

If not for profit,
for what and how?

S O C I A L
E N T E R P R I S E

Promoting Good Work by Enriching Women's Work Environment: the Case of Social Enterprises in Swedish Childcare

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Abstract

Karasak & Theorell's demand/control model for analyzing work environment posits a high degree of both demands and control for active or good working conditions, while stress occurs when demands are plentiful, but there are few possibilities of control. This article addresses a significant increase of work-related demands, with few possibilities for control, leading to a dramatic deterioration of the psychosocial work environment for women employed in the public sector in Sweden during the 1990s and 00's. It also explores the potential contribution of social enterprises to enrich women's work environment. The empiric data is collected from two studies of work environment at Swedish childcare facilities, one from 1994-95 and another from 2006-07. This allows for a historical perspective where the results of the austerity driven changes in social politics in the 1990's are compared with the situation just over ten years later. The article will try to show that work environment conditions changed radically about 20 years ago and that the effects are still apparent today. The results also show, however, that small, social enterprises continue to offer a better work environment than public or for-profit facilities.

INTRODUCTION

In a well-established and highly developed welfare state like Sweden providing good working conditions should be a key building block to guarantee high quality personal services, particularly for the hundreds of thousands of women providing public social and welfare services. Numerous studies show a dramatic deterioration of the psycho-social work environment in the public sector in general and for the women providing welfare services in particular, in the 1990s and 2000s. However, poor work environment in public services goes unnoticed in the public debate about the future of the welfare state. One reason for ignoring work environment in the public sector is found in the high degree of polarization in the Swedish debate between supporters of greater privatization and those defending continued public provision of such services. Finance and efficiency remain paramount in this debate. Moreover, the many advantages of small scale cooperatives and social enterprises easily get lost in this infected debate, particularly in terms of providing good working conditions and more influence to the staff.

The materials employed in this article stem from an extensive empirical study of Work Environment and Cooperative Social Services in Sweden, undertaken at the beginning of a major push for privatizing public services that is still ongoing today. It clearly shows the advantages of small scale social enterprises in promoting women's influence and decision-making capacity in the internal structures of such organizations. This was part of multifaceted research on cooperative social services in Scandinavian welfare states involving an Organizational Study, a Staff Study and a user or Parent Study. The empirical part of the Staff Study focuses on the staff of 57 day care centers, chosen randomly throughout the country. The size of the staff sample is nearly 250 respondents. It compares the work environment of three main types of social enterprises providing preschool services in Sweden, namely parent cooperatives, voluntary organizations and worker cooperatives. The Staff Study also undertakes a retrospective comparison of work environment with similar municipal services. It presents two tables based on materials from the Staff Study. The materials also include results from a recent and smaller follow-up study performed just over a decade after the original study, ending in 2007. The follow-up includes a staff study with a sample of 116 respondents in municipal, cooperative and for-profit preschools. This second part of the study uses a similar research design as the first one and can therefore be used to extend the conclusions to the present date and to make comparisons over time.

The two datasets will be used to answer the following two questions:

1. How did work environment develop in public, for-profit and cooperative social services following the extensive privatizations of the 1990's?
2. How has the work environment in the same services changed over the 12 years since the first study?

These questions will also be used to make some, more general, predictions about the relation between work environment and organizational change.

BACKGROUND

Until the mid-1980s social services were provided almost exclusively by local governments in Sweden, but a variety of alternative models for providing social services were developed during the late 1980s and 1990s. Contracting out to the third sector, purchaser-provider models, cooperative social services, volunteering and third party provision are but a few of the models now being tried in order to resolve the ideological and financial problems that arose in the Swedish welfare state in the 1990's. Privatization and contracting out has led to the growth of many new social enterprises that have become an important alternative to the public provision of such social services. Private for-profit service providers have also become a significant factor in the Swedish welfare mix in recent years. Childcare provides a good example of these developments.

In 1994 nearly 560,000 children up to the age of seven were enrolled in preschool care in Sweden, which was a majority of all children in that age group. The number of children is somewhat lower today due to fewer children in that particular age group and the fact that children now can attend regular school at an earlier age. The number of children enrolled is 482,309, but this is actually a greater share of the total, as many as 84 percent of all children are enrolled today in preschool service (Socialstyrelsen, 1995: 23, 25; Pestoff, 1996: 156; 1998, Skolverket 2013). The number of 'private' or non-municipal preschools more than tripled between 1988 and 1995, going from 538 to 1,888 facilities, while the number of children attending them more than quadrupled during the same period, increasing from 8,500 to 39,100 (Pestoff, 1996, 1998; Stryjan, 1995). Today as many 97,000 children receive childcare in cooperative or for-profit preschools. Thus, 'private' childcare now accounts for more than 20 percent of all children enrolled in preschools. More than two thirds of these children attended childcare provided by social enterprises up to the mid-1990's but today momentum seem to have shifted in favor of the for-profit preschools and the growth in private childcare since then is almost entirely made up of for-profit preschools, often produced by large corporations running many facilities.

THEORY: KARASEK & THEORELL'S DEMAND/CONTROL MODEL

The Swedish stress researcher B. Gardell helped pioneer an interest in the field of psychosocial work environment. He was followed by R. Karasek, an American sociologist, who developed a more comprehensive interactive model of psychosocial work environment. According to Karasek's model, it is not psychological demands at work per se that have negative consequences, but rather only if and when they are combined with low control or decision autonomy over the work situation (Karasek and Theorell, 1990: 6). In high-stress jobs an individual is prepared to deal with a challenging situation, without the possibility of being able to do so; thus amassing unused/unusable energy, which can later express itself in diminished health, lower psychological well-being and heart and circulation difficulties.

R. Karasek and T. Theorell summarized the demand/control model of "good work" in their book *Healthy Work: Stress, Productivity and the Reconstruction of Working Life* (1990). They point to the importance of demand, control and support for the well-being of workers and develop a model based on these three components. They argue that:

Our findings show that the social and psychological aspects of the work situation are indeed significant risk factors for coronary heart disease... {However,} work that is demanding [within limits] is not the major source of risk. The primary work related risk factor appears to be the lack of control over how one meets the job's demands and how one uses one's skills. In many cases elevation of risk with a demanding job appears only when these demands occur in interaction with low control on the job. (ibid., 9).

Their demand/control model contains two dimensions, made up of low and high psychological demands as well as low and high degrees of control, resulting in a classical sociological four fold table. It posits both a high degree of demands and control for active or good working conditions, while stress occurs when demands are plentiful, but there are few possibilities of control. Active work is associated with both high demands and high control, while high strain work is related to high demands, but low control. The remaining two categories in their model make few demands and are called low strain and passive jobs (*ibid.*, 70). Moreover, Karasek and Theorell (1990) argue that it is possible to distinguish between good and bad jobs:

The bad job in the future industrialized world, although it pays well and has decent physical working conditions, is still a horror of modern debilitation: no opportunities to learn, computerized monitoring, boredom interspersed with crises, unexpected layoffs, no rights, social isolation, inter-worker competition, loss of contact with the real world of customers, etc.... The good jobs are good because they offer the potential for human development: learning, user-friendly tools,

responsibility, negotiable demands, stimulating challenges, co-workers as teachers, pride of accomplishment in creative achievement, customers whose growth re-stimulates the workers. We cannot change bad jobs into good ones by increasing wages, decreasing working hours or remove physical hazards... (*ibid.*, 314, underlining in the original).

Karasek & Theorell developed their model after studying and comparing work environment in Sweden and the USA. Their model was employed and expanded in the mid-1990s to include client interaction as a fourth variable by the Swedish project called Work Environment and Cooperative Social Services (WECSS) (Pestoff, 1998). In the empirical part of our paper we will demonstrate that social enterprises in Sweden provide good jobs in the fullest meaning of Karasek and Theorell. In addition to being psychologically demanding, they provide high decision latitude to the workers, high social support for the workers and enduring interaction with the clients. These work-life attributes, unfortunately, stand in sharp contrast with those found in the services provided by the large hierarchical bureaucratic organizations often associated with the public sector services in Sweden, including municipal childcare services, judging from the data presented below. Thus, in this sense the social enterprise model can not only help to transform social services jobs into active, participative and interactive jobs. It can also help to enrich work-life of the employees.

Finally, their discussion of job redesign strategies put more emphasis on participative than on the material aspects of work. (Karasek & Theorell, 1990: 314). Increasing employee control and freedom to use and develop their skills offers a more viable solution to the stress of high-strain jobs. Job redesign should therefore concentrate on the following things: improving skill discretion, increasing worker autonomy, mixing psychological demands, encouraging social relations, introducing democratic rights, augmenting job meaningfulness by increasing direct customer feedback.

WORK ENVIRONMENT RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENTS AT THE TURN OF THE CENTURY

Extensive Swedish work environment research documents the gradual polarization of the labor market in the 1980s and 1990s. Women working in the service sector experienced growing demands with few possibilities for control, while men in the private industrial sector did not experience a similar rise in demands nor stress (Szulkin & Tåhlin, 1994). In particular, the big municipal budget cuts together with growing demand for public services led to a stressful situation for the women in the front-line staff providing public services, particularly welfare services. The Swedish Bureau of Statistics (SCB) undertook a work environment with over 10,000 respondents every second year, starting in 1991. Thus, extensive data is available to study work environment in Sweden.

For example, the 1995 SCB Work Environment Study included some comparative questions concerning job demands, to persons with the same occupation during the past five years, i.e., only to those persons who are able to make personal comparisons of developments. On four of five items the staff of preschools experienced a greater increase in job related demands than the average for the entire work force. More than three-fourths (77.7%) of the staff of day care centers with five years' experience claimed that the pace of work has increased, compared to less than three-fifths (58.5%) of the entire work force. Increased unemployment during the 1990s had driven up the tempo of work in general. In addition, major reductions in the childcare budgets of most municipalities resulted in higher children to staff ratios. Moreover, nearly half (45.0%) of the staff of preschools complained of an increase in heavy work tasks, (e.g. lifting toddlers), while about one-eighth (14.2%) do so in the work force in general. This is coupled with growing difficulties in getting sick relief or temporary replacement help in municipal preschools. Many other welfare service occupations suffered similar developments in the 1990s and 2000s (ASS/SCB, 1996).

One major expression of unhealthy work life is long-term sick leave, when adverse conditions are so intense that an employee becomes so ill that she/he simply can't go to work. In order to document the development of long term sick leave the situation in 1989 was compared with that in 1999 (SOU

2000: 121). The report noted that the proportion of women who were on sick leave was much greater among those who are subject to *high demands* in their work; moreover, concerning their influence or *control over work* the relationship was unequivocal. Persons of all ages and both genders on sick leave have less control at work. This comprises the classical *high stress* category developed by Karasek & Theorell (1990). The combination of high demands with low control over their work resulted in the highest level of sick leave during the 1990s.

For all types of welfare services the 1990s was a decade of decentralization, reorganization and cut-backs. Municipalities took over more responsibility for providing welfare services both from the central government and from the counties. For example, in health care, there were over 112,000 hospital and health care places/beds in the county and privately run health care in 1988, but by 2007 there were less than 30,000, making Sweden the OECD country with the fewest hospital beds per capita (Borgarström 2007). Shorter care times and greater patient turnover have also led to a greater burden on hospitalized care by the counties. Budget reductions and rationalizations in health care led to reorganizations and redundancies (Harder, *et al.*, 2000). Thus, in 1999 nurses and other health care workers to a greater degree than average felt that they had too much to do and that they had too little influence over when tasks should be done and how to plan their work. They also felt to a greater extent than the average that they seldom got support or encouragement from their bosses (*ibid.*). Furthermore, the *Ädel* Reform for eldercare in 1992 transferred 31,000 eldercare places from the counties to municipalities, while another 31,000 places simply disappeared. A large part of the social care which previously took place within county health care is now taken care of by the municipalities. This resulted both in a lack of care places and new demands on the social and health care under the auspices of the municipalities.

This also resulted in a sizable staff reduction on the county side, where the number of full-year workers employed by the county councils for health care went down from 20.4 to 18.0 per 1,000 inhabitants between 1992 and 1998. Taken together the staff in health care and eldercare was reduced by 15 percent in that period. At the same time the general population was aging and needed more care. Thus, at the end of the decade, we find a smaller number of employees who gave service to more clients than ten years earlier.

Similar developments are noted for schools. The National School Board notes that the costs per pupil in elementary schools decreased by nine per cent between 1991 and 1998. In 1997 resources for teaching were only 80% of what they were in 1991. Thus, the ratio of teachers per 100 pupils decreased from 9.1 in 1991 to only 7.5 in 1998 (*ibid.*). That figure has now risen to 8.2 teachers, but the ratio of teachers seems to have settled at a distinctly lower level than before the crisis of the 1990's (Skolverket 2010). The Teachers Union noted in 2001 that seven of ten teachers experienced greater work loads during the 1990s, primarily as a result of more and newer work responsibilities (Lärarnas Riksförbund, 2001). Changes in work organization, growing conflicts and numerous meetings also contribute to a heavier work burden, alongside new tasks like pupil care and growing social problems, etc. Moreover, childcare experienced one of the greatest staff reductions among welfare services. This led to an increase in the average size of the groups from 13.8 children in 1990 to 16.5 in 1997 and 16.9 in 2012 (Skolverket 2013). Similarly, the number of children per "full-year worker" increased from 4.4 to 5.6 and 5.3 during the same period (*ibid.*).

It comes, however, as no surprise that numerous work environment studies show that the proportion of staff exposed to high stress in the municipal and county sectors increased by 50 percent between 1990 and 1997, while the comparable increase in high stress for the central government and private sector workers was 20 respective 10 percent. The MOA-study (*Moderna Arbets- o. Livsvillkor för kvinnor o. män*) shows, moreover, that many occupations in the public sector have been de-qualified, i.e., qualified staff has to perform relative unqualified tasks to a greater extent than previously. This has led to feelings that they have less time to perform the tasks they are trained for. In spite of their attempts not to let the reductions impact on clients, they feel insufficient. This is particularly evident for women providing welfare services (Härenstam 1999, p.52-55).

An encompassing project or total work environment study was undertaken by the National Occupational Safety and Health Authority, ASS, called "Control of negative stress and lifting ergonomics in health care and social care, regardless of employer". All Occupational Inspectorate (YI) districts in Sweden were involved in it and nearly 2,000 inspections of such worksites took place during 1998 & 1999. The study noted that there were serious and extensive problems in the area of lifting ergonomics and negative stress. Organizational changes during the 1990s dramatically deteriorated the psychosocial work environment for employees in health care and social care, in terms of demands in work, the content of work and access to support and guidance (Harder, *et al.*, 2000).

All the Occupation Inspectorate (YI) districts reported big increases in the amount of work in the whole health care and social care sectors. The increase concerns all occupational categories, with foremen and nurses in municipal eldercare services a specially burdened group. The staff says that they have more and more to do because of staff reductions and more work responsibilities. They describe the consequences of this as a difficulty in fulfilling the organization's goals and problems with tiredness, stress symptoms and nervousness for making mistakes.

The Survey on Work-Related Disorders in 2005 was the 15th annual study undertaken by the Central Bureau of Statistics (SCB) and the Work Environment Authority (*Arbetsmiljöverket*). It is based on interviews with 20,000 persons concerning work-related disorders experienced during the past twelve months. The 2005 Survey showed that nearly 25 per cent of the Swedish work force suffered from some disorder that they relate to their work during the past 12 months. Slightly over one-third of them also were on sick leave during the last 12 months due to their disorder (*Statistiska centralbyrån 2006.*).

Reported work-related diseases were classified by probable reasons. Ergonomic factors were the most important category of suspected reasons for all work-related diseases in 2005, reaching 58 per cent for both men and women in 2005. Next in importance came organizational and social factors (stress) which had an average of 22 percent, but where men and women differ greatly. Here only 14 percent of men, but 28 percent of women reported work-related diseases due to these factors in 2005 (*Statistiska centralbyrån 2006.*).

Work environment problems not only affect the staff directly, but are probably related to service quality. The link between poor work environment and service quality as experienced by the user of the service was explored by Vamstad (2012), using interviews with both parents and staff. The overall results showed that the social enterprises had a completely different focus on communication between parents and staff, compared to municipal and for-profit services and this communication, although time and energy consuming, was a key factor in both good work environment and high levels of user satisfaction (Vamstad 2012). Furthermore, a high level of sick leave in welfare services can be considered a quality problem in its own right. High staff turnover and temporary replacements for sick staff result in a loss of continuity in activities and not employing replacement staff results in an even greater infringement on service quality.

The 1990's was, in conclusion, a period when the general standard of work environment in the Swedish welfare state was significantly lowered and all indications are that it has remained at this new, lower level since. The political response to this, rather dramatic, development has been minimal. Johnson (2010) showed how the number of Swedes on long term sick leave increased in the 1990's and, even more important, that the length of their absence from regular work grew. He also showed, however, how the political response focused almost exclusively on suspicions of over use and fraud in the public health insurance system, rather than the dramatic drop in work environment (Johnson 2010). The work environment issue therefore remains unsolved and largely unaddressed.

METHODS AND DATA: WORK ENVIRONMENT AND COOPERATIVE SOCIAL SERVICES (WECSS) 1994-95 AND THE 2006-2007 FOLLOW UP STUDY

Given the dramatic deterioration of the work environment in public childcare in the 1990's and beyond, it remains urgent today to find ways and means of improving the work environment of the personnel there and for women employed in other public social services (Pestoff, 1992). However, it is, as we learned from Karasek and Theorell, not merely a question of job-related demands or work tempo, but also one of control by the workers themselves. How much or how little control do they have over their work in the public sector compared with social enterprises? It is also important to explore new models for organizing work, in particular ones that permit greater participation and engagement of the staff of childcare services. Social enterprises providing childcare services comprise one clear alternative to the dramatic deterioration in the working conditions of today's municipal services, as noted by the project on Work Environment and Cooperative Social Services (WECSS). It compared three main types of social enterprises providing childcare service in Sweden, namely parent cooperatives, voluntary organizations and worker cooperatives. It also contrasted them with public childcare services. The WECSS Staff Study included a retrospective comparison of these three types of social enterprises with municipal services for respondents with personal experience as an employee of both a social enterprise and municipal childcare services. The follow up study performed about 12 years later followed this design, but also included for-profit preschools that had become a substantial category among the different types of childcare providers.

The data for the WECSS project and the follow up was collected through a quasi-random sample of three different types of social enterprises providing childcare services, in order to compare and contrast them. The WECSS included 24 parent cooperatives, 16 voluntary organizations and 17 worker cooperatives. The project can be divided into three separate parts or studies: an Organization Study of 57 cooperative preschools in six parts of the country, a Staff Study of the employees at these same cooperatives and a Parent Study of the parents to the children at these 57 preschools. Most of the managers of these 57 preschools were interviewed during a personal visit to their premises, but a few of them were interviewed by phone for practical reasons. The response rate of the staff was 81.7 percent and 70.4 percent for the parents, making for 244 completed staff and 580 parent questionnaires. The 2006-2007 follow up study was smaller, the survey study included 116 members of staff and 269 families at 20 preschools, of which 7 were municipal, 2 worker cooperatives, 9 parents cooperatives and 2 for-profit preschools. The response rate for the parents was just 49.5 percent and the response rate for the staff was 81.1 percent. The follow up study also included 36 semi-structured interviews with staff, managers, parents and local civil servants.

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS: WORK ENVIRONMENT AND COOPERATIVE SOCIAL SERVICES (WECSS) 1994-95

We will give a brief introduction to the social background of the staff of the three types of social enterprises providing childcare services in Sweden before comparing them with municipal services. This is clearly an occupation dominated by women, there are very few male employees in any types of social enterprises providing childcare services and there is little difference between them in this respect. The proportion of male preschool staff reached a "peak" in the 1980's at about four percent and today it is about three and a half percent. The staff in all three types of social enterprises displayed a similar average age, in their mid-30s. Thirty percent have an upper secondary education, and in addition at least half of them have a university education. We do, however, find some difference here. Voluntary organizations employ a greater proportion of women with a university education and fewer with only a upper secondary education than the other two types of social enterprises. Mastering the special pedagogics they use requires longer formal higher education. Between half and two-thirds of the staff of all three types of social enterprises in our study are nursery school teachers (förskollärare) or managers, while the qualification of children's nurse (barnskötare)

is held by one-quarter of the staff of voluntary organizations, nearly two-fifths of the staff of parent cooperatives and more than two-fifths of the staff of worker cooperatives.

1. Comparing Social Enterprises and Municipal Services

Most of the staff of cooperative childcare services, regardless of type, has previously worked in municipal childcare service. The proportion of staff with previous work experience from municipal childcare services was 56 percent for voluntary organizations, 75 percent for parent and 85 percent for worker cooperatives. By contrasting their current situation with their previous experience as employees in municipal childcare services, we can undertake a retrospective comparison of the two. Although this is not the same as making a parallel study of these two different types of childcare facilities, it nevertheless helps to examine the differences experienced by the same individual with direct personal experience from both forms of childcare services.

The staff of cooperative childcare facilities were asked to indicate their motives for taking employment with their present childcare service, by taking a stance on a seven-point scale, ranging from 'completely false' (1) to 'completely true' (7), on several potential motives. Two-thirds or more of the staff of all three types of childcare services rated 'wanting a meaningful job' as the most important reason for taking employment with their current employer; and the staff of parent and worker cooperatives rank 'increased staff influence' as the second most important reason; while the staff of voluntary organizations rate 'a specific (pedagogical) profile' as their second most important motive for working at their current childcare service. The staff of worker cooperatives demonstrates more interest in questions like increased staff influence, small organizations, good job benefits and having a colleague who worked there than does the staff of the other two childcare services. The staff of all three types of childcare services gave roughly equal importance to nearness to home, and they also attributed the least importance to reasons like 'the only way to get a job' and 'while waiting for another job'. The staff of parent cooperatives gives a little more weight to good working hours than does the staff of the other two types of childcare services. Our material clearly shows that working in social enterprise childcare service is considered a positive development in the work life by most employees, and not merely as a necessity.

2. Work Life in Social Enterprise childcare Compared with Municipal Childcare Services in General

Our retrospective study begins with a general comparison of work life in social enterprises and municipal childcare services. The staff was also asked to compare 23 different aspects of work life in both forms of childcare services. Answers to the general comparison of working for cooperative and municipal childcare services show that the overwhelming majority of the staff of all three types of social enterprises prefers working for them (see Table 1). Over two-thirds of the staff in parent cooperatives and voluntary organizations and more than four-fifths in worker cooperatives say it is better working for a social enterprise. Only a very small fraction of the staff of any type of social enterprise state that working there is worse than municipal childcare.

TABLE 1. How Do You Like Working for a Social Enterprise Compared to a Municipal childcare Facility? (in percentages)

Comparisons <i>a</i>		Parent Cooperatives	Voluntary Organizations	Worker Cooperatives
Better	68.3	71.9	85.5	
No big difference	27.0	25.0	10.8	
Worse	4.8	3.1	3.6	
Total	100	100	100	
(Md- %) <i>b</i>	(28.4)	(45.8)	(14.4)	

Source: Pestoff (1998). *a* Adds column wise to 100 %. *b* The proportion of employees who have not previously worked for a municipal preschool and cannot compare them with their present social enterprise.

Half of the staff of parent cooperatives, nearly half of the staff of voluntary organizations and nearly three-quarters of the staff of worker cooperatives also provide comments on this question to explain their preference for the cooperative form. In fact, this was the second most commented upon question by the staff of parent co-operatives and voluntary organizations, and the most commented upon by the staff of worker cooperatives. The fact that this question came near the end of a more than 200 items long questionnaire did not deter them from making comments. The very number of comments elicited indicates the saliency and importance of this topic for the respondents - they clearly felt quite strongly about it.

The overwhelming majority of the comments from the staff of parent cooperatives concerning their personal comparison with municipal childcare services were positive to the social enterprise form, but there were also a few negative opinions. The comments include issues like greater influence and responsibility or freedom; better contact with parents; quicker, shorter decision-making; everybody's involvement; direct contact with their employers, smaller group size, and so on. The overwhelming majority of the comments from the staff of voluntary organizations concerning their personal comparison with municipal childcare services were positive to the social enterprise form. The issues were nearness to their employer; better contact with the parents and/or their involvement; closer, shorter or quicker decision-making; greater influence and/or responsibilities and greater freedom; being more motivated and engaged; praise from parents; smaller group size; or a combination of several of these motivations. The overwhelming majority of the staff of worker cooperatives was very positive to this form when compared with municipal childcare services, but a few were also neutral or negative. Comments concerning increased influence and/or responsibilities or greater freedom stand head-and-shoulders above all the other alternatives mentioned in terms of the frequency with which they were made by the staff of worker cooperatives, while being able to make their own decisions came second. Both these types of comments reflect greater staff control over their own working conditions and work life. (See Pestoff, 1998 for details.)

3. Specific Comparisons of Work Life in Social Enterprise and Municipal childcare Services

The staff also answered a series of specific questions comparing their current work conditions with those in municipal childcare services. They were asked to state whether each of numerous items or aspects had 'increased a lot', 'increased somewhat', 'remained unchanged', 'decreased somewhat' or 'decreased a lot', in the social enterprise compared with municipal childcare services. The 23 different aspects of work life in childcare services included here permit a detailed comparison of the social enterprise and municipal forms, in terms of physical, social-psychological and organizational aspects of work environment and co-determination.

Various aspects of increased control over the work situation are among those showing a 'large improvement' by the staff of all three types of childcare cooperatives. They include: improved possibilities to influence their own work, improved possibilities of taking their own responsibility, improved possibilities for participating in decision-making, improved possibilities for trying their own ideas, improved contacts with the parents, greater work satisfaction, improved possibilities for personal development, greater shared values with colleagues, greater possibilities to improve their own work environment and improved contacts with the management, all of which receive a sizable proportion of the staff replying 'increased a lot' for most types of social services, compared with municipal childcare services.

While these possibilities improved considerably for the staff of all three types of childcare services, the improvement for the staff of worker cooperatives is often greater or much greater than for the staff of either parent cooperatives or voluntary organizations. A greater proportion of the staff of worker cooperatives claimed a 'large improvement' on 15 of these 23 items than did the staff of the other two types of social enterprises. The improvement scores noted by the staff of parent cooperatives and voluntary organizations are often rather similar, and usually lower than those of worker cooperatives. One notable exception is contacts with parents, where the proportion of the staff of worker cooperatives indicating great improvement is considerably less than that of the staff of the other two types of childcare services. This is of course quite logical, since parents are also members of the other two types of childcare services, but not in worker cooperatives.

The staff of parent cooperatives reports a smaller decrease in conflicts than the other two types of childcare services. On the other hand, a smaller proportion of the staff of worker cooperatives report increases in dirty air and premises. There are several other items where smaller improvements have taken place compared with municipal childcare services. They include the risk of being exposed to violence, the length of vacations, the creation of new positions, the admission of children with special problems, psychological demands, more flexible working hours, salaries and physically demanding tasks.

4. If You Could Do it All Over Again ...?

Our final comparison with municipal childcare services concerned the hypothetical question of choosing to work in a social enterprise again (rather than returning to municipal childcare or doing something else). Table 2 provides the answers of the staff of the three types of social enterprises. Two-thirds of the staff of worker cooperatives states that they would definitely choose to work in a cooperative again, which is twice the proportion of the staff of parent cooperatives or voluntary organizations who claimed this. Only a few state that they would not consider working for a cooperative again. Thus, only a small minority would prefer to work for municipal childcare services.

TABLE 2. If you could chose all over again?

Would choose cooperative again? ^a	Parent Coops	Vol. Orgs	Worker Coops
Yes, perhaps	54.0	59.6	29.2
No, hardly /definitely not ^b	11.5	7.0	4.2
N	88	59	97

Source: Pestoff (1998). ^a Adds column wise to 100 %. ^b Combines alternatives 'No, hardly ' and 'No, definitely not'.

These findings from the WECSS study show, in conclusion, that staff at social enterprises in Swedish childcare compare their experiences there favorably to those at municipal services. This, now historical, study was performed while Sweden was undergoing a transformation of the public sector following what was an especially critical economic crisis in Sweden in the early 1990's, as well as the reforms of a liberal-conservative government in response to this crisis between the years 1991-94.

Do these dramatic changes during that time mean that the results were unique for that period or can these differences between social enterprises and the public sector still be found today? A possible answer to this question is provided by the follow up study performed about 12 years after the WECSS study.

THE FOLLOW UP STUDY 2006-2007

The follow up study was carried out as part of a PhD thesis project and even though the main parts were performed in 2006 and 2007, some pilot interviews were made as early as 2003 and 2004. Special attention was given to the issue of the work environment, both in the survey of the staff and in the interviews with the preschool managers. The Staff Study shows that the physical work environment varies according to organizational types, as can be seen from Table 3.

TABLE 3. Satisfaction with physical work environment, in percent

	Bad	Neither good nor bad	Good	Very good	n
Municipal	22.2	22.2	55.6	-	(45)
Parent cooperative	6.8	13.6	72.7	6.8	(44)
Worker cooperative	5.6	11.1	55.6	27.8	(18)
For Profit	12.3	16.5	87.5	-	(8)

Source: PhD project (Vamstad, 2007). a Adds row-wise to 100%.

The physical environment is considered best at the worker cooperatives followed by the parent cooperatives and then the for-profit preschools. The staff at municipal preschools is the least satisfied with their physical work environment. What makes these figures so interesting, in spite of the small sample, is that there seem to be little or no relation between physical work environment and resources. The municipal preschools are part of a large organization that can move and/or add resources like regular staff, specialists and premises at will, but it is still the physical work environment, made up of exactly those kinds of resources, is considered lower at the municipal facilities. The worker and parent cooperatives, in contrast, are typically small units without any larger organization to rely on for additional resources. This could be seen as support for the theory by Karasak and Theorell, since other things than the material assets at a workplace seem to decide the perceived work environment in the modern service economies today. In this case the theory would suggest that the greater level of participation of both staff and users in the whole of the service providing organization gives a sense of involvement and meaning that improves even the perception of the physical work environment.

If the theoretical link between staff influence and work environment satisfaction holds one would expect even clearer results for the psychosocial work environment. An uncomfortable chair, heavy lifting or a troublesome staircase is at least to some extent a physical work environment concern regardless of how involved the staff or co-producing user feels that they are. A high level of staff and user involvement does, of course, mean that there is a greater readiness to deal with such problems and the feeling of empowerment in issues of physical work environment can also raise levels of satisfaction. The satisfaction with the psychosocial work environment should however be even more clearly and probably directly related to staff influence. A staircase is a staircase, but the inter-relational climate at the preschool has everything to do with how the individual working there feels in relation to his/her preschool and colleagues. If he or she feel disenfranchised and lacks influence at the preschool, the satisfaction with the psychosocial work environment could be assumed to be lower. This assumption is supported by the findings in Table 4.

TABLE 4 Satisfaction with psychosocial work environment, in percent a

	Bad	Neither good nor bad	Good	Very good	N
Municipal	15.6	13.3	62.3	8.9	(45)
Parent cooperative	-	2.3	81.8	15.9	(44)
Worker cooperative	5.6	5.6	33.3	55.6	(18)
For Profit	-	12.5	75	12.5	(8)

Source: PhD project (Vamstad, 2007). a Adds row-wise to 100%.

The pattern found here is the same as for the physical work environment, but the tendency is even stronger. The organizational types that scored high on the physical work environment scored even higher on the psychosocial work environment. The municipal type also scored higher on the psychosocial type but not nearly as high as the other types, which implies that the assumed correlation between co-production and work environment satisfaction is even stronger for psychosocial than for physical work environment.

The remarkably high level of satisfaction with the psycho-social work environment at the parent cooperative preschools is not surprising if one considers the findings in other available studies of the issue of cooperatives and work environment. The WECCS study showed that the active participation of staff in running preschools as well as a generally good level of communication between staff members, management and parents at the cooperatives greatly benefits the psycho-social work environment and also how the physical work environment is perceived (Pestoff 1998). The parent cooperative preschools in this study all spend a lot of time and energy on communication, the staff and management must be able to explain all the professional considerations they make to the participating parents, while the municipal staff and management can rely on the parents' trust in their professionalism, since the parents don't participate in the day-to-day work at the preschool. This greater level of communication and equalized level of information is close to what Karasak and Theorell described as a possible remedy for poor work environment. The cooperative way of improving this environment is, in other words, one where authority and information are evenly distributed among all concerned actors, a method not the least interesting because of the fact that it does not lead to greater costs of the service provision, in fact it may result in the opposite.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

A summary of our findings shows that the overwhelming majority of the staff had no previous personal experience of cooperatives before starting to work in a social enterprise providing childcare services, but most of them had previously worked in municipal day care services. Two-thirds of them were motivated by 'wanting a meaningful job', combined either with 'increased staff influence' or 'a specific pedagogical profile'. The overwhelming majority of the staff of all types of social enterprises clearly preferred working for a social enterprise compared with municipal childcare services. In almost all respects of work life social enterprises were rated better or much better than municipal childcare services by the staff of all three types of cooperative services and the difference is stable over time. In general terms, the staff of worker cooperatives is clearly the most positive about improvements in their current work situation compared with employment in municipal childcare services. Both the staff of parent cooperatives and voluntary organizations demonstrates lower levels of improvement.

The staff of worker cooperatives has both the freedom and responsibility to make decisions on their own, both as independent childcare facilities and their own employers. It comes, therefore, as no great surprise that they are more positive to such changes when comparing their current situation with that of municipal services. The positive changes between municipal childcare and parent cooperatives or voluntary organizations appear much smaller. This should not, however, detract from

several areas, particularly those related to self-development and co-determination, where the staff of parent cooperatives and voluntary organizations also notes significant improvements over their previous situation as employees in municipal childcare.

Numerous comments to the questions illustrated both the positive as well as the negative side of work life in social enterprises providing childcare services. Again the overwhelming impression from these comments supports the picture provided by the tables. Social enterprise childcare services permit the staff much greater influence on their own work, much greater responsibility for and participation in decision-making, greater contacts with parents, greater possibilities for improvements in their work environment, greater work satisfaction and so forth than do municipal childcare services.

We noted at the outset that there was a clear deterioration in the psychosocial work environment in the 1990s in Sweden, at the same time as Sweden experienced two-digit unemployment for the first time since the Great Depression. General trends in Swedish work environment from the 1990s and onwards, and for the staff of childcare services in particular indicate a dramatic increase in job demand, but with little possibility for staff control. The dramatic increase in work tempo seen in public childcare services led to high-strain and work related stress, or bad jobs. However, the empirical part of our study demonstrated that social enterprises in Sweden, by contrast, provided good jobs in the fullest meaning of the word and continues to do so today. In Karasek and Theorell's terms, work in social enterprises is psychologically demanding, but it provides high decision latitude, and high social support for the workers. These work life attributes stand in sharp contrast with those found in the services provided by the large hierarchical bureaucratic organizations often associated with the public sector services in Sweden. In this sense the social enterprise model cannot only help to transform social services jobs into active, participative and interactive jobs. It can also help to enrich the work life of employees. The answer to our *first* research question is, in other words, that Sweden experienced a critical and lasting change for the worse in terms of work environment in the 1990's but that this change affected the social enterprises less, and they continue to provide better work environment today. The follow up study showed that the worsened work environment in public childcare seemed to have become permanent by 2006-2007, while the more positive results for the social enterprises also remained stable over time, which answers our *second* research question. These findings suggests, from a more constructive perspective, that one of the quickest and most direct ways of enriching work life, of redesigning work organizations and promoting human resource management in the personal social service sector in Sweden would be to decentralize the provision of social services, by contracting them out and letting social enterprises provide them, with continued public finance. The historical perspective provided by these two empirical data sets show that this solution would have helped work environment in the 1990's as well as in early 00's but it has never been taken seriously during this time by leading politicians and policy makers, a situation that remains today.

Our study of Swedish women's work environment in social enterprises focused on one clearly limited segment of personal social services, namely childcare services. We hope that it can contribute to a greater understanding and pluralism of potential models for enriching work life and renewing the welfare state. No single model is universally applicable to all segments of work life or all types of production, to all types of services or for all types of clients or consumers. Not public, private or cooperative models alone provide a panacea or the model for producing all types of goods and services for everyone in modern societies. Solutions based simply on privatizing, on guaranteeing continued public provision or on running it as a social enterprise, all fall short of the mark. Thus, we do not intend to propose the solution to the problems facing the welfare state in the new millennium, but rather to propose one solution to one type of problem for one type of service in one European welfare state. It may have some relevance for other types of problems or for social services in some other countries. But, were it to be interpreted as the solution, we would have clearly failed in our endeavor. However, in combination with other solutions to other problems facing the public sector, it can contribute to enriching working life and, thereby, to renewing the welfare state.

Enriching the work life of civil servants and improving their work environment are important and legitimate concerns of many hundreds of thousands of women and men working in the large bureaucracies of the public sector in Sweden and elsewhere. Given loss of productivity, the poor quality of services, the costs of treating stress-related symptoms and absenteeism due to stress-related sickness and so on, improving the work environment is an important economic, social and political problem. Efforts to reform the welfare state should take improving the work environment into account. However, the public debate in Sweden seems only to focus on one thing at a time. Given the current historically high level of unemployment, the third sector and social enterprises are only conceived of in terms of their potential job creation. Jobs are, of course, necessary; but good jobs are preferable to bad ones. Why not try to get both at the same time?

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