

Anna Bendz

***I välfärdsstatens hägn.***

*Autonomi inom arbetslöshetsförsäkringen.*

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The point of departure of this dissertation is the general question of how to combine normative political philosophy with empirical analysis, the argument being that concepts from the political philosophy can and shall be used for the construction of theoretically and empirically relevant research questions. The core concept in the dissertation, which is also the object of the empirical analysis, is autonomy. The empirical analysis answers the question of what consequences for individual autonomy follows from the design of unemployment insurance institutions. The empirical study focuses on policy choices taken in Sweden and Norway concerning the reformation of the unemployment insurances between the 1930's and 1990's. The design of the study is a comparative case study, the point of departure being that Sweden and Norway are social-democratic welfare states which are similar in many ways but have chosen different kinds of unemployment insurance institutions. The theoretical model used in the dissertation is derived from institutional theory. The hypothesis is that the difference in unemployment insurance systems should mean that the political actors should face different situations when making decisions about the rules of the unemployment insurance, which in turn means that the outcome when it comes to individual autonomy should be different. Since the countries have had the same institutions since the 1930's, another hypothesis is that the policy decisions regarding the rules affecting autonomy should be relatively stable over time. This hypothesis is derived from the historical-institutionalist theory of path dependency.

The result of the empirical study shows that there are some differences between the two cases when it comes to autonomy and that it is possible to argue that these differences can be attributed to the institutional systems. But the conclusion is not unanimous since there are also some similarities in the autonomy outcome, and a conclusion therefore also is that in some instances, the differences in unemployment insurance institutions are not significant for the political actors when they make policy decisions. The empirical study also shows that the path dependency hypothesis gains support in the Norwegian case, but not to the full in the Swedish case. The differences between the two cases decrease over time, mainly due to changes in the Swedish unemployment insurance.

A general conclusion in the thesis is that the design of political institutions not only is of importance for political decision-making and public policy, but also for the normative character of the state.

*Key Words:* Autonomy, political institutions, path dependency, unemployment insurance, welfare state, causal mechanisms, political decision-making, Sweden, Norway, public policy