
Carl Dahlström (2004). *Nästan välkomna. Invandrapolitikens retorik och praktik*. (Almost Welcome. Rhetoric and Practice in Immigrant Policy). Swedish text. English summary. Göteborg Studies in Politics 87. Department of Political Science, Box 711, 405 30 Göteborg, Sweden. 220 pages. ISBN 91-89246-12-8. ISSN 0346-5942.

This dissertation argues that Swedish immigrant policy – that is, the conditions provided to resident immigrants – has gained legitimacy when distanced from past immigrant policies. Legitimizing immigrant policy by contrasting it against an undesirable past is strange, considering the development of immigrant policy programmes. The findings in the dissertation show that all important immigrant policy programmes were introduced in the 1960s and 1970s and that there has been astonishing stability since then. At the same time, the rhetoric of immigrant policy has changed several times. This book is an attempt to explain this puzzling discrepancy between rhetoric and practice.

The theoretical model suggests that the explanation can be found in differing evaluation processes: rhetoric is evaluated in public political debates whereas practice is evaluated through government audits. In these different contexts different questions are asked. The public debate focuses on questions of moral values, and the government audit system focuses on questions of efficiency. Rhetoric and practice therefore respond differently to criticism, which creates a decoupling between rhetoric and practice. The purpose of both rhetorical and practical changes is to increase policy legitimacy, but this is done in different ways and therefore with different consequences.

The theoretical model is confirmed. This conclusion is based on four observations. The first concerns the conditions when rhetoric and practice were established. They were widely different. The rhetoric was introduced in a polarized public debate, whereas the practice started off to solve specific problems concerning information and training in the Swedish language. As a result of these different conditions of introduction, rhetoric and practice were but loosely knit together. This observation supports the notion of the importance of formative moments. The second observation is that stability is contained only when feedback mechanisms constantly confirm the policy formation. This has happened on the practical but not on the rhetorical level. The third observation concerns how the rhetorical level has changed. It has accommodated the opinions of critics in the public debate. As this criticism has been on matters of principles, the core values of the rhetoric have been changed. Finally, the fourth observation is about the lack of major change on the practical level. Here, too, the opinions of critics have been accommodated, but in this context the criticism has concerned the efficiency of existing policy programmes and not the principles behind them.

Keywords: decoupling, immigrant policy, immigration, institutionalism, practice, public policy, rhetoric, Sweden, welfare policy.
