

## **The Paradigmatic Struggle for Legitimacy of the Danish Welfare State regarding the Provision of Welfare Services**

Taking care of vulnerable children and youths as a core problem

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The Danish welfare state constitutes a paradigmatic case of the welfare struggle of modern welfare states. Taking care of vulnerable children and youths is used as a case study here, to illustrate the efforts of the welfare state to acquire legitimacy as a body of public administration. That is, the efforts to close the gap between the welfare state's ideology of doing what is 'good' for its citizens and doing this in practice. In this article, we analyze this struggle for legitimacy of the Danish welfare state with illustrations based on the case study. We present the concepts of biopower and moral blindness, in order to test the legitimacy of the welfare state's provision of welfare services at the beginning of this century. We propose a new paradigm to improve the welfare state's legitimacy. Our case is considered critical.

## **1. The present challenges to the modern welfare state**

Today, the welfare state in Denmark is a good example of the legitimate struggle of the modern welfare state. The Danish welfare state, like most other welfare states, is confronted with the following challenges in particular:

- The demand for public welfare services and growth stimulus cannot be met due to the present public debts and fiscal crisis.
- The neoliberal critique of the welfare state for being too big and too inefficient.
- Globalization which weakens the national welfare state.
- Migration which threatens national labor markets.

These challenges confront the modern welfare state with its ideology of 'doing good' for its citizens. These challenges as a result create a gap between the welfare state's ideology of 'doing good' for its citizens and 'doing good' in practice in real life. In Denmark, this gap constitutes a paradigmatic case of the struggle of modern welfare states which can be defined as a struggle to close the gap by replacing the old deployed paradigm with a new one.

The Danish welfare state's care program for vulnerable children and youths is used to point out and define the core problems, which together create the gap between the ideology of the welfare state's 'doing good' for its citizens and 'doing good' in practical terms. Furthermore, the case illustrates why a paradigm, which can close the gap, cannot be evolved from the neoliberal vision of less state and/or more market/charity. Finally, it is shown why a hybrid mix of public management paradigms is the most appropriate strategy to close the gap.

It is important to emphasize that the Danish state's care program for vulnerable children and youths does not illustrate the welfare state's crisis of legitimacy in general caused by the four challenges listed above. The ambition in this article is only to show the core problems causing a gap between the ideology of the state and its practice regarding the provision of welfare services to a core group of citizens which is essential for the modern welfare state's legitimacy. Besides, our case is considered a critical one (Flyvbjerg, 2006, pp. 229-230). That is, the conclusions in our case can – with caution – be generalized to other sectors in the modern welfare state, which provide citizens with public welfare services.

## **2. The case**

Our case is presented in the next three subsections. In subsection 2.1 we show why and how the Danish welfare state acquires necessary and profound legitimacy by taking care of vulnerable children and youths. The paradigm of the provision of the services to vulnerable children and youths is presented and discussed in section 2.2. Some major consequences of this paradigm are shown in section 2.3. In addition, it is shown how the consequences have opened up for neoliberal criticism of the dominant paradigm of the provision of the services.

### **2.1. Vulnerable children and youths and the legitimacy of the welfare state**

The principal ideology of the Danish welfare state is that it is obliged to take care of citizens who are sick, disabled and vulnerable (for example, children, youths, single mothers, unemployed and indigent citizens) (Mogensen, 2010; Bonfils, 2010). The sicker and more disabled and vulnerable citizens are, the more public welfare services should be offered to and provided for its citizens, with the aim to (re)integrate them truly into society and its norms and institutions. The most vulnerable citizens are almost by definition children and youths who are abused or at risk of being abused by their parents or other adults, the church and care taking institutions. In other words: vulnerable children and youths constitute a key group for

the welfare state and its legitimacy. This is why the welfare state's care program for vulnerable children and youths is used here as case.

### **2.1.1. The paradigm of the provision of the services to vulnerable children and youths**

Vulnerable children and youths are provided with services from a subsector within the Danish welfare state called the Sector for Specialized Social Problems (SSSP) [Det Specialiserede Socialområde].

Resources – tax money – have generously been allocated to the SSSP for decades. The growth rate of public spending on services within the SSSP has historically exceeded both the growth rate of the GNP and that of the public sector's general spending (Bengtsson, 2011). Besides, public spending on services continued to increase up until 2010, or after the emergence of the economic recession. Finally, public spending within SSSP has not been cut during the current economic crisis in contrast to almost all other public sectors. However, present austerity measures mean that the growth rate is now, generally speaking, zero (Gregersen, 2013). This indicates that vulnerable children and youths constitute a key group for the Danish welfare state.

The paradigm of the provision of such services to vulnerable children and youths also indicates that these citizens constitute a key group for and in the welfare state. Since a 'wave' of decentralization in the 1970s within the SSSP, the provision of services has been increasingly handed over to street-level bureaucrats, in efforts to ensure that services of the highest quality are seen professionally (Pedersen & Hammer, 2012). Consequently, the norm was developed that street-level bureaucrats assess

and judge the single case in accordance with their professions' standards (norms, traditions, values and ethics) as defined, described and analyzed by Lipsky (Lipsky, 1980; 2010).

This approach to the provision of the services was institutionalized in 1998 by the Service Law [Serviceloven] which regulates the provision of the services to vulnerable children and youths. The law prescribes that the services offered and provided for these children and youths had to be based on an assessment and a judgment of the single case carried out by street-level bureaucrats. Besides, the assessment and the judgment had to be done by dialogue with the individual child, youth and family (if possible), because it is assumed that the services will have the highest positive impact factor if they are co-designed and co-tailored with children, youths and parents (Kirkebæk, 2010).

The main reason behind the approach mentioned to the provision of these services is the perception that the problems and needs of children and youths are both complex and individual. Therefore, the problems cannot be solved and the needs not met by the well-defined standardized services associated with statutory rights within a universalistic welfare state like the Danish one. The services have to be designed, produced and delivered individually by street-level bureaucrats in co-operation with the individual child, youth and family.

In particular, the core of the paradigm of street-level bureaucrats is defined as the combination of de-centralized control with the provision of communal, or common, and individualized services. In other words: the more control of service provision in the hands of street-level bureaucrats, the more discretion and autonomy characterize their work-field. In addition, the more services designed, produced and delivered individually on the basis of the bureaucrats' professions' standards in co-operation with the individual child, youth and family, the stronger the position of the paradigm of

the street-level bureaucrat is. As a result, the paradigm of street-level bureaucrats has been very dominant in the provision of services to vulnerable children and youths in Denmark since the 70's.

## 2.2. Some consequences of the paradigm of the street-level bureaucrats

The dominant position of the paradigm of street-level bureaucrats in the provision of services to vulnerable children and youths has some major consequences.

**First**, vulnerable children and youths have no statutory rights to services if they live up to certain objective criteria in the Danish universalistic welfare state. Consequently, children and youths, by and large, are dependent on the street-level bureaucrats' discretion in their assessments and judgment concerning the individual case. However, according to the Service Law, street-level bureaucrats must provide children and youths with what they themselves consider to be the best possible services. These are typically defined as services which truly can (re)integrate vulnerable children and youths into society, its institutions and norms.

**Second**, because street-level bureaucrats are only expected to pay little attention to the costs of these services provided up until 2012, soft budget constraint (Kornai, 1980; Kornai, Maskin & Roland, 2003) became the norm regarding public spending on services before the current economic crisis (Gregersen, 2013). Furthermore, because the services have to be provided, produced and delivered individually, like in modern service production in private service firms, the costs of the services is not easy to predict and control. In fact, the costs of the services, and accordingly the public spending on these, have been considered unmanageable (Bonfils & Berger, 2010; Svanholdt, 2013). As a result of this, huge budget deficits emerged in the

municipalities in 2007, 2008 and 2009 regarding the provision of services. The municipalities in Denmark have full responsibility for the provision, production, delivery and financing of services for vulnerable children and youths. Furthermore, the church and charities have historically only played a marginal role in taking care of vulnerable children and youths. No intentions to change this have appeared in the general public for decades.

**Third**, the services provided within the SSSP are, by and large, not evidence based (Vickery, 2010). A comprehensive study of institutions for replacement of children and youths (Hansen, 2009) showed clearly that street-level bureaucrats, authorized by the welfare state to design, produce and deliver the services directly to children and youths, had developed an extreme individualistic approach to the assessment and judgment of the problems and needs of the single child and youth. Street-level bureaucrats had, and still have, a culture and tradition in which a strong institutionalized norm were, and still are, that methods are optional. In practice, this norm resulted in a situation where the individual street-level bureaucrat or a group of street-level bureaucrats at a certain institution had developed its own method how to assess and judge individual cases and how to produce and deliver the best possible services. The study showed that the individual street-level bureaucrat/group of street-level bureaucrats developed her/his/its own rules of thumb (Hansen, 2009). Consequently, the provided services were not and are still not evidence based.

**Fourth**. Let us present an example: For many decades a little more than one percent of all children and youths in Denmark – approximately 12.000 children and youths in 2012 - has not lived with their parents, but rather with foster families or institutions (Andersen, 2010, p.182; Bengtsson, 2011, p. 28). The intention of bringing children and youths to foster parents or institutions has, of course, been to give children and youths better future lives when compared to the expected future lives they would have had they remained with their parents. It is, however, impossible to conclude scientifically that children and youths in general have had better lives due to foster families and institutions (Andersen et al., 2010; Egelund et al., 2009; Hansen, 2009; Olsen et al., 2011). To put it differently: the population of replaced children and youths has been rather stable for decades; the causes of replacement have been stable for decades; and, the offered and provided services (foster families and institutions) for children and youths have been stable. In spite of this, the effects of

the services have not been recorded scientifically. Furthermore, significantly positive effects of the services cannot be found in available statistics (Andersen, 2010). Consequently, the effects of the services for the children and youth are widely unknown at present (Pedersen & Hammer, 2012).

However, we do know that 40 percent of the replaced children and youths have experienced 'breakdowns' in their relocation, which means that children and youths have had to move on to other foster families and/or institutions (Egelund et al., 2010, pp. 12-13). This has, of course, to be considered as a negative side-effect of the policy of replacement.

**Fifth**, maladministration of the provision of the services to vulnerable children and youths and of the provided services has been disclosed in recent years. An example is several recent Danish cases of very severe abuse of children and youths in foster families and institutions. A document study (1) has been carried out concerning a variety of these cases covered by the media. As a response to these cases, the Ministry of Social Affairs appointed a Task Force to complete thorough investigation of the quality of case work in the affected local authorities. The Task Force concluded that the legal requirements in Danish Service Law had been insufficiently followed by the affected local authorities. This conclusion further severely threatened the legitimacy of the local authorities, in addition to the professionals (the street-level bureaucrats). An outcome of this was the further bureaucratization of social work regarding children and youths in Denmark. An example was the implementation of reform initiatives, amongst others a reform of the supervision of social care institutions named 'Tilsynsreformen' centralizing the supervision authority, which had previously been the responsibility of the individual local authorities, in five large units. At the level of the local authorities, further supervision steps were generally implemented, in order to regain legitimacy and secure the quality of casework. Furthermore, in some of the cases, dismissals at the management levels were carried out (Nielsen, 2014).



A similar tendency seems to be noticeable in England where several severe cases of child abuse have previously resulted in processes of 'scape-goating' and thus dismissals at the managerial level in public welfare institutions along with professionals being heavily criticized. One of the cases that resulted in extensive government initiatives was the highly debated case of "Viktoria Climbié who died when she was eight years old in 2000 due to extreme abuse. Her great aunt was later convicted. Another example was the 'Baby P'- case which concerned a 17-month-old toddler, Peter Connelly, who died in 2007. 'Baby P' had been severely injured, tormented and neglected by his mother, her partner and his brother who were all later convicted. A thorough report revealed that the abuse had continued, despite more than 60 visits by police, social workers, and doctors carried out in the last eight months of Peter's life. The cases of both Baby P and Climbié did, as was the case in regards to the Danish examples, strongly challenge the legitimacy of the services provided by the local authorities, and thus put pressure upon the professionals engaged in child protection services (Spray & Jowett, 2012).

The Danish cases have revealed a lack of control of foster families, public institutions and especially private institutions authorized to 'treat' the children and youths. Maladministration of information about abuses of children and youths in 'ordinary' families has also been revealed. The previously mentioned Task Force appointed by the Ministry of Social Affairs concluded that appropriate actions had not been taken in (many) cases where knowledge about the abuse of children and youths was evident. Furthermore, investigations into the administration of the provision of services to vulnerable children, youths and their parents have shown that the administration in some major cases has been unacceptable and insufficient (The Ministry of Social Affairs, 2012).

### **To summarize:**

- The ministerial investigations into the local authorities' handling of the previously mentioned Danish cases of abuse seem to have been

predominantly focused on the level of observance to existing law.

- Efforts to re-establish the legitimacy and quality of social work as a response to the aforementioned cases seem to lead to further bureaucratization of social work, including reform initiatives and further standardization of case work.
- It appears that a gap exists between the intention of 'doing good' and 'doing good' in practice, which is proved scientifically regarding the replacement of children and youth in Denmark.

Because many of the cases of abuses and maladministration have been mentioned in the mass media, the general public has become very much aware of the problems and the lack of documented positive effects of the provided services. Public awareness of the problems has led to a legitimacy crisis of the administration, provision, production and delivery of services for vulnerable children and youths. This legitimacy crisis has been reinforced by the fact that the replacement of the children and youths is expensive - especially at institutions. The price of one replacement is often 10,000 Euros or more per month. Therefore, a strong demand to document the effects of the services scientifically and to spend the resources – the tax money – cost-effectively has emerged within the last few years. However, this demand is strongly challenged, due to the prevailing culture and tradition of freedom of method and lack of recorded documentation of the effects of the services. A case study concerning a selected high priority child-case in a Danish local authority concluded that four 'breakdowns' in the placement of the child at institutions had taken place caused by the child running away. The study showed that the breakdowns and lack of significant improvement in the child's well-being did not fundamentally challenge the professional logic of replacement of the child as being the optimal solution, despite no apparent positive effects over a period of several years. The study also showed that an individualistic approach to case work and an objection to efforts of standardizations seem to characterize the social workers (Nielsenb, 2014).

## **To conclude:**

The dominant position of the paradigm of street-level bureaucrats in the provision of

services to vulnerable children and youths has caused two major problems:

1. The effects of the services are not documented scientifically.
2. In many cases the public administration no longer follows the ideals of a Weberian bureaucracy.

Due to this, the welfare state has to struggle for the legitimacy of the provision of services for vulnerable children and youths. To better understand this struggle, the main actors regarding and principal arguments behind the replacement of vulnerable children and youths, in addition to the ethics of the replacements, will be presented and analyzed in the next section.

### **3. Main actors and principal arguments**

The replacement of children and youths concerns the right of the welfare state to intervene into the citizens' right to autonomy and self-determination, dignity, integrity and vulnerability (Rendtorff, 1999; 2011). Consequently, three types of interests are confronted: the rights and interests of the parents, the rights and lives of the children and youths, and the interest of society and its responsibility for its citizens.

The replacement of children and youths can be defined as a matter of taking away the children and youths from the family. Already in this context, the state puts pressure on the parents and the family in order to decide the future of the children and youths in society. The replacement of a child or a youth outside the family is legitimized by reference to the future life of the child or the youth. The replacement is

considered the least damaging solution to this social problem. That is, the power monopoly of the state is used to promote the interests of the child or the youth in an open confrontation with the wrongdoing of the biological parents.

Replacement typically includes the most vulnerable and isolated groups of society: people with low income and high un-employment; single mothers; and, people with severe social problems, including problems of alcohol and drug addiction. The risk of replacement of children and youths outside the family is high when it comes to single mothers, immigrant families, people suffering from mental illness, families with alcohol problems, drug abuse and medical problems, violence, sexual harassment and crime within the family. That is, the group of citizens which the welfare state is supposed really to help. However, this seems not to have been the case thinking of how stable the population of replaced children and youths has been for decades, as shown in section 2.

It is, of course, the street-level social workers and street-level bureaucrats in the daily administration who, on behalf of the welfare state and authorized by the same welfare state, provide the analyses and arguments which lead to replacement of children and youths outside their families. In other words, the type of street-level bureaucrats whom Lipsky defines as the ultimate street-level bureaucrats (Lipsky, 2010, p. 233). However, although the service 'replacement' has been provided for decades by the intention of 'doing good', it has not been proved scientifically that this is actually the case, as shown in section 2. How is this possible? An answer to this question can be found in the ethics of the replacement.

The ethics of the replacement of children and youths is based on the value of the right of the person - the child and youth - to self-development. The child or youth is considered a citizen who is different from their parents with his/her own right to develop and become himself/herself. Therefore, the main aim of replacement is this development of the human person and his/her right to have a good and happy childhood.

However, this ideology and policy of replacement of children and youths sometimes overshadows the dark sides of replacement. Because many of the replaced children and youth never join their biological family again and because no major positive effects of replacement have been recorded scientifically, these two questions become important: Is replacement rational? And to which degree is it acceptable that street-level bureaucrats control families by deciding over children, youths and parents?

The ideology and policy of replacement can be perceived as rational, because replacement prevents children and youths from having a negative confrontation with, and being influenced by, the family and biological parents. However, by using the concept of biopower from the French philosopher Michel Foucault (Foucault, 1976), it can be said that what happens is that the welfare state forces its biopower on its citizens – families – by using the street-level bureaucrats as its agents. The institutional structures of the welfare state, including the children's and youths' homes, schools and institutions contribute to the disciplinary power of the state. Here, it can be observed how the institutions through the street-level bureaucrats as state agents decide over the bodies and lives of the citizens – the families - in order to ensure that they can be an integrated part of the welfare state's institutions.

Furthermore, biopower is associated with the moral blindness and banality of evil of the public welfare institutions conducted by the street-level bureaucrats, administrators and managers (Foucault, 1976). The street-level bureaucrats want, generally speaking, to replace as many children and youths as possible because they, thereby, both contribute to do the work as agents of the welfare state and what they themselves consider as best for the children and youths. However, this is a problem because the street-level bureaucrats often forget that they, as employees in the welfare state's institutions, are directly placed in a political space. As a consequence, it might provide the children and youths with services that express totalitarian power and technological interventions in the lives of both children, youth and parents, with the aim of making them fit according to the welfare state's ideology, policies and institutions (Ewald, 1986). It is in this context that the risk exists that the street-level bureaucrats, who replace children and youths, are captured by moral blindness: they are not aware that they serve the biopower of the welfare state, because they are captured by the ideology and policy of 'doing good' for the children and youths by replacing them. In other words: the risk exists that the street-level bureaucrats, with support from the administrators and the managers in the welfare state, impose an unacceptable amount of state power on children, youth and parents.

In this context it is relevant to refer to the German-American philosopher Hannah Arendt who developed the concept of 'The Banality of Evil' (Arendt, 1963). Here one is not really aware that one commits an evil act because evil is a thoughtless action that is determined by the structures and contexts that are a part of daily life and daily operations in the welfare state. There is a risk that evil becomes a part of background mentality in the institutions involved in the replacement of children and youths. That is, a risk exists that the street-level bureaucrats involved in the replacement of children and youths, in the name of 'doing good' and with the heartfelt intention of 'doing good', actually do evil meaning that they do no good for

or even in some cases harm the children and youths.

Can this concept of moral blindness leading to banal evil be defined in more details and be related to the replacement of children in Denmark? Efforts to answer this question are made in the next section.

#### **4. Moral blindness and banal evil in Denmark?**

The essential content of the concept of moral blindness leading to banal evil can be said to include the 10 dimensions listed below (Rendtorff, 2012). To which degree these 10 dimensions are integrated into the paradigm of street-level bureaucrats, and thereby into the provision of the services to vulnerable children and youth in Denmark, are stated for each dimension. The statements are based on the description, in section 2, of the dominant position of the paradigm of the street-level bureaucrats in the provision of the services to vulnerable children and youths.

##### **4.1. 10 dimensions of moral blindness leading to banal evil**

The 10 dimensions of moral blindness leading to banal evil are the following:

1. Moral blindness implies that the street-level bureaucrats have no capacity of moral thinking. This is not the case. The essence of the paradigm of the street-level bureaucrats is that the single bureaucrat must help vulnerable children and youths in the best way possible.

2. The street-level bureaucrats only follow orders and justify this by reference to the technical-goal-rationality of the organization. This is not the case. The street-level bureaucrats do not represent a technical-goal-rationality. Instead they – in principle – represent a fresh judgment and assessment in each individual case based on the different professions' norms as prescribed in the Service Law.

3. In many cases the moral blindness strangely enough is due to role identification. This includes collaboration, i.e. children, youths and parents cooperate with the street-level bureaucrats regarding replacement and by doing this (more or less) are content with the ideology and policy of the replacement. Besides, children, youths and parents follow the rationality of the system by identifying with their roles as co-operative clients. This is motivated by obedience or efforts to minimize the (bio) power imposed by the street-level bureaucrats, as Lipsky (Lipsky, 2010, p.16) also identified. This dimension in the moral blindness is, to some degree, integrated into the paradigm of street-level bureaucrats. Besides, the integration is rather sophisticated. The street-level bureaucrats' ambitions are, as part of the paradigm, to create an environment of trust between the client and the individual street-level bureaucrats to facilitate co-design and co-production and delivery of the services to the children, youths and parents.

4. Moral blindness contains dehumanization, i.e. the families feel guilt and the children and youths are treated as mere objects. They are not considered as human beings, but as elements, things or functions of the system. This dimension is definitely not an element in the paradigm of the street-level bureaucrats.

5. Moral blindness relies on total obedience by the street-level bureaucrats to the system. The Service Law [Serviceloven] and other relevant laws, which regulate the provision of the services to vulnerable children and youths, make this impossible. The law(s) simply prescribe(s) that street-level bureaucrats should have an extensive discretion and autonomy which makes total obedience impossible.

6. Each member of the organization is accomplishing a specific work function with role identification and a specific task but he or she has no general overview of the organizational system. This dimension might be an integrated part of the paradigm of the street-level bureaucracy. Due to a strong division of labor among managers, administrators and street-level bureaucrats both in the administration and in the daily operations, administrators, managers and street-level bureaucrats might in some cases too little overview of the organizational system leading to the maladministration of the provision of services and the provided services shown in section 2.

7. Top-administrators and managers may act irrationally beyond common human understanding of morality in order to serve the instrumental rationality of the organizational system. Even if this should be the case, it would have no or only little impact on the provision of the services to the children and youths due to the street-level bureaucrats' discretion and autonomy.

8. Street-level bureaucrats are pressured to become increasingly irrational and arbitrarily role implementing. Again, this dimension is not an integrated part of the paradigm of the street-level bureaucrats and will, therefore, be rejected.

9. Obedience, role identification and task commitment remain the central and ultimate virtue of the commitment of members of the organization to the organizational system. As described previously, this dimension is impossible to integrate into the paradigm of the street-level bureaucrats.

10. Each member of the organizational system commits themselves to the values of the organizational goal of the system without questioning the legitimacy of the system as a whole. It can be said that this dimension has, to a high degree, been integrated into the paradigm of the street-level bureaucrats. Because of the paradigm's dominant position in the provision of the services to vulnerable children and youths, no open discussions of the values and ethics of the provision of the services including replacement were raised for decades. Besides, because the paradigm of the street-level bureaucrats is not based on scientific accountability for the provided services, it cannot be ruled out that some banal evil to vulnerable children and youths and their parents has happened in Denmark over a very long period of time.

### **To conclude:**

The paradigm of the street-level bureaucrats, and thereby the paradigm of the provision of services to citizens, might have caused banal evil, because of moral blindness due to: 1) no scientific documentation/accountability of the effects of the provided services to vulnerable children and youth; and, 2) organisations which are too complex. The question becomes: How to eliminate or minimize these negative side effects of the paradigm? Before answering this question in section 5, we shall take a step deeper into the analysis of moral blindness leading to evil.

## **4.2. Unmasking administrative evil!**

In the book *Unmasking Administrative Evil* (third edition 2009), Guy B. Adams and Daniel L. Balafout give some indications of a theory of evil and of the concept of moral blindness in public administration. Adams and Balafout propose the concept of



administrative evil as an interpretation of Hannah Arendt's concept of moral blindness.

According to Adams and Balafour, organizational evil may become even worse than moral blindness because it implies a moral inversion where something evil suddenly is defined as a good (Adams & Balafour, 2009, p. 4). The starting point for the argument is: the modern organizations are complex to such a degree that it is impossible for street-level bureaucrats, administrators and managers to have an overview. Complex organization may result in a situation where the street-level bureaucrats, administrators and managers cannot see the consequences of particular actions in the overall organizational processes. This might lead to results far from those intended. Therefore, a technological bureaucracy may be unforeseen evil, meaning actions with the intention of 'doing good' might result in doing evil.

Adams and Balafour argue that the main reason for the risk of doing unforeseen evil in administration is the scientific analytic mindset of the technical-rational approach to social and political problems. This type of approach has a built-in risk of creating a kind of administrative evil which is masked and, therefore, creates blindness which results in public servants such as street-level bureaucrats, administrators and managers who suddenly are doing evil although they do not intend to. They are, so to say, engaged in activities that lead to evil, but they are morally blind because they do not see that they contribute to the inversion of the moral situation and thereby create blindness.

Sometimes even ethical codes and other rules of conduct may be inefficient to prevent this because the technological analytical mindset is so powerful that the street-level bureaucrats, administrators and managers do not see that they participate in processes that lead to doing harm. Also compartmentalization of knowledge and creation of too narrow identities of street-level bureaucrats contribute to the masking of evil (Adams & Balafour, 2009, p. 30). It is this moral inversion Adams and Balafour call the 'Mask of Evil'. This is, of course, a complication of moral blindness and in a sense a 'double-blindness'. Evil wears a mask in addition to our blindness. The concept of moral blindness in administrative evil may be following Plato's idea that one cannot, with knowledge of it, do evil.

The important point here is not to reveal the masks of evil in details in the provision of the services to vulnerable children and youths. The important point is: it is likely that masks of evil can be revealed in the provision of the services to vulnerable children and youths and in the administrative control with the provided services. Seen in this

perspective, an important question is: How to provide services to vulnerable children and youths and how to control the provided services so masks of evil can be revealed?

## **5. Which paradigm can ensure legitimacy?**

Whether the issue is negative side-effects of the dominant position of the paradigm of street-level bureaucrats in the provision of services to vulnerable children and youths, 'moral blindness' in the provision of the services resulting in banal evil or masks of evil due to the complex organizations and top-managers mind-set, the key word is 'blind spots'.

The gap between the welfare state's ideology of 'doing good' for vulnerable children and youths and doing this in practice is caused by the consequences of 'blind spots'.

The five 'blind spots' in our case are the following. The paradigm of the street-level bureaucrats has 'blind spots' when it comes to: 1) the management of the public spending on the services; 2) the administration of the provision of services and the provided services; and, 3) scientific documentation of the effects of the provided services. Furthermore, 4) the services are based on ethics that have a 'blind spot' regarding the downsides of the services. This 'blind spot' is reinforced by the 'blind spot' regarding scientific documentation of the effects of the services in the paradigm of the street level bureaucrats. Finally, 5) the organizations' complexity and the top-managers' mind-set, based on goal-instrument rationality, have a 'blind spot' regarding doing unforeseen evil in the name of 'doing good' for the citizens of the welfare state.

The first 'blind spot', which results in unmanageable public spending on services, is to a high degree caused by the fact that within the paradigm of street-level bureaucrats '...values about being economical or even efficient seldom loom large...' (Brunsson, 2009, p. 62).

The second 'blind spot', which results in maladministration, can be explained to a

high degree by the street-level bureaucrats' positions in the bureaucracies and their role in these. The street-level bureaucrats are, by definition, not in the center of the bureaucracies (Lipsky, 2010, p.12). Besides, the street-level bureaucrats' roles are to exercise discretion regarding the bureaucracies' rules and norms, on the one hand, and the citizens' problems and needs, on the other hand (Lipsky, 2010, pp. 230-231). Thereby, the roles of the street-level bureaucrats are to greater extent to advocate for the citizens' needs in the 'system', rather than to support the ideals of a Weberian bureaucracy in the 'system'.

The third 'blind spot' resulting in a lack of scientific documentation of the effects of the services can be explained by norms and traditions. Doctors have, as an example, integrated scientific documentation into their professions' norms and traditions, and thereby in the paradigm of their profession. Doctors are requested to operate on the basis of the 'gold standard' for documentation: double blind randomized controlled studies. Although the 'gold standard' for various reason is neither simple nor appropriate in all cases (Lipsky, 2010, p. 220), it is important that a scientific standard for documentation is established and met partly to legitimize the street-level bureaucrats' provision of the services and partly to make them accountable for the effects of the provided services. In Denmark, due to norms and traditions, the street-level bureaucrats are, as shown in section 2, far from meeting a scientific standard regarding documentation of the effects of the services and far from being held accountable for the effects of the services.

The fourth 'blind spot', which results in moral blindness and accordingly banal evil might be explained by the dominant position - close to monopoly – of the street-level bureaucrats in the provision of services for decades. The paradigm's position might have blocked or even oppressed an open and free discussion of the ethics of the provision of services and the consequences of ethics in the provision of services. Besides, the lack of scientific documentation of the effects of services has properly reinforced moral blindness and the accordingly banal evil.

The fifth 'blind spot', which results in masks of evil, has neither a simple explanation nor a simple solution. Besides, it can be questioned to which degree the top-managers have or can have a technical-rational approach to the decisions about and the management of social and political problems. Almost endless cases and analyses show that top-managers neither have, nor can have, a technical-rational approach (March, 2008; Brunsson, 2009; Røvik, 2002 amongst others). However, we accept that the ideal for most top-managers is a technical-rational approach to decision-making processes and management simply because this type of rationality is the most common way to legitimize decisions-making processes and management (March, 2008; Røvik, 2002).

What cannot be questioned (any more) is that organizations are complex. In Denmark, one of the many reasons for this is the numerous changes in criteria of what determines success, which confront public organizations. In Denmark, the standard public organization is confronted with more than 25 general success criteria plus some specific sector and organizational success criteria (Pedersen, 2008). In the attempts and efforts to meet all these success criteria an organization becomes complex because the organization: 'must be efficient today, while also adapting for tomorrow; it must produce at low cost, while also innovating; it must deploy the massed resources of a large corporation, while showing the entrepreneurial flair of a small startup; it must achieve high levels of reliability and consistency, while also being flexible in adapting to change' (Grant, 2002, p. 519).

The key question now is: Is it possible to eliminate or minimize the 'blind spots' just discussed and the consequences of the 'blind spots'? Because all public management paradigms with reference to Kuhn (Kuhn, 1962) by definition and in practice have 'blind spots' (Lerborg, 2010), the answer to this question is another question: Is it possible to create a mix – a hybrid - of paradigms, which can eliminate or minimize the 'blind spots' discussed and, by doing this, close the gap between the welfare state's ideology of 'doing good' and doing this in practice?

### 5.1. Efforts made to eliminate 'blind spots' via a new mix of paradigms

One strategy to eliminate the 'blind spots' of the paradigm of the street-level bureaucrats would be to reduce discretion and autonomy among the street-level bureaucrats radically. This is, however, not a wise strategy because the street-level bureaucrats legitimize the provision of the services in general (Lipsky, 1980; Lipsky, 2010) and in Denmark in the SSSP in particular (Pedersen & Aagaard, 2013). A more appropriate strategy to eliminate the 'blind spots' and the consequences of them is to impose some restrictions on the street-level bureaucrats' discretion and autonomy combined with new demands addressed to the street-level bureaucrats. Efforts, and attempts to do this, have already been made, especially during the current austerity, by implementing core elements from a neoliberal paradigm and the paradigm of Weberian bureaucracy in the public management of the SSSP.

Core elements in a *neoliberal paradigm* have been implemented to eliminate or minimize the 'blind spots' of the paradigm of the street-level bureaucrats regarding the management of public spending on services and scientific documentation of the effects of these services.

The 'blind spot' regarding public spending has been eliminated successfully. Since 2010 public spending has not increased and budgets have, generally speaking, been kept in line (Gregersen, 2013). The main reasons for this are initiatives taken by the former liberal-conservative government (2001 to 2011). The former government introduced the policy of zero growth in public spending on services in the SSSP. This has put a cap on public spending, which was a key ambition of the former liberal-conservative government (Pedersen & Löfgren, 2012). Besides, the former government introduced and implemented the policy of hard budget constraint (Kornai, 1980; Kornai, Maskin & Roland, 2003). That is, budget deficits were (and are still) met with administrative cuts in the budgets (Ministry of Finance, 2010, p. 7).

As a result of the fact that the public management of public spending on services is based on central elements in a neoliberal paradigm, the street-level bureaucrats can no longer necessarily provide children and youths with services which the street-level bureaucrats themselves consider as the best possible provisions. Besides, to ensure that budgets are kept, it is no longer, in many cases, the individual street-level bureaucrat who makes the final assessment and judgment concerning the individual case and, accordingly, decides which services are to be provided. During these years, the trend has been that teams, involving both street-level bureaucrats coming from different professions and managers coming from the daily administration in addition to the top level, are established to make the final assessment and judgment of the individual case and to decide which services are to be provided. By doing this, the teams try to balance the quality of services and the overall budgets (Johansen & Pedersen, 2012). In sum, the street-level bureaucrats have to apply to some restrictions.

Furthermore, some public management and managerial performance tools have been introduced recently to make it possible to establish scientific standards for the documentation of the effects of services. Examples of such tools are ICS (Integrated Children System – developed in the UK) and DUBU (a database tool to register verdicts, services provided, costs of the services etc.). The problem is that none of these tools at present have provided scientific documentation of the effects of services at the level of segments of the gross group of vulnerable children and youths.

To sum up, the 'blind spot' regarding public spending has been eliminated. In contrast to this, the 'blind spot' regarding scientific documentation of the effects of services has not been eliminated.

The core elements of the paradigm of a Weberian bureaucracy have also been promoted again to eliminate the 'blind spot' regarding the administration of the provision of services and of the provided services to vulnerable children and youths. That is, the administration has been re-centralized, to avoid future maladministration of the provision of services and of the provided services. Some examples can illustrate this. As mentioned in section 2, a national task force has been established to check the local authorities' administration of the services to vulnerable children and youths and to advise the local authorities on how to implement correct administration. A reform called 'The Child's Reform' [Barnets Reform], which was implemented in 2011, has the goal to ensure a correct administration of the provision of services to children and youths. An evaluation in 2012 of the national-wide organizational set-up regarding the provision of the services in SSSP has, as previously mentioned, resulted in more centralized control of the provision of services to small segments within the gross group of vulnerable children and youths. Once again, the result is that the street-level bureaucrats have imposed restrictions regarding their discretion and autonomy. Once again, in spite of these restrictions, the street-level bureaucrats are still essential in the provision of services and still legitimize the provided services.

In sum, the core elements in the paradigm of a Weberian bureaucracy have been deployed to eliminate the 'blind spots' of the paradigm of the street-level bureaucrats.

**The overall conclusion** regarding the efforts and attempts to eliminate the three 'blind spots' associated with the paradigm of the street-level bureaucrats must be a mix of - a hybrid - three paradigms which have been developed to manage the SSSP: the paradigm of the street-level bureaucrats, a neoliberal paradigm and a Weberian paradigm. This mix of paradigms has the potential to eliminate or minimize the two first of the three 'blind spots' associated with the paradigm of street-level bureaucrats. However, more research is needed to design the most appropriate mix to eliminate or minimize these two 'blind spots'. Besides, we still have to eliminate the 'blind spot' of scientific documentation of the effects of the services.

Furthermore, we still have two more 'blind spots' to eliminate or minimize. The one spot is the ethics of the provision of services, which results in moral blindness and accordingly banal evil. The second spot is the combination of organizational complexity and the top-managers technical-rational approach to the solutions of social and political problems which results in masks of evil. To our knowledge, no steps have been taken to eliminate or minimize these two 'blind spots' and their

inherent consequences.

In sum, we are left with three 'blind spots' remembering that the 'blind spot' of scientific documentation of the effects of the services reinforces moral blindness and consequently banal evil.

To eliminate or minimize these three 'blind spots' and the consequences of them, we shall propose the development of a fourth paradigm: the paradigm of scientific documentation and ethics. This paradigm has, of course, to be integrated into the mix of three paradigms already mentioned.

## **5.2. A new paradigm and a new mix of paradigms!**

To eliminate the 'blind spot' regarding scientific documentation of the effects of services, to make the street-level bureaucrats' more accountable for the services and to help reduce moral blindness resulting in banal evil, society must require scientific documentation of the effects of the services the street-level bureaucrats provide directly to vulnerable children and youths.

It is, of course, impossible to implement the 'gold-standard' mentioned for scientific documentation overnight. It is, however, possible to move towards the 'gold-standard' stepwise *vis-a-vis* increasing requirements to the documentation of the effects of services. By doing this, the 'blind spot' regarding documentation will be reduced over time. It will, however, result in a movement towards a technical-instrument rationality towards the provision of services. If this technical-instrument rationality is coupled with an economic rationality, the result will be that the provision of services is done on the basis of cost-effective analyses. That is, the provision of services will be based on objective criteria. As a consequence of this, the mind-set of a technical-economical-instrument rationality will be promoted among street-level bureaucrats, administrators and managers. This will increase the risk of double moral blindness and accordingly masks of evil as discussed previously. In other words, we are confronted with wicked problems which are well demonstrated in the Danish SSSP (Gregersen, 2013).

To eliminate or minimize the risk of both banal evil and masks of evil associated with moral blindness, organizational complexity and a technical-economical-instrumental rationality, we would like to propose an improvement of organizational ethics and awareness of social responsibility made transparent to the public. One idea would be to establish a system of ethical and legal review of the decision-making processes of

the provision of services, the administration of the provided services and the effects of the services provided. This approach would emphasize the importance of the ethics in the provision of the services and in the services provided, as well as the ethics of the effects of the provided services. This concern can further be situated at the level of management and leadership of public organizations via value-driven management or total quality management. Besides, we will propose to emphasize the communicative dimensions by making the review of the provision of services and the effects of services more transparent. Many different stakeholders should be involved in the proposed review to ensure transparent reviews.

To develop this fourth paradigm of scientific documentation and ethics and to integrate this new paradigm into the mix of the three paradigms discussed previously, more research is needed.

## **6. Conclusion**

In this article we have analyzed the Danish welfare state's struggle for legitimacy as a paradigmatic and critical case, based on the case of the provision and the management of services to vulnerable children and youths. In particular, we have demonstrated a gap between the welfare state's ideology of 'doing good' for its citizens and this in practice – in real life. Besides, we have analyzed insufficient problem solutions to the gap. Finally, we have pointed out 'blind spots' linked to the existing paradigms of the provision and the management of services to vulnerable children and youths, which support the creation and maintenance of the gap of the welfare state's ideology of 'doing good' and doing this in real life.

We have argued that we need a new mix – a new hybrid – of paradigms of the provision and the management of the services to vulnerable children and youths to eliminate or minimize the 'blind spots' and, consequently, the gap between the welfare state's ideology of 'doing good' and doing this in practice. That is, we need to introduce a new paradigm in the provision and the management of public services, based partly on the scientific documentation of the effects of the provided services and partly on a new ethics in the provision and the management of these services. Moreover, this new paradigm has to be integrated into the already existing mix – combination – of three paradigms regarding the provision and the management of services to vulnerable children and youths.



## Notes

1. The included overall account of the Danish media-covered cases of abuse and maltreatment of children and youths is based on an in-depth document study of a selection of six of the most media-covered cases from 2011 to the present (Nielsena, 2014).

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