to their knowledge, improved during the last year, 28 % indicated deterioration and 57 % either held no view on the matter or considered conditions unchanged.[18] Parents' views

[18] Ivarsson 1999, p 28. In the 1999 survey on which tables 4-5 in the text are based, a relative proportion of 11.500 out of Stockholm's approximately 29.000 families with children in childcare were included. In

in 1999 thus reflect the conviction both in the municipality and the wider public debate that the main childcare issue from then on has been funding. In the current public debate the staff-child ratio and funding themes overshadow all other considerations. Very little positive or negative criticism is heard publicly concerning the actual way childcare works in a pedagogic, day-to-day sense. Citizens and government alike to some extent seem to think of this as a non-issue.

To understand these sentiments, it helps to note that in Sweden, the national childcare system is the object of some civic and political pride. In a recent survey published by the Stockholm School of Economics [*Handelshögskolan*], the preschool system rates far ahead of all 25 other specified businesses and services in terms of user satisfaction. In the survey, the preschool system was firmly fixed at the top of the list with a satisfaction index of 75,3 on a 1-100 scale, followed at a certain distance by satisfaction levels with the national system of pharmacies. (Trailing at the bottom end was satisfaction with the police authority, some distance below privately operated life insurance services.)[19]

Diversity

The city-wide coordinator, our interviewee Berg, notes that there are no grave obstacles to alternative (i.e. non-municipal) ways of providing childcare in Stockholm. As implied by table 1 above, public childcare dominates, but other modes of provision are also common and available, under the same legislation and public sources of funding. The legislation that prohibited commercial childcare solutions was removed in 1991. Now, it seems as if the norm is that any mode of provision is acceptable, as long as it remains within legal and other parameters. The point, Berg points out, is that parents should have a wide range of options in terms of childcare solutions. In densely populated central parts of Stockholm, this freedom of choice seems to be fairly real. Here, parents are able to choose between different forms of provision, different local settings and different pedagogical styles in most sub-municipal wards. But the variety is less great in less central areas.

In 1998, three quarters of all day care centre childcare in Stockholm was provided

five Stockholm wards all the relevant families were included; in the rest selections were made. The overall reply frequency was an excellent 81 %.

municipally. Of the remaining non-municipal quarter only 5 % was for-profit childcare. 40 % was provided by different associations, 35 % by parent co-operatives and 20 % by employee co-ops. Out of one hundred preschool children in Stockholm that year about 75 were thus enrolled in municipal care, 10 in care provided by churches, work places etc, 9 in parent co-ops, 5 in staff co-ops and 1 in commercial, for-profit facilities.[20] The strong growth through the 1990s of non-municipal childcare was primarily a large city phenomenon. In 1998, again, non-municipal childcare in all of Sweden had reached a level of 8 % of all care. For greater Stockholm, the corresponding figure was 14 % and for the municipality of Stockholm 20 %. As indicated in table 1, for the inner city and its adjacent wards the proportions are even greater. The level of non-municipal solutions in the sector thus varies systematically both socio-economically and geographically. In 1998/99, the then six inner city wards rated highest in terms of the prevalence of non-municipal childcare, closely followed by the wards immediately to the west and south of the city.

Financing

As in the rest of the country, childcare in Stockholm is today financed by a system of municipal childcare vouchers [*barnomsorgspeng*]. Each Swedish municipality receives funds for childcare from the state at a cost level that covers expenses for provision in the local area. The state funding is marginally adapted to account for local cost variations, but is virtually the same everywhere. In Stockholm, the municipality then either, in the case of municipal facilities, passes the corresponding funds on to the sub-municipal wards, which transfers them to each local unit monthly or, in the case of non-municipal facilities, has the central coordinative administration transfer the funds directly on to the individual childcare centre accounts.

The legislation for this taxation-financed solution has been in place since 1992 (when it replaced other legislation to the same end). There are minor differences between the net amounts transferred to municipal and non-municipal childcare providers. For municipal facilities, the city keeps a certain percentage of the funds to cover administrative costs

[19] *Dagens Nyheter*, February 3, 2004. 30.000 Swedish residents participated in the survey.
[20] Ivarsson 1999, p 9.

generated by the system. For non-municipal facilities, this is not intended to be the case. Arguments concerning the status of this part of the state funding sometimes occur between municipalities and childcare facilities.[21]

After the introduction of the *maxtaxa* in January 2002, the ability of individual childcare facilities to supplement public funding by fees has decreased.[22] Before the reform, there were two main options for facilities to improve on their economical situation. They could either charge higher fees or rely on unfinanced work contributions by members or users. Today, the first of these possibilities has disappeared. The national standard set by the *maxtaxa* does not allow for fees above a certain limit. Since the introduction of the limit, it has remained at SEK 1140 – i.e. approximately € 127, given a conversion rate of 9:1. As we point out elsewhere this has made childcare quite affordable to the vast majority of Swedish families, particularly given the falling cost to be enrolled in the publicly financed care system both for preschool and 0-6 grade school children for each successive child after the first one. For the second child the maximum fee is SEK 760 (€ 84) and for the third SEK 380 (€ 42). From the fourth child on there is no fee.[23]

It is worth mentioning in this context that the proclaimed longer term aspiration of the Social Democratic party is that all childcare should be free of charge. In current rhetoric on this field, childcare is described as an ideally citizenship-based social and political entitlement. The party has taken a first step in this direction by initialising legislation in which 4-5 year olds with a maximum use of childcare of 15 hours weekly are exempted from charge. There are also regulations in place within the *maxtaxa* system that reduces fees for 1-3 year olds using childcare less than 30 hours/week; for 4-5 year olds in care over 15 hours weekly; and for school children until 6th grade in wrap-around childcare in the early mornings and late afternoons on regular school days.

Fee levels could thus earlier be used to balance altering economical circumstances, or

[21] For non-municipal care in Stockholm, this administrative "tax" or overhead cost is only a few percent. In Östersund, it is a great deal heavier, about 25 percent. This level can hardly be considered motivated, we suggest, but the local non-municipal childcare sector has so far been unsuccessful in trying to make the gap more moderate.

[22] The two linguistic parts of the concept "max-taxa" are etymologically derived from an abbreviation of the Swedish word "maximal" [*maximum*] and the word "taxa" [*fee* or *tariff*].

[23] The primary system is designed for children 1-3 y/o who attend childcare full time, i.e. for more than 30 hours/week. It does, however, not merely refer to absolute prices. Parents are not required to pay the maximum fee if their incomes are too low. The relative cost of the fees for children 1-3 must not exceed 3, 2 or 1 %, respectively, of the family's income. Cf Pestoff & Strandbrink 2002.

maintain operational standards that would otherwise have been harder to achieve. This option was, however, mainly used by non-municipal care givers. Today, this possibility is marginal. Variable fees are still legally allowed for, but they cannot exceed the limits imposed by the *maxtaxa* system.[24] The second alternative mentioned above, i.e. to use the unpaid work of childcare users or of members in staff or parent co-operatives, still plays a role in the organisation of Swedish childcare: though mainly at co-operatively run facilities. As indicated below, co-operatives normally use this means to maintain an edge over municipal facilities. In the latter, this solution is rare. It is known to exist, but cases are few and far between. The main reason appears to us to be that the municipal mode of organisation has no natural way to incorporate this kind of regulated, irregular user participation. Publicly provided welfare services are in this sense defined by a bureaucratic rather than a participatory ethos. The state or municipal logic is very hard to combine with voluntary labour contributions – at least today in Sweden.

Access

As indicated above, the extension and coverage of the childcare system in Stockholm is currently good. It generally involves little cost or effort for families to get access to care for their preschool children. In this sense access appears to be adequate.[25] The legal pressure on Swedish municipalities to provide childcare was tightened in 1995, when new legislation was adopted requiring that all families without undue delay were to be

[24] Nor are municipal wards in, for instance, Stockholm permitted to increase fees with the use of any local additions to the *maxtaxa*'s stipulated fees. In September 2003, however, the new Swedish national budget for fiscal year 2004 announces a 10 % rise in the *maxtaxa*'s cost ceiling, from SEK 1140 to 1260. There is one other aspect that deserves mentioning here, though. Individual non-municipal co-ops have the right to require members to pay a yearly membership fee to the association. This membership fee, however, must not be large enough to risk being considered a regular financial contribution to the running of the service. Common membership fee levels are in the interval of SEK 500-1000 [€ 55-110]. Non-municipal facilities are also able to require that parents/users pay for their child's nappies and similar consumer goods, within reasonable limits.

[25] The city of Stockholm adheres to the following principles when admitting children to municipal care: (a) siblings have priority to slots at facilities that their brother(s) or sister(s) already attend, (b) children who have quit a certain facility for a period on grounds of parental leave have a right to return to the same facility prior to other applicants, (c) age is decisive; older children are admitted first and other slots are distributed equally at the regular autumn admittance time on grounds of age to children without a slot or who require transfer from one facility to another, (d) children in need of special support are granted a stronger right to a slot than specified by the general "guaranteed-place" policy, (e) consideration is given to the composition of pedagogical groups, and, finally, (f) at autumn admittance, applications submitted from August 1st to September 30th are considered equally.

offered care for children in the 1-12 age span.[26] The relocation of the legal regulations on (as well as the political responsibility for) childcare from the social to the educational sector can partly be interpreted as a move to increase the availability of care. As the educational aspect of childcare was emphasised more strongly than before, the argument for general accessibility gained ground. The conventional link between childcare access and parents' paid work thus weakened. Under this legislation, childcare was rather seen as a political and social entitlement for all families, regardless of occupation or social conditions in various regards. In 2000, the 1995 legislation was strengthened further, making the right even more general.

Other aspects of access are if there are systematic differences of accessibility between different social strata or whether families with specific needs can be accommodated within the system. Here, our analysis is on the one hand partly inconclusive. We find no major indications that the local childcare system as a whole should be unable to cope with demand for childcare for children from different social backgrounds or with special clinical or socio-psychological needs. If the child is able to attend childcare at all, the (legally required) means in terms of extra staff and pedagogical support or supervision for the facility is municipally available.

Nor is there any large public debate at present concerning discriminatory official treatment in this field. Children with special functional conditions are thus generally cared for within the ordinary childcare system. It is conceivable that tasks of this kind may even be actively sought by facilities, particularly if the individual child's needs are in the lower part of the needs scale. One side-effect of such extra staff/support could then be increased staff density that could be favourable for the whole group. But these considerations are possibly a marginal phenomenon, even if they do exist, both in the preschool and the primary school system.

Concerning the issue of social differentiation or segregation in the context of childcare there are no indications that the system actively differentiates between different social groups or families from different backgrounds. Such explicit behaviour would be out of the legal bounds of childcare. Provision is expected to be given to citizens and legal residents who demand care, without exception. Of course, these legal ramifications do

[26] SOU 2001:79, p 96.

not, on the other hand, in themselves warrant equal access for different social strata to the childcare system. In fact, the figures show that – even though there was an increase in the number of 3-6 year olds in childcare nationally during the 1990s from 64 to 82 % – it is apparent that the system is used in a non-conformist manner by different social groups. Parents of Swedish descent, with higher educational levels, higher professional positions, stronger private economies and stronger social networks are, however, more inclined to use non-municipal childcare solutions than non-middle class parents.[27]

This seems to go against the official policy goal of creating meeting places for children and families from different social, ethnic and cultural strata. A question here, however, is whether the childcare system is a producer or re-producer of these broader patterns. It seems clear that even the expanded Swedish universal childcare system provides no bars against social segregation in this context. But does it ameliorate or worsen the situation? To assess this, contra-factual reasoning would be necessary. At present, we are unable to provide any adequate reply to this. Both scenarios are conceivable. On the one hand, it seems plausible that the formal universalism of the childcare system indeed decreases social segmentation of this kind. Were it not for the fundamental ambition of the system to make childcare available to families from all walks of life, the situation could perhaps be worse than it is now. A more sinister and pessimistic interpretation is, on the other hand, that the universalist principles underpinning childcare make discriminatory social patterns harder to discern or address politically. A choice between these interpretations should ideally be based on solid empirical investigations. Lacking such a basis here, we would nonetheless feel that the slightly more plausible hypothesis is the former. In this study, we have found no heavy indications that the childcare system in itself should be a main cause of the social demography visible in the system. We would rather assume that the causes of these patterns are external and of a more general kind. The policy aim to make access and availability as equal as conditions allow is clearly visible in the Stockholm case. It is more likely that it rather equalises social relations than contributes to build hierarchical patterns. Even if this seems to us to be the general political logic of this welfare system, the issue should be considered seriously. Let us make one last consideration concerning the contextual question.

[27] Cf SOU 2001:79, p 97. In Stockholm, our central level interviewee states that the municipality takes a liberal view on parents' geographical childcare desires. But generally, parents want childcare in the close

How should one, then, interpret the empirical relationship between the childcare system and its social setting, given the actual differences between the Stockholm wards in terms of institutional and social style patterns? The most ready answer is that the local logic of prevalent childcare solutions to some extent corresponds with local social, cultural and political patterns. In inner city middle-class wards, childcare seems to be more imbued with values and needs prevailing in this group. In less privileged parts of Stockholm, the local childcare system – illustrated, for instance, by a lower relative proportion of parent co-ops and academically trained staff – seems to cater less to needs and demands of the kind associated with middle-class values in the sector. Childcare could thus be assumed to generally mirror and reproduce its own social context.

But even this can be too simple an answer. The parameters of this investigation do not really allow us to draw clear conclusions on this. It is conceivable, however, that the idea of a mirror-relationship is misleading. To provide a firm ground for this notion, one way would be to analyse a larger number of middle-class inner-city wards. It is possible that this would uncover style differences between different but similar demographic and social contexts. One paradoxical dimension of Stockholm's childcare system is that parts of the city that come across as generally less ideologically liberal or conservative (such as the left-leaning Maria-Gamla Stan ward) are more prone than more liberal or conservative parts to take advantage of less traditional, universalist Social Democratic welfare solutions, at least in the field of childcare. As will be shown below, the instance of non-municipal facilities in Maria-Gamla Stan is exceptionally high. This can be read as lower indirect levels of support for traditional Swedish welfare solutions.

Yet the local area in itself is hardly reputed for a devoted adherence to the neo-liberal privatisation agenda challenging the notion of a publicly run welfare system. The supremely affluent Östermalm ward (which is not included in this study), however, to a far greater extent relies on traditional childcare options. Here, the investment of private time in co-operative childcare, for instance, is not so attractive. In both settings ideology and everyday-life choices thus seem to be somewhat in disharmony with each other.

Service quality

vicinity of their homes.

The service quality of childcare in Stockholm has partly been touched on in tables 4 and 5 above. We have also pointed out that the share of academically trained staff employed in day care tends to be above national average levels. This could be read as an indicator of better service quality. Another aspect that should be mentioned here is the continuous supervision by municipal officers of local, both municipal and non-municipal, childcare facilities to ensure that educational, curriculae and social standards are upheld. Physical facilities are also inspected regularly by fire, health and safety inspectors. In 2000, all Stockholm's childcare facilities were required by the central municipal administration to temporary install technical equipment to monitor certain air quality aspects. Properties housing childcare facilities are legal subjects to the same yearly controls of ventilation and air quality as are other real estate properties.

As mentioned above, however, the perhaps main indirect indicators of service quality in the sector are very often considered to be (a) staff to child ratio and (b) level of staff's education. In neither case does Stockholm's performance appear to be exceptionally poor. During the 1990s the staff to child ratio in childcare increased nationally from 4.2 to 5.4.[28] These indirect factors took a turn for the worse during the 1990s, but the more precise impact on childcare quality – in terms, for instance, of families' feeling that they are provided with excellent care – is hard to assess independently (as is also pointed out by the government's official 2001 analysis of the whole Swedish welfare sector). Again, tables 4 and 5 above at least seem to point rather clearly in the direction of fair levels of satisfaction amongst parents in Stockholm with the service they're given. The childcare coordinator notes that levels of reported satisfaction across different modes of provision are highest for families using childminding homes (the main, but marginal alternative to day care), but that the real difference in satisfaction levels is very small.

As touched on above, there are three professional categories working in the Swedish childcare system: preschool teachers holding an academic degree [*förskolepedagog*], preschool assistants [*barnskötare*] with secondary education and unqualified staff (often young people, particularly women, who see this as a temporary job comparable to other unqualified health- or care-related work). In Stockholm, the city is today sponsoring

[28] SOU 2001:79, p 98. The overall financial conditions of the childcare sector during the decade did not, however, change dramatically. A similar amount – about SEK 40 billion (€ 4.4 billion) – was spent on this service both in 1990 and 1999. Ibid., p 97.

employees with secondary education of this kind to study for an academic preschool teacher degree. Candidates do not have to run up student loan debts, but are instead paid 80 % of their regular salary for the three years of the academic programme. The city considers this a way, not only to raise the professional competence (and status) of the staff, but indirectly also to boost service quality levels in childcare practice.[29]

The responsible Swedish minister, Lena Hallengren, has recently given air to the view that serious consideration should be given the new idea of creating a one-year academic programme specifically designed to raise the professional competence for preschool assistants in childcare employment. But any major steps towards a reform of this kind have not yet been taken.[30] Critics argue that this would instead devaluate the degree, and thus indirectly the profession. One problem connected to all this is that the professional field has widened for this group of employees since the shift of all six year-olds from the preschool to the school system. Preschool teachers/educators are now able to find regular employment in both sectors. To invest in competence-raising measures for non-academically educated preschool staff thus does not necessarily mean securing qualified staff for the preschool system. With the basic academic preschool teacher qualifications, this group may also choose to work at the introductory levels of the primary school system. By adding a relatively modest extra effort on top of their basic degree they can qualify as regular teachers up to grades 3-4 or higher in the nine-year primary school, or even continue on to the secondary school level. As yet, it is debatable whether preschool pay levels will be able to match the going average levels in primary or secondary education. On the whole, this makes the (very costly) Stockholm initiative politically interesting. It is not quite clear if or to which degree it will serve its purpose.

Integration

Under this heading, the main issue is whether the character and logic of the universally

[29] The cost for the city is not modest. Recent estimates put the price tag in the area of SEK 660.000 (€ 73.333, at a 9:1 exchange rate) for each person going through the programme. The number of students is 30-50 each term in Stockholm and the length of the course is six terms. This puts the maximum cost span for the city at the peak of the reform at million SEK 118.8-198 (million € 13.2-22). The argument for this hefty investment is that the shortage of academically educated preschool staff is expected to reach serious proportions in the medium term – not only in the capital, but nation-wide. This is often listed as one of the most promising careers in the coming years.

[30] *Dagens Nyheter*, October 7 2003.

available childcare system in Sweden is helpful or detrimental to social integration. On the Stockholm level our material adds little information on this aspect. One conclusion that can be drawn, however, is that in times of scarcity of this social service, inequalities in mere accessibility could conceivably be of importance here. As indicated by other national TSFEPS-reports, the question of childcare to whom often connects to patterns and issues of social integration. It is in many cases obvious that the availability of care is unequally distributed between families with different social, economical and cultural backgrounds. Resourceful middle-class families often seem to be more successful when it comes to using this (and probably many other) social services to their advantage. This is surely an integration/segregation-related phenomenon.

The Swedish experience in this regard is somewhat different. When coverage is near complete and availability high, integration problems relating to bare accessibility seem to fade from focus. The question then rather becomes how childcare practice *per se* connect to patterns of social segregation/integration. For instance: among immigrant Swedes this aspect of childcare needs to be systematically addressed. Policy-wise, it is difficult to see how care could be interpreted as particularly conducive to segregation. As we have seen, one of the central aims for childcare (as well as primary schooling) is to provide a place where children and families from different backgrounds can interact. The marginal role played in Sweden by private primary and secondary schools connects directly to the long-standing Social Democratic commitment to non-separatist modes of welfare and education. Given, however, that local areas in Stockholm exhibit different demographic patterns, we suggest that the childcare system rather tends to mirror local social characteristics, than function as an arena for integrationist policy implementation. In the end, local facilities have to cater to local needs, i.e. enrol local children, and different local areas are not socially built-up in the same way. Socio-economical and geographical segregation are thus surely facts of life in the Stockholm area, as indicated by our choice of wards.

The central Stockholm childcare coordinator notes, however, that city-wide, different social groups do not seem to choose different forms of care on a social basis. It is more a matter of choosing a style of pedagogy than being tacitly connected to different modes of provision on brute socio-economic or ethnic grounds. The question then becomes: how is this visible in local childcare? We will return to this issue below.

Participation

Participation is a wide and fuzzy concept. It can mean many things. In this investigation we have chosen to divide it in the following three parts: social, political and economical. Social participation indicates the interrelationship and interaction between childcare and the social context. In Stockholm, as in the rest of Sweden, the main institutional form of childcare provision is municipal. An often overwhelming majority of available facilities for childcare at any given place are, with a small number of exceptions, municipal. The questions then become to what extent these solutions interact with the local context, as well as allow for parents to take active part in the operation of care.

Generally speaking, the main institutional format performs rather weakly in this sense. There are no strong traditions, nor incentives, for individual day care centres to interact continuously or systematically with any other local civil interests or welfare institutions – particularly non-municipal. There is, however, substantial interaction primarily within this municipal welfare sector, but also to some extent across this and other sectors. What broader social interaction goes on mainly seems to us to take place within "the family". This is hardly surprising, since municipal childcare in principle belongs to one and the same organisational and institutional structure. Regulations, advances, incentives, policy styles and institutional characteristics valid for one Stockholm facility are more or less directly valid for all others as well. Reform in the sector concerns the whole sphere.

In a like way, co-operative facilities seem to interact mainly within "their own family" – where contacts and channels for cooperation and synchronisation are present between childcare facilities as well as across this and other co-operatively managed services. In greater Stockholm, there is even, as mentioned at the outset of this text, an organisation designed only to cater for and safeguard the co-operative sectors interests and needs: the SEFIF. This organisation is a main tool for the sector to influence the municipality, but activity levels are not extremely high. There are, however, regular reference meetings between different SEFIF-partners and between the organisation and the municipality. Work-shops on various aspects of non-municipal welfare provision are also organised for members. But today, there are no rallies, campaigns or mass mobilisations.

This other "world" is thus set somewhat apart from the municipal welfare sector. Here,

social participation and energy is markedly stronger, but mainly manifested in the form of parents' participation in the daily running of the individual childcare facility used by the family. In broad contextual terms of social participation, the situation seems to us to resemble that of municipal services. Extensive neighbourhood involvement – either of local childcare facilities in other aspects of local life or the other way around – is very rarely developed even in the co-operative sector in Stockholm.

The non-municipal for-profit sector is yet another separate world, connecting, when at all, mainly to other levels or institutions of the market sphere. Social participation in this sense mainly seems to occur "internally", vary somewhat across the different worlds of provision but generally be fairly modest, excepting the special involvement required by families with children in co-ops.

The image of economical participation today appears rather homogenous throughout the Swedish childcare system. As we have seen, funding for the service is provided by the national, central government through the means of taxation. After the introduction of the *maxtaxa*, the even earlier minor financial contributions to the running of the system that came from parents and other non-state sources has become almost symbolic. Participation on this level is thus institutionally heavily played down. It is not possible to use financial means to promote involvement, influence or "participation" in today's Swedish childcare system. There are no legal provisions for alternate schemes in this sense, regardless of provider. As noted, all childcare services are integrated in one and the same national funding system, and the system covers this entire welfare service sector. Parents do, however, contribute their unpaid time to co-operative childcare, and no doubt get better quality service in return.

Political participation, lastly, comes in different shapes across different types of service providers. The municipal sector is effectively a part of the Swedish political structure. Childcare provided municipally is thus in a sense already politically orchestrated. The aims and logic of municipal care are manifestations of local and national policy goals. It should be noted here that in Stockholm, and most other parts of Sweden, the municipal political landscape mirrors the national scene. The same parties are involved in the same ideological struggle on both levels. (In Sweden, there are no strictly separate regional political bodies like in many other European countries. There is a regional council level,

but constitutionally these councils are referred to as "secondary municipalities" – i.e. besides the 289 primary municipalities. The same party structure organises this political level as well.)

Given the universal nature of Swedish childcare, political incentives and initiatives that could aspire to the rank of political "participation" in the structuring or running of the childcare sector would have to happen through national political structures to then be able to influence or reach the level of practices. As we have see, municipalities have limited scope for independent action. Voting for a certain party (and indirectly the views it entertains on this sector) in the municipal elections does not translate too readily or directly to political influence. It is currently difficult for municipalities to fundamentally alter or redesign local childcare practices. Change can be accomplished (and has indeed occurred in some non-social democratically governed well-off suburban municipalities around Stockholm – like Täby, Solna and Nacka), but in such cases always within legal parameters and in line with the aims provided nationally.[31]

These changes have therefore had less to do with the way childcare works, than with the structural balance of provision in the field. Even these opposing municipalities have had their primary quarrel with the state on the matter of how services should be provided – publicly or privately – not to any large extent with the level of service that is provided, which indirectly but lucidly illustrates the fact that this substantial aspect of care is not a bone of political contention in Sweden today. Maybe one main reason for this is that the conventional argument for the abolishment of municipal provisions of welfare is efficiency. Productivity, the standard market argument claims, increases on all fields of production if market mechanisms, *ceteris paribus*, are allowed to do their work. But market thinking in the field of welfare services is maybe harder to convincingly establish than elsewhere. As implied above, the central issue of measuring quality and productivity is for obvious reasons difficult to easily define here.

The system is thus organised top-down. Does this make it monolithic? Today, not as much as before. Municipalities appear sensitive to public charges for badly working and overcrowded childcare. The overall impression is that they pride themselves on well

[31] In the northern municipality of Täby, for instance, all municipal provision of childcare was abolished in the 1990s on ideological grounds, to the dismay of the national Social Democratic minority government. The support for this radical move amongst the local electorate was and is, however, varied.

functioning care and seem strained and defensive when the local system falters. Given the national legal requirement that childcare should be generally available, the lack of success in this field is both morally deplorable and vaguely criminal, even though legal sanctions are absent.

It would, in a similar vein, be difficult to claim that the central government is insensitive to families' and children's care needs. On the contrary, we interpret childcare as a main focus of the state's attention. Nor are we able today to discern any major indications that this will change. In every Swedish election campaign in the last decade, the rhetorical improvement of the welfare fields *health, schools and (child)care* have been central political elements. All contending parties have had to deliver systematic thinking and reform (which generally equals "maintenance") strategies for this sector of society. In Sweden, this is a major, highly visible political topic.

3.2 Stockholm: the Maria-Gamla Stan ward

Goals

The overriding pedagogical, educational, developmental, cognitive, social and political structure of goals for Swedish childcare cover, as indicated elsewhere, the entire sector, regardless of who provides the care or how operations are run.[32] Local facilities can only redefine or alter goals within the basic national parameters.

One aspect that deserves elaborating on here, though, is that the introduction in the late 1990s of the intermediate 0-grade for six year-olds between preschool and school has led to a more coherent institutionalisation of pedagogical goals. The current national preschool educational programme 98 [LPFÖ 98] adopted by the *National Agency for Education* has shifted focus from consideration only of preschool matters to the integration of preschool *and* primary school perspectives in the statutes.[33] The political ambition is to provide a comprehensive and covering body of policy thought that treats children's development as continuous and ongoing all through childhood, not as consisting of radically different phases that should be seen as separate entities, subject to different modes of thinking and dealt with in isolated professional and institutional

[32] Cf Pestoff & Strandbrink 2002.

contexts. One implication of the new mode of goal formulation is that a greater stress is placed on childcare's educational agenda, compared to the traditional approach, that made a point of childcare's non-educational, *sensu strictu*, nature. As we shall see, however, the value of this change is disputed. Some hold that (some) children may not be mature enough for this shift in orientation to make sense. The critique notes that the reform may also be interpreted as economically motivated.

Diversity

The argument, according to the ward's representative Anita Keuter, for having different forms of childcare provision in the ward is the same as on the city level (and indeed as in the policy rhetoric on the issue on all levels of government and society): to ensure alternatives of choice for families who desire childcare. In this inner city ward, this is surely also the actual case. Keuter describes this in terms of preferences concerning both location, ideology and pedagogical styles.

In 1999, the proportion of non-municipal childcare facilities in Maria-Gamla Stan was exceptionally high, almost 50 %. In 2002, the rate had decreased to a more conventional 36 %. The availability of different forms of childcare in the ward is thus in line with the goal of full and variable childcare coverage.[34] Our interviewee, Keuter, points out that a very large proportion of the ward's facilities are situated in one particular residential area built in the 1980s on ground earlier used industrially around the South Stockholm railway station [*Södra station*].[35] During the 1990s, this area had a high concentration of young families. These children have reached adolescence today. The need for childcare has thus fallen steadily since 1997. Keuter reports that since then the number of places

[33] Cf Ivarsson 1999, p 12.
[34] Cf Ivarsson 1999, p 3; Pestoff & Strandbrink 2002. In 1985, the Swedish parliament passed legislation requiring full coverage to be available no later than 1991. The expansion was somewhat slower. Swedish municipalities had substantial difficulties in keeping pace with the soaring reproduction rates during the late 80s and early 90s.
It may deserve mentioning here that the central parts of the Maria-Gamla Stan ward (i.e. without the later addition of the more peripheral former Hornstull ward) scored an exceptional 99 % in terms of childcare enrolment in 1998/99 (Ivarsson 1999: 4), making this the highest-rater in Stockholm at the time. This can partly, we suggest, be explained by the demographic change wrought by the production of a new large residential area, *Södra station*, during the mid/late 80s in the ward.
[35] At this point, Stockholm's childcare system had not yet expanded to today's scope, which also throws a great deal of indirect light on the large amount of non-municipal childcare in the ward into the 90s. There

provided in childcare has dropped by 700. This appears like a dramatic change, compared to the 2002 1-5 y/o children cohort of 2512 children. Many of the disappeared facilities/places have been municipal, but this is also a possible explanation for the relative decrease between 1999 and 2002 of non-municipal centres. It seems as if the proportion of non-municipal facilities taken out of operation could be even larger.

There is effectively no waiting time in the ward to get a place in childcare, but waiting may still occur since families "have become used to having a facility right outside their doorstep". As Keuter points out, however, distances within the ward are very modest. In the most extreme cases, parents may have to travel 2-3 kilometers from their homes to reach their respective facility. But normally, distances are much shorter. The ward has excellent public transportation means: buses and underground. This tendency amongst some families to prefer to wait for a slot at a first-choice facility near the home could be read in terms of an access or diversity problem. In practice, however, the difficulties in this sense should not be overstated; it does not necessarily require great sacrifices on the family's part – at least not within certain limits.

Moreover, the parental insurance scheme can help parents, since it is very flexible. It requires no planning ahead. Parents claiming the benefit report every two weeks to the local public insurance office to what extent they want to use it – i.e. for how many days during these weeks and to what relative degree each day. With some foresight, parents are thus able to keep the window of opportunity for childcare admittance open for quite some time. Half a year is not an exaggerated period. Should admittance be given early, the remaining insurance days can be saved and spent until the child's eighth year. It is easily seen how this makes for a certain flexibility on the part of families' enrolment of their children in care, given that employers are happy with the same flexibility.

Another change in the overall conditions for childcare that could play a role here is the introduction of the *maxtaxa* system. As mentioned above, the logic of this reform effectively took away one of the competitive tools formerly used by different forms of non-municipal childcare: to – in the co-operative case – offer fees lower than municipal tariffs, and make up for the loss of funding by using parents'/members unpaid labour or – in the for-profit case – finance higher quality standards with higher fees. Both of these

---

were simply nowhere near enough facilities to cope when demand dramatically went up. So parents went

alternative methods of childcare provision must adjust to these structural changes and facilities have no doubt been discontinued in the process. Locally in Maria-Gamla Stan, however, the main reason for the changes over the last decade in the childcare system is surely demographic.

Another aspect of the diversity-availability theme pointed out by Keuter is the unevenly distributed ability and willingness in different forms of childcare provision to cope with children with special emotional, cognitive, pedagogical, psychological and social needs. She reports a marked increase over the last decade in the number of children in this group. But the main proportion of the group does not necessarily include children with clinical disorders. Instead, Keuter conveys the impression that the number of children in the zone between a clinically defined group and those functioning well has increased. It is not possibly for us to assess this observation independently. She primarily links the change to altered economical circumstances for childcare generally, and mainly to the fact that during the 1990s more children were attended to by fewer staff. But she also offers the interesting interpretation that staff "today work a lot more consciously with taking care of each individual", hinting that improvement in the professional approach has enabled sharper attendance to each child. The pedagogical approach to how children function, both personally and socially, is thus believed to have developed strongly in the 1990s.

The group indicated by Keuter consists of children who have difficulties adjusting to the social and pedagogical day care environment and children with unusually high levels of stress, worry or otherwise "nervous" behaviour. Both these children and those with clinically diagnosed developmental disorders are to a much larger extent cared for in municipally run childcare. Municipalities are obliged to care for all children, as opposed to non-municipal facilities. Of course, there are no formal obstacles to the enrolment of these children in co-operative and other non-municipal care, but in the end, it seems as if the municipal sector is more practically open in this sense. This suggests that there may be quality-related differences between municipal and non-municipal facilities, given the greater pedagogical burden carried by the former in this regard, though this difference hardly plays a more significant overall role than the quality difference

---

into private childcare production at a massive scale.

caused, say, by the ability of co-operative childcare facilities to call in members/parents to replace staff on sick leave. This is a considerable asset. In municipal day care, the consequence during the harsh 1990s of staff being sick and unfit for work has more often than not been temporarily understaffed groups or facilities. In non-municipal forms of childcare this is possible to deal with without sudden losses of pedagogical density in this sense.

Financing

Childcare in Maria-Gamla Stan is part of the national financing system. Keuter reports that there is a financial difference between different forms of provision, with, as we mention above, the municipal sector being slightly worse off than the non-municipal. If non-municipal facilities are able, for instance, to dramatically cut costs (for rents, food, commodities, activities, wages, pedagogical materials etc), they can use the surplus to change the staff/child ratio, maintain smaller children's groups or make extra activities. Keuter assumes that parent co-ops have the best position in this sense, with their ability to use unpaid pedagogic labour. She notes that the aspiration and ongoing effort of the ward is to minimise these differences, but is unable to be more precise in terms of how this should happen.

The prevailing political logic seems to make the shrinking of this gap hard. It is not politically viable today to legally or economically favour municipal solutions in this field of social welfare (even if this no doubt was the case earlier). And the main way to improve on the infra-structural conditions for municipal childcare is through legislation or funding hikes that it instantly would be possible to take advantage of for any mode of provision. Logically speaking, it appears as if the difference in this sense between the different sectors has little to do with political provisions made for the childcare sector in general. Non-municipal and non-public solutions are rather able to use what amounts to extra-political resources according to their different logics. Associational organisations may use resources connected to their own sphere and market-oriented solutions are able to draw on market-related resources and maybe a more flexible, cost-effective approach. Municipal facilities are unable to compete in any of these fields, whereas alternative facilities are free to take advantage of any accommodations that are introduced for the

whole sector. Competition is in this regard tilted somewhat in favour of non-municipal solutions. In Stockholm, finally, approximately 20 % of the total municipal revenues go towards financing childcare.

Access

As mentioned above, access to childcare in Maria-Gamla Stan is ready. No waiting time is required today to get a place in local care. Of all Stockholm wards in 1999, childcare users/parents in Maria-Gamla Stan (which then still consisted of two wards) received medium/above medium ratings in terms of the fit of opening hours with times required by families.[36] Keuter reports that in the ward parents are able to demand municipal childcare for any period and length of time between 6.30 am and 6.30 pm. The ward also runs a night-open childcare facility seven days a week for parents working nights.

A problem implied by the fluctuating demand for childcare (cf above) in the ward is that the number of required physical facilities changes. Given the shrinking size of the local childcare sector over the past few years, the situation in the ward is good in terms of available leases on proper facilities. As the number of small children in the inner city parts of Stockholm is now increasing, however, and as the municipal policy goal is to reduce the size of each pedagogical group at the rate of approximately 10 %, new facilities will be needed. Keuter envisages that this will be a challenge for the ward. The municipal policy is that the cost of individual leases should be paid with the regular funds received by each facility, under a certain (fairly high) commercial limit. If leases for day care centres are contracted that incur costs over this level, extra funding may be applied for from the municipality.

There is thus an incitement for the city to have a certain amount of control over how leases are contracted. Even many co-operative facilities sub-rent their from the city, that controls the first-hand lease. Historically, this has been a convenient solution, not least because Swedish municipalities traditionally have run their own real estate and housing companies, owning large amounts of primarily residential property. It has thus been fairly easy to strike general or individual agreements between these two municipal areas of responsibility regarding leases for childcare facilities. In the past, relatively speaking,

a larger number of childcare centres were located in municipal properties. During the last non-Social Democratic city council period 1998-2002, radical means were taken to sell off much of this property, which, among other things is claimed to have made it substantially harder to procure facility leases. In this – as well as other welfare sectors such as care for the disabled, elderly or mentally ill – private property owners in central parts of Stockholm are markedly less eager to arrange favourable (if any) contracts with the council administration or the wards.

This tied in well with the earlier non-Social Democratic municipal coalition's agenda that social welfare should not necessarily be conceived of as a public matter. As things stand in Stockholm today, however, it seems clear that a private housing sector is less prone to contribute to general social welfare needs in this particular sense. Since the Social Democrats together with its coalition partners – the left and the greens – regained municipal power in 2002, the trend has been to stop and maybe revert this development in the local housing sector and real estate market.

Service quality

It is hard to provide a simple definition of the concept of "service quality" in the field of social welfare. We therefore address this dimension by indirect means. In Maria-Gamla Stan, the level, according to Keuter, of academically trained pedagogical staff in 2003 is 53 %. This seems like a reasonable situation, not least in quality terms – given that there is a positive correlation between higher levels of education and quality. As an inner city ward, Maria-Gamla Stan has a relatively strong professional market pull in the sector, which may explain this level.

As non-municipal facilities are non-publicly provided, the level of supervision that is possible differs between the two modes of care. Municipal care is regulated by political structures that are in turn transparent. Even so, discontent amongst users is, as shown above, very limited. In terms of quality, municipal facilities may have a slight edge in that they're supported by the larger municipal institutional context. The distance to specialised help to sort out difficult situations could therefore be shorter. Professional psychological, clinical, social work and/or educational assistance is structurally present

[36] Ivarsson 1999, appendix 3:18.

for this sector in a way that one could not expect in non-municipally run care.

On the other hand, one role that is played by the central municipal administration for non-municipal childcare and schools is to provide exactly this kind of assistance. There are also non-public resources for these tasks available for non-municipal care facilities. In the end, the difference may not be significant. It is also conceivable that the structural edge of municipal care in terms of permanent special resources is less obvious today, after many years of economical down-scaling in the Swedish public sector. Whether problems of this sort are better or more effectively solved with permanent institutional means like these or by momentary mobilisation, individualised psychological efforts etc is another issue here. Our material supplies no information on these matters. Nor is there any debate that brings these things to the public mind. We therefore find little reason to suspect any relevant differences between different forms of provision here.

Integration and participation

One aspect of institutional integration in Stockholm childcare is the recent reform of the school-preparatory 0-grade for six year-olds.[37] These children, who were earlier part of preschool childcare, have now been integrated into the school system. This has meant the introduction of new pedagogical and educational modes of thinking designed to care for this in-between or threshold age group. These 0-graders now attend school instead of preschool, but possibly more in terms of where they spend their time than what they spend it on. The educational dimension of 0-grade schooling is very preparatory and rather indirect. In a sense, this could be interpreted as a softer model for transition than what was possible under the more radical institutional differences between preschooling and schooling proper. The change in environment for each individual child thus occurs a year earlier, but the step is reasonably shorter and less emotionally or socially dramatic.

In terms of social integration, little evidence for discriminatory practices can be found in our material on this level. Given the fact that childcare is universally available in the ward, it seems far-fetched indeed to suggest that it is unequally distributed. This problem does not really exist. It seems inevitable to conclude that virtually all families requiring care have excellent options to get a satisfactory solution. There is still a

preponderance of provision catering to parents with conventional office work hours, but even in this regard, the available framework is fairly accommodating.[38] As the basic system stands, the cost and effort involved for parents or other interests to create provision to meet any potential demand of this kind are not prohibiting. The legal framework itself presents no major obstacles to initiatives in this vein.

If there are any systematic differences between different population segments' relation to childcare in the ward, these social patterns should be interpreted as indirect. Being a high-status, socio-economically affluent ward, Maria-Gamla Stan is not representative of the demographic or socio-economical structural set-up of the entire city. But the provision of local childcare rather exists under these conditions, than directly creates them. In an indirect sense, this could be interpreted as an illustration of the critique that the group that primarily benefits from a universal and comprehensive welfare regime is the well educated and well-positioned middle-class. We have no possibility, however, to further investigate the mechanisms behind this phenomenon – or address the relevant literature – in this context.

According to Keuter, there are numerous ways for parents to participate in and influence the way in which childcare is provided. Like schools, all municipal childcare facilities have regular meetings with parents for discussion and exchange of views regarding how the provided care should be organised. Parents at a day care centre also usually organise a parental board to articulate families' views and represent them in contacts with both the facility manager and staff and the municipality. Keuter stresses that there also is a forum for exchange of views on the municipal level, in which municipal politicians and ward administrative officers meet with parent representatives.[39] After the municipal and national elections in 2002, such meetings have, for instance, taken place to discuss the yet unfulfilled election campaign promise that the size of children's pedagogical groups should decrease.

In terms of different types of facilities' interaction with the local social context, nothing substantial can be added here than what is already conveyed under the corresponding heading in the previous section. The same goes for the issue of participation. One aspect

[37] Cf Pestoff & Strandbrink 2002.
[38] One potential critique could be that opening hours should be more flexible.

of the ward's ability to function well emphasized by Keuter, however, is the fruitful fact that all social service branches relating to children and children's needs are located in the same building. In-house knowledge of the conditions of the ward's 1-20 year-olds is therefore unusually comprehensive and sharp. She stresses that this arrangement both makes it easier to follow-up on the development of individual children/adolescents and radically shortens the distance between different branches of welfare. This could, we feel, be conducive to a more integrated approach to children's needs throughout their early years. As the coordinator rightly points out, it is better not having to move families between different bureaus at different places in the ward.

One last aspect of social integration – in terms of social interaction – for local childcare mentioned by Keuter is that both police and fire brigade officers regularly visit facilities to discuss safety issues and how to respond to different types of crises with the children. As this, as far as we know, is a tradition throughout the country it does not, however, set Maria-Gamla Stan apart. The same practice exists in the other local cases.

3.2.1 User experience of municipal childcare in Maria-Gamla Stan

The parent interviewed here has one child of three who is attending a regular municipal childcare facility in the second year, and who has earlier been enrolled at a for-profit centre.[40] The working name of this interviewee is parent A.[41] For the three local parent interviews in Maria-Gamla Stan (as well as for those in Skärholmen), we have chosen to focus on some primary aspects relevant from a parental point of view: service quality, access, participation and, partly, changing conditions.

As regarding service quality levels, parent A is very content with the care provided. The facility has three departments, with up to 17-18 children in each one. The group of child A is organised according to the "sibling-principle" – i.e. age-integrated – and there are three employees. The group of staff is very stable. Two of these women have been

[39] On a more abstract organisational level, there is a corresponding forum for exchange of views between officials and bodies like the SEFIF, i.e. national and local interest organisations in the sector.
[40] Technically, the facility in question does not belong to Maria-Gamla Stan, but to the adjacent Katarina-Sofia ward. This choice of interviewee and facility was, however, more convenient for us to make. Both the physical and political distance is minute, which makes the exception very reasonable.

working together for fifteen years, and the third joined the other two eight years ago. Parent A considers the staff very competent. She is not quite sure, but guesses none is a preschool teacher. She wonders, however, at the work ambitions and loyalty in the group, considering the very modest pay levels in the profession. She estimates that these employees earn in the vicinity of SEK 14.000 [€ 1556] a month (a figure that indeed indicates that it's not a question of preschool teachers). The manager of the facility, with its three groups, is also the manager of two or three other facilities and present at this particular one only one day in the week. Parent A cannot recall that any of the staff has been ill or absent since the family enrolled at the facility. The need for temporary staff thus appears marginal. We have no information on what would happen if the need would be more pronounced.

The competence and professional dedication of the staff is obvious in the way activities are structured. Each day in the week, parent A observes, is thought through. There is a model for what children should work with and how each week should be spent. There are, for instance, regular outdoor activities. Wednesday is excursion day. This day, the children have to be dropped-off at a certain time, and may not arrive at any point during the morning, which is ordinarily optional. The staff's views on legitimate dropping-off and picking-up behaviour is flexible. There is a willingness, parent A feels, to adapt to changes in time schedule, even at a short notice.

The children always have some new thing they have worked with or produced to bring home with them in the afternoon. The days seem to be spent in different creative areas, such as drawing, building, making music, painting, using natural materials, water etc. The facility is located in its own separate building. It is next to a park area with a staffed municipally run playground [*parklek*] with live animals, barbeque possibilities and, in the other direction, a couple of hundred meters from Stockholm's great lake *Mälaren*. On Wednesdays, these are both popular excursion goals. Many stories are told of how the ducks and swans in the lake have been fed with bread crumbs. But the private yard of the facility is also very functional and has its own playground. In the winter, there is an abundance of sleigh-riding in the small hills at the back of the facility, on the way to

[41] The identities of parents A-C (as well as D-F and G-I) are known only to the project's researchers. All parents will, for reasons of simplicity, be referred to as 'she', but this practice will not necessarily be a reflection of the interviewee's actual sex. Nor will any social or cultural traits be unnecessarily stressed.

the *parklek* – which also has a great slope for the older children.

This kind of municipal playground/park touches on an element of the Swedish childcare system not directly discussed before. A digression is therefore motivated here. At the particular *parklek* mentioned above, there is also a branch of the *öppna förskolan* (or the open preschool). We have so far left this aspect of care out of the analysis, since it is of a completely different kind. Open preschool facilities are generally – but not always – connected to the old public institution of the municipal *parklek*. Here, smaller preschool children (generally 0-3 years old) who do not attend childcare are able to take part in preschool activities, like playing and singing with other children of the same age. Open preschools are municipally staffed and usually operate for some hours in the morning, often outdoors at the adjacent *parklek*. In Stockholm, this is a popular meeting place for those on parental leave. There are toady about 40 of these establishments in Stockholm. At the peak of the system, there were about 200.

The style of these open preschools is rather laid-back. There are no application systems or waiting lists, no registrations to attend beforehand and no fees. They are simply there for people with children of the right age. As they are generally located at parks where there is a *parklek*, parents and children and able to hang out there and have coffee, cakes and ice-cream at non-commercial prices. Technically speaking, neither the *parklek* nor the open preschool are direct parts of the childcare system as such. There is no national legislation regulation operations and the threat to have the service shut down or reduced in times of economical hardship regularly creates uproars in local papers. Families seem to be very appreciative of these places in Stockholm. They ought maybe rather be read as a general, supplementary welfare service for families with young preschool children. As in Östersund, however, this is also a field for the involvement of churches and other social actors in the broader childcare sector. In Maria-Gamla Stan, for instance, there are a few open preschools of this kind organised by the local Swedish church, as well as by other confessional orientations. But we are unable to assess the relative proportions of municipal and other open preschool providers. Since there is no registration for this service, we also lack figures concerning the amount of families taking advantage of it.

The municipal staff and facility studied in Maria-Gamla Stan, our interviewee parent A points out, are open, to parents' views. In the afternoon, she goes on, there are excellent

possibilities to get an account of what the individual child and the whole group have been up to during the day. Communication is clear and direct and no staff appears to be threatened by the parents. Parent A assumes this has to do with the staff being very secure in its professional identity. There is no question whether each child is seen and its needs adequately recognised by the staff or not. Relationship patterns between staff and children seem to be reliable and stable. The only real critique parent A volunteers with of the facility is that the size of the pedagogical groups could be smaller. At a level of, say, 15 children in the group, conditions would probably, she feels, be ideal.

Apart from the ongoing every-day discussions, there are also the conventional meetings between all parents and staff once every term. Our interviewee considers these meetings to be held in a constructive and relaxed manner. Views are never ignored. In the spring, there is a traditional picnic excursion with all the families at the facility. Each child also has an individual "development and assessment plan", that is defined together with the parents and followed-up on regularly. Participation levels are thus, we feel, as ambitious as can be expected from a non-co-op. There is as little interaction, however, between this facility and the local environment as in all other modes of Stockholm childcare, showing how the world of childcare is a world unto itself (or maybe rather: three worlds unto themselves).

Our interviewee, lastly, has no way of assessing if any structural changes have affected this facility's childcare over recent years. As a municipally employed secondary school teacher in the Maria-Gamla Stan ward, though, she has some indirect insights into the system. She is thus aware of the overriding quality-securing programmes that apply to the entire municipal welfare sector and assumes that these work for the facility as well.

As a recent user of for-profit childcare in Maria-Gamla Stan for the same child, she is also able to compare these modes of provision. Her critique of the first solution is severe indeed. Her discontent with the poor ambitions and low standards at the facility where the child spent a year is wide and scorching. She even refers to this as an "under-class" establishment. One year's enrolment was more than enough for the family. Concerning the present facility, parent A, however, does sense that the socio-demographical patterns of this part of the city come across fairly clearly. There is a tendency for parents to be of Swedish descent and reasonably well-to-do. As pointed out above, this clearly reflects

on the composition of the ward.

3.2.2 User experience of co-operative childcare in Maria-Gamla Stan

The parent interviewed here is referred to as parent B. This parent has been a user of the same parent co-operative facility for six consecutive years with two children. In terms of service quality, she feels that the staff is phenomenal: no doubt the best in the world. What quality levels are possible to maintain, however, primarily hinges on the group of member parents at any given time. In this regard, she says, parent co-ops are vulnerable. At her particular facility, the group has not always been stable enough for things to work smoothly. Luckily, the practical consequences for the children have been small, because parents at this particular co-op do not normally contribute with pedagogical work. Instead, all parents have cooking weeks. So the quality, our interviewee points out, of the service given to the children has been remarkable throughout these years.

The facility enrols 15 children and employs a staff of three. Its opening hours are 8 am to 4.30 pm. This implies that the service is not accessible to families with working hours and childcare needs outside these times. Our interviewee notes that this surely creates a basic kind of segregation, adding to the general but more vague impression that nuclear families have least trouble fulfilling the facility's member obligations. The food is thus excellent and prepared in the kitchen by the parent on duty. The children tend to spend a large amount of time outdoors. Our interviewee feels that there has been a reorientation over these years from more structured and visibly thematic pedagogical approaches to more unpredictable ways of organising the children's time. The idea now seems to be to allow the directions and inclinations to grow in the group and maybe not impose goals quite as much as before.

In terms of access, our interviewee senses that the staff is very forthcoming and active when it comes to adapting to parents' needs. There is visible flexibility in the views held on what is considered legitimate dropping-off and picking-up behaviour. Parents' needs and children's security take precedence at the facility over staff convenience. "If you're in a great hurry in the afternoon, you're able to call them and ask them to dress the child for you and wait in the hallway." This is not considered as over-stretching the rules for appropriate levels of service. Parent B reads this as an example of collective mothering,

which in turn hinges on a hetero-normative conception of motherhood, she observes. In these terms, the facility culture does strike her as very conventional.

Regarding participation, our interviewee notes that the co-operative solution requires that a lot of work is put in by members of the co-operative. At this facility, pedagogic work does not, however, belong to the tasks required. The staff prefers to have parents stay on the outside of the daily pedagogic work. Temporary solutions to fill in for sick staff are hired directly by the manager, using private and official contacts. The manager may also ask parents if they are able to fill in at the level of pedagogy. The reasons for the choice of candidates, however, are only the manager's business. All temporary staff are thus hired at the manager's own discretion.

Besides cooking and being responsible for the running of the entire operation, parents are organised in work-groups with different tasks. Decisions are reached at meetings with all members of the co-operative and must be unanimous. There is no board. Our interviewee observes that the amount of active fathers in the co-operative has decreased since her first child was enrolled. She cannot tell why, but suggests it could have to do with increased work-life or general socio-economical pressure, requiring men to work longer hours. Another thought is that it connects to a gentrification-related back-lash for the idea of gender equality.

The facility is located in a part of the ward with a more suburban, than urban spatial structure. The block is built openly around a common central court and there is a park (with the usual *parklek*-open preschool combination, as described in the section above) nearby. There are a few other co-ops in the same local area and between these, bonds are strong. There are, for instance, common schemes for the 5 year-olds from all the block's co-ops during their last preschool year. The managers also cooperate tightly, not least when it comes to influencing the common (municipal) landlord about ways to improve the court's play area and yard.

One recent change in the structural environment of this facility, parent B notes, is that fees have fallen sharply since the introduction of the *maxtaxa* in 2002. Today, they are a fair bit lower than the conventional *maxtaxa*-levels, mainly, she assumes, because of the modest rent levels in the block. Another possible explanation is the absence of a cook.

3.2.3 User experience of corporate childcare in Maria-Gamla Stan

The parent interviewed here is referred to as parent C. The main themes addressed in the interview are the same as is in the foregoing two sections. This parent has been a user of for-profit childcare (and primary schooling) provided by the same major company in the sector for six years.

Parent C starts out by observing that quality levels in the preschool service she has been using have not been very impressive. Conventional quality agenda issues – such as the staff to child ratio – have been all but absent from the company's rhetoric or apparent priorities. There is an impressive educational vision – comprehensive and systematic – for care and schooling elaborated in the brochures and at meetings directed to interested parents. The arguments are very persuasive, and the competence levels and integrity of the company seem impeccable. The level of practice, however, is a completely different thing. Through these years, the childcare facility in question has suffered heavily under the strain of shrinking resources, huge staff turnover and a chronic shortage of regular, as well as temporary, staff. The normal atmosphere has thus seemed to redeem a certain level of social and relational insecurity for the children and visible indifference towards the issue of continuity in parents' or children's relationship to the service. This, parent C observes, has been a main characteristic of the service and evolved into a major problem for her as a parent using it.

Parent C describes herself as inadequately informed at the original time of choice of this childcare solution. If she had known then what she knows today, she would have opted for a co-operative facility. Now, she sees that her choice had a clear political dimension, but at the time she was unaware of this. As the corporation has expanded over the years, the character of the individual facility and service has changed. The hierarchic nature of the organisation has become more and more pronounced. It is obvious, she says, in this kind of care that those working "on the floor" have no say over how activities should be planned or carried through, even at the remotest local level. Instead, standards and goals travel down the hierarchy. Our interviewee feels that, over these years, the consolidation and "corporativisation" of the company has been obvious. The distance is increasing between the managerial level and what goes on in the children's day-to-day lives. This may suit some people, but parent C is no more one of them. She considers this form of

care inferior to both the other main options: municipal and co-operative care, and mainly for organisational reasons. She acknowledges, however, that people do support this mode of provision both for pedagogical/quality reasons and on ideological grounds.

One serious consequence, she however argues, of the corporate structure is that hiring temporary staff to fill in for sick regular staff generally does not happen. The guiding principle is that the work should be possible to perform also when someone is absent. In reality, she remarks, this is impossible without grave practical implications. The main idea is instead to cut labour costs. The unavoidable implication of this approach is that otherwise ambitious staff oftentimes are physically unable to maintain more than minimal activities. At these not so rare times, the service ought to be described more in terms of looking-after, than caring-for the children and helping them develop their abilities.

As we have noted, the quality issue is often connected to the size of children's groups. For this mode of provision, the rule is maximum group sizes. As far as our interviewee is aware, the company never refrains from enrolling enrolable children. Throughout her years as a user of the service, there were never, she feels, any doubts about the priorities of the company. Productivity in this sense seems to be the company's key policy goal. Pedagogy thus generally came across as a rhetorical, rather than a real parameter. In the advertising material provided by a similar major educational corporation the point that the company's childcare views are flexible in terms of pedagogy is rather explicitly made. This does not appear to be a profile issue in the corporate, for-profit sector. The core motivation of these efforts is thus of a different kind. Of course, this does not mean that high educational or pedagogic standards can in principle not be met by corporate welfare providers, but in this case the revenue priority seems to have been very strong, and would possibly partly explain the comparatively poor overall practical performance shown by this facility and corporation.

Regarding patterns of access, the facility has been rather flexible. Parents' requirements for various time-schedules were recognised and often adapted to, parent C claims. There were also individual assessment and development plans for each child in care. The plans were discussed at regular meetings with the parents each term and seriously dealt with. The staff thus entertained satisfactory levels of tolerance and receptivity.

In terms of parental participation, our interviewee stresses that her corporate facility was extremely underdeveloped. There were no channels for user influence and no routines in place to cope with views from parents engaging themselves anyhow. Parent C describes how she thus at one time was directed up from level to level in the corporate structure and ended up discussing a trivial problem concerning her child's daily routines with the acting director of the entire company.

The same regular meetings between staff and parents that take place everywhere in the Swedish educational system are, however, part of this world as well. Our interviewee describes these meetings as peculiar. Starting out as a user of this service, she expected these meetings to be constructive and reciprocal. The primary forum, as it were, for the involved stakeholders to exchange views. But she soon experienced that any view put forth from the parent level was considered as a potential threat. The usual staff reaction being that, in the end, parents had no knowledge of childcare pedagogy or provision. It took some time until she had digested the managerial style, but after some terms she had a clear enough idea, she argues, to be able to assess what was happening more freely.

She describes some of the observations she was then able to make at our interview. One of these is that the staff (i.e. the manager) in charge of these meetings had a consistent, clearly visible style of discouraging parents to organise themselves in groups on any of the topics addressed. All points and arguments made by the parents were considered as isolated phenomena, unrelated to all other views. Discussions generally ended, parent C conveys, with the manager asking the person in question to "send me an email on this". Another issue related to the theme (if not reality) of participation was the presence, after all, of a parent's committee to channel and make use of latent user involvement. This committee, however, on which parent C was active for a brief time, had all the trappings of committees of the same kind in municipal and other care or primary schooling, but almost immediately turned out to be something quite else. At the first meeting, the local manager and the company representative stressed that from now on, this engaged group of parents was to consider itself the local "ambassadors for the company". These parents were encouraged to take advantage of information material provided by the corporation and work to spread its message in different ways. Again, the function of this purportedly participatory body was clearly not to generate participation, rather revenue.

Our interviewee states, lastly, that this mode of childcare service and provision overall did not lack dimensions of integration. But they were of one kind only: the in-company and corporate-consolidating kind. She also points out that the shrinking resources in the sector were clearly visible and reflected on the level of practice during her six years as a user of this mode of childcare.

3.3 Stockholm: the Skärholmen ward

Goals

Besides national and city goals for childcare, the Skärholmen ward's specified activity goal is that "preschool children and their parents feel welcome to our preschool facilities and partake in a stimulating and developing preschool activity". The ward takes on a direct responsibility to offer preschool slots for all children whose parents so desire; to offer a good environment for the development of children's language and knowledge skills; and to create good conditions for parents' participation and influence in the preschool. This generates a range of practical priorities, that we will come back to below. The administrative official responsible for the ward's social welfare for children, families and young people, our interviewee Anna-Bella Kraft, stresses that the language goal is the main priority for the municipal childcare sector. Given the many different non-Swedish first languages of the children in care, support for and the strengthening of Swedish language skills has to be accomplished before many other issues are possible to address. So the ward puts much emphasis on this aspect of childcare.

Diversity

Together with some other wards to the north-west of the city, Skärholmen has one of the most socially and ethnically heterogenous populations in Stockholm. Approximately 80 % of all children in care in the ward are of non-Swedish descent. Social diversity levels are thus great.[42] The levels of diversity in childcare provision, however, are modest. The overwhelming majority of facilities is municipal. As shown in table 1, there is only one parent co-op in the ward. These amount to "inner city-solutions to inner-city needs",

argues our interviewee. Nor are there any corporate commercial facilities. The non-municipal childcare facilities in Skärholmen are virtually only of one kind: separately run companies converted from former municipal facilities. This is a direct institutional reflection of the ideological agenda of the non-Social Democratic city councils 1991-94 and 1998-2002 to privatise social welfare and preschool/school systems. During these periods, employees were encouraged to take over their municipal facilities/work places. It should be noted that in Skärholmen, virtually all of these facilities are located in the same geographical sub-area: Sätra. Kraft considers this mainly as a spill-over effect. When some facilities started to convert, others suddenly recognised that this was realistic and possible, and followed suit. In Skärholmen, there are thus no equivalents to the corporate providers of non-public care present, for instance, in Maria-Gamla Stan.

One direct consequence of the legal changes made in the 1980s-90s in order to allow for different childcare providers, our interviewee observes, has been a massive increase in facility profile-building. Today, most facilities have strengths and orientations that they often stress publicly to attract families. Earlier, the need to argue for certain kinds or orientations of care was marginal indeed. Now, in Skärholmen and elsewhere, it is a normal thing to (be able to) elaborate on the specific advantages of the day care service that is offered. If this increased argumentation is matched by any corresponding real specialisation at the level of local pedagogic practices, we're unable to say.

Financing

The financing of childcare in the ward follows the same model as elsewhere. One aspect highlighted by our interviewee and the ward's 2003 budget and activity plan, is that the local policy emphasis on the development and strengthening of Swedish language skills for preschool children is followed-up financially, and not only rhetorical. Additional funds are available on top of the regular state/municipal contribution to the ward.[43] The point that early development of these skills is necessary for later social and educational progress is thus implemented institutionally by providing each childcare facility with

[42] The amount of children with another first language than Swedish has increased by 30 % since 1995. A current estimate is that 74 languages are spoken in the ward. The largest of these are: Arabic, Kurdish, Somalian, Spanish and Turkish.
[43] The average contribution level to the regular funding system by this addition is 9 %.

resources to strengthen the pedagogical competence in this field. The additional funds are meant to help create conditions favourable for the development both of children's first and second language (i.e. Swedish). Models both for language development and for evaluation of the policy itself are worked out during 2003 by the teams responsible for this welfare level in the ward's four geographical sub-areas. The ward's 2003 budget for the welfare of children, families and young people is given in table 6 below.[44]

Table 6. Welfare budget 2003, Skärholmen ward, million SEK [million €]

	Cost	Fees etc	Net cost
Care for families and individuals	73.6 [8.2]	1.2 [0.1]	72.4 [8.0]
Preschool childcare (1-5 y/o)	129.9 [14.4]	5.7 [0.6]	124.2 [13.8]
Wrap-around school care (6-11 y/o)	33.4 [3.7]	4.4 [0.5]	29 [3.2]
Primary school	301.2 [33.5]	19.4 [2.2]	281.8 [31.3]
Other modes of care	10.0 [1.1]	0.2 [0.02]	9.8 [1.0]
Total budget	**548.1 [60.9]**	**30.9 [3.4]**	**517.2 [57.5]**

Budget and activity plan 2003, Skärholmen ward

Access

Patterns of access in Skärholmen resemble those in the other wards. The same city-wide "guaranteed-place" policy applies here. The ward is today able to keep up with demand, and intends to be able to do the same in the further. The city's Office for Research and Statistics [USK] estimates an increase in the ward by 400 preschool children until 2010. This is noted in the 2003 budget and activity plan and no indications are given that these children should be left without care, even if specific plans are too early to make.

Our interviewee notes that one effect of the demographic set-up of the ward is that new

[44] Budget och verksamhetsplan för Skärholmens SDN 2003 [*Budget and activity plan 2003, Skärholmen*

children are admitted into childcare throughout the year, as new families with preschool children arrive to settle in the ward. The ordinary childcare admittance cycle has a large input at the beginning of each autumn (the start of the educational year) and additional admittance at the start of the spring term in January.[45] In Skärholmen, the cycle is less regular. Or rather: introduction of new children is going on evenly throughout the year. At the end of 2002, 86 % of all local preschool children were enrolled in childcare.

This connects to the language issue. Skärholmen is the largest receiver of newly arrived refugees and asylum seekers in Sweden. As from January 2003, preschool children in families in these groups are entitled to the same childcare provision as other residents. As is readily understood, Swedish language skills for these children is generally the first and main issue that has to be dealt with. The language development emphasis in the ward touched on above thus makes practical sense. There is some distance between this experience, however, and the average Swedish childcare system. But it is still the same system, showing, in Skärholmen, surprising levels of social adaptation. Kraft notes that one interesting consequence of the local linguistic and ethnical patterns is that a number of parents – both in the primary school and preschool system – try to get their children into childcare facilities or schools/classes where Swedish is the predominant language.

Another issue here that we have not had reason to address in the foregoing, but which springs to attention in Skärholmen's particular context is that in the city of Stockholm today, preschool childcare is compulsory for families/parents who lack means to support themselves economically. Families with preschool children, Kraft points out, but who have no regular incomes from paid work, unemployment insurances or the like, are thus in effect barred from keeping their children at home. The main official argument for this is that the people in this group have to be considered as looking for work and should on these grounds (in the same way as other job seekers) be available to the labour market on short notice. With preschool children at home, this time-flexibility would surely be impossible, the argument goes. This municipal norm implies, however, that families with major social problems (such as drug abuse, alcoholism, petty criminality etc, but

ward], p 15.

[45] The Swedish educational system is divided in two terms per year: August-December and January-June. The main Swedish holiday month is July. But preschool childcare is generally provided throughout the summer for those requiring it. The municipal sector rationalises this operation by directing all families to

whose children are not in the actual custody of municipal authorities) also have to make use of the childcare system. This policy could be read as a strategy to better reach these families/children and indirectly to understand and assess the care and social conditions provided for them in a better way.

Another manner in which the childcare system is consciously used in Skärholmen is as a channel to newly arrived families. Our interviewee points out that people in the refugee group often arrive in Sweden with very rough experiences behind them. The childcare facility in these cases both works as an introduction to the workings of this new social setting for these families, a separate support system for their children, and as a way for the ward to reach them and provide potential social, psychological and other kinds of aid that may be required. Since childcare coverage is fairly comprehensive even for this group, this is often a good means to establish a confidence-based relationship between these families and the ward. Particularly for unemployed new-comers, who lack access to the other main natural route into Swedish society: the work place.

Service quality

In Skärholmen ward, the city's overriding quality policy provides a basis for the work to maintain and improve quality levels in childcare. One difficulty is the issue of how to transform general and thus rather vague policy goals to specific tasks that are possible to implement in day-to-day practices. How is the abstract transformed to the concrete? The main method here is to specify main dimensions of care – such as "security", "teaching and development" and "influence". Then require of each facility to report back to the ward administration the means and strategies that will be used to accomplish the goals. We have no way to independently assess the degree of success for this model, or if there are alternative means for this task. But it seems like a reasonable method.

One of the indirect indicators of service quality that has been discussed above, however, is the relative proportion of academically trained staff employed in the local childcare system. In this regard, this southern suburban ward exhibits a different pattern than the other two analysed wards. Preschool teachers/educators are not as many in Skärholmen

only one or a couple of local facilities from late June to early August. There is also a winter break around Christmas time.

as elsewhere in Stockholm. In January 2003, the local proportion in municipal childcare facilities of this category was 22 %; hardly an extremely low figure. The impact of this group on practical care, however, can be assumed to be somewhat lower than the figures suggest. In the public sector, as we have already pointed out, facilities containing only one pedagogical group, following the "sibling-principle", are rare. In the ward, the share is about 10 %. The academically trained staff almost invariably combines her (men less frequently work as preschool teachers/educators) time between administrative and pedagogic work. Multiple units are generally managed by a preschool educator, who is then proportionally disenabled to work with the children. When units consist of three, four or even five groups, the time available for pedagogic work for this group is minimal. Increasing the size of units thus decreases the likelihood that the most highly qualified staff category is present in day-to-day work – although even in Skärholmen, this does not amount to making the group absent. The data indicates that there are active preschool teachers working pedagogically at most facilities in the ward. The ward does, however, consider the levels too low and actively works towards raising them.

An observation that can be made here is that if the proportion of preschool educators in childcare is a valid criterion of service quality, the conclusion must be that to boost the numbers is a potentially powerful means to improve childcare. One main problem at this particular point is economical: highly qualified staff is more expensive to hire. Today, supply does not meet demand. Nor would, however, the economical conditions of most Swedish municipalities allow for extremely high proportions of academic staff in local childcare. The challenge thus seems to us to be to strike a constructive balance between structural economic conditions and pedagogic excellence, given that there are no ready principles to validate an optimum professional balance between different categories of staff, or different tasks. These matters are essentially disputable.

One last issue that deserves to be indicated in terms of service quality is that the model for how to structure children's days at the childcare centre is comprehensive. The idea is that every element in day-to-day life is possible to approach pedagogically. Children in Skärholmen (and elsewhere) thus spend all of their time in a pedagogic environment, be it indoors, at excursions, at the local playground, at mealtimes or in the bathroom. There are no breaks, in this sense, in the staff's pedagogic relationship to the children. There is a continuous structure and activity plan at each childcare centre. This is generally seen

as one of the main relative advantages of day care over childminding solutions. In this latter, more private care model, the possibilities to provide well-structured, professional care are maybe not as good. The arguments for childminding are, on the other hand, the closer, more home-like environment and lesser scale of the service.[46]

In Skärholmen, heavy resources are provided for professional development for those employed in the sector. The main reason for this is the character of the ward. Given the linguistic pluralism amongst the local population, the first issue that has to be dealt with is the children's development of working and basic Swedish. As stated officially, skills to work with small children's linguistic development are necessary and central. Given that "the meeting between the staff and the child decides the quality of preschool care", good communication is vital, and hinges on Swedish language skills for non-Swedish children. To achieve such skills, competent education is a precondition. The cognitive-developmental element is also stressed by the ward. Adequate language treatment and good language-structured learning and understanding capabilities are seen as central for fulfilling and improving the children's possibilities later in life.

The options for municipal employees to develop their professional competences during 2003 almost exclusively concern different linguistic aspects of childcare and tuition, as suggested by this passage from the budget and activity plan: "this year's professional development programme is extensive and primarily consists of opportunities for linguistic education. Two competence-raising programmes, one for staff with secondary education and one for non-trained staff, supervision for the four geographical team coordinators and for pedagogical leaders [academically trained staff, i.e. *förskolepedagog*] will take place."

Another local initiative likely to increase quality levels, Kraft reports, is a major extra input of resources 2003-04 to twelve groups of 1-3 year olds at selected facilities. Here, staff will get salary hikes, and pedagogic groups will be smaller. An important aspect of this initiative is a strong emphasis on documentation and individual development plans for the children at these facilities. Two functional goals have been specified: providing conditions for more excellent childcare and giving the, sometimes questioned, status of the professional field a visible push ahead.

[46] 28 % of all children in preschool care in Skärholmen in November 2002 attended childminding homes.

Integration and participation

As we have seen, integration and participation are at least rhetoric goals of Skärholmen's (as well as Stockholm's) childcare system. Our interviewee observes, however, that the levels of parental participation are actually very low in the ward. It is impossible, Kraft points out, to encourage many of the newly arrived families to even attend parental information and discussion evening meetings at their child's facility. Oftentimes, she assumes, there is no readiness to understand that this is a conventional dimension of Swedish childcare and schooling. The point of these meetings – i.e. to become involved in, reflect on and generate impetus concerning the care that is provided for the children – is seldom appreciated by families from this group. As is apparent in other aspects of Swedish childcare, activism of this kind seems to be a prerogative of the established, the socially resourceful and the relatively well-to-do. Does this mean that childcare in the ward is less excellent? We hesitate to draw this conclusion, feeling that it is perhaps too simplistic.

The issues at stake here are complex: the question is how to interpret a situation where parents are happy with the service provided, and thus remain silent about what could be done to make it better. This can be seen as a basically rational attitude. In this context, however, we can only mention this. On the whole, however, it seems to us as if the main participatory and integrative patterns in Skärholmen are similar to those exhibited by the other two Stockholm wards: i.e. modest.

3.3.1 Local managerial level in municipal childcare in Skärholmen

Goals

Our interviewee at the local managerial ward level in municipal childcare in the ward, Despina Gramenidis, is one of four intermediate managers responsible for roughly one fourth each of the ward's care. When asked about the ward's childcare goals, she refers to the national preschool educational programme. The United Nation's convention on the right of the child provides general guidelines, according to Gramenidis, and the

This is the highest proportion in Stockholm.

central city council specifies more specific rules. As for her personal visions for the childcare as an area manager, she emphasises diversity and multi-cultural experiences. Her main priorities for the Skärholmen/Vårberg sub-sector of the ward are to develop language training and parent networks.

These goals demand special qualities from the staff, according to Gramenidis. She says that a profound interest in multi-cultural life is a basic requirement for staff; one should see the multi-cultural environment as a challenge. Gramenidis' ambition is to hire both older and younger employees, as long as they are interested in the multi-cultural social thematic.

Gramenidis also shares some thoughts on preschool pedagogy. "Few children are very mature at age six", she says, and argues that it is unfortunate that school pedagogy is gaining ground at the expense of preschool pedagogy. Gramenidis does not approve of the new system of preparatory classes for six-year olds at school, but holds that children of that age should develop through play and not by going to school. Gramenidis feels, however, that the focus is slowly shifting back to the preschool from the regular school. The government and political elite are beginning to recognize preschool's special role. Efforts are presently being made, she notes, to provide the preschools with extra money for raising the wages of the staff in the groups for small children. The purpose is to raise the status of the profession through higher wages and supplementary education.

Diversity

Gramenidis recognizes private provision of childcare as being of sufficient quality but she does not see that there is any real need for alternatives: "There is already so much flexibility in the municipal system that there is no need for private actors, at least not for this reason", she says. She does not think it is right to run preschools privately, but states that "preschools are part of the education and education should not be privately run". When asked why she thinks private actors do occur, she answers "to make profit". She believes that some parents choose private alternatives "because of the prestige, it is considered classy to use private preschools". Gramenidis is also asked why she thinks there are less private childcare alternatives in the Skärholmen ward. "Parents are not as interested here, not in that way", she says. Parents of non-Swedish descent are not very

informed about different alternatives, she says, “The municipal preschools feel safer for them”.

Gramenidis is asked why traditional Swedish families chose private alternatives more often than families with non-Swedish backgrounds. “Lots of people make that decision because there are too few Swedish children here”, she answers. Swedish parents are aware of the socio-cultural set-up of the municipal preschools and look for alternatives, according to Gramenidis.

Gramenidis is also confident that the municipal preschools are very serious alternatives in their own right. They have the best education programmes for the staff, and are in the forefront of the pedagogical development in the childcare area. Educated people in the childcare sector therefore tend to favour municipal employment. “Many of the ones that leave us for private alternatives come back because of the job security here”, our interviewee says.

Gramenidis offers some reflections on the years of liberal/conservative city government in Stockholm. According to her, the city council exerted heavy pressure on the wards to privatise preschools. “I almost had to hide from them some days” she states, referring to officials at the city level. Relatively few preschools where actually privatised in the Skärholmen area, something Gramenidis is happy about. “I’m really glad we stood up to them”, Gramenidis says. The pressure to privatise has completely has waned, however, since the Social Democrats regained municipal power in Stockholm, Gramenidis even talks about the liberal/conservative years in power as a test that is now over.

Financing

The local municipal preschools are part of the same public financing system as all other preschools, but Gramenidis observes that the public preschools have received more funding lately. She feels that politicians are becoming more attentive and responsive to the sector’s needs. The Skärholmen/Vårberg area is also receiving extra funds because of the special needs here. It is a challenge, she continues, to keep the right number of employees in a business with rapidly changing basic conditions, Gramenidis says. The number of children varies and thus also the demand for childcare. “We try to be flexible and adjust to the demand”, she says.

The introduction of the *maxtaxa* has not greatly effected municipal childcare, according to Gramenidis. The one obvious effect she is able to think of is that parent who already used public childcare now demand longer hours. But the difference is marginal. The reform has not had any real impact on the economy of care; the municipal sector gets its funding regardless.

Access

Demand for childcare is greatest in the spring, our interviewee notes. Access is always readily available, by token of the general Stockholm three-month rule. Nor is there in real terms any significant waiting time for a slot in the area or ward. Gramenidis does, however, point out that public childcare in the ward and area will have to expand. The ward is in preparation for this. New preschool facilities are being planned. The increase in demand is thus expected and will, Gramenidis estimates, be adequately met.

Service quality

In the area, municipal preschools have a relatively lower ratio of academically educated staff. Gramenidis observes that it is very hard to find properly educated staff today but that they make every effort to guarantee the quality of the staff. All educated preschool teachers are offered an extensive complementary course. The year-long part-time course focuses on the special need for preschools in areas with many non-Swedish children. The course is organised in the workplace. All academically educated preschool teachers must take this course sooner or later but they are free to initiate their studies at any time the course is given. Gramenidis also believes that the way the staff feel about the workplace is of great significance for the service quality. “We try to work with staff issues in a long term perspective”, Gramenidis declares and continues: “We try to think about what kind of employers we want to be”.

In the municipal childcare facilities under Gramenidis’ responsibility, children’s groups are fairly small. The average group has 14-15 children, but there may sometimes be as many as 16-17 in one group. The number of staff per group is always high because all positions are planned as full-time, which makes for high density of teachers.

As noted above, municipal childcare in the ward is divided in four sub-areas. Each area (or team) has one unit manager [*områdeschef*] like Gramenidis, and three or four deputy managers. Each team is responsible for about 8 preschools with 20 departments. The municipality also employs pedagogical leaders that supervise two or three preschools each. These pedagogical leaders are intended to compensate for the relatively low ratio of preschool teachers, and to ensure that adequate pedagogical standards are met.

Gramenidis thinks that a large public organisation like the municipality has a far better chance of providing high quality childcare than small non-public actors are able to aspire to. A large organisation can be more effective by having some functions provided by experts common to 25, or so, preschools. Gramenidis refers to a sort of economies of scale. She argues that bigger units have greater flexibility in that spare resources always are at hand. There are always substitute teachers, when needed, since the work pool is substantial. Temporary preschool teachers are always available when regular staff is ill or absent. The economy is also generally better, she says.

Integration and participation

Integration and participation are two significant issues in the ward. Gramenidis says that there is a major tradition of language pedagogy in the municipal childcare system. On top of this, local additional methods have been developed to meet special needs there. These local methods concern development of everyday skills, such as learning the new language in every possible situation at the preschool, not just in special designated slots. Gramenidis thinks it is important to read to the children, but even more important is to let the children talk themselves and develop in their own pace.

The municipal employees have special meetings, where the unit manager informs them about changes in the organisation. Employees are then expected to share their opinions with the management. There are also central meetings for the ward's entire managerial staff once a month and regular meetings at the different preschools, also once a month. Gramenidis notes that they don't get many suggestions from the employees; she would like to see more. She is, however, confident that the organisation works in this respect, which may be reflection of the fact that she has been involved in developing it herself.

Parent participation is a complicated issue in a ward like Skärholmen. There used to be

a system with regular meetings with parents. But this didn't really work, according to Gramenidis. This form of parent participation did not really recognize or address some of the difficulties in a culturally diverse community such as Skärholmen. Now, there is instead a case-based method where staff sit down with parents and talk about education and raising children from the parents' own perspective. The important part is to establish contact with the parents, Gramenidis says. It is all about getting the parents involved. Cultural differences is another topic often discussed with the parents. Gramenidis says that they try to meet and interact with parents in many different ways. Sometimes there are parties, sometimes staff talk with parents about the children's work or watch videotapes of preschool activities. Taping what the children do is a popular way to give the parents insight into what goes on at the preschool, which is especially important, Gramenidis observes, when it comes to non-Swedish parents who otherwise may have difficulties to relate to everyday childcare life.

Another method is to let the children make collages with their parents. They can make personal exhibitions about themselves, their families, pets and so on. These works are framed and exhibited at the preschool, so that the children have something to show the group when trying to express who they are and where they come from. Gramenidis tells the interviewer a story about one particular father who came to the preschool and found that some of the other children had more pictures than his son/daughter in their collage. The proud father brought his son/daughters collage with him home and sent it back the next day with twice as many pictures in it. Gramenidis uses this story to show how this technique works to make parents involved in their children's care.

3.3.2 User experience of municipal childcare in Skärholmen

Our interviewee, parent G, is very happy with the care received by her daughter at the municipal preschool in the Skärholmen ward. She is now having her second daughter attending childcare; the older one has moved on to primary school. Parent G was first offered a place in childminding care [*dagmamma* or *familjedaghem*] but she preferred to have her daughter attend regular, public childcare.

Parent G declares that she chose municipal childcare because she wanted her children to be in a larger group of children and staff. "I think it is better for [the daughter] to meet

more people", she says. Parent G does not seem to share the usual preference for small groups, but instead feels it is good for the child to get accustomed to a lot of people and municipal childcare provides a good opportunity for this. "She can develop more there", parent G explains. The family originally had to wait four months to receive childcare at a municipal facility in the ward, which exceeded the three-month limit to waiting time. Parent G knew about the three-month limit and brought up the exceedingly long waiting herself during the interview.

Parent G had her children attend childcare already before the *maxtaxa*-reform and says that it made a real difference for the family's economy. Before the *maxtaxa*, the family paid in excess of 2000 SEK [about € 222] per month for their two daughters. Today, they pay a total of 1260 SEK [€ 140] for childcare and after-school care, for the older girl. "It makes a big difference", parent G says. She does think, however, that people are taking advantage of the current *maxtaxa* system. In her opinion, people are using the system to consume more childcare than they actually need. "People who used to have childcare on a part-time basis are now using it full-time", parent G says.

The economic situation has become worse over the last years, according to parent G. She feels that municipal funding of childcare is less generous today than during her first spell in the system, and offers one particular example: "there were less gifts and candy for the children at this year's *julgransplundring*" [i.e. the traditional Swedish Christmas-farewell party, when the tree is plundered of its sweets and thrown out], she says. Parent G would also like to see more activities for the children but guesses "there is no money for that". Conditions do, however, seem to vary between different preschools. Parent G argues that some municipal preschools fare worse economically than others.

Parent G is not aware of any forum for parents to influence the way the preschool is run. Meetings are, however, held twice a year between staff and parents. There are also some social events, like an international potluck once a year, to which all the parents bring traditional foods from their country of origin. Other than that, parent G does feel that she can talk with the staff about things that concern her, when dropping off and picking up her daughter.

When asked what she likes about her preschool, parent G immediately responds: "the teachers". She is really happy with the teachers and she feels good about the fact that

her daughter runs off and hugs her teacher every morning when she is dropped off at the preschool. “She sometimes doesn’t want to go home”, parent G says, half jokingly. The wonderful teachers contribute to make her impression of the preschool very favourable. She thinks that she might be lucky to have found this particular municipal preschool. She has heard of other places where the situation is not as good. “Some preschools have lots of substitute teachers”, parent G says who is happy with the fact that she always meets the same staff at her daughter’s facility. But she has no particular affection for the municipality itself: “they just want to save money”, she says.

Parent G says that she has recognized one general trend during her years as a mother of children in municipal childcare. “When my oldest daughter went to preschool there were many more Swedish children there, now there is just one at the entire preschool”, parent G says and adds: “we are also foreigners”, referring to herself and her family. When asked why she thinks this is so, she answers “I guess it is that kind of an area”. She would wish that there were a more even distribution of children, with both Swedish children and children of foreign descent.

Parent G has gotten the impression that there is an especially high ratio of children of foreign descent at municipal preschools. She suspects that this has to do with lack of information. Families arriving from other countries do not know of the different options or are uncertain about what they imply for their children. Parent G exemplifies with her own family: “I was introduced to a Montessori preschool but I did not know anything about it”, she says and continues: “I know it is really common here in Sweden but I didn’t know what it meant, so I picked normal childcare”.

3.3.3 Local managerial level in co-operative childcare in Skärholmen

Goals

Our interviewee at the co-operative Skärholmen facility, Bodil Steen, refers to herself as the co-operative’s senior employee, not its manager. In terms, firstly, of goals, Steen argues that *Björken* [Swedish for “the birch tree”; the name of the facility] specifies no pedagogical goals other than those stated in the national preschool educational programme (LPFÖ 98). All three employees have, however, extensive experience from different kinds of pedagogical schools. Steen mentions Montessori, Waldorf and Reggio

Emilia. “We’ve picked the bits we liked best in different schools”, she says. According to Steen, the employees have in their previous careers come to understand what works and what does not and at *Björken* adjust their work accordingly. She does not feel any great need to affix any pedagogical label on *Björken*, but instead stresses flexibility and attentiveness to the children’s needs.

Steen summarizes the basic philosophy at *Björken* in the following way: “every child must feel equally important, everybody must be recognized. Every child must learn to show respect for people around them”. *Björken* favours outdoor activities and Steen talks proudly about the wild piece of rocky nature behind the preschool, where the children spend lots of time every day. *Björken* is located in an earlier school building and its 15 children can roam playgrounds designed for a much larger group of children. “Sätra [the local neighbourhood] is a beautiful area with great possibilities of outdoor life and we have decided to take advantage of this”, Steen says.

Diversity

Björken was originally founded as a parent co-operative; it was in other words already up and running when Bodil Steen was employed nine years ago. At first, *Björken* built on loose co-operation between parents who were baby-sitting each other’s children. The co-operative was organisationally developed from this practice. Steen is one of the three employees that constitute the backbone of everyday business at *Björken*. Parents are responsible for some of the everyday work; they are scheduled to work on three Tuesday afternoons out of four. As in other co-ops, parents are also responsible for the general management of the preschool and do a lot of unscheduled work at the facility, in three different work groups. All significant decisions concerning the running of *Björken* are taken at special board meetings, where both parents and employees are represented. Parents also fill in when regular staff is absent because of illness, vacations or for other reasons.

Steen thinks that the parent co-operative model has more benefits than disadvantages. She has previously been employed in municipal childcare and likes the co-operative workplace better. She says she is happier here and feels better about going to work in the morning. “It is a wonderful place to work”, she declares. “It is cosier than at the

municipal childcare, a better atmosphere, you get closer to the parents". She regards the parents as friends and appreciates the closeness she feels towards them, something she has not experienced at any of the municipal preschools she has worked at before. "The parents are really sweet" she says, and continues, "they take care of us [the staff], they provide money for preventive health care and recreation".

When asked if she can think of any less favourable things with parent co-operatives as a form of provision of childcare, Steen brings up two points. The first problem is that there is both an upside and a downside to the fact that all the parents are part of the running of *Björken*. She feels that it is great to have such active parents, people that the children know and trust. But parents' familiarity also causes some problems. Everybody feels so much at home that they tend to treat the place as a second home rather than a workplace, Steen notes. Everybody has their own keys and they sometimes go there to borrow things and let their children play there after work hours. It is also a problem that parents remain at the location after their scheduled care hours, just to hang out and have the children play outside *Björken*, together with children who are still formally in care. "Sometimes I must find nice ways to tell the parents to get themselves together and go home after they have picked up their kids", Steen reports. This problem did not exist at the municipal facilities she worked at earlier. There, none of the parents would think of staying on at the premises after picking up their child.

Another problem has to do with parents in management positions. "Members of the board only stay on for one year" Steen says, and goes on: "when they leave the board, they are just beginning to learn how things are run, it takes a long time to learn everything". The positions at the co-operative's board are refilled so often that there is no continuity, which in turn creates a certain lack of business knowledge among board members at any given time. "A lot of time is spent on informing the parents how to do things, time that could be spent with the children", Steen says and continues: "then we have to start all over again with the new parents the following year". The parent's lack of information ranges from not knowing in which drawer to find certain things, to not knowing how to handle staff recruitment.

Even though Steen stresses that she really likes the parents and appreciates their trust and companionship, she still speculates about the possibilities of running *Björken* as a

staff co-operative, without parents in management positions. She has no plans, however, to actually work for a solution of this kind. Steen believes that non-public forms of childcare have an edge over municipal ones, but is not completely certain to what extent the parent co-operative is the best non-public alternative. “It means a lot of extra work”, she says, adding that she would rather spend time talking with the parents about the children than about how to do this and that.

Steen also touches on the fact that *Björken* – as a parent co-operative – does not have a manager, something she thinks might be a bad ting.[47] At times it could be good to have someone making everyday decisions without having to ask the board. This, however, is no significant issue to her. “It is not easy to change things in these organisations” she says, and continues: “it takes time until all the people involved in the management recognise changes”. Steen brings up the facility’s menu as an example. If the staff realise that the children do not approve of a certain dish, they might want to change it. Even if the board accepts the change in the menu, it still takes a long time until all the parents are informed about the change. Some parents might continue with the old menu although the board has approved of the new one.

Steen thinks that the mode of provision of childcare is less significant for the quality of care and that the quality of the staff is what really matters. At a parent co-operative like *Björken*, the quality of the co-operation amongst the parents is of vital importance. This varies with time, as parents come and go.

Steen has not experienced any uncooperative behaviour from the city council. The city council has a special department for privately run childcare and as far as Steen knows, the cooperation with this department has been excellent. “Someone from the city council comes out to see us once a year and they are always supportive”, Steen says. She does not feel that *Björken* is being treated better or worse than the municipally run preschools where she has worked before. She does feel, however, that they are a bit isolated at *Björken*, and that, being such a small facility, that they could need to come out and meet children from other facilities. *Björken* has therefore initiated cooperation with another co-operative for the oldest children; the five-year-old group.

[47] This, however, is not the rule for parent co-ops. Practices vary.

Steen can only think of one instance where *Björken* has been treated differently than the municipally run preschools. One of the parents at *Björken* had heard of some kind of children's event being held in the Skärholmen ward and suggested to the staff that they bring the children to this event. Once they got there they were informed that only children from municipal preschools were allowed. Steen thinks that this was a petty distinction, since *Björken* is run on taxpayer's money and follows the same regiment as all of the municipality's preschools. The only relevant difference she can think of is that "the municipality offers continuing education to its staff, but that offer does not apply to us, of course".

Financing

Björken receives public financing, just like all other preschools. It used to be a low cost alternative until the introduction of the *maxtaxa*, Steen says. The idea was that you as a parent contributed with some work and therefore paid a lower parent fee than in other modes of provision. The *maxtaxa* made all the other forms of childcare as affordable as the parent co-operative, but without obliging parents to work. "I do not understand it", Steen says, referring to the *maxtaxa*. "What do we need it for, the ones that needed financial help to pay for childcare got it anyway". She cannot see any point in giving the people that can pay the same cut in expenditures.

The *maxtaxa* has, however, not affected the finances at *Björken*. "We feared that it would get much worse", Steen admits. There has been a steady flow of new children even after the reform, when the alternatives seemed to offer the same fee but without the parental work obligation. This indeed suggests that people have other motives than strictly economic ones when they choose care for their children.

Access

Steen senses that it is the buyer's market when it comes to childcare. *Björken* is dependent on a steady flow of children. But the flow of children fluctuates, which gives an element of uncertainty to the planning at *Björken*. At times the co-op has feared that it would not get enough children to make ends meet, but so far it has always managed to

reach the necessary numbers in the end. “I even got notice once, because we did not have enough children” Steen says. That time, as all other times, they managed to get enough children in the end.

Steen thinks that the difficulty to find children that they sometimes experience, might have to do with the local demographics. She suggests that the high ratio of people of non-Swedish descent might hamper the general interest in parent co-operatives. The special information needs that exist with parent co-operatives are perhaps hard to meet when it comes to newly arrived residents. “Maybe it is hard for them to understand the concept”, Steen says. She illustrates her argument with the opinion that parent co-operatives are much more common in other parts of the Stockholm area, where there are fewer non- or new-Swedes.

Steen also suspects that a lot more people would be interested in enrolling their children at *Björken* if they could provide better opening hours. But *Björken* is too small and has too few employees to offer long opening hours. Access to *Björken* is readily available (at the moment, there is one family waiting for a place). The only real access problem would be that it is too readily available, meaning that the staff at *Björken* has to worry about finding new children while parents are guaranteed care within three months.

Service quality

Björken has a high proportion of educated staff. Two out of the three employees are academically educated preschool teachers. The third employee is an educated caregiver. Bodil Steen is thus one of two preschool teachers. Some of the actual care, however, is provided by parents, who generally lack any kind of education in the area. But as Steen points outs, parents only work in regular care on Tuesday afternoons, three weeks out of four. The rest of the day to day care is performed by the three employees. And these are very experienced. At *Björken*, there are 15 children in one group. But sometimes there are as little as 11-12, which is too few and sometimes there are more than 15. Steen says that they try to give all the children proper attention and she feels they can manage this with three teachers on 15 children.

The staff must, however, spend some of their time cooking and doing the dishes. Steen would rather spend all of the time with the children but she must spend hours every day

with other things. This leaves the group of 15 children with two or even one member of the staff while the others are performing duties that are done by extra non-pedagogical staff at most other preschools. Steen regards this as another result of *Björken*'s modest size; it has very limited resources. Steen is not happy about having only three full-time employees. She thinks that it might have been more effective to have more part-time employees. The staff sometimes take courses in various educational and policy fields. Lately, she notes, there has been recommendations from the city council to educate the staff in language analysis, something especially important in this specific community.

When it comes to service quality, Steen emphasizes the homogeneity of the group. The small group is like an extended family where all the children know all the parents. She willingly admits to one problem with service quality; the less than perfect building of the facility. *Björken* is located in the old library of an abandoned primary school. The older children have no problems with the building but it is obviously not built with the needs of the smaller children in mind. The staff, for instance, has to climb a set of stairs to get the children to the bathroom.

Integration and participation

The social integration is not such a big issue at *Björken*, at least not presently. It is suggested by the interviewee that it is a special kind of parents that chooses parent co-operatives. This rarely includes immigrants. Steen says that only one family at present is of non-Swedish descent at *Björken*, which is a poor reflection of the demography in the local area. "We do not have as many as they do in municipal childcare", Steen reflects. *Björken* is thus a very homogenous preschool facility.

The co-operative has, however, the necessary experience and knowledge to deal with the special needs of children from non-Swedish families. Steen practices a special kind of language analysis where the children's speaking patterns are analysed so that efforts can be made to improve on their communication capabilities. The children are taped and the tapes are analysed according to special scientific methods.

Parental participation is of course significant at a parent co-operative. The parents are the employers and make all major decisions, even if they do so after consultations with the staff representative at the board. Steen points out that the staff has all the necessary

information about how to run the co-op. Judging from Steen's general description, participation from parents as well as staff is near complete, possibly at the expense of management efficiency. The most important decisions are often taken by people who don't have all the know-how, according to Steen.

3.3.4 User experience of co-operative childcare in Skärholmen

The first thing parent H has to say is that it is parents are running things at the *Björken* co-operative. Parent H is both mother of a child at the co-op and head of personnel. She makes clear that she likes the co-operative way of running things; she likes that she is allowed to get really involved in her son's childcare. "It is a lot of work", she says. She explains how all parents have to participate in one of the three work groups or the board, which is also in this sense regarded as a kind of work group. The groups are the *fixing group* that deals with chores outside the everyday routine, the *food and cleaning group* that does all the shopping and the heavier cleaning, and the *recruiting group* that tries to ensure that there are always new children coming in when old ones leave. Then there is the board, where two parents serve for one year. Parent H is an exception to this rule; she has done two and a half years on the board.

When asked why she chose a parent co-operative, parent H willingly admits that she picked *Björken* because there was a majority of Swedish children there. "It is really mixed at other places", she says. She doesn't live nearby *Björken*, but in her mind it is worth the effort to drive a little further in the morning if you like a particular preschool facility. She tried municipal preschooling before, but found that too much effort was put into language-training and other elements that she did not believe beneficial to her son, whose needs were different than those focused on at the municipal facility. "They had pictures everywhere on the walls so that the children could communicate by pointing", parent H says and although she thinks this is fine for children who do not speak Swedish, it is not what she wants for her son. Parent H thinks that time is better spent for her son if he does not have to go through the same stages as relatively newly arrived children.

Parent H did a lot of research on childcare in the area, before deciding on *Björken*. She looked everywhere, both close to home and in other parts of town. She says that most

other parent co-operatives had very long waiting times. There is not very much demand for parent co-operatives here, she says. *Björken* is one of the few that exist but there still isn't much of a waiting time. She thinks that local families generally just want to drop their kids off in the morning and not have to worry until picking them up again at night.

Parent H can think of a number of things that make this form of provision especially attractive to her. One is the fact that there is always enough staff. Staff is replaced in case of sickness. Her experience from the municipal sector is that sick employees are not always replaced; sometimes it has no substitute preschool teachers. At *Björken*, they can always call in parents to take care of business. "There is a feeling of safety in that", parent H claims.

Parent H also likes the fact that she gets to know the other parents, something that would not happen at a municipal preschool, according to herself. There are different kinds of people among the parents at *Björken*, with academic as well as non-academic backgrounds, artists and workers and so on. There are also a few non-Swedish parents, which parent H sees as positive. She feels good about being a part of her son's care during the days, even though she has to go to work. "You know that he is in a good place", she says. "It feels good to know what happens to my son during the day".

Parent H is also very happy with the staff. She says that the different sets of parents are very important to the way things are handled at *Björken*. The quality of the cooperation between parents and staff also varies with different parents. Right now they have a great set of parents, parent H says. When asked about what is less good about a parent co-operative, parent H admits that "it can be a bit of a chatter at times, but there are no real problems. You get used to it", she says. She is also less than satisfied with the building.

Parent H stresses that one family means the difference between what is economically viable and what is not, at a small non-public preschool like *Björken*. It used to be easy to get a slot in care at *Björken*, she says, but since the fall of 2003 it has become much harder. This might have to do with families from other parts of Skärholmen moving children to the local area, which is seen as a somewhat respectable part of the ward.

Parent H feels that she plays (at least) double roles at *Björken*, with partly conflicting interests at times, being the head of personnel and employer/manager at the same time. This means that she has to represent the staff's interest towards, amongst others, herself.

She senses, however, that she has learned to handle this situation alright. “We all know each other’s positions”, parent H says. This is a very small preschool and everybody is able to make their opinion known to the others.

3.3.5 Local managerial level in for-profit childcare in Skärholmen

The studied facility is called *Förskolan Femtiettan* [Preschool number fifty-one], which refers to the street number of its location. In the account, it will be referred to as simply *Femtiettan*, i.e. ‘Number fifty-one’. Our interviewee Ulla Hedberg is CEO.

Goals

The goals for *Femtiettan* are all assembled from the national preschool educational programme (LPFÖ 98). While following the general guidelines in the national educational programme, *Femtiettan* also has used it as an inspiration for the preschool’s special profile. Hedberg says that the nine, later eight, co-founders read the document and sat down to discuss which specific segments in the national preschool programme they considered to be the most essential. These segments provided the foundation to *Femtiettan*’s own, ambitious pedagogical programme. Key words in the facility’s own programme are: happiness, safety, development, self-confidence, empathy, playfulness, responsibility and cooperation.

Hedberg argues that there is a clear development towards more school-like pedagogies in Swedish childcare today, something she does not approve of. *Femtiettan* embraces the “classical Swedish childcare ethics”, which emphasizes the pedagogical value of playing games and developing freely as a child. Hedberg points to a division between school and preschool pedagogy in Swedish childcare today. “We are on the play-side”, she declares proudly, meaning that children enrolled at *Femtiettan* are expected to play, rather than attend school-like education. She also recognizes a problem in the fact that preschools now tend to be situated together with or in regular primary schools and even share some activities. The schools are so much bigger and so influential, she argues, that the special needs for preschoolers are set aside in favour of school pedagogy and the needs of older children.

As for other goals, Hedberg especially stresses the health and environmental ambitions in the facility profile. *Femtiettan* is certified to use the KRAV-label for environmental sustainability, a stamp of approval from the KRAV-association, which is a key player in the market for environmentally friendly and organic products in Sweden.

Diversity

As far as our interviewee is able to tell, there are few or no real differences in the actual childcare provided by different childcare givers. She holds that there are thus no general differences between *Femtiettan* and the neighbouring facilities run by the ward – at least not in the general approach to children. The main difference, according to Hedberg, lies in the staff, and not the organisational structure. *Femtiettan* was earlier municipally run. Hedberg illustrates the importance of the staff by pointing to the fact that all families at *Femtiettan* chose to remain after it was reorganised as a for-profit preschool. She says that the parents don't care about the organisational structure as long as they are pleased with the staff, or as long as the chemistry is right between parents, staff and children.

Hedberg protests (somewhat oddly) against the notion, supplied by our interviewer, that *Femtiettan* is in fact a private childcare solution. "We are not really private" she argues, referring to the fact that *Femtiettan* is run along the same guidelines and regulations as the municipal preschools. She also reminds the interviewer that the only real source of income is from the national financing system and with the *maxtaxa* in place, the financial freedom of *Femtiettan* is minimal. The only differences between *Femtiettan* as a municipal preschool and today's for-profit *Femtiettan* is that the staff is more loosely associated with its employer, at least in a legal sense, and that the for-profit *Femtiettan* has a somewhat higher degree of freedom in deciding its pedagogical orientation. Apart from that, "the municipality and the educational board at the city level decide everything", Hedberg declares. She even goes so far as to say that "this is basically a municipally run preschool". So why did she and the other co-founders go through the trouble of transforming *Femtiettan* to a for-profit preschool?

"I was dead tired of the municipal organisation" Hedberg says, describing a situation in which she were called to one meeting after another to receive the latest instructions from a distant, anonymous municipal administrator. That policies changed a lot with the

change of civil servants, eroded her confidence in the municipal organisation. Hedberg willingly admits that she also "wanted to decide more myself". The decision to break free of the municipal organisation was a way to gain power over everyday decisions. "I like to be in control over the decisions that concern me" Hedberg says.

But there is also another reason why *Femtiettan* was transformed to a for-profit establishment: pressure from the city council to try alternative forms of provision for childcare. According to Hedberg, the liberal/conservative city council of 1998-2002 was aggressive in its efforts to increase the share of private alternatives to the municipal childcare in the Skärholmen ward. *Femtiettan* was thus strongly encouraged to shift to private management. They were provided with education, information and professional help from consultants, free of charge, from the city council. The council's efforts were maybe less successful in Skärholmen than in other parts of the city, but *Femtiettan* did decide to privatize in the year 2000, since they were tired of the municipal organisation and since the backing from the then Stockholm city council was unconditional.

These favourable conditions changed when the Social Democrats gained power in 2002. The positive attitude towards the new for-profit *Femtiettan* was replaced with a more neutral stance from the city. In some respects the attitude even became slightly hostile. Hedberg mentions one example. *Femtiettan* pays rent to the city of Stockholm. Recently there has been a change of status in their contract with the city; they are now considered a "for-profit organisation" which means that the rent has doubled. Hedberg notes that this has put enormous strain on the facility and indirectly on the members of the staff that put up the money when establishing the preschool. Conditions have, in other words, changed considerably with the political shift of power in the city council.

With the benefit of hindsight, Hedberg today offers a more sceptical view on why the city council once pushed them so hard to privatize. "They wanted to collect more taxes" she says and explains that a for-profit preschool must pay value added tax. Even though they are compensated to some extent for this, Hedberg is quite certain that more is paid in taxes than received in VAT-compensation.

Hedberg briefly touches on how the municipal preschools reacted on the establishment of for-profit actors in the field of childcare. Many of the municipal employees reacted with distrust towards the changes, according to Hedberg. She argues that the long

tradition of municipal welfare solutions for childcare has established a sense of self-righteousness among municipal actors. “They are stealing our children” was the kind of reaction Hedberg faced from the municipality, even though she does not claim to have heard those exact words from any municipal official.

“Non-municipal operators don’t have the same safety net as municipal ones do”, our interviewee concludes. She holds that the non-municipal actors are much more exposed to the economic and political reality of the day. During periods with fewer children they experience economic hardship, and if there should ever appear a surplus in the budget, this would be needed as a buffer fund for the next downturn.

Financing

The nine founders (all former employees from the time when *Femtiettan* was run by the ward/municipality) founded *Femtiettan* on a system of equal size stock investments. Hedberg has since acquired one more of the 9 shares, now holding two, one more than all the others. Since the first year of for-profit management (2001) generated a SEK 300.000 (about € 33.333) surplus, some of the investments have been repaid as yield. The second year *Femtiettan* gave a profit of SEK 80.000 (€ 8888). The first two years of the new establishment, earnings were above expectation. “The accountant usually brings pleasant surprises”, Hedberg says. The book-keeping is done in a down to earth manner. “I do most of the work with the economy back home in my couch”, remarks Hedberg.

A for-profit preschool such as *Femtiettan* is supposed to generate a profit but this is hard to do when the only source of income is taxpayer money, Hedberg says. She also feels that it is somewhat awkward to seek profit in a business such as childcare. She makes very clear that economic gain was not a motive for privatizing *Femtiettan*.

The number of children at the preschool is vital for the economy. *Femtiettan* is permitted to care for fifty children. More is paid for younger children and children with disabilities. They therefore welcome young children and they try to recruit children for the spring semester especially, since this maximizes earnings.

With the transition, Hedberg and *Femtiettan* simply took over the municipality’s bills. In fact, they still share utility bills with a municipal preschool facility next-door and pay

half of these. The biggest expense is the monthly rent, which has recently been doubled by the city council, from SEK 25.000 (€ 2777) to SEK 50.000 (€ 5555).

The *maxtaxa*-reform had little effect on the facility's budget, Hedberg notes, since fees already at the time of the reform were kept roughly in line with the municipal fees. The *maxtaxa* only meant a minor loss of income, for which *Femtiettan* was partly compensated. It did, however, impose more severe limits on the economic flexibility of the establishment, according to our interviewee.

The economy is a source of great concern and uncertainty for the staff at *Femtiettan*. It is seldom known just how many children there will be the following year, which makes economic prospects hard to ascertain. There is now a very slim margin but for the time being it is possible to make ends meet. Hedberg is unable, however, to say if *Femtiettan* will face bankruptcy in a future not too distant. Still, she thinks that today's uncertainty is easier to bear than the feeling of being controlled by uninformed civil servants during the years in the municipality.

Access

Access to *Femtiettan* fluctuates somewhat but there is usually no problem getting a spot within a reasonable time. Parents generally do not have to wait the specified amount of time anyway, Hedberg explains. The three-month limit to waiting times at Swedish preschools is established in law, which in her interpretation prohibits longer queues. She prefers to have a time of notice before accepting a child, so that they can be properly introduced but they have occasionally enrolled children as early as two weeks after their first contact. *Femtiettan* accepts children with disabilities and has a special group with fewer children for children with special needs.

Service quality

Femtiettan has a low ratio of academically trained pedagogical staff, only one out of eight staff members holds an academic degree. The rest of the eight have lower level childcare training, but all of the employees have extensive experience, Hedberg notes. The average age among the staff is relatively high. At times, *Femtiettan* employs

temporary staff to cope with increased workloads. Recently, three younger people have been hired, one educated in the field and two without formal education. *Femtiettan* also employs two part-time cooks who do all the cooking.

Ulla Hedberg is currently seeking an academically educated preschool teacher, but these are hard to find, she says. The interviewer asks if she thinks a for-profit preschool has a special disadvantage in competing for skilled staff. Hedberg answers "yes, maybe". The municipal preschools can offer quite different job security and social benefits that a for-profit preschool is unable to match. "Once you get employment in the municipality, you are certain to have a position for a long time somewhere in the municipality" Hedberg says, and continues: "We are too small to offer such a job security". In other words, skilled childcare staff is generally hard to find and possibly especially hard to find for non-municipal actors.

The pedagogical groups at *Femtiettan* are somewhat smaller than in most comparable municipal preschools. The ideal number is 15 in each group of children, according to Hedberg. Sometimes there are as few as 10 or 12 children in one group, but this is not economically viable. At other times they are forced to jam 16 or even 17 children into one group, but this is pedagogically very bad and that big groups are avoided if possible at all.

Integration and participation

Social integration concerns come naturally for any practitioner of childcare in the ward (*Femtiettan* is located in the Sätra neighbourhood), because of the high levels of ethnic and social heterogeneity in the local community. Hedberg regards the many ethnicities as an asset for the preschool, in which about 50 % of the children have a non-Swedish background. Hedberg remarks that immigrant families at first pressure her to get their children into pedagogical groups with many other immigrated children. They usually reconsider these demands later on, however, and request to have their children in groups where the other children speak fluent Swedish.

The language issue is important at *Femtiettan*. Activities are designed to provide natural language training in a calm environment. There is a reading-session every morning where stories in Swedish are read and explained to the children. *Femtiettan* also uses a

lot of music and nursery rhymes. All of the staff sing with the children and one of the employees with a musical education accompanies on the piano, according to Hedberg. "Some children learn to sing in Swedish before they know the meaning of the words". Hedberg believes in the importance of a peaceful and calm setting where the children can develop their language abilities at their own pace.

The most important decisions for the facility are taken at board meetings where all the shareholders/employees participate. Everyday decisions are taken at the daily planning at the 9.30 am coffee breaks. During these informal meetings activities for the different groups are decided. "Sometimes I do informal inquiries among the staff before taking a decision, sometimes I just decide by myself", Hedberg says. *Femtiettan* has no formal participation by parents in the running of the preschool, but Hedberg stresses that the staff tries to be open to wishes from the children's parents.

3.3.6 User experience of for-profit childcare in Skärholmen

Parent I is the mother of one of the 50 children at *Femtiettan*. Her son is two years old and thereby in the lower age span that *Femtiettan* favours because of the larger revenues received for younger children.

Parent I was recommended *Femtiettan* by a relative. The relative's son already attended *Femtiettan* and the family had only positive things to say about the preschool. The outstanding quality of the staff was one particular point that was made. When parent I's family decided to move to Sätra, Femtiettan was a natural choice. The quality of the staff is a recurring theme during the interview. Parent I had previous experience from municipal childcare and she finds that the staff at *Femtiettan* is much more actively involved with her child. They simply seem to care more, she feels, for the welfare of the children.

Parent I had no problem to get a position for her son at *Femtiettan*, but recognizes that she probably was lucky to get a slot so smoothly. The family was notified in April that the child was welcome after the summer. Another two-year-old boy had left, and this opened a vacancy.

As for parental participation, parent I knows of no formal function that would allow her as a parent to influence how things are run. During parent I's earlier experience with a municipal preschool, she had some possibility to contribute in a special parent council. She is not aware if there is such a council at *Femtiettan*, but she has not heard of any such channel there. She has not, however, felt the need for a special parent council since the staff is so receptive to parental views and suggestions. "I really feel that I can talk to the staff", parent I states.

Parent I receives a weekly newsletter from *Femtiettan*. This newsletter contains all the latest information about what goes on at the facility. Parent I exemplifies with a recent notice by Hedberg that *Femtiettan* is about to modernize and improve the kitchen area.

Parent I is not completely sure of in which organsational form *Femtiettan* is run. She seems aware of the fact that it is not a municipal preschool but the interviewer is the one that informs her that *Femtiettan* is a for-profit business. This could be consequential of Hedberg's philosophy that *Femtiettan* is "not really private". It should be noted, though, that the child of parent I at the time only had attended *Femtiettan* for a few months and that the organsational structure of the preschool might not be one of parent I's greatest concerns as a parent when the child is obviously being very well taken care of. It could also be mentioned that, curiously, no one our interviewer interacted with in the Sätra local area seemed to be aware of the fact that *Femtiettan* was a for-profit venture, which does suggest that it is not regarded as a great merit locally for a preschool to be run as a company.

Parent I thinks that the relatively small pedagogical groups are positive, although she is aware that her son attends an especially small group. Parent I also admits that a child of this young an age might not put the quality of the care at *Femtiettan* to any real test, and that there might be deficiencies that she could not know about yet. The relative of the family that originally recommended *Femtiettan*, however, has an older boy attending a special group for five-year olds and as far as parent I knows that family is very pleased with the care provided there.

Parent I is, additionally, asked about the many different ethnicities that exist among the children at *Femtiettan*. She considers this merely positive; she was aware of the fact that there would be many children of non-Swedish descent. She finds it interesting to meet

parents from other cultures. On the same note, *Femtiettan* sometimes arranges social events for parents and children, after regular business hours. Parent I mentions a potluck to which families from a range of countries contributed with traditional foods from their country of origin. This was highly successful, she says.

Parent I's overall impression with *Femtiettan* is, as can be surmised, very positive. She recalls the information leaflet she was handed at the introduction. This contained the preschools keywords (cf Hedberg's enumeration in the section above) and parent I does feel that every one of those keywords is practiced in the actual care given at *Femtiettan*. She seems to imply that the staff at *Femtiettan* deserves praise for making it such a great preschool. In this perspective, our interviewee unambiguously seems to indicate that the mode of organisation be of lesser importance.

3.4 Stockholm: the Bromma ward

Goals

Apart from the national goals, Bromma has defined two goals levels for childcare. One kind concerns directions to reach quantifiable stages; the other concerns more general, policy-dimensions of care. An illustration this year of the first level, states the Bromma ward's officer responsible for childcare, Monica Ullvede, is that all employees in the municipal sector should have a satisfactory work environment by 2003. At the end of each fiscal year, the presentation of the ward's financial and other results include assessments of this goal level. At the second level, one goal for childcare is to teach the children to relate democratically and fairly to each other in their peer-groups. The issue of children's socialisation thus constitutes a basic aspect of the ward's thought patterns. In this sense, it reflects the Social Democratic preoccupation with democraticness.

Diversity

In the ward, some 30 % of all childcare facilities are non-municipal. The conditions for this group in Bromma mirror the conditions for the group city-wide. The coordinator points out that the ward (just as other Stockholm wards) only has indirect control and influence over this sector. As indicated in the foregoing, a central city-administration is

in place for non-municipal preschools and schools. This implies a lesser level of direct municipal supervision, but, Ullvede stresses, the ward has no indications that quality or operational standards are lower for these providers than for the municipal sector.

In terms of reproducing, producing or simply coping with patterns of social diversity in Bromma, the situation seems to us to be similar to that of other Stockholm wards. There are such local patterns, but the childcare system is not necessarily a main cause of these. Both in purpose and practice, it tends to mirror the national priorities for preschools that have been mentioned above. Neither this nor any of the other wards could get away with handling local childcare needs in any blatantly discriminatory way.

Financing

Financing structures and patterns are the same in Bromma as elsewhere in Stockholm. Our interviewee concurs with the dominant interpretation that non-municipal facilities maintain a slight economical edge over municipal providers since they do not carry the same administrational burden. In this sense, small-sized, decentralised solutions could be read as a more effective means of provision than the traditional large-scale system is able to offer. The question, however, is complex. Superficially, this theory seems to hold water. But from a broader point of view, one could argue that private providers of different kinds benefit from a legal-institutional superstructure in the welfare field that they have to assume very little responsibility for. If, for instance, the financial structures were not already established the non-municipal sector would play a completely different game than it does now.

The empirical indications thus fit with the general notion that non-municipal childcare is slightly ahead of the municipal sector in terms of financial structures. This may often be possible to convert into “better” care, but the causal relationship here is not systematic. It is misleading to make too easy translations of money into quality. Social context and other structural dimensions surely play a prominent role as well. It could be argued that general service levels and characteristics to a substantial extent mirror the local context. A socio-economical context like Bromma would thus seem to generate a certain attitude and culture in the field of childcare, broadly speaking, regardless of mode of provision.

Access

Bromma is covered by the same "guaranteed-place" provision as other parts of the city. In practice, parents may not be able to get a place in childcare right on their doorstep, but this aspect aside, supply meets demand. Ullvede notes that some families decline the place they're offered, because it is not at the location they would like. But throughout the ward, only some 25 children do not attend preschool childcare. The main reasons for this voluntary abstention from using the system, according to the coordinator, are one unemployed parent or that the family hires a nanny.

A strong impression conveyed by our interviewee is that parents do not choose facility on grounds of the family's socio-cultural or economical circumstances. Instead, the choice is practical. Families want childcare to be convenient, i.e. fit well with everyday work and commuting patterns. The demand for childcare places in the ward is steadily on the increase. The ward recognises that local expansion in the sector will have to take place, even though the central city's view is that the overall number of available places in Stockholm rather should decrease. The area is already densely inhabited, and there is some worry that the expected volume of new resident families will put too great a strain on the childcare (as well as the schooling) system. There is scepticism as to whether the "guaranteed-place" strategy will be possible to uphold in the coming years, particularly considering the ambition of the city to make pedagogical groups smaller.

One accessibility dimension highlighted by Ullvede is that family patterns are different than they used to be. For children who divide their life between two separated parents at different addresses there is the option to use two different childcare facilities half-time, one according to the choice (and in the vicinity) of each parent. This is not considered as an ideal alternative, but if needs can be met in no other way the ward is flexible. This solution can be required or demanded for other reasons as well.

There is no night-open municipal care facility in the Bromma ward. Instead, a system is provided where a caretaker spends the night in the child's home as parents work. This is a rarely given solution, subject to a complex screening process, where other conceivable ways to deal with the situation are first investigated and discarded. Main alternatives are to have children minded by relatives or friends, and to consider the option for parents to get different jobs. If the former alternative proves realistic, remuneration can be possible

to apply for from the municipality. Grandparents may thus, for instance, be able to get paid to care for their grandchildren. (A similar solution has for a long time been in place when it comes to personal assistants for disabled people who live in their own or their families' homes. Care for this group is often provided by their own kin, but paid for and professionally regulated by the public welfare sector, either at the primary or secondary municipal level.)

Non-municipal facilities differ from municipal ones among other things in the fact that they independently control admittance. This gives more influence over whether siblings should be kept together in the same pedagogical groups or not. As shown earlier in the analysis, another dimension here is that parent co-ops, for instance, tend to be smaller in size. This means that the "sibling principle" is a less prominent phenomenon in facilities run municipally. There, groups often have to be restructured and reshaped to adjust to population changes in the area. Since the municipal services have to be accessible to everyone, as a system they cannot cushion or insulate themselves from demography, to focus as hard as the competition is able to on social and pedagogical continuity. Ullvede observes that non-municipal services, all in all, can keep activities more coherent. The same staff is generally present through the day and children's groups are more actively formed by the facility. Care can thus to a greater extent be cast in formats that suit the preferred ideas of childcare.

One piece of additional information supplied by our Bromma interviewee, however, is a feeling that parents who make an "active" choice of childcare are more inclined to carry a greater burden in various regards than others.

Service quality

In the ward, a "psycho-social" round on every municipal facility is arranged each year. At this point, Ullvede meets with each local facility manager for an assessment of the state of the complete facility. The current working of the facility and potential goals and directions for the coming year are discussed at these meetings.

Ullvede also stresses that the ward's quality work has improved radically over the last decade. It is now more conscious and systematic than before. This has both caused and resulted in a stronger emphasis on the continuing professional development of the staff.

Today, there is a collegial network for local municipal facilities where various issues can be handled. One problem here, however, is that there is not always sufficient available time to act on the insights reached in this way. The network certainly produces creative views and solutions, but implementation is not always adequate; be it on the level of the facility, the ward or the municipality. Time and resources are limited.

One issue highlighted by our Bromma (as well as Maria-Gamla Stan) interviewee is that the quality levels have risen over the last decade. This has enabled staff to get a sharper focus on children with "special" psychological and other needs. The main interpretation is that average stress levels in today's families are high – and may have increased in the course of the 1990s. Conceptually, Ullvede claims that the general trend has gone from emphasising the "faults" to stressing the capabilities of individual children in the zone where social, cognitive and other difficulties are clearly above average. The higher level of professional competence today is repeatedly stressed by the coordinator. As in Maria-Gamla Stan, the ambition to work for comprehensiveness in the social welfare sector is a main priority for the ward's administrators. The increased professionalism is visible when it comes to coordinating and adjust to the complexity of the spectrum of social needs amongst local residents. Again, the levels of in-house competence and overview seem to have benefited from Stockholm's ward reform in this respect.

Gaps between municipal and non-municipal services in terms of quality are reportedly very hard to see in the ward. Standards of performance are not the same in all facilities, but do not seem to co-vary with the type of provider. It is stressed, however, that non-municipal services allow greater margins for flexible solutions. Opening hours may be designed to fit specific demands and can be adjusted as circumstances change, as long as a minimum eight hours of availability is provided. As indicated above, the standard opening hours for municipal facilities is 6.30 am to 6.30 pm.

Integration and participation

The situation in Bromma concerning integration and participation resembles that of the other wards. There is, however, a "family centre" in the ward, where parents on parental leave and others may spend time, connect to other parents and solicit support from the ward's resources. The centre organises a range of courses for parents where different

aspects of child-rearing and family-life are discussed. And a non-public, educational organisation [*bildningsförbund*] arranges other courses, on cooking, nutritional thinking and everyday skills for parents in the same building.

3.5 Östersund

Our aim has been to study a a few providers of the childcare system in the municipality of Östersund.[48] In the less fragmented Östersund empirical case, we have chosen a different narrative structure than for the more complex Stockholm case. In this section, no corresponding primary methodological distinction is made between different voices or levels in the material. Instead, the case is approached as a single, thematic field.

Since the municipality both consists of the city and a number of surrounding villages, we have chosen to study one municipally-run facility and one parent co-operative centre located in the centre of the city and another parent co-operative in a small village just outside the city. One of the parent co-ops was selected on grounds of pedagogic style and the other for its location. Of the studied facilities, the parent co-op in the small village is the most socially and economically well-to-do area. The families living in this area are often married, employed and own their own house, all indicators of social stability. The other co-op is also situated in a well-to-do area with high levels of social homogeneity.

The municipally run childcare centre is located in an area from the early 1970s. Then many families with small children lived in the area, and when the children grew up and moved to other places the parents stayed. Very few new families with small children have since then moved to this area. Now mostly the elderly and some single parents live in the neighbourhood. Because of the lack of children in this area, this municipally run childcare centre is a so-called *buffertförskola* [buffer childcare facility], attended by children from all over the city. This implies that children come from different socio-economic areas and also that if they were to later get a place in a centre closer to home they would probably shift the child over. One direct consequence of this is that some of the children stay for only a short period of time in this particular facility, which in turn means that it becomes harder to work with the group in a pedagogically developed way.

[48] Nina Seger is the main contributor to this section.

Goals

One official goal for childcare services is to provide continuity between provision and family life. The child should be able to play and educate him-/herself under supervision of the childcare workers and also take part in group interaction.

According to the manager of the municipality run childcare centre they work by the curriculum [*läroplan*], a way to conform all the services in the country. The way the plan is implemented differs from year to year. At present, greater emphasis is put on mathematics and language. The children also stay outside a lot, regardless of weather conditions (that may be severe during the winter season). This is an explicit goal for this facility. There is a large garden/playground were the children are able to explore the surrounding nature. The co-op's goal is to be a natural part of the child's day, which means that some parents are always present and engaged in the daily activities. This makes children feel more secure and embedded in a continuous social space. Respect and understanding towards each other is regarded as very important. All members of the co-operative are involved in the yearly effort to formulate the local facility's activity and orientation plan.

All the parent interviewees D, E and F express that they want the childcare service to take care of the child during the day and that the child learns to communicate in its peer group. The preparation of the child for starting school is conceived as another important task. But just as important is that the child has an opportunity to play and have fun, and establish stable friendships and relationships.

The interviewed politician says that the municipality is obliged to establish quality goals and criteria. After that is done, it is up to each service and the local parent-committee to work out the details. Of course, the staff is involved in that process as well, she notes. She also comments on the problems: "If you ask the staff they would say that it is hard because of all the different interests and of course that creates conflicts. The politicians say that we have to meet these goals and have this quality but we do not get enough money to do it".

Diversity

All the municipal services get the same administrational and economical support, according to the interviewed politician, but she would like every childcare centre to start up their own local board. That would really be good, she states, both for them and for us. Like it is for the co-operatives: "To develop democracy in the childcare services is important – a lot remains to be done."

The municipality has one explicit plan for equality, another for environmental control, a third for how to tend to children with special needs, and so on. And this is the same for all the centres in the municipality. But the co-ops have to make their own plans. It is up to each individual facility to decide what is important, within the parameters of national as well as municipal goals.

Financing

Both municipal services and the co-ops are funded municipally. However, the sum is bigger for the municipality service. It is about € 6000 per child and year (varying with the child's age; the remuneration for younger children being slightly higher) and this should cover rent, staff, food, pedagogic materials etc. This is perceived to be less than enough, and the supervisor of the municipal facility has to apply and compete for more money from the municipality when he wants to do something extra. "Maybe one should try to get some sponsor money", he says. As mentioned above, the introduction of the *maxtaxa* has made the municipalities conform so that the parent fess are now the same nationally. Before the reform, Swedish municipalities themselves could decide on local tariffs more directly in line with local economical and political circumstances.

The co-ops get about € 4500 per child to cover the same things.[49] The co-operatives feel that this is a problem. They have to put in a lot of time to protest and lobby to shrink the gap, but these efforts have generally not been successful. Even so, the co-operatives are showing a better financial performance, and they do those extra things for the staff, like providing staff education.

When the *maxtaxa* was introduced in the childcare service the parents fees for childcare

[49] This 25 %-gap is substantially larger in Östersund than in Stockholm, where it's only 3-4 %.

changed to be only a maximum of 3 % of their income.[50] This is a substantial difference from the financing system used before. Then they had to control that the child didn't stayed more than 40 hours a week, if it did they had to pay more. The parents with children in the co-operatives pay less now, about € 45-65 monthly, but they also provide unfinanced labour time. They have to work for one to two weeks a year in the co-operative and they also have to put in extra time in meetings at least once a month. If they are engaged in the board of the co-operative the time adds up quickly. These parents mean that even if they have to put in a lot of time, taking time off from work, it is still worth it because they have a superior control and overview over the childcare quality, environment and pedagogy compared to parents of children in municipal services. As parent E says: "and I get to see my child more, when it is my turn to work in the co-operative we go there together and we do things together all week. We share something."

When talking to the manager of the municipal run childcare centre he says that all the control is exercised by the politicians, the supervisor of the childcare service has no control at all. Everything from staff to child group size is controlled from the municipal level. The staff and parents have little chance to influence the decisions. Every service has a parent committee that meets twice a term but it is more of an information meeting, with control and overview distributed hierarchically. Some of the parents have issues they want us to deal with but mostly they confront the staff right away, he says. In the co-ops, on the other hand, parents have full control. They work as a board and within the legal space they decide everything themselves. Both the co-operative managers state that they are tolerant concerning conflicts and problems. If something appears wrong they deal with it right away.

When the parents talk about the difference between municipal and co-operative services, it is easy to see the difference between goals, staff, intake etc. In the co-ops, parents themselves decides all these things (again, within the parameters). They have basic control over the staff per child ratio (today, of course only within the space given by current economical circumstances), how many children are enlisted in each age and pedagogical group, the formulation of pedagogical goals and so on. For the municipal

[50] Cf above, and Pestoff & Strandbrink 2002.

services, the municipality plays this role. Today, the primary issue seems to be financing problems. This means larger groups, less staff per child, which in the end, among other things, adds up to less time for activities with the children as well as lower levels of attendance to each individual child.

Access

The municipality is obliged to offer a place in public childcare to parents within six months (compared to the three months in Stockholm). The location and facility does not have to be in the families' neighbourhood. The service we visited is a "buffer facility" [*buffertförskola*], with children from all over the city enrolled. This implies that parents have to travel with their children what is an often quite long distance in the morning and after work. The area were the service is located used to have many families with small children. Now demography has changed: more families with older children and elderly people live there, meaning that the service has not full attendance, making it possible for it to enrol children from wide and far in the municipality: "This is something we have to do, it is better to shut a smaller centre down so that we could maintain our good quality. But of course there is a problem for the parents".

The co-operatives in Östersund have a long queue and have had so for many years. It often takes a year or more for a family to get a place for single parents, since they have to put in extra time in the service, for example cleaning the place in the evening. They then have to bring their children along, meaning quite long days for them. The co-operatives have relatively few single parent member families. Often only one or two and they usually drop out after a year or so. "No matter how much they want this, in the long run it is too much for a single parent. They have to be engaged and enthusiastic all the time and to have nobody to share that with could be too burdensome". One geography-related difference between the Östersund and Stockholm cases is that in Östersund, many families use day care centres in the vicinity of the work place, whereas in Stockholm, as we have seen, this rather seems to be an exception.

One of the interviewed family representatives waited for over a year for a place in the co-op. They often let their child attend a municipal facility whilst waiting. But they never considered keeping that place because what the co-op could offer, they felt, was

so much superior in a number of ways.

Service quality

The politician stressed that each municipal service has to perform a control of quality every year, involving both staff and parents. This is something that the municipality checks up on to make sure that they have reached all the goals for that year.

All the managers in this study have a yearly procedure for quality assessment for their service. The municipal services differ inasmuch as only the staff is involved while in the co-operatives both staff and parents meet and discuss the facility's activity. Something that is common for all the services is that they all see that after the introduction of *maxtaxa* the children are less stressed. They can stay a bit longer both in the morning and evening without the parents having to think about that it is going to cost them more money. The children and the parents can take the time to finish up before they leave. The parents talk more to the staff about what has happened during the day: "Now they ask more about the kid, and not only what we had for lunch".

Parents with children in a service run by the municipality express that they have no real control over the service's quality. They can and often do, tell the staff what they think about the contents of the provided care, but feel that they have no say in these matters. Parent D states this in terms of: "the staff always knows best". Parents in co-operatives, on the other hand, are positive they have all the say when it comes to both quality and for example opening hours. They are also more content with the relation between staff and parents.

Integration and participation

In the municipal service the parents are not very involved in the daily running of the service. They are not involved in decision-making or organisation. They have a family committee that meets twice a year. These meetings tend to be more about information than about actual participation and democracy. The manager observes that most of the parents do not want to participate. They work full-time and when it comes to their children they are content as long as the child apparently is doing alright. Earlier, parents

were allowed two days every year, to use the parental insurance scheme to spend time at the childcare centre with their child. This opportunity was not used by many parents and at least some of those who used it were parents who possibly would have taken time off to do it anyway. The manager speaks about two groups of parents; one group that really cares about the child and what he or she is doing all day. These parents usually stay an extra half hour every day, asking questions not only about their own child but also about the whole group, plans for future pedagogic work, etc. The other group includes parents who work full-time and feel that they have no extra time for asking questions about how things are working in the centre. They show up once each term at the regular parent and staff meeting [*föräldramöte*], and that's all.

The parent that we talked to was in-between these two groups. She wanted to care and said that she often stayed a bit longer to ask how her child was doing. The things she was most concerned about was what they had for lunch and if he was getting along with the other children in the group. She also mentioned that sometimes the staff did not have sufficient time to talk to her.

In the co-operatives the parents *are* the organisation and are responsible for all decisions about everything. They are also very involved in daily routine activities, since they have to work for at least one week every year. The parents are involved in the board of the co-operative at least once during their time at the co-operative and this requires at least one meeting a month. Often more time is spent at meetings between parents and staff. With the week spent at the co-operative being part of the work obligation, there is a lot of time that has to be put in. But since one of the parents almost always is engaged in the daily work, a lot of questions or problems can be taken care of during the day. The parent at one of the co-operatives says that she would not have it any other way. Parent F feels she has to know that her children are taken good care of and by working in the co-operative she has the possibility to influence the daily work at the centre. It takes a lot of time, of course, but it is only for a few years while the children are young and that time is so well "paid off" that there is no question if it is worth it. She also thinks that it is good that all the parents have to take part in the activities – in that way the children also get to know the parents and families of the other children. When it is the fathers' turn, this is also a way for children to interact with men during the day. An important point, considering that most preschool teachers are women. Arguably, it is (probably

mostly) children of single mothers who would profit very much from this interaction, and these children more often attend municipal childcare.

No municipal childcare services seem to be very much involved with their respective neighbourhoods. In December each year they celebrate the coming of the queen of light (*St Lucia*) with customary, traditional light parades and carols at local elder care centres, but that's virtually all. The Östersund co-operatives have been involved in a European Reggio Emilia-network over the last two years. They have visited different childcare centres inspired by the Reggio Emilia, both in Norway and Italy to learn more about the pedagogic style. But there is no other cooperation between the different services in the municipality and almost no common activities.

4 Conclusion: social cohesion and Swedish childcare

As has become apparent in the course of this analysis, universality is a distinguishing feature of the Swedish welfare state. Personal social services are provided in a standard and comprehensive fashion to all citizens and residents entitled to them. In order to achieve this goal, the public sector has become the main provider of such services. Childcare is no exception. It rather provides a clear example of how a universal welfare state works. Standards of provision and legal norms are national – even though the local municipalities provide and supervise the services throughout the country.

But the universality of the system is primarily structural. It embodies a comprehensive and well-established design on the level of public policy. Even if its legal, financial and professional parameters are uniform, this investigation shows how the childcare practice in Sweden has many faces. One way to read this is in terms of social suppleness. The system does bend, as it were, to local social, pedagogical, demographic and political patterns. The universality at the system-level is not necessarily reflected at the level of practical provision. Instead, our different cases diverge quite visibly from each other. In Skärholmen, for instance, the local social structure generates a mode of provision different from that in Bromma, Maria-Gamla Stan or Östersund (although here, many local patterns of provision occur within the same system). Here, demands of social cohesion arte approached in a different way, due to the relatively large proportion of refugees and newly arrived Swedes in the ward, who generally have higher levels of unemployment and greater reliance on social insurance.

In this setting, the childcare system becomes an important tool to assess and strengthen bonds of social solidarity. It provides the local polity with a direct means to reach (out to) families with little or no footing at all in Swedish society. The emphasis on language development is a prominent aspect of this. Thus, childcare in Skärholmen is far ahead of the other three cases in terms of promoting social cohesion. The system's universal format seems to be quite adjustable to local needs in this sense. Looking at the situation in Skärholmen, it is hard to believe that childcare is provided on the same basis as in the other units of analysis (or, for that matter, the rest of the country).

One conclusion here, is that the issue of social solidarity or cohesion is obviously not possible to approach in the same way across Sweden. The significance, relevance and

even the meaning of the concept varies. In fairly homogenous places like Bromma and Östersund, it makes less sense to focus on the cohesive functions of childcare. Here, the issue of social cohesion is not salient. In neither of these places are local social bonds in serious disarray, as far as we are able to judge. The childcare system is thus not geared towards restoring or strengthening them. It would make no sense to think of childcare as a means to accomplish this here; other goals are pursued instead. The main point we would like to make here, is that, even though today's system is comprehensive and uniform, it apparently provides a structural form that is quite malleable on the level of policy practice. The locale defines the manner and style of childcare production in Sweden. The national system takes care of the "hard" economical and material side of things, but allows the local administration or non-municipal actors the latitude to let the "soft" dimension of childcare respond to local needs. The question here is whether this should essentially be interpreted as a uniform/ universalist or a fragmented/particularist system. Both views can be applied, but, as we have pointed out, to different aspects or levels of childcare. Some precision is required to proceed in this discussion.

The uniform Social Democratic system began to change in the mid 1980s, when childcare demand outstripped supply for many consecutive years. After a change in the law, parents were permitted to form parent co-operatives for providing childcare, to employ daycare staff, to manage the services themselves while still getting public funding for such services. The change in national government in 1991 led to a further decentralisation of the provision of major personal social services, including childcare. However, the non-socialist government also made it mandatory for municipalities to provide access to childcare for all parents who demanded such services within six months (this was later shortened to three months). A greater diversity of providers followed in the wake of these reforms, and worker co-operative and private for-profit providers appeared in many welfare areas, including childcare. At about the same time, however, many municipalities began restricting access to basic social services due to growing budget constraints and the fees paid by parents for childcare increased, as did the fees for a range of other welfare services. This both caused and increased differences between municipalities across the country in terms of the amount and quality of the provided services.

The Social Democrats were returned to power in 1994 (both nationally and in the Stockholm municipality) and devoted several years to reforming public finances. They then turned their attention to combating the growing diversity in the provision of childcare at the end of the decade by initiating a ceiling or *maxtaxa* for parent fees. This may be read as a move to re-centralise and re-standardise the provision of childcare. This centralisation and standardisation of childcare services is clearly seen in the studies undertaken by the Swedish team of the TSFEPS project on comparative family policy and alternative provision of childcare services. The daycare services provided to preschool children are quite similar wherever they and their parents live. This includes such major aspects as the goals of the service, the diversity of services provided, their financing, the governance of childcare facilities, the access and equality of services provided, the quality of daycare services for preschool children and the integration, participation and democracy of such services.

However, in spite of the structural similarities in Swedish childcare services, a growing diversity in the forms of providing childcare services was also noted. This diversity clearly reflects major ideological differences in terms of the macro polemic concerning privatisation of personal social services. As mentioned in the analysis, one suburban town in the northern part of Stockholm, Täby, has decided to privatise the provision of all its municipal childcare. The conservative majority in this well-to-do suburban municipality chose to convert all the municipal providers into limited companies. A study of the impact and consequences of this total privatisation move still remains to be undertaken. In Stockholm daycare vouchers were introduced in the 1990s.

Moreover, municipal daycare facilities were strongly encouraged to convert to limited companies by the non-socialist majority that ran Stockholm City from 1998 to 2002. In the Skärholmen ward of Stockholm this resulted in a case included in our study where the staff decided to follow these ideological pressures to privatise. They took over the childcare service and now run it as a small private-for-profit service today. How this change of ownership will affect the social composition of the parents and children using the service is too soon to say. However, we also noted in Skärholmen that parents in the parent co-op included in this study gave the dominance of non-Swedish speaking children at municipal services as a reason for choosing the local co-operative alternative. In this case co-operative daycare runs counter to the ambitions of increasing

social solidarity and integrating refugee children and their families into Swedish society, through special language efforts in childcare centers in this ward. In the Maria-Gamla Stan Ward we noted the prevalence of the parent co-operative alternative. Here their position was explained in terms of the socio-economic concentration of middle-class and academic parents in this particular ward. By contrast, in Östersund we both municipal and parent co-operative childcare services were found but no private-for-profit providers, in an overall strongly Social Democratic city.

Thus, we note clear ideological differences in terms of the legal form chosen for providing child care services. These differences shift with different political majorities and even with changes in political majorities. This type of legal experimentation under the guise of different ideological stances in terms of public/private providers may prove detrimental to the development and future of universal childcare in Sweden. If such development appears to be ideologically driven, rather than motivated by pedagogic concerns, or concern for the future of the children, staff or parents, they may erode overall public support for tax-based collective services and public financed childcare.

There are other intriguing differences between municipal and non-municipal daycare services, in particular in terms of the quality of the services provided and the participation and influence of parents. Parents are more active in parent co-ops and thus able to directly influence the decisions made by the daycare centre, including matters affecting the quality of the provided care. This, we feel, is quite natural since parents by definition *are* the daycare centre in a parent co-op. They legally own, manage it and they employ the staff. Parents set the standards for the activities, determine the ambition level of the services provided, decide about opening hours, fees, pedagogical profile, etc. – all care aspects that directly influence quality levels.

Such possibilities for direct influence are not readily available to parents with children in municipal or private-for-profit childcare, nor is it clear if these parents desire a greater degree of involvement. It seems that Swedish parents have different aspirations for their child(ren)'s daycare services and these aspirations influence, at least partly, their choice of service: municipal or non-municipal, co-operative or private for-profit (which in turn is divided into large-scale corporate or small-scale local). Having made this basic choice their satisfaction with the services provided is determined both by the

availability of the service and more general parameters, such as ratio of staff to children, size of the children's groups, etc.

The differences between the main modes of childcare provision in Sweden are also visible when it comes to the participatory patterns mentioned above. On the basis of the research undertaken here, it is possible to tentatively grade the performance of the different sectors in certain respects. It is thus clear that parent co-ops provide the socially most ambitious form of childcare. Here, both service quality and parental and social involvement standards appear to be substantially higher than elsewhere. But the municipal sector also seems to perform reasonably (indeed often very) well, although it partly caters to different socio-economic segments of the population. The relative low-performer by comparison is corporate for-profit childcare. Here, many of the aspects of childcare that are considered central in the other modes of provision seem to be less markedly pursued or prioritised.

It should be borne in mind, however, that there are some points to modify this last remark. The first is that the for-profit form of care we have in mind above is corporate. The Swedish corporate world of childcare obviously tends to be structured along different lines than the rest of the sector. The one area where it possibly and marginally outperforms other forms, is in terms of maximizing revenue. The small one-facility daycare centres taken over from earlier municipal management by the staff in the course of the 1990s tell a different story. These appear to be rather similar in terms of pedagogic ambition, quality levels and visionary patterns to the municipal world of childcare. The second point is that as the corporate alternative is quite small in Stockholm (and non-existent in Östersund), the overall effect of for-profit childcare on the whole sector is bound to be modest. It certainly serves an ideological purpose to be able to point in the direction of established corporate childcare structures, but as a real, substantial alternative the role played by this solution is realistically marginal. It does, however, increase the fragmentation of providers along additional lines.

So how does childcare in the analysed cases relate to the issue of social cohesion? As we pointed out in the beginning of this text, the Swedish childcare system today covers the country virtually comprehensively, and it is equally provided for all children between 1 and 5 years old. It is thus not logically possible to think of the very

introduction of comprehensive childcare services as a potential means to strengthen social cohesion in a heterogeneous society. It should instead, we feel, be read as an aspect of a process of individualisation and changing family patterns that has been going on for quite some time. More explorative, contra-factual and open-ended kinds of reasoning that were still possible when childcare had not yet been expanded to this comprehensive degree are difficult to apply today.

How does this relate, specifically, to social cohesion? In these final paragraphs of the analysis, we conclude that the prevailing form of childcare in Sweden is difficult to read as weakening of virtues like social responsibility, solidarity and democratic behaviour. The values and aspirations built into the system seem to point clearly in the direction of non-segregating social practices and a fairly progressive ideal. Does this mean that the sector actually promotes virtues such as these, i.e. is there any correspondence between ideals and rhetoric? Our findings on this point at least seem to make it possible to disregard simplistic criticisms of a valid or sound connection. Professed aspirations in these directions are obviously guiding the childcare sector in the local cases investigated here. In this sense, it is possible to state that the investigated system at least does not come across as detrimental to issues related to social cohesion and community-building. In particular co-operative, but also to a large extent municipal, childcare practices could surely be interpreted as important bases for an ongoing reproduction and strengthening of civicness and social virtues.

In terms of interaction and involvement between childcare and other local interests, the same cannot, however, be said. It is obvious that the world of childcare is horizontally set apart from its local or neighborhood context. Vertically, there is some interaction (and also within the organisational structure of municipal, co-operative or for-profit childcare, respectively), but that is all. It is fair, however, drawing on the argument above, to conclude that the different modes of care investigated here perform differently in this regard. Again, co-operative care seems ahead of the other forms, and municipal (and individually-run small size for-profit) care has a substantial edge over corporate care. The smaller scale of most co-ops make for a more direct, controllable and home-like environment. But as we have seen, this mode of care is generally, at least in Stockholm, more associated with middle-class values and career choices (where social cohesion at least within the group possibly already is stronger) than to social values and

geographical micro-areas that would have more to benefit from this kind of childcare solution. The remaining question is whether, or not, childcare policy should thus be seen as a tool for change or a function of social cohesion patterns. But to be able to offer any robust interpretations here, we would have to address the issue further in another context than the present one.

REFERENCES

Almqvist, Roland. 2001. *SDN-reformen i Stockholms stad – en studie av förskoleverksamheten* [*The ward reform in the city of Stockholm – a study of the preschool*]. Stockholm University. Department of Business; The Institute for Municipal Economy. Report 2001:106.

Ivarsson, Jan-Ivar. 1996. *Så tycker föräldrarna om barnomsorgen i Stockholm* [*What parents think of childcare in Stockholm*]. USK-report 1996:3. Stockholm's Office for research and statistics.

Ivarsson, Jan-Ivar. 1999. *Förskoleverksamheten i Stockholm 1999 – så tycker föräldrarna, en jämförelse med 1996* [*Preschool care in Stockholm 1999 – what parents think, a comparison with 1996*]. USK-report 1999:2. Stockholm's Office for research and statistics.

Pestoff, Victor. 1998. *Beyond the market and state: social enterprises and civil democracy in a welfare society*. Aldershot. Ashgate.

Pestoff, Victor & Strandbrink, Peter. 2002. *The politics of Swedish childcare*. Final version, Swedish national report for the 5th framework EU-project TSFEPS.

SOU 2001:79 *Välfärdsbokslut för 1990-talet. Slutbetänkande – Kommittén välfärdsbokslut* [*Welfare audit account for the 1990s. Final report – The welfare audit account committee*]. Ministry of social affairs.

INTERVIEWS

Berg, Kicki. 8/5 2003. Central coordinator for non-municipal childcare, Stockholm municipality.

Gramenidis, Despina. 9/1 2004. Unit/area manager of childcare, Skärholmen ward.

Hedberg, Maria. 3/7 2003. Manager of parent co-operative childcare facility, Östersund municipality.

Hedberg, Ulla. 8/1 2004. Manager and CEO of for-profit childcare facility, Skärholmen ward.

Johansson, Karl-Erik. 13/6 2003. Manager of municipal childcare facility, Östersund municipality.

Keuter, Anita. 16/5 2003. Head of childcare provision, Maria-Gamla Stan ward.

Kraft, Anna-Bella. 2/10 2003. Head of childcare provision, Skärholmen ward.

Parent A. 12/10 2003. User of municipal childcare, Maria-Gamla Stan ward.

Parent B. 9/10 2003. User of parent co-operative childcare, Maria-Gamla Stan ward.

Parent C. 9/10 2003. User of corporate childcare, Maria-Gamla Stan ward.

Parent D. 13/6 2003. User of municipal childcare, Östersund municipality.

Parent E. 25/6 2003. User of parent co-operative childcare, Östersund municipality.

Parent F. 4/7 2003. User of parent co-operative childcare, Östersund municipality.

Parent G. 19/1 2004. User of municipal childcare, Skärholmen ward.

Parent H. 9/1 2004. User of co-operative childcare, Skärholmen ward.

Parent I. 12/1 2004. User of for-profit childcare, Skärholmen ward.

Rydstedt, Agneta. 23/6 2003. Manager of parent co-operative childcare facility, Östersund.

Steen, Bodil. 9/1 2004. Senior employee, parent co-operative childcare facility, Skärholmen ward.

Svaleryd, Harriet. 22/5 2003. Head of childcare provision, Östersund municipality.

Ullvede, Monica. 23/5 2003. Head of childcare provision, Bromma ward.

EMES NETWORK PUBLICATION LIST

Books

Laville, J.-L. & Cattani, A.D. (eds) (2005) *Dictionnaire de l'autre économie*, Paris: Desclée de Brouwer, 564p.

Borzaga, C. & Spear, R. (eds) (2004) *Trends and Challenges for Co-operatives and Social Enterprises in Developed and Transition Countries*, Trento: Edizioni31, 280p.

Evers, A. & Laville, J.-L. (eds) (2004) *The Third Sector in Europe*, Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 288p.

Borzaga, C. & Defourny, J. (eds) (2001) *The Emergence of Social Enterprise*, London: Routledge, 386p.

Spear, R., Defourny, J., Favreau, L. & Laville, J.-L. (eds) (2001) *Tackling Social Exclusion in Europe. The Contribution of the Social Economy*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 359p.

EMES Working Papers relating to the "PERSE" Project

Aiken, M. & Spear, R. (2005) "Work Integration Social Enterprises in the United Kingdom", *Working Papers Series,* no. 05/01, Liège: EMES European Research Network.

Bode, I., Evers, A. & Schulz, A. (2002) "Work Integration Social Enterprises in Germany", *Working Papers Series,* no. 02/04, Liège: EMES European Research Network.

Borzaga, C. & Loss, M. (2002) "Work Integration Social Enterprises in Italy", *Working Papers Series,* no. 02/02, Liège: EMES European Research Network.

Davister, C., Defourny, J. & Grégoire, O. (2003) "Les entreprises sociales d'insertion dans l'Union européenne. Un aperçu général", *Working Papers Series,* no. 03/11, Liège: EMES European Research Network.

Davister, C., Defourny, J. & Grégoire, O. (2004) "Work Integration Social Enterprises in the European Union: An Overview of Existing Models", *Working Papers Series,* no. 04/04, Liège: EMES European Research Network.

Eme, B. & Gardin, L. (2002) "Les entreprises sociales d'insertion par le travail en France", *Working Papers Series,* no. 02/01, Liège: EMES European Research Network.

Hulgård, L. & Bisballe, T. (2004) "Work Integration Social Enterprises in Denmark", *Working Papers Series,* no. 04/08, Liège: EMES European Research Network.

Nyssens, M. & Grégoire, O. (2002) "Les entreprises sociales d'insertion par l'économique en Belgique", *Working Papers Series,* no. 02/03, Liège: EMES European Research Network.

O'Hara, P. & O'Shaughnessy, M. (2004) "Work Integration Social Enterprises in Ireland", *Working Papers Series,* no. 04/03, Liège: EMES European Research Network.

Pättiniemi, P. (2004) "Work Integration Social Enterprises in Finland", *Working Papers Series,* no. 04/07, Liège: EMES European Research Network.

Perista, H. & Nogueira, S. (2004) "Work Integration Social Enterprises in Portugal", *Working Papers Series,* no. 04/06, Liège: EMES European Research Network.

Stryjan, Y. (2004) "Work Integration Social Enterprises in Sweden", *Working Papers Series,* no. 04/02, Liège: EMES European Research Network.

Vidal, I. & Claver, N. (2004) "Work Integration Social Enterprises in Spain", *EMES Working Papers Series,* no. 04/05, Liège: EMES European Research Network.

EMES Working Papers relating to the "ELEXIES" Project

Delaunois, P. (2003) "Profils nationaux des entreprises sociales d'insertion : Luxembourg", *Working Papers Series*, no. 03/02, Liège: EMES European Research Network.

Delaunois, P. (2003) "National Profiles of Work Integration Social Enterprises: Luxembourg", *Working Papers Series,* no. 03/07, Liège: EMES European Research Network.

Eme, B. & Gardin, L. (2002) "Les structures d'insertion par l'économique en France", *Working Papers Series,* no. 02/07, Liège: EMES European Research Network.

Eme, B. & Gardin L. (2003) "National Profiles of Work Integration Social Enterprises: France", *Working Papers Series,* no. 03/09, Liège: EMES European Research Network.

Grégoire, O. (2003) "Profils Nationaux des Entreprises Sociales d'Insertion : Belgique", *Working Papers Series,* no. 03/03, Liège: EMES European Research Network.

Grégoire, O. (2003) "National Profiles of Work Integration Social Enterprises: Belgium", *Working Papers Series,* no. 03/08, Liège: EMES European Research Network.

Gruber, C. (2003) "National Profiles of Work Integration Social Enterprises: Austria", *Working Papers Series,* no. 03/06, Liège: EMES European Research Network.

Loss, M. (2003) "National Profiles of Work Integration Social Enterprises: Italy", *Working Papers Series,* no. 03/04, Liège: EMES European Research Network.

O'Shaughnessy, M. (2002) "Social Integration Enterprises in Ireland", *Working Papers Series,* no. 02/05, Liège: EMES European Research Network.

Pättiniemi, P. & Immonen, N. (2002) "National Profiles of Work Integration Social Enterprises: Finland", *Working Papers Series,* no. 02/10, Liège: EMES European Research Network.

Perista, H. & Nogueira, S. (2002) "National Profiles of Work Integration Social Enterprises: Portugal", *Working Papers Series,* no. 02/09, Liège: EMES European Research Network.

Schulz, A. (2003) "National Profiles of Work Integration Social Enterprises: Germany", *Working Papers Series,* no. 03/05, Liège: EMES European Research Network.

Spear, R. (2002) "National Profiles of Work Integration Social Enterprises: United Kingdom", *Working Papers Series,* no. 02/06, Liège: EMES European Research Network.

Spear, R. & Bidet, E. (2003) "The Role of Social Enterprise in European Labour Markets", *Working Papers Series,* no. 03/10, Liège: EMES European Research Network.

Spear, R. & Bidet, E. (2003) "Le rôle des entreprises sociales dans les marchés européens de l'emploi", *Working Papers Series,* no. 04/01, Liège: EMES European Research Network.

Stryjan, Y. & Laurelii, E. (2002) "National Profiles of Work Integration Social Enterprises: Sweden", *Working Papers Series,* no. 02/08, Liège: EMES European Research Network.

Vidal Martinez, I. & Valls Jubany, C. (2003) "National Profiles of Work Integration Social Enterprises: Spain", *Working Papers Series,* no. 03/01, Liège: EMES European Research Network.