Pressure from inside, assessment of the stake-holders;
Perspectives of the providers – social workers in Latvia, Estonia and Norway

- Zane Loza - Latvia
- Riina Kiik - Estonia
- Arne Grønningsæter - Norway

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Pressure from the inside

Pressure from the inside – f.x. concerns related to the system

Is the system ..

- **.. comprehensible/transparent?**
- **.. legitimate?**
- **.. enhancing/securing high employment?**
- **.. a dignified supporter?**

The system being problematic in itself (transparency, legitimacy, low employment, does the system treat people with respect etc) Perspective of those depending on the system

A presentation in two parts

- Arne Grønningsæter: Comparing Estonia and Norway
- Zane Loza: Views from Latvia
- Joint conclusions

Overview of the presentation Estonia and Norway

- The project - data collection
- Conclusions from 2001
- Comparison along some dimensions
- Changes from 2001 to 2005 – is there convergence?
- What does this represent as pressure from inside?

- "It is necessary to handle many problems at the same time; this is unbelievably hectic. There is no peace around my ear before at 16h00 in the afternoon"
  - (Norwegian social worker)

- How do social workers perceive their situation in different environments? The relationship between aims and reality, external conditions and development of the profession is important.
- Social workers in the Estonian environment; characterised by extensive poverty and limited resources. Compared with colleagues in Norway; where there is a different standard both economically and when it comes to resources.
- Social workers in Estonia and Norway describe their situation as implementers of social policy.
  - The differences are related to the understanding of problems and traditions, the level of professional development, available resources, and social problems.
  - The similarities are related to a gap between needs and resources, professional attitudes and the views of social policy issues. A feeling of being insufficient when confronted with the needs of the users is combined with a feeling that the social work is exciting.

Data and analyses:

- In the two projects (-01 and -05) we used a range of methods for data collection:
  - Analyses of statistics
  - Previous survey data
  - A survey on attitudes in the population
  - Qualitative interviews with key informants
  - Interviews with users
  - Focus group interviews with social workers

- The analyses in this presentation is are mainly based on the following sources:
- In 2001 we organised three focus group interviews:
  - 2 in Estonia, Jõgevamaal and Pärnumaal;
  - 1 in Norway, Oslo
- In 2005 we organised five focus group interviews:
  - 3 i Estonia: Jögevamaa, Pärnumaa and Tallinn
  - 2 i Norway, Oslo and Trondheim

Some background information

Inhabitants	1,3 mill	4,6 mill.
GDP per capita (PPP US$) 2003 (1)	13.593	37,670
Poverty level (2)	12,4	6,4
HDI (1)	0,853 (no. 38 of 177)	0,963 (no 1 of 177)
Gini-coefficient (1)	0,372	0,258
Number of social workers		19.138 (3)
Number of social workers employed by the municipalities	593 (4)	10.816 (3)

(1) Source UNDP, Human development report 2005

(2) Population living below 50% of median income (%) 1990-2000. (Data refer to the most recent year available during the period). Source UNDP, Human development report 2005

(3) The figures include social workers and social educators that are members of Norwegian Union of Social Educators and Social Workers (FO) March 2006. FO organises app. 80% of the group. Source: FO

(4) Social service personal in municipalities and counties, app. ½ of them has social work diploma. Source; Ministry of Social Affairs Estonia.

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Issues covered in the focus groups

- Focus 1:
  - Vulnerable groups
  - Social policy response
- Focus 2.
  - The practice of the social workers
  - What works – why does it work?
- Focus 3:
  - The social worker
  - Institutional framework
  - Professionalizing, needs for new knowledge

Estonia and Norway

The situation in 2001:

- Focus on the users' ability to manage his/her own life or on quality of life
- To approach the consequences or prevention
- To work with symptoms or with holistic solutions
- Different expectations
  - Legal, the municipalities, users, cooperation partners/network

- Vulnerable groups:
- In Estonia:
  - Single mothers
  - Un-employed
  - Elderly people

- I Norway:
  - Users with double diagnoses
  - Ethnic minorities

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Estonia and Norway

Conclusions from 2001

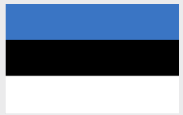
- The differences are to a large extent linked to:
- Understanding of social problems
- Traditions
- Level of professionalisation
- Level of available resources
- Level of problems
  - Most markedly: level of poverty

- The similarities are to a large extent linked to:
- Professional attitudes
- The views of professional autonomy in regard to other professions
- Social policy issues such as:
  - How to organise the work
  - The will and ability to solve social problems

Focus 1- 2005: Vulnerable groups and social policy response

- The users
  - More conscious about their rights and needs
  - Unemployed
  - Substance abuse
  - Youths with little education
  - Single mothers

- Users
  - The cases become more heavy and complicated
  - Increased number from ethnic minorities
    - Many of them are not covered by introduction programmes
  - Youths have new expectations to the social and health services
  - Loneliness
  - Homeless, mental problems, double diagnoses
  - Demanding users that know their rights
  - A more demanding labour market



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Focus 1- 2005: Vulnerable groups and social policy response

- Social policy response
  - Decrease in services (e.g. transport and telephone support) and decrease in benefits (They are not adjusted according to inflation)
  - Increase in number of social workers
  - Increase in paper work
  - Decrease in state transfers
  - Increase in and improvement of counselling
  - Stronger focus on rehabilitation

- Social policy response
  - Increased expectations
  - More complicated division of responsibility between the state and the municipalities
  - Demands on cut backs and less use of economical resources
  - Individual plans and users' participation
  - Focus on poverty and workfare

Focus 2- 2005: Social work practice/ What works and why does it work?

- Social work practice
  - We are not able to judge on who are the poor and are to a very limited degree relate to national plans planer
  - The starting point for helping a user is to let him/her define that they have a problem problem
  - From focus money to more and more focus on services
  - Engaged in developing cooperation with other agents – especially related to work with the unemployed
  - The role as a "diplomat"
  - To much bureaucratic work on the cost of social work

- Social work practice
  - We are expected to implement social policy, but have at the same time a personal responsibility; an example: asylum seekers without permission to stay in the country
  - The relation between "acute" help and "normal" social assistance
  - Increased focus on users' participation and on control of the user go parallel
  - We know very little about the plan for fighting poverty, and do not discuss what poverty is
  - The work-line and the use of means aimed at inclusion; there is a need for better coordination – The NAV reform

Focus 2- 2005: Social work practice/ What works and why does it work?

- What works – why does it work?
  - We must use time to talk to the users
  - We should give services to the users, not solve their problems for them
  - It is the small issues that are solved that create satisfaction
  - Need for evaluation

- What works – why does it work?
  - We lack criteria for success
  - We need time to talk to the users and to see them
  - The most important is to help the users to trust that they can do something themselves, help them to find new personal strategies.

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Estonia and Norway

Focus 3- 2005:

- The social workers
  - The works place community is a positive starting point
  - There is a need for an association of social workers
- Institutional framework
  - Important to see that the different sectors depend on each other (also private organisations)
  - Large difference between the municipalities
- Professionalisation, capacity development
  - Today we are generalists, there is a need for specialisation
  - We want to learn from our neighbouring countries

- The social workers
  - Need for development of new methods
- Institutional framework
  - Fragmentation as a problem
  - Joint work across professional borders is more of an ideal than reality
  - A broad understanding of social work goes together with increased specialisation
- Professionalisation, capacity development
  - We need administrative practical tools
  - Knowledge about other foreign cultures/religion (both our own and that of other people)
  - Need for continuing education; knowledge about how to find new knowledge
  - We need forums for discussing principle issues

Estonia and Norway

The situation in 2005:

- Internationalisation
- Generalists/specialists
- Many common problems
- Lack of resources
  - But different perspectives on this
- Local solutions
- Acknowledgement of social work as a profession
  - But from a different starting point

- The users
  - More resourceful
  - More conscious about their rights
  - Some users are partly invisible
- Social workers
  - Need for supervision
  - Continuing lack of time and ability to plan their use of time
  - Importance of further education and professionalisation
  - Influence on social policy is a part of the working day

Is there convergence in relation to how municipally employed social workers in the two countries perceive their working situation?

- A "normalisation" of the socio-political situation in Estonia (ref. to A. Trumms analysis of poverty in Estonia)
- From 2001 to 2005 we can see that the ways that groups discuss becomes more similar
- Common: they relate to a limited degree to the plan for fighting poverty (Norway) or the plan for social inclusion (Estonia))
- They all point to that the users become more conscious about their right and needs
- Focus on need for enough time to talk and listen to the users
- Estonia: need for more specialists – Norway: the specialisation ahs been developed further
- In 2005 is the biggest difference how they describe the process of profesinalisation and need for capacity development and new knowledge.

Pressure form inside

- Not much complaining; active approach
  - They play an important role as implementers of changes
- Social work is developing from being a semi profession to a profession
  - aspects of the situation in Estonia resembles the situation in Norway in the 70s
- The Norwegian social workers
  - are better organised in the sense that they have a strong association
  - are able to dominate their segment of the labour market, based on the number of social workers
  - the level of education are increasing (from bachelor to master level; and specialising education).
  - national influence due to being a stronger profession, but locally their main approach is on methodological development
- The Estonian social workers
  - lack an strong national association
  - due to their limited numbers they lack dominance of their segment of the labour market
  - have a higher level of education (relatively more with master level education).
  - local influence due to professional entrepreneurship.

Latvian case: research locations

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Social workers in Latvia, Estonia and Norway

Latvian case: Dobele region

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Latvian case: situation in 2000

In the year 2000, the situation is characterised by:

- recent decentralization and introduction of the law “on social assistance” (current law)
- strong disapprove of the national policies
- large variety of municipal social assistance benefits
- lack of criteria for their disbursment
- weak or non-existent social services
- sceptic attitude towards GMI
- social workers with no education in the field
- professional confusion and difficulties to define the role

Latvian case: vulnerable groups in 2005

- Families with lonely mothers
- Families with many children
- Ex-prisoners

- **People in pre-pension age:**

  "I have a profession. I am technician-mechanician. I have a driving license. I do not drink. But I am not employed simply because of my age. With over 40 – you are not needed in any organization".

- **Rapid appearence of new and complex risk grops: drug abusers with heath problems; alcoholics with mental problems; disabled aloholics, etc.**
- **Pensionniers are not a target group any more**

Latvian case: vicious circle

Client characteristics

- historical track of a risky family;
- early first marriage with children, followed by a seperation;
- un-solved legal problems and lack of knowledge about own rights;
- no permanent residence and social network;
- no permanent work, discimination at work and lack of financial resources;
- bad or deteriorating health.

The “vicious circle” – **may begin at any point!**

Latvian case: social services and benefits in 2005

SERVICES:

- development of **"soft"** social services such as care centers for cildren and elderly, other meeting possibilities, washing machines, travelling possibilities, etc. both in Riga and Dobele region. More varied possibilities available in Riga
- **critical neccessity** for "hard" social services – higly specialized social rehabilitation institutions for complex cases

BENEFITS:

- GMI = example of a united criterion

  "GMI is providing at least one criterion in the jungle of many different clients and their many different needs" (from the social workers' focus group)

- GMI consumes a large part of the municipal budgets for social assistance
- GMI given to a large part of the clients
- Public works or re-qualification typical, especially in municipalities, like in 2000
- Variety of municipal benefits and their amounts still remains:
  - universal benefits;
  - categorical benefits (glasses for all school-children, fire-wood for all pensioniers);
  - categorical benefits with limitations (free medicine for all pensioniers older than 70);
  - targeted benefits to needy families

Latvian case: client attitudes

SERVICES:

- large interest for "soft" social services; social work in general highly appreciated among the clients:

"it is better and better each time. At first, I was lost; step by step everything was put in place together with her (the social worker) – what to do, when and how."

BENEFITS:

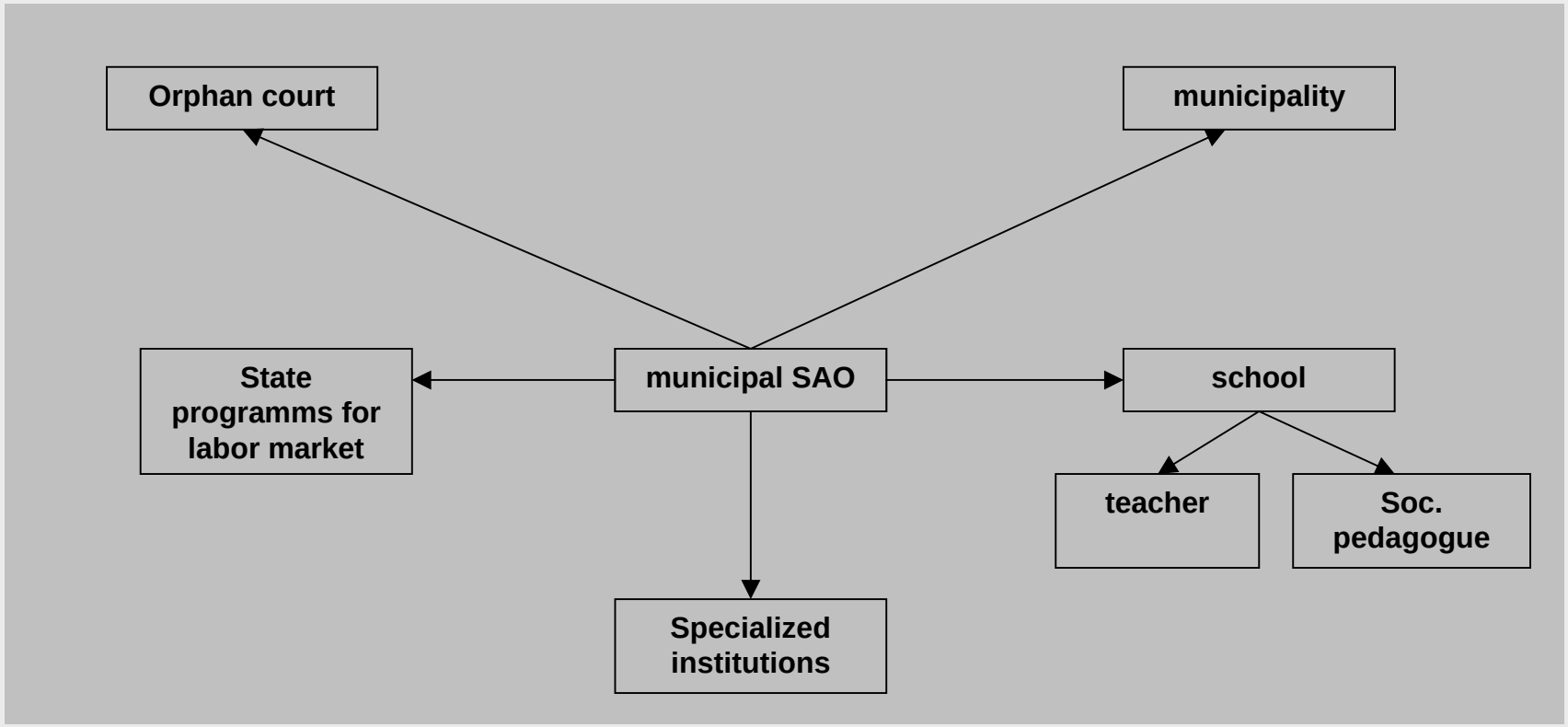
- social benefits have become a self-understandable income support for many clients:

" about material assistance I do not even think. It is simply so usual that seems natural. It is a typical responsibility – to bring the monthly "sheets"" (from an interview in Riga)

- GMI: the benefit is

"earned in hard work", is "not a benefit compared to EU standards", and "one should be careful when helping neighbours and others".

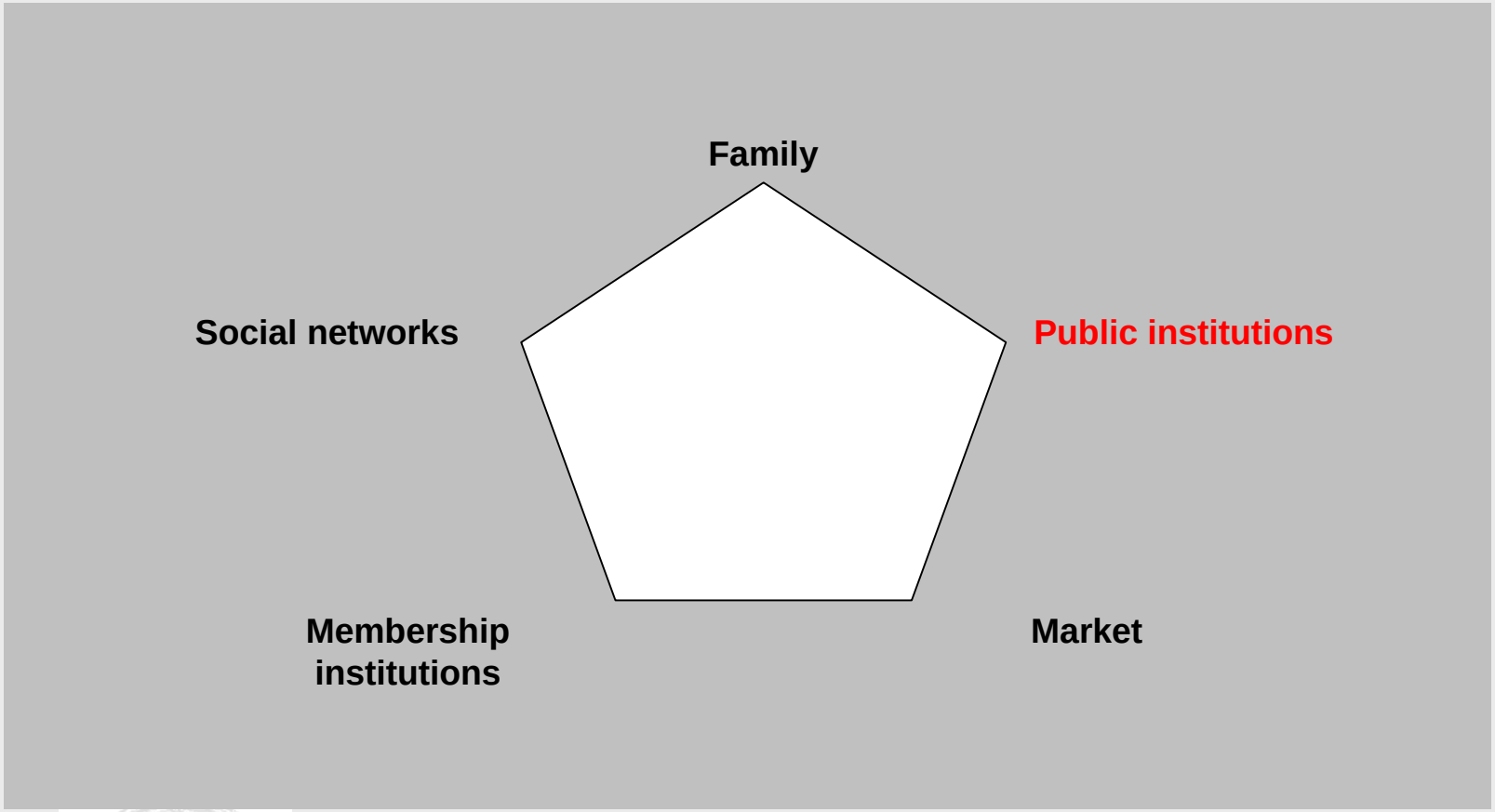
Latvian case: the institutional framework



Latvian case: framework conclusions

- different “bosses” and different outcome goals and a consequent lack of cooperation with orphan court and of speical importance, with the school
- a similar problem with goals, related to political factors, with the municipality
- labor market programmes not coordinated with labor market needs
- the already mentioned overwhelming lack of specialized social care institutions

Latvian case: coping strategies and the Welfare Pentagon:



Coping strategies and the Welfare Pentagon-conclusions:

CLIENTS

- Public institutions (kindergarden, schools and SAO)
- Market (many jobs, no matter, what kind; seasonal employment)
- Family – some
- Social networks - few

SOCIAL WORKERS

- Assigning major importance to public institutions (kindergardens and schools) that have a major influence on forming a child from a risky family and bringing him/ her out of the vicious circle

Latvian case: resulting policy suggestions

- "Streamlining" of goals and outcomes of the public institutions important for social assistance;
- Support to kindergardens and schools to sustain their existance
- Development and evaluation of social services to cover the full spectrum of the needs:
  - analysis of the existing services;
  - decisions on state/ private regulation, finance and/ or provision of needed services;
  - coherent approach to development of re-qualification programmes and to use of EU funds in general
- Policies to support families with children
- Policies to discontinue the "vicious circle"

Example of a common “pressure from inside”

- Pressure on influencing other institutions to recognise and value social work
  - To understand why they do what they do. They fear that the other institutions by not understanding what social work is, should spoil what they are doing.
- On development of new kinds of services.
  - The social worker is a kind of a networker. When the network is not available and the user has problems that need complex treatment, there is no place to send them, and they tend to come back
- More specialised services

Pressure from inside?

- The system being problematic in itself (transparency, legitimacy, low employment, does the system treat people with respect etc)

- Maintaining and expanding the welfare system
- Struggle for legitimating their work
- Demands for more time to listen to the users
- Professional autonomy