

Abstract

Title: Family Policy in Iceland 1944-1984

Written in English, summary in English, 272 pages.

Author: Guðný Björk Eydal

Doctoral Dissertation at the Department of Sociology,
Göteborg University

Box 720, SE 405 30 GÖTEBORG, Sweden

ISBN 91-975404-3-9

ISSN 1650-4313

Göteborg 2005

The aim of this study is to identify the main objectives and themes of Icelandic family policy in the period 1944 to 1984. It does this through a documentary analysis of all relevant parliamentary documents from this time found in the proceedings of Alþingi. The data provides not only information about actual proposals and parliamentary discussions. It also shows who proposed them and participated in debates. The data is thus a testament to the rationales that were offered when a particular proposal came up for a vote. The data gives valuable insights into where political parties, and their members in parliament, stood on the issues. This allows for an evaluation of the claim that welfare development is shaped by what types of political parties govern.

The study examines three policy areas that make up the body of family policy. This is in accordance with the definition of family policy as a public policy that has been enacted into law and is aimed at parents with children. These include: family law, law on services for families and law on transfer payments and benefits for families. The findings show that Icelandic family policy became more extensive with time. The period from 1944 to 1962 was characterized by the increasing political acceptance of the ideal that the state had an important role in ensuring the economic well being of families with children. In the 1970s the state came under new pressures to support parents in their care obligations. Laws on public day care and maternity leave/parental leave in the 1970s and 1980s are a good example of this. Furthermore during the period societal changes were reflected in family policies that attempted to achieve gender equality and securing the rights of children. A comparison of the five Nordic countries shows that the welfare schemes in the area of family policy that evolved in Iceland were to some extent less generous than those of the other countries. This applies, in particular, to day care and paid maternity leave.

The findings show that the political parties in Iceland had different emphases but the degree of political differences varied given the policy area. Throughout the research period the left-of-the-centre parties were in favour of more state support to families with children. Political divisions were the most intense from 1944 to 1962 in the policy areas of social security and taxes. Towards the end of the research period the political divisions became fuzzier and the centrist Progressive Party and the right-of-the-centre Independence Party proposed many important changes that led to increases in entitlements. In the area of family law and child welfare there was not much disagreement among the political parties.

Keywords: Family policy, state, families, mothers, fathers, children, political parties, Iceland.