ABSTRACT

The general purpose of this dissertation is to study the causes and the consequences of the formal structure of intake of potential social assistance clients at Swedish social welfare offices. The focus lies on the social welfare offices, their organizational framework and routines concerning intake. A focus on the formal structure of the intake may provide information about the importance of organization for people seeking help but also for the municipalities themselves. The data used in the analyses comes from two surveys of welfare offices augmented with register data.

Study 1 examines the very first contact between social assistance inquirers and the social welfare offices. Telephone intake and first personal visits are documented and a considerable variation in the share of inquirers who received an appointment for further assessment was found. Considerable variation was also found in the share who were granted social assistance after the assessment during the personal visit. An examination of the offices’ intake routines and organization provided some indications that the unequal priority given to intake is an important explanation behind the variation.

Study 2 analyzes the link between intake organization and the degree of selection taken place at telephone intakes by focusing on those inquirers not becoming clients. The relationship between intake organization and the social workers’ reasons for selection is examined and several selection strategies could be found. The results confirm the fact that Swedish municipalities have great autonomy in designing the social services and in addition show that offices within the same municipality may choose different organizational solutions.

The aim of study 3 is to investigate how intake of social assistance inquirers is organized in Swedish municipalities and what factors determine intake organization. The results show that there are three different intake types. One of them, called special intake units, is distinct from the other two in that the intake staff has relatively high qualifications. Examining factors likely to affect the creation of special intake units, the results show that mainly professional and organizational factors related to the organization of work within the whole social assistance unit are important.

The purpose of study 4 is to examine the connection between organizational factors and local social assistance expenditures in Swedish municipalities. The organization of the social assistance unit, in particular the intake of social assistance inquirers, and its potential implication for local social assistance costs are emphasized. The results show a cost reducing effect of special intake units first when analyzed together with additional specialization and taking account for staff resources. Thus, specialized intake organization
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by itself does not play a cost reducing role, but in combination with certain other factors describing internal organization.

In an introductory part the studies are located in a broader framework starting with a historical description of different strategies and classification systems traditionally used when distributing poor aid. The expansion of the welfare state changed the importance of a last safety net. Specific characteristics of public organizations administering social assistance are described and the legal framework is outlined focusing on the right to apply for social assistance. Different aspects of intake are then discussed: stages of the intake process, the organization of intake in Sweden and elsewhere, intake organization as a fashion, and possible functions of the intake. Finally, implications of the four studies with regard to access to benefit and the issue of specialization as well as further research are discussed.
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1. INTRODUCTION

Social assistance is an important component of the Swedish social security system. It is the last resort for people who are supposed to have tried all other alternatives but still need help supporting themselves. The importance of social assistance varies over time but it is always substantial. Although it is a small proportion of all social expenditures, it is nevertheless crucial for a significant number of citizens. The availability of services and benefits is of course generally important but in the case of the last resort it can be argued to be even more essential.

Access to social assistance takes place mainly through the social welfare offices’ intake units or through specialized staff handling incoming social assistance inquiries. Access has to be seen as the outcome of a complex interplay between several actors with different expectations, obligations and rights. One important actor is the national government, granting the citizens a broad range of services and benefits in order to guarantee them a socially adequate level of living. The national government regulates the general social security system, including the general framework for the social assistance scheme. Characteristics of the old poverty tradition remain, primarily eligibility tied to individual circumstances as indicated by a means test. A selection between eligible and non-eligible inquirers is in other words still carried out.

Yet, a common expectation exists that all citizens shall be treated equally when needs for social assistance are assessed. This also implies equal access and eligibility standards irrespective of the citizens’ residence. Swedish local governments are thus important for the individual citizens’ well-being since it is political decisions at the local level that govern social assistance as well as most other welfare services. Here, the individual citizens meet the welfare state. The municipalities have rather large autonomy in deciding over the organization of their activities, which they may adapt according to their local conditions. This also includes the choice of the organization regulating the inflow of new potential clients. Different organizational forms for intake can be therefore expected. The individuals’ ability to seek and chance of finding information about the appropriate benefit is essential for the possibility to make use of available benefits.

Intake can be seen as an organizational solution to conduct the weeding of eligible from non-eligible inquirers and different intake organizations may result in different demands regulating entry to the social assistance scheme. The question of how to organize the delivery of welfare services is essential and is the focus of this study.

Access to benefits can be seen as consisting of a broad set of factors affecting take up of benefits (Ribot and Peluso 2003). When using the term
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access I focus here on the organizational setting for handling new inquirers for social assistance at Swedish local social welfare offices.

A reason for emphasizing the formal organization is that most welfare services normally are performed in bureaucratic organizations, that is the municipal social services. Such organizations are often referred to as Human Service Organization, meaning that they process, sustain or change people who come under their jurisdiction (Hasenfeld 1992). When focusing on organizations two aspects are often emphasized: the power the organization has over the individual citizens because of the resources that the organization distributes and the obligations, rules as well as expectations the organization has to meet and to respond to (Lundström and Sunesson 2000). With respect to the former, power is to a large extent manifested in the choice of the formal organizational structure. The intakes’ organizational framework and routines force potential clients to behave in a certain way when they want to gain access to the benefit. The kind of staff handling incoming inquirers, the organization of the intake in certain units, rules regarding how the first contact has to take place and when, routines about the assessment of the inquirers’ need for social assistance are some examples of how the organizational structure is an expression of the power the social services have over the individual citizens. Regarding the latter, there is the right on the part of the citizens to obtain help in certain circumstances but also the expectation that help is limited only to those who are really in need. Further expectations and obligations are that work carried out shall be professional and guarantee the individuals’ legal security. A focus on the formal structure of the intake can thus give information about the importance of organization for people seeking help but also for the municipalities themselves.

AIMS OF THE DISSERTATION

The purpose of this dissertation is to study the causes and consequences of the formal structure of intake of potential social assistance clients at Swedish social welfare offices. The focus lies on the organizational framework and on routines concerning intake. Briefly summarized, I want to study the role of intake organization for sorting inquirers, factors that may affect the organizational form of intake and the role of organizational factors and especially intake for local social assistance costs. In analyzing intake my focus is on the organization of the Swedish social welfare offices.

The dissertation consists of four studies. In brief, the purposes of the four studies are the following:

1 The four studies are presented in more detail on page 48.
1: The first study examines the importance of intake organization and intake routines for the fate of help-seeking people at seven social welfare offices in Sweden. Inquirers contacting social welfare offices by telephone and new clients meeting a social worker personally for the first time are described. Different routines in classifying inquirers in new respectively former clients are analyzed as well as the impact of different intake designs on the inquirers’ possibilities of receiving an appointment for further investigation.

2: The second study analyzes the link between intake organization and the degree of selection taking place at the intake at seven Swedish social welfare offices. This is done by focusing on inquirers not becoming clients and examining the relationship between intake organization and the social workers’ reasons for dissuading inquirers. An additional purpose is to distinguish different selection strategies.

3: The third study investigates factors related to the choice of intake organization in 100 Swedish social welfare offices. Factors of potential importance for organizational choice such as socio-economic, professional and institutional ones are analyzed by combining interview data with register data.

4: The fourth study examines the role of intake and work organization for municipal social assistance expenditures in Sweden. Factors related to the organization of the social assistance unit and, in particular, to the intake of social assistance inquirers and their potential implication for local social assistance costs are emphasized.

This introductory part of the dissertation attempts to locate the issue of intake organization in a broader framework. In the next section, I start with a historical description of different strategies and classification systems used when distributing poor aid. The expansion of the welfare state and the establishment of a broad variety of social insurance benefits changed the importance of a last safety net. Specific characteristics of public organizations administering social assistance are described and some general trends regarding the development of public organizations are discussed. Section 3 then focuses on social assistance, on its legal framework and especially the right to apply for social assistance. A brief review of empirical evidence is also given. Different aspects of intake such as various stages of an intake process will be discussed in section 4. Furthermore, intake in Sweden as well as in other countries is described and the question if intake organization follows organizational trends will be outlined. Possible functions of intake conclude this section. Different theoretical ideas used in the various studies about elements important for organizations are outlined in section 5 and...
considerations regarding methods are discussed in section 6. The four studies are presented in section 7 and a final discussion in section 8.

2. POVERTY, THE SWEDISH WELFARE STATE AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

The dissertation can be placed in-between the three research traditions poverty, welfare state and public administration. It touches upon the theme of poverty by focusing on people lacking sufficient income and needing help of society. Distributing help to poor has a long tradition in Sweden as does the distinction between eligible and non-eligible poor. First in the second part of the 20th century the traditional poor relief system was replaced with the establishment of the Social Service Act. As “the modern heir of earlier Poor Law arrangements” (Lødemel 1997, p.7) social assistance is a system often described as constituting a “last safety net”. It is established as a right to all suffering from lack of means and the inability to satisfy their needs in other ways. However, both lack of means and inability has to be proved in an individual means test. Thus, the selection of eligible from non-eligible inquirers is still part of the delivery of modern poor help.

The dissertation also touches upon principles relevant for the Swedish welfare state. Through universal, earnings related and targeted programs the Swedish welfare state guarantees all citizens a minimum of economic welfare and promotes the principle that all citizens are equally entitled to a decent standard of living. An important distinction between social assistance and social insurance benefits is however, that the entitlement to assistance is based on an individual means test. A right to economic help is thus granted to the citizens under the condition that they first and foremost support themselves. The national law regulating social assistance formulates general aims and intentions without giving more detailed instructions regarding access to the benefit. In addition, regulations touch upon some other important aspects. The financial and administrative responsibility for social assistance is delegated to the municipalities. Administrating social assistance is thus a municipal obligation and carried out by the municipal social services.

Here, the issue of public administration becomes important. The social welfare offices are part of the local public administration regulated by legislation such as for example the Local Government Act (Kommunallagen) and the Administrative Procedure Act (Förvaltningslagen). That means, that the organization of public services underlies certain demands. The municipalities are free to organize the delivery of services and benefits according to local conditions; they are obliged to inform the local inhabitants about available services and to give support. Case processing is extensively regulated,
once an application is handed in. However, intake of incoming social assistance inquirers is not covered by these regulations. It normally takes place over telephone, without documentation and possibilities of appeal. There is consequently a risk that intake organizations affect help-seeking people’s chances of obtaining access to the society’s last safety net. In this respect, the dissertation is about “poor” peoples’ possibilities to get help from society. Put differently, it highlights a system where the opportunity for the most deprived citizens to find support from the last safety net may be dependent on the way municipal authorities administer the intake.

The following parts shall outline the context of the dissertation, discussing the tradition of selecting eligible from non-eligible poor, moving forwards to the social security system in today’s Sweden and the rights and obligations influencing access to social assistance and finally discussing the importance of the characteristics of the municipal social services for the intake.

POVERTY

That some people lack sufficient resources to make ends meet is an old phenomenon. The same may be said about the different strategies that have been used to handle such situations. Municipal responsibility for providing support to needy inhabitants as well as different systems for selecting eligible from non-eligible poor and the obligation to prove one’s eligibility are characteristics normally linked to the distribution of poor help.

In the early middle Ages poor help in Europe was mainly provided by charitable institutions, such as churches, monasteries and hospitals, through distribution of alms and individual charity. But already in the fourteenth and fifteenth century municipal authorities had initiated attempts to establish a legal framework to regulate help to the poor. In south Germany, special officials (Bettelherr) were appointed by the municipalities to establish a register of beggars and distribute tokens to them (Geremek 1997). With the beginning of the sixteenth-century the cities and parishes took an increasing part in organizing aid to the poor (Geremek 1997, Hunnecke 1983). Legislation began to play a larger role. In Sweden one of the first governmental directives regarding poverty was formulated in 1763, the so-called hospital order (hospitalordning) that obliged the parishes to support their own poor (Holgersson 1977). Somewhat later, the municipal responsibility regarding the controversial question of which parish was responsible for people without permanent housing was clarified. Further specification of the parishes’ responsibility towards their inhabitants can be found in the regulations from 1847 and 1853, stating an obligation to distribute poor relief to people unable to support themselves such as children, disabled or ill. Needy citizens now had a right to poor relief and they also had the possibility to appeal the parishes’ decision. This obligation was however reduced in 1871.
Towards the end of the 19th century poor relief was finally separated from the church. It becomes exclusively a municipal affair with the municipalities having fairly large autonomy in deciding how to organize the activities. Since poor relief was financed by municipal taxes, for many municipalities poor relief was an extremely burdensome responsibility (Edebalk 2003). A great problem for the many small municipalities was the dramatically increasing number of elderly about the turn of the century. The share of elderly increased from 4.8 percent in 1850 to 8.4 percent in 1900 (Edebalk 1996). An obligation to establish old age houses came with the law from 1918 together with an extension of the municipal obligation to provide poor relief. Both a broader definition of eligibility and a more generous definition of the level of help indicate increased ambition to improve the situation of the poor. For the first time it was also possible to employ civil servants supporting and controlling the poor (Government Bill 1918:135).

As discussed above, distribution of any kind of aid to needy people has normally been tied to some kind of system to distinguish between the eligible and the non-eligible poor (Midré 1990). The poor were classified by all organizations providing charity or poor relief. But classification was not only a way to manage the distribution of alms; it was also a way of stigmatizing the poor, to designate people as deviant or different from the mainstream values in a negative sense (Gans 1995). Common categories in classifying the poor were for example those from the parish versus those from outside, or the genuine poor in contrast to beggars or vagrants. When responsibility for the English poor in the fourteenth century was handed over from the centralized church to locally governed parishes the distinction between the worthy and unworthy poor was applied regularly (Gans 1995). The worthy poor included primarily widows, orphans, disabled and old people. Various types of hospitals and religious institutions offered aid to these groups. The unworthy poor, on the other hand, consisted mainly of able-bodied men coming from the countryside. Laziness and unwillingness to work was assumed to be the reason for this group's poverty, thus none of the charitable institutions was open to them. The labels deserving and non-deserving poor were invented in England during the discussions about the Poor Law of 1834 (Gans 1995). The label "neglectful family-supporter" (försumliga familje-försörjare) was introduced in 1847 in Sweden to refer to men who brought poverty to their families through laziness. They could be sentenced to work in the poor houses (Government Bill 1918:135).

The selection process, differentiating between deserving and undeserving poor, has been performed in many different ways. Home-visits including both a controlling and a supporting element were common. Examples are the “friendly visitors” (volunteers visiting the poor in their homes) in Great Britain, Germany and the USA in the 19th century and the Elberfeld system (citizens visiting and helping poor families) in Germany (Müller 1999). Other systems were courts where the poor should present their need and
where their eligibility for help and the extent of help was assessed and decided (Geremek 1997). A detailed investigation of the inquirers' health, ability to work, available assets, pension, other benefits, existence of other people likely to support the person and regular home-visits was common in Sweden in the beginning of the 20th century (Wallentin 1990). Here the poor normally contacted the poor relief office (fattigvårdsbyrån) where the responsible official performed a systematic investigation of the inquirers' living conditions. The official then presented the inquiry to the poor relief board (fattigvårdsstyrelsen), which in turn decided over need. Today the selection process in Sweden takes place in the direct contact between the inquirer and the social welfare officer who, very similar to the situation a century ago, tests eligibility with the help of a systematic questionnaire (the application form).

Today poverty remains an important problem and the question where to draw a poverty line cause a great deal of controversy. One way of studying poverty, traditionally used in Sweden, is to emphasize social assistance recipiency. This seems appropriate since people receiving social assistance experience a situation characterized by a lack of economic resources and an inability to support themselves. Furthermore, the local authorities decide to grant social assistance after an investigation of the person's economic situation. On the other hand, one has to be aware of the problems with this approach (Franzén 2003, Halleröd 2000). One problem is the fact that there is a group of people with an annual disposable income under the level of the national uniform social assistance standard that do not receive the benefit. Studies of non-take up of social benefits indicate that there are some types of poverty that remain hidden when only social assistance is studied. On the other hand do many social assistance recipients have an annual disposable income above the poverty line (Halleröd 1991). De facto social assistance schemes become poverty lines, based on what governments decide to be minimum income levels (Eardley et al 1996) but one has to be aware of that the social assistance scheme does not reach all people likely to be eligi-

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3 Measurements regarding people with an annual disposal income under the level of the national uniform benefit standard should however been treated with caution. Reasons not necessarily related to poverty, such as studies or temporary part-timework can cause a lower income. Others have capital or other liquid assets. Problematic is also the measurements for the self-employed (Government Bill 1996/97:1 Appendix 4). In other types of studies, using income as a poverty measure, there are other problems of overestimation. For example, in Swedish income data young people over 18 years who live together with their parents are defined as own households. Since most of them still go to school and only have low incomes they are defined as poor households despite the fact that they live at home.

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Rules and legislations furthermore change over time resulting in a varying number of social assistance recipients. The economic crisis in Sweden during the 1990’s thus led to tightened conditions for eligibility and less generous compensation levels. Fewer people received social assistance than would have been the case under the previous more generous conditions, but it would be problematic to state that poverty has decreased.

THE SWEDISH WELFARE STATE

All Western democracies have left the traditional poor laws behind them but differ with regard to their emphasis on welfare. The kind and quality of welfare provided differ as does the emphasis on expenditures and personnel related to welfare. When classifying countries into different social policy clusters or regimes types, Sweden is normally placed in categories such as the social democratic regime (Esping-Andersen 1990) or the encompassing model (Korpi and Palme 1998). The overarching principles of these regimes are universalism and equality. Universal programs covering the entire population and offering them basic security are combined with earnings related benefits for the economically active population. The Swedish welfare state promotes the principle that all citizens should be equally entitled to a decent standard of living and particularly supports those needing help to be able to participate in society. Other distinctive characteristics of the Swedish welfare state are its comprehensiveness and the degree of institutionalization (Korpi and Palme 1998).

As outlined by the English sociologist T. H. Marshall the development of modern welfare states can be said to involve changes in the content of citizenship (Marshall 1964). The welfare state implies social citizenship, guaranteeing rights not merely linked to performance on the labor market. In contrast to civil and political rights (such as freedom of speech or the right to vote) social rights are supposed to guarantee a minimum of economic welfare and the possibility to participate in society according to the standards prevailing in the society (Rees 1996). In the social rights discussion the social insurance system has been defined as central for realizing social citizenship. This system is supposed to cover economic problems caused by e.g. sickness, childbirth or old age. Important parts of the social insurance system are linked to earlier earnings from work, while others are independent of the citizens’ performance on the labor market, such as child allowance.

During the early phases of the welfare states’ expansion many policymakers believed that an encompassing social security system would eliminate the poverty problem in the industrialized societies. However, in the last quarter of the 20th century the problem of low income and economic suffering has grown, in Sweden as well as in many other industrialized countries (Eardley et al 1996). Where benefit levels are too low or people are ineligible
for work related benefits they may apply for other benefits. Besides universal and earning-related benefits also selective ones exist in Sweden, such as the housing benefit and social assistance. Social assistance is often described as a general means-tested benefit available for people below a specified minimum income standard (Eardley et al 1996). By the structure of the social assistance scheme the Swedish welfare state guarantees all citizens help in situations where they cannot support themselves and all other maintenance possibilities are exhausted. This right to support is stated in a national law; the Social Service Act. As in the other Scandinavian countries, Swedish social assistance has relatively high benefit levels, a strong role for local authorities and a strict means test (Gough et al 1997, Lodemel and Schulte 1992). In a system where there is a high threshold to access a benefit, the intake process becomes central.

A condition for the legitimacy of Scandinavian social assistance systems is that support and services actually reach those in need and at the same time only those in need. In general substantial support for the universal welfare state model is observed in Sweden. The exception here are selective benefits, especially housing benefits and social assistance which lack support among a relatively large proportion of the population. Suspicions of fraud and misuse by recipients are here often mentioned as an explanation. Furthermore, critique of excessive bureaucracy and paternalism in programs with rather extensive administrative elements is rather common (Svallfors 1996). The balance between limiting the benefit to those really in need while at the same time offering help to those likely to be eligible underlines the importance of the initial contact since it is here that the first selection often takes place. That is, a substantial part of the legitimacy of the social assistance system may be based on decisions made by the social assistance units' intake. The choice of organizational form can be assumed to have a large influence on the selection process. Organizational aspects such as the qualification of the staff, appropriate resources or location can have an essential impact on what, for example, the initial contact looks like.

Summarizing, the last resort offered by the Swedish society was initially supposed to play a minor role in an encompassing social security system. It is regulated by national legislation and guarantees a general right to support to all citizens under certain conditions. In a next step, the frame of the intake as a part of the public organizations activities shall be discussed.

PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

The way welfare services and support systems are to be organized has frequently been discussed. Rothstein (2001) sees the welfare states’ legitimacy as an organizational problem and depicts the relation between democracy and bureaucracy as one of the welfare states’ classic and unsolved problems.
In the same way Premfors et al (2003) emphasize the public administrations’ responsibility for enacting political decisions and thereby influencing content and impact of public politics. Public administration is the part of the political system that citizens come into contact with most often and it is therefore crucial for maintaining the states’ legitimacy. A substantial part of the citizens’ well-being is in turn the responsibility of the municipal public sector and the label “welfare municipalities” is sometimes used (Kröger 1997).

Some characteristics of public administration relevant for those contacting the social welfare offices’ intake are described below. I will concentrate on features that can illuminate the importance of public administration for the citizens’ possibilities to gain access to the social assistance scheme. The distinction between rights and obligations of the municipalities and the national governments’ steering and control instruments serves to structure the discussion. The role of the professionals is also mentioned briefly.

**Obligations**

Stated generally the obligation of the municipalities is to implement national politics with respect to all local inhabitants’ equal worth and to support their personal, economic and cultural well-being. The Instrument of Government (RF 1974:152), which lays down the basic premises of the Swedish administrative system, states that “all public power shall be exercised with respect for the equal worth of all and the liberty and dignity of the private person. The personal, economic and cultural welfare of the private person shall be fundamental aims of public activities”. Regarding the tasks of the public administration it is stated that “Courts of law, administrative authorities and others performing tasks within the public administration shall have regard in their work to the equality of all before the law and shall observe objectivity and impartiality” (Swedish Government Offices 2004).

Within specific sectors where authority has been delegated from the national government to the municipalities special acts, of which the Social Service Act is one, regulate activities. The administration of social assistance is an obligation for the municipalities, including a final responsibility for offering the local inhabitants the support and help they need (2 Ch. 2§). The municipality where an individual’s need for help becomes apparent (vistelsekommun) is responsible for providing support irrespective of how long the individual has stayed in this municipality. The application process is however not regulated in the Social Service Act, which only states in general terms that the social welfare boards shall initiate an investigation without delay when receiving information about circumstances requiring action by the social services. Moreover, there are no regulations about when and under which conditions the individual means test shall be performed. It is left to the discretion of local politicians and individual professionals to adjust the treatment according to the citizens’ needs. This opens the door to arbi-
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trariness. Even though the Social Service Act is a national law, the lack of regulations regarding the application process and the municipal autonomy may result in differences in the availability of the benefit.

The Administrative Procedure Act (Förvaltningslagen) regulates the activities of the municipalities in greater detail. It was introduced in 1971 with the aim to protect the individual citizens’ legal security when dealing with public administrations. The Administrative Procedure Act regulates the processing of cases in a rather extensive and detailed way. With respect to the initial contact, the importance of these regulations is however only limited. Regulations for case processing become relevant first when an application form is handed in, and does not cover the situation where inquirers seek information. Of greater relevance is the municipal obligation to inform local inhabitants about the administration’s services and activities and the requirement of accessibility (4§ and 5§). The obligation to inform includes an obligation to inform as quickly as possible and to an extent appropriate with regard to the question at hand, the administration’s work and the individual’s need of help. The administration is also required to accept telephone calls and visits by individuals. The way in which this obligation is to be carried out is however not mentioned. The crucial distinction between more general information and an inquiry is touched upon only indirectly through regulations regarding the possibility of oral case processing (14§). If a help-seeking individual wants to provide oral information with respect to a case implying the exercise of authority, the administration is required to provide an opportunity for this. This, however, presupposes that a case already has been opened. The distinction between information and inquiry is discussed more extensively in the recommendations of the National Board of Health and Welfare (2003a). However, these are recommendations intended to assist the social welfare officers in their work, not obligations.

Rights

Historically the Swedish municipalities have a rather strong position vis-à-vis the national government, the so-called tradition of local government autonomy. They have for example the right to levy taxes. The municipal council (kommunfullmäktige) is the highest decision-making body at the municipal level and elects the municipal executive board (kommunstyrelse) and the municipal administrative boards (nämnder). Questions regarding the municipal administrative boards’ organization or distribution of resources for their activities are decided by the municipal council (Gustafsson 1996). The municipal executive committee and the municipal council are responsible for the general distribution of resources at the municipal level, while the social welfare board distributes the means between different parts of the social services. The actual distribution of resources to a certain unit within the social services is thus dependent on adjustments between resource need in
various municipal activities as well as on the priority given to different activities within the social services (Bergmark 1995). It can be assumed that the organizational setting of the intake is dependent on the priority this part of the social welfare offices’ activities has, something that may vary among municipalities. With the new Local Government Act from 1992 (*Kommunallagen*) the municipalities’ obtained greater authority in determining their internal organization, and this resulted in extensive changes in the structure of the public sector (Swedish Agency for Public Management 1999). Three quarters of the municipalities abandoned the traditional division of boards according to different sectors (Swedish Government Official Reports 1996).

**Control and steering by the national government**

There are different ways to control and steer municipal activities and to strengthen the citizens’ position in relation to both the local government and the state. The right to appeal municipal decisions at the County Administrative Court is one instrument; inspecting supervision\(^5\) performed by national authorities, for example the County Executive Boards (*länsstyrelserna*) and the National Board of Health and Welfare (*Socialstyrelsen*) another. Often however, the initial contact by inquirers for social assistance takes place on telephone where a preliminary assessment of the individuals’ need for social assistance is performed. Here, the national control instruments supposed to guarantee the citizens’ legal security vis-à-vis the municipalities do not apply. Without documentation of the assessment and without a formal decision no appeal is possible and furthermore no inspecting supervision can be carried out.

Other more general ways to steer and control municipal activities is the distribution of state grants and legislation. Changes in the Administrative Procedure Act in 1992 and the transformation of targeted state grants into general ones in 1993 gave the municipalities the possibility to prioritize parts of the municipal activities and greater autonomy in choosing the internal organizational form. The responsibility in certain areas such as active labor market policies directed at long-term unemployed youth was transferred to the municipalities in 1995 (Swedish Government Official Reports 1999). Taken together this was intended to improve the work done on the local level and to result in a more efficient use of resources.

The arguments for transferring responsibility and competence to the municipal level were both of ideological and economic nature. It was seen as a way to move democracy closer to the citizens and to improve the correspondence between the citizens’ will and the public activities. However,

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\(^5\) The term supervision is in English used both in the sense of inspection and in the sense of guidance. To avoid confusion the terms inspecting supervision and guiding supervision are used.
through these changes the state reduced its possibilities to influence the priority and direction of municipal work. These changes enhancing municipal autonomy were mainly introduced in the first part of the 1990’s. They were however followed by some changes aimed at guaranteeing national policy goals, changes working in the opposite direction. One of the decisions limiting municipal autonomy was a ban on municipal tax increases between 1991 and 1993. The introduction of a national uniform benefit rate for social assistance in 1998 can also be seen as strengthening the individual’s position vis-à-vis the municipality. The national uniform benefit standard is intended to guarantee a minimum standard including a certain number of budgetary items equal all over the country, thus limiting the municipalities’ possibilities to lower the levels. But the municipalities still have the possibility to choose if certain budgetary items shall be included in the uniform benefit rate or not (Bergmark 2001). Anyway, none of these instruments directly affect the individual inquirers position in relation to the municipalities.

The situation described above has to be seen against the changes and developments in Sweden taken place in the last 20 years of the 20th century. Modernization of the public services has come on the public agenda throughout Europe and several principles for governing and steering public organizations, often summarized as New Public Management, strongly influenced the organization of national and local public administrations (Montin 1997). Professional leadership, criteria for productivity and efficiency, result control, disaggregation of units, competition within the public sector, privatization and economizing with public resources are issues emphasized within these new trends. The implementation of such common trends on national levels is of course different. The modernization of the Swedish national and local public administration was mainly concentrated on internal changes, such as the establishment of steering by management of objective and of result (mål- och resultatstyrning), division into purchaser and provider (beställare och utförare), competition within the public administrations, and privatization (Montin 1997). The dramatic economic crisis in Sweden during the 1990’s also increased the importance of economic issues for administrative politics. Result steering, demands to save money and limit activities to core tasks are evidence of the close relationship between the economy and municipal policy. This involves a risk that the activities of the public administrations to a greater extent are steered by budgetary concerns than by the citizens’ need.

**Professionals in public administration**

A few words shall also be said about the role of the professionals in public administrations, or more specifically in the municipal social services individual and family care. Most of the personnel in this part of the public administration are professional social workers (Swedish Government Official Reports 1995). Their professional role actually consists of two roles. One is
the role of the social worker aimed at providing support and help to needy people. The other one is the role of the administrator, where the contact with the help-seeking person is structured by administrative rules and standardized routines. These two roles imply different attitudes towards the citizens. The former is characterized by a more relational attitude that also can imply therapeutically elements whereas the latter can be described as bureaucratic and controlling. These components, the helping and the controlling, would seem to be incongruous but in reality exist side by side in most cases (for a further discussion see Billquist 1999, Kullberg 1994).

In sum, individuals’ access to social assistance is linked to municipal obligations and rights. Municipalities have the obligation to administer social assistance and have also the final responsibility for the local inhabitants’ social and economic situation. There are clear regulations how to process cases, but not for the application process. Greater municipal autonomy in choosing organizational solutions in turn may result in an increasing variation in the organization of the initial contact and in how the municipalities meet their obligation towards help-seeking inhabitants (Bergmark 2001). This risk becomes even stronger with framework laws that do not regulate the application process in detail. That this may lead to conflicts with national political aims is obvious. Since public administrations carry out activities of essential interest for the citizens under the authority of the state, there is a common expectation that these services should be offered equally irrespective of the citizens’ residence. Local standards and priorities diverging from national aims and great variations between different municipalities can be experienced as wrong and unjust (Bergmark 2001).

3. SOCIAL ASSISTANCE

The vision of the politicians during the post-war years was to abolish poverty by establishing a universal social insurance system where help to the poor should be unnecessary or of marginal importance. This has not been realized. Poor help or social assistance, as it is called today, has been an essential complement to the social insurance system during the whole century and moreover gained increasing importance to the end. In the following part I draw attention to the specific character of the social assistance scheme, with a legislation that leaves citizens in a weak position against the authorities interpreting and determining the individuals’ right to the benefit. The question if social assistance is a social right for the citizens has been discussed extensively but nevertheless little attention has been paid to the unique situation potential clients are placed in when applying for social assistance. But first I will start with a review of evidence on the factors influencing social assistance recipiency and thereafter of the social services’ work with social assistance.
EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

Factors influencing social assistance recipiency

The question of why people need social assistance and what kind of circumstances causes the need for help has occupied researchers from several research traditions for quite a long time. Explanations are generally located on a structural or on an individual level.

At the structural level three main aspects can be distinguished, that is factors linked to the labor market, demographical factors and migration. Regarding the factors related to the labor market, unemployment has in most empirical studies appeared to be the main cause behind the need for social assistance. The relation between unemployment and social assistance is however not uncomplicated. Studies carried out at different levels (individual, municipal) as well as with different designs (cross-sectional or longitudinal) show some differences in the importance of unemployment. A direct positive association between unemployment and social assistance is found in studies on an individual level (for example Bergmark 1991, Salonen 1999) as well as in longitudinal studies on an aggregate level (Gustafsson 1983, 1986, Korpi 1971, Stenberg 1997). Studies focusing on municipal variation of social assistance recipiency carried out on cross-sectional data however, point to a more complicated and indirect relation between unemployment and social assistance recipiency. In those studies unemployment without unemployment compensation co-varies strongly and significantly with social assistance recipiency whereas the importance of unemployment in general is only weak or negative (Aguillar and Gustafsson 1989, Bergmark and Sandgren 1998, Byberg 2002). This phenomenon is often explained by the fact that in municipalities with high unemployment membership in unemployment funds is more common than elsewhere implying that unemployment not always causes higher social assistance recipiency. Thus, both unemployment and unemployment without compensation are important factors behind the need for social assistance.

With respect to demographical factors a frequently named aspect is the composition of the municipalities’ population. More specifically the share of single persons, of single mothers as well as of single men, appear as important for the municipal social assistance expenditures (Bergmark and Sandgren 1998, Byberg 2002, Salonen 1994, Schwartz and Puide 1993). The share of immigrants also co-varies with social assistance costs. Tax capacity,

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6 Swedish unemployment insurance is administered by 38 unemployment funds. Formally, these are autonomous, private organizations. Membership of a fund is required for entitlement to unemployment insurance.
a measure for the municipal inhabitants’ income situation, shows a significant negative association with social assistance costs.

A factor that gained increased importance for social assistance recipiency during the 1990’s is migration. There are two main reasons for this. One is the deteriorating position of immigrants on the Swedish labor market and the other is an extensive immigration of refugees and of persons receiving Swedish residence permits by reason of family ties taking place when Sweden went through a serious economic crisis. Social assistance recipiency among immigrants varies; depending for example on where they come from and on the time they have lived in Sweden. There is extensive research showing that the time an immigrant has lived in Sweden is an important factor for social assistance recipiency; the shorter the time the higher is the recipiency (Aguilar and Gustafsson 1994, Franzén 2003, Gustafsson 1997, National Board of Health and Welfare 1999).


Another part of empirical research tries to capture factors related to the individual social assistance recipient. The interplay between the recipients’ social situation and individual characteristics are examined (Inghe 1960, Korpi 1971, Stenberg 2000). Thus, the possibility of inter-generational inheritance has been discussed (e.g. Stenberg 2000). A more complex explanatory model trying to capture the complicated interplay between social and personal factors was developed by Korpi (1971) who divided the factors leading to social assistance recipiency into three categories: principle, conditional (e.g. health) and triggering factors (e.g. separation). Others have developed that model further trying to explain the co-variation between conditional and triggering factors (Bergmark 1991, Salonen 1994).

Research focusing on individual recipients emphasizes the social situation with respect to family relationships, physical and mental health and abuse (Bergmark 1991, Gunnarsson 1993, Jonasson 1996, Puide 1985). Not surprisingly social assistance recipients have less economic resources, lower educational level and work in jobs with low income (Bergmark 1991, Jonasson 1996). The social assistance recipients’ relation to the labor market is another important aspect (Bergmark 1991, Gunnarsson 1993, Jonasson 1996).

The process from individual needs to an eventual receipt of social assistance is however not obvious and touches upon another dimension that has been largely overlooked in research about social assistance recipiency. That is the role of the social service administrations for the number of recipients.
Yet, not the circumstances causing need for help but the probability of receiving help at the local social services should be emphasized. In research on non-take up of benefits, the administration as a factor affecting the probability of non-take up of benefits has recently gained in importance (see van Oorschot 1995, 1998). Still, there is no corresponding research regarding the importance of administrations for the take up of social benefits in general and social assistance in particular. Most of the research mentioned above is based on information that is received from clients, that is people who have established a contact with the social services or data describing the institutional settings of the social assistance scheme. Here the dissertation tries to fill a gap by emphasizing the importance of administrative routines and organizational settings for the citizens’ probability of receiving the benefit.

**Studies on the social services’ work with social assistance**

Another research tradition is occupied with questions relating to the work with social assistance clients at the municipal social service offices, the kind of methods and models used and how the work is organized.

The direct contact between the clients and the social workers has generated a great amount of studies mostly focusing on how they understand each other or the characteristics of the conversation, e.g. examining the negotiation between the clients and the social workers. These studies often emphasize the dual role of the social assistance officers, as helpers and controllers, and point to the dominance of the controlling function (Billquist 1997, 1999, Cedersund 1992, Erickson and Schultz 1982, Fredin 1993, Hydén 1987, 1988, 2000, Marklund, Nordenstam and Penton 1984, Mosesson and Jönsson 1998). In this context the fact that many recipients express strong feelings of inferiority when applying for the benefit is underlined (Bergmark 1987, Gunnarsson 1993, Jönsson and Starrin 1999).

With respect to the content of the work carried out at social welfare offices with social assistance recipients, there is some research pointing to the decision-making regarding social assistance. These studies are based on assessments social workers have done on identical hypothetical applicants cases. The results of these studies point to rather substantial variation in decisions not only between but also within municipalities (Gustafsson, Hydén, Salonen 1990, 1993, Hydén, Kyhle Westermark, Stenberg 1995, Törn 1986).

Another part of the work with social assistance recipients is the use of various models or methods; something that also touches upon the organization of the work. The lack of clear methods in work with social assistance clients often results in changes in the organization of the work aiming to improve work with clients. A general distinction in work organization is the one between specialization and integration (Pettersson 1994) and where recent research point to an increasing specialization (Bergmark and Lundström
Models emphasizing simplified casework can be seen as one kind of specialization (Bergmark 1987, National Board of Health and Welfare 1988, 1990, Pettersson 1988). Other models underline the responsibility of the clients to support themselves and try to strengthen the clients’ chances of finding work (Edholm 1994, Milton and Bergström 1998, National Board of Health and Welfare 1990, 1995, Rönnlund 1992, Steen and Sundberg 1999, The Swedish Association of Local Authorities 1994). Studies about particular measures such as temporary projects for certain kinds of recipients (Bergmark and Lundström 1998, Byberg 1998, National Board of Health and Welfare 1995) or more permanent measures such as for example financial advice (Dellgran 2000) can also be found. Despite the fact that the different models quickly spread over the country, evaluations of them are rather rare. Byberg (2002) examined consequences for social assistance expenditures of different organizational settings and methods with social assistance. The results showed that the different settings found in municipalities with a high cost level compared with municipalities with a low cost level co-vary with their choice of different organizational models.

Specialization can also take place by attracting attention to certain stages in the contact with clients. Thus the first contact has received some attention (Billquist 1999, Gostick 1976, Gostick and Scott 1982, Stjernholm Fehn and Puntervold 1994, Stjerno 1988, Sunesson 1985, Westlund 1991). Interest has often centered on the intake officers’ gate-keeping function in sorting and categorizing new clients (Cedersund 1992, Ericsson and Wickström 1998, Mosesson and Jönsson 1998, Swedish Association of Local Authorities 1994). Worth mentioning in this context is in particular Billquist (1999), who studied the process of becoming a client, that is the way into and through the social assistance scheme.

All these studies emphasize the intakes’ crucial role for providing access to social assistance. However, most of these studies do not focus on intake instead it is only touched upon in passing. Consequently, no systematic knowledge exists regarding different ways to organize the inflow of potential clients at Swedish social welfare offices. Furthermore, the differences in the organizational designs are rarely mentioned instead the focus often lies on the direct contact between the potential client and the officer. An exception is Billquist (1997, 1999) who concentrated on the sorting at different stages of the case process, mainly sorting at the first contact. Nonetheless, since she focused on those who become clients and since the data came from only two offices a systematic picture of the impact of intake organizations on the routing of inquiries is not possible. Most of this research is indeed based on those inquirers that become clients and does not include those not becoming clients. An effect of the rather subordinate role

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An unit where people with primarily economic problems are handled in a rather administrative way, in Sweden often called SOFT unit.
intake has in Swedish social assistance research is that it is only seen in a rather narrow context, for example in terms of the organization of individual social welfare offices or the relationship between clients and social workers. There are no studies that try to examine intake in a broader perspective. Thus, this dissertation tries to fill another gap, which is to examine intake organization in a broader and more systematic way.

**THE LEGAL FRAMEWORK**

The legal framework for work with social assistance consists of the Social Service Act (2001:453). A characteristic of this act is that it has the form of a framework law, stating general intentions and requirements regarding eligibility for social assistance without formulating detailed regulations. No formal legal requirements regarding the application process as such exist instead the municipal social welfare offices are free to organize the intake according to their local conditions. However, regulations formulated by the National Board of Health and Welfare complement the legislation and emphasize the importance of the initial contact (National Board of Health and Welfare 2003a).

Social assistance encompasses not only financial aid but also help such as family support, help with abuse problems, home-help service or transportation service for the disabled. The Social Service Act has been revised several times, changes that influenced the division of responsibility between the state and the local level but also affected the relation between the individual and the administration (Government Bill 1996/97, Swedish Governments Official Reports 2000/01, Åström 2000). The right to appeal is one aspect that has changed over time. In the revised Social Service Act from 1998 the individual possibilities to appeal were restricted. This however was changed anew in the law from 2001 (Government Bill 1996/97, Government Bill 2000/01). Restricted possibilities to appeal resulted in a reduced influence of the courts whereas municipal influence grew. Changes in the law have however also had an effect on the relation between the individual and the public administration. With the revised Social Service Act from 1998, the municipal authority over the individual help-seeking person clearly increased. The social boards’ right to demand activities from the client in certain situations increased. This was especially directed towards youth beneath 25 years of age. They were often obliged to participate in labor market programs or other measures to qualify for social assistance.

As mentioned earlier a national benefit standard was introduced in 1998. This has to be seen in the context of the basic idea with a monetary benefit standard introduced by the National Board of Health and Welfare in 1985. The monetary benefit standard was supposed to strengthen the citizens’ right to benefit by serving as guidelines for the monetary standards established by
the municipalities. Its purpose was to harmonize assessments of what a reasonable living standard is and to limit the variation between the municipalities but also to simplify case processing routines by including as many items as possible in the standard (Svensson 2000). The monetary standard was based on items included in a household budget drawn up by the National Board for Consumer Policy. Not included were for example items such as housing costs, local travel, and childcare costs since these often varied between municipalities. These guidelines had importance for rulings by the Supreme Administrative Court in 1993, implying that the monetary benefit standard should be the basis when assessing what a reasonable living standard should be for those obtaining social assistance (Svensson 2000). Nonetheless, several municipalities began to exclude some budgetary items included in the guidelines, supported by a decision of the Supreme Administrative Court in 1994, and in 1996 about half of the municipalities had excluded one or several items from their local standards (Svensson 2000). The national uniform benefit standard now serves as a kind of lowest standard the municipalities are obliged to follow. They are however free to set a higher local monetary standard but to lower the standard only under certain conditions.

THE RIGHT TO APPLY

There is an extensive discussion regarding whether social assistance as a means tested benefit can be seen as legal right (Hollander 1995, Johansson 2001, Landelius 1996, Marshall 1981, Åström 2000). According to a legal perspective, stating that something is a legal right implies that certain conditions should be fulfilled. The right should be stated in law, its content and preconditions should be specified and it should be possible to appeal in court. Essential is furthermore that all citizens are equal by law, that they have access to courts or other authorities that can adjudicate in disputes between individuals and public authorities, and that laws and regulations are predicable for the individuals. According to Hollander (1995) several of these components should be fulfilled when talking about a legal right. Yet, the design of the Social Service Act stands in contrast to some of these principles. First, being a framework law, the act only to a limited extent formulates the content of the right to social assistance, meaning that neither the conditions for obtaining economic help nor the exact content of the benefit are specified. Instead, the circumstances in each individual case have to be tested to determine the form, content and extent of help. Second, social assistance is formulated as an individual right but linked to an assessment of need. The possibility to appeal is of course a crucial aspect for the definition of a benefit as a legal right. Here we could see some changes in the legislation towards the end of the 1990’s but Hollander (1995) states that
According to this aspect the Social Service Act can be characterized as a right governed by law (rättighetslag). Third, there is inspecting supervision by both national and regional authorities even if the sanctioning power is weak (Lundin 2003). Consequently, the Social Service Act often is characterized as a framework law with certain elements constituting a legal right.

There is thus no general right to social assistance; instead eligibility is connected to individual circumstances. However an implicit precondition for obtaining the benefit is the right and the possibility to apply for it. In the discussion of the legal aspects of social assistance this essential issue has so far been neglected. Take up of benefits is not only determined by entitlement, it is also determined by the implementation of the benefit. Benefits are supposed to be available to all citizens. This may sound obvious and has therefore not received much attention in research in social service. Only in recent years has the availability of benefits attracted some interest, mainly in the context of the discussion about quality of social services (Council of the European Union 2003, European Foundation 2001, Swedish Governments Official Reports 2000:3). Access to social assistance, in the meaning of the actual possibility of applying for it, is of course crucial for the individual citizen. This holds in particular for people lacking sufficient income since this benefit is the last help they can receive from society. The possibility to apply should be equally available to all; the benefit however only to those who are entitled to it.

Often, individuals contacting the social welfare office only want information about their possibility of receiving the benefit or have more general questions about the social assistance scheme. These kinds of questions have the character of an inquiry, in contrast to a formal application. Inquiries do not lead to further investigations, thus no official decision regarding the individual’s entitlement for social assistance will be taken and the person does not have the possibility to appeal. Regarding the difference between an inquiry and an application, the National Board of Health and Welfare (2003a) emphasizes that individuals always have the right to hand in an application for social assistance. The officer has to inform the inquirers about this right and to make sure that the callers does not understand the information received as a refusal or a formal rejection. Thus, a crucial moment in the contact between an inquirer and a social worker is the ability of the officer to distinguish between a persons’ more general inquiry or question and an application. The consequences of this distinction are important. If it is unclear if the person only wants to have information, his request should be treated as an application and be settled through a formal decision.

The concept of take up or non-take up of benefits is normally rather broad including for example the decision making process before contacting the appropriate authority (See Gustafsson 1987, 2002, Oorschot van 1995, 1998). Here I am primarily concerned with the actual possibility to apply for social assistance.
Crucial in this context is the practice common in Sweden of performing a preliminary means test of the help-seeking person's need during the very initial contact, before the person has had the opportunity to apply formally. The result of the assessment can be assumed to be of substantial importance for the person's decision to apply. Furthermore, carrying out means tests before an application is handed in moves this activity out of the range of the inspecting supervision performed by national authorities and precludes the possibility of appeal since no documentation exists. The already tenuous right to social assistance becomes even more precarious with the first contacts occurring in a legal vacuum. Several reviews by County Administrative Boards in 2003 showed that citizens in need have difficulties in passing the hurdle of the intake and thus do not receive help (National Board of Health and Welfare 2003b). Social services in different city districts fought with each other trying to avoid the responsibility for applications from homeless persons. Other problems mentioned in the reviews were that it became increasingly difficult to get in contact with the social assistance unit when applying for the benefit. Furthermore, individuals complained over being refused (National Board of Health and Welfare 2003b). Poor administrative casework, such as extensive use of oral notifications or failure to inform inquirers of rights and application procedures, resulting in difficulties when claiming benefit is also found in other countries. For Norway, Lødemel and Schulte states that there is a reason to believe that “large numbers of people who would be found eligible for benefits are discouraged from approaching the social assistance authorities” (Lødemel and Schulte 1992, p. 529).

In sum, some distinctive characteristics of social assistance of relevance for the intake can be outlined. The initial contact often takes place in a legal vacuum, no legal requirements regulate this part of the contact application process and no legal control over the application process is possible. This is likely to result in diverging local standards but furthermore access is administered in a way that may violate essential principles of legal rights. This implies a risk that the balance between municipal obligations and rights and individual rights shift to the disadvantage of the citizens. Compared with other application routines within the Swedish social security system, access to the last resort is therefore administered in a rather unique way.

4. Intake

In several countries intake is a rather well established activity within the social services. In 1969 Zimmermann, investigating the intake process in a metropolitan county of a large western state in the USA, described intake as a task “to assemble and assess information pertaining to the set of eligibility factors specified for the particular program of assistance in question”
Administrating poverty (Zimmerman 1969, p. 324). A general trend of establishing intake units was also observed in the UK and specialized intake teams in the social service departments of the local authorities appeared to be one of the most popular organizational developments in Great Britain since the Seebohm reorganization (Gostick 1976). Since the beginning of the 1970’s special intake units were also common in the social services in Sweden (Landegårdh et al. 1986, Pettersson 2001) but their existence has clearly increased. In a survey of the Swedish social welfare offices done in 1988/1989, more than one fourth of all offices reported having an intake unit (Eriksson and Karlsson 1989). Nine years later intake units were found in 64 percent of the Swedish municipalities (Bergmark and Lundström 1998).

In this part, intake as an organizational solution for the separation of eligible from non-eligible inquirers shall be discussed. First some stages of the intake process will be described. Then intake in Sweden and elsewhere will be outlined with the purpose of placing Swedish intake routines in a broader perspective. Then, the question if the organization of intake follows fashion trends will be discussed. Finally, intake shall be described as a complex activity fulfilling several, sometimes conflicting functions.

DIFFERENT STAGES IN THE INTAKE PROCESS

The initial contact is of course only one part of an application process that consists of several different stages. Although only some are relevant here, it is important to clarify the stages to be discussed.

When talking about intake of social assistance inquirers, the focus is on a certain part of the social welfare services often located within the social assistance unit. But of course, a number of different ways of contacting officers at the social assistance units are possible. Depending on workload, the routine that all inquirers are obliged to contact the intake before meeting a social worker personally may for example be followed more or less strictly. In other cases previous clients might contact their prior officers directly and manage to meet them without contacting the intake. However, in many Swedish social welfare offices a first contact with an intake officer is obligatory before meeting a social worker personally at the offices. Since people calling the social assistance unit need help with very different problems, the first contact can be about a wide variety of questions.

Still, all first contacts have the character of inquiries, meaning that at this stage information is needed, no application is submitted or benefit received. These inquiries can in principle have two results. Either they result in an appointment for a further more detailed assessment, i.e. the inquirer is encouraged to submit an application. Alternatively they result in an advise against an application, i.e. the inquirer is dissuaded from applying. However, being encouraged to submit an application does not mean that the person actually
will do it. People either can refrain from handing in an application or from coming to the personal visit. Various factors can affect the decision to refrain from applying, such as changes in the economic situation of the help-seeking persons that appear after the contact with the intake officer. Another factor might be that help-seeking persons consider other alternatives to manage their situation, especially likely for those where the probability of receiving social assistance is not quite clear. The problem of stigma is also likely to influence the decision process. Another problem may be that special routines are experienced as difficult when applying for the benefit (Gustafsson 2002, van Oorschot 1998). Factors, leading to non-use of benefits, especially in situations where the persons is assessed as probably entitled, is a complex issue.

**INTAKE IN SWEDEN**

A person with economic problems who wants to acquire information about the possibility of obtaining social assistance has to contact the municipal social welfare office. Normally it is not possible to go to the social welfare office and meet a social worker personally. Instead the help-seeking person has to contact the social assistance unit per telephone and talk with an officer in charge of new incoming inquirers. This function is often called intake. The intake of potential social assistance clients can be handled by specially designated social workers within the social assistance unit, or all officers take turns. The intake unit can be a particular group within the social assistance unit or a unit not only for potential social assistance clients but also for people seeking help from other parts of the social services.

The intake shall not be confused with the reception or switchboard that passes all kind of inquiries to the right person or unit within the social services. One can characterize the intake as an organization regulating the inflow of new social assistance clients. In the literature the intake officer sometimes is called a gatekeeper controlling and regulating access to social assistance (Cedersund 1992, Kullberg 1994, Lipsky 1980).

The intake is primarily important for new inquirers since a contact with the intake is often obligatory before proceeding with a further investigation. In cases were the inquirer has become a client, i.e. has handed in an application and has established a contact with his or her regular social worker, all further contacts will be directly with this officer. But the category new inquirer also includes previous clients who have not received social assistance for a while but now apply again. If a client does not receive social assistance for some months, the case will be “closed” in the sense that the registration of the individual as a client by the social welfare office will be ended. Returning with a new application, the person will be forced to contact the intake once again. Applications made three to six months after the last contact
will often be defined as applications by new clients. The exact routines for the definition of new clients vary between municipalities and even between offices within the same municipality.

**INTAKE IN OTHER COUNTRIES**

What does intake of new social assistance clients look like in other countries? In a study of social assistance schemes in OECD countries carried out in 1996 the making of a claim was one aspect of administration and delivery of social assistance that was examined. In most of the countries applications are made in person by visiting the local social welfare office, but often the possibility of sending in an application form by mail also exists (Eardley et al 1996). An unusual solution has also been reported in the state of New Jersey in the USA, where a help line for welfare recipients had been outsourced to India. Public pressure however forced the state to bring it back again (The Economist 2003).

As a complement to data collected for this thesis, I made a small non-representative survey in different countries gathering information from one randomly selected social welfare office. I received information for Germany, Austria, Italy, USA (New Jersey and Michigan), Netherlands, Finland and England. The survey included questions on how a potential client normally gets in contact with the office distributing the benefit, what kind of staff is in charge at the intake, if they perform a means test during the first contact and if they make a distinction between old and new potential clients. Although, this only gives a very simplified picture of intake in other countries, and there is likely to be variation within the countries or even within the cities, the survey nevertheless provides an indication of how general the Swedish experience may be.

In England and in Finland the first contact can be made either personally or by telephone. The German system is most similar to the Swedish one in the sense that an appointment for a personal visit has to be made. In cases were a person drops in at the office, he would normally receive the telephone number to the officer in charge. However, in Austria and Italy the first contact normally occurs personally at the office. In Austria, only legal information is given over telephone or in Italy only particular cases such as disability are handled over telephone. What the first contact looks like in New Jersey, USA, depends on the inquirers experience with the system. If they know what kind of program they are interested in they can ask directly for the officer in charge, otherwise the intake officer routes them. In

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Michigan, initial contact can be made by phone, drop in, Internet or mail. Citizens can have an application mailed home. The office has an enormous amount of information on the web and, as the local manager indicated, many of their clients’ make use of the net and as a result know some of the program regulations better than the staff. Here, the staff receives specialized training for the intake work. The Netherlands has an entirely different system. Intake occurs at so-called Centers for Work and Income (CWI) where special staff, often with social-legal training, first carry out a “work-intake” (alone or together with an employee the potential recipient has to look at the job vacancies the CWI offers) and if no suitable job can be found an appointment for an “assistance intake” will be made.

A preliminary means test is carried out over telephone in Germany, Finland, and USA. In the other countries this assessment is done during the personal visit. At the office in England, only administrative staff are employed at the intake sending all application forms to a particular assessment office. A “first call office” is however, being developed and it will locate the intake of all social benefit programs in one place.

However, the distinction between old and new recipients, common at Swedish social welfare offices does not exist in any of the other countries. All have to go through the same procedure.

INTAKE ORGANIZATION AS A FASHION?

As mentioned above, distribution of social assistance and its predecessors always needed some kind of organization regulating the inflow of potential recipients. What this organization looks like is however likely to vary over time and among countries. One can assume that in a very general sense the organization of activities always follows trends that are dominant at particular times.

There is a rather large literature in organizational research describing how organizational trends and standards are spread both geographically but also within and between fields of activities (Christensen and Lagreid 2002, Czarniawska and Joerges 1996, Fernler 2002, Røvik 2000). These discussions often emphasize the permanency of trends or standards. Trends can be long-lived and institutionalized, for example as norms of rationality and efficiency that have become rooted in most western societies. On the other hand, there are also temporary trends that pop up and disappear after a rather short time. Such ideas often focus on only a part of the organization for example on the structure of organizations, the culture regarding how to meet clients or on the steering of organizations. Thus, different ideas, sometimes even contradictory to each other, can turn up within the same organization.

Intake as a part of the process of help to needy people can be characterized as quite institutionalized. The poverty literature describes the existence
of intake activities aimed at sorting the deserving from the undeserving. Earlier such screening was often carried out in the form of personal visits at the poor peoples’ homes but nowadays they typically are performed at special municipal offices. How these ideas spread across boundaries is described by for example Müller (1999). The way the inflow is organized has thus changed over time and one can assume that it is influenced both by general institutional standards about how society is to be organized and by more passing ideas.

The way intake currently is organized in Sweden can mainly be seen with respect to the fact that social assistance traditionally is distributed by public organizations that in a very general way determine the contact between potential clients and responsible officers. More passing ideas was for example the requirement on the social services in the 1970’s to act as service agencies, which was supposed to improve the contact between the citizens and the social welfare offices. Some years later the dominant trend was to increase the efficiency of the social services. These trends are however not specific to the social services or the work with potential social assistance clients, instead the same ideas could be observed in many areas of Swedish society and also in other countries. Different ideas pass through western societies, influencing varying activities within them. Thus, today intake is a common way of processing people in all kind of organizations (e.g. employment agencies, hospitals and insurance offices). It can be seen as an activity embedded in a highly institutionalized frame yet exposed to temporary global trends.

It is thus obvious that various aspects regulating and formatting access to social assistance come together at the social assistance offices’ intake. In the following part I have tried to summarize these in formulating possible intake functions.

**POSSIBLE FUNCTIONS OF AN INTAKE**

Intake is an activity within the social services steered by the national regulations. It is also a part of a public administration that underlies other laws and rules, and it is performed by professionals treating help-seeking individuals according to their professional rules. Thus, it is an activity expected to fulfill different functions. Without claiming to be exhaustive, some of the functions of the intake will here briefly be reviewed. The term function is not used as a theoretical concept, but in the sense of formal tasks and general expectations.

The state in its position as lawmaker and designer of social policy is one important actor steering intake. Generally formulated, the state’s interest is to improve the individual citizen’s well-being and to promote the citizen’s economic and social security. First and foremost intake can be assumed to have a distributional function in regulating access to a social benefit – in this case
social assistance. Distributing social assistance is a municipal obligation and receiving the benefit - under certain circumstances - a right for all persons living in Sweden. Municipalities also have an interest in and a responsibility to promote their inhabitants’ well-being. This responsibility can however come in conflict with cost-containment demands. In the Government Bill (2000/01) it is emphasized that the municipalities’ financial situation can be taken into consideration when deciding about social assistance. The intake may then limit access to social assistance (Dagens Nyheter 2004). To strike a balance between the demand for and a limited supply of resources, it is necessary in some way to ration, to select, or to set priorities when the benefit is to be distributed. One can assume that a close connection exists between the distributional and the limiting function. The greater the economic problems are, the more likely municipalities are to limit access to social assistance. If the economic situation however improves, access is likely to be more generous. Changes between more or less generous access are easily made because of the intake’s rather subordinated position within the social service activities. It is barely mentioned in the municipalities’ policy documents (Minas 2001) and only indirectly touched upon in the Handbook for Social Assistance of the National Board for Health and Welfare (2000). From the perspective of the municipalities the intake may thus have a rationing function.

According to the Administrative Procedure Act (1992) public agencies are obliged to provide service and information to citizens. Services are supposed to be readily available and qualified information regarding the tasks of the agencies shall be offered. These are expectations that directly bear upon the intake. Thus, the intake has a service function. The intake can also be seen from a bureaucratic perspective. A characteristic of bureaucratic organizations is their specialization in, for example, different subunits focusing on different tasks. Specialization demands delimitation. Delimitation is needed both within the organization with regard to other units and externally towards other organizations. Within the social service agency, intake is one of various specializations guaranteeing an efficient processing of a large number of cases. Sorting and categorizing of new incoming cases is one of the key tasks of intake. It is about transforming the history of the individual into administrative terminology and into categories that are used at the office (Zimmerman 1969, Tilly 1998). The person’s problem is thus likely to be adjusted to the offices’ task. In short, the intake function is to compile and assess information in relation to the existing eligibility demands. In relation to this bureaucratic perspective the intake has a delimitation function.

The professionals’ interest in the intake is normally to make a qualified initial investigation that results in the appropriate help and information for the person contacting the office. Someone needing help should have the possibility of meeting a social worker for further investigation while unnecessary visits should be avoided. The intake consequently has also an investigation function.
5. Theoretical Considerations

The question of intake organization is central to all four studies in this dissertation. The character of the articles is more empirical than theoretical, yet the analyses are structured by theoretical ideas regarding key organizational elements. In the following part some of these ideas will be presented.

Public administration is often seen as a special type of organization. It is typified as a Human Service Organization, that is a group of organizations whose primary task is to process, sustain or change people who come under their jurisdiction (Hasenfeld 1992). The staff, sometimes called street-level bureaucrats or frontline officers, work directly with and on citizens trying to change some of their characteristics. In this context the staffs’ discretion is often mentioned as something innate to human service organizations. Discretion is an important part of the work but makes the clients and inquirers vulnerable to the sometimes arbitrary decisions by individual officers. Inherent in people processing work and service delivery is also the fact that it is moral work. This is especially pronounced in relation to benefits supporting people with insufficient income when there is strong agreement that people first and foremost shall support themselves through earnings or via social insurance programs. It is also moral in the sense that resources normally are limited and systems for rationing the service are used. However here it is not the professionals’ particular position in relation to the (potential) clients that will be in focus. Instead another characteristic of human service organizations will be emphasized, that is their character as bureaucratic organizations.

Human service organizations share the characteristics of other bureaucracies. They are social units designed to attain specific goals. Every organization has to establish an internal structure to make certain that organizational activities can be carried out in an appropriate way and with respect to its goals. Distinctive features of internal structures within bureaucracies are specialization and formalization of work (Ahrne 1989, Weber 1968). These are often seen as two fundamental features of formal organizational structure and emphasized especially by rational system theorists (Fayol 1949, Scott 1998, Taylor 1913). From this rational perspective, structural arrangements within organizations such as specialization of activities, rules and regulations are tools designed for the efficient realization of ends (Hasenfeld 1983). The organizational structure is a kind of instrument that can be modified if necessary to improve performance. Early studies on organizations centered on the relation between efficiency and the organizations’ formal structure and they showed that the division of individual tasks into smaller subunits increased the efficiency of the organizations activities (Taylor 1913). Specialization was thus regarded as a way to increase the productivity of the individual workers and contribute to the organizations’ efficiency. In addition to specialization, clear rules, standard procedures and
common routines were instruments regulating the working process guaranteeing that all personnel perform the work in the same way. Thus, the formal structure of organizations is seen as a rational steering instrument with formalization and specialization as some of the key elements.

Specialization includes decisions about how various activities are to be handled within the organization and can be implemented in different ways. A main option is the distinction between an integrated unit and a division of tasks in several organizations or several internal units. This type of differentiation is called horizontal specialization. The higher the degree of horizontal specialization is the narrower are the tasks for the individual officer. The contrast to that is horizontal job enlargement (Mintzberg 1983). An extreme example of the horizontal job enlargement principle corresponds to an integration of tasks meaning that all officers work with all types of cases with the aim to facilitate a holistic treatment of clients. Another type of specialization concerns how much control the individual officer has over his tasks and is by Mintzberg called vertical job specialization or vertical job enlargement. This dissertation is mainly about the first type of specialization, examining the degree of specialization of tasks relevant for the inflow of social assistance inquirers. Thus, the focus is on the formal division of work and not on the professionals’ position within the organization or vis-à-vis the inquirers. Specialization and formalization in their different forms inspire all studies. Aspects like the division of intake tasks into certain units or to certain staff are of relevance, as well as number and type of staff and intake routines.

In two of the four studies the theoretical framework is also extended to include the organizations’ environment, an aspect neglected by rational system theorists. Rational system theorists formulate a general theory applicable for all types of organizations in all times. Nevertheless, research pointed out that some organizational models working well under some conditions do not work under others (Lawrence and Lorsch 1967, Burns and Stalker 1961). To examine conditions that determine organizational structures another perspective is useful. Contingency theory broadens the approach in several respects. A basic assumption of contingency theory is that different organizations are not equally effective and the best organization depends on the nature of the environment to which the organization relates (Scott 1998). Organizations whose internal structure best match the demands of their environment will attain the best performance. Important aspects are in this context the attributes of the technologies used by the organization as well as the environmental demands and contingencies determining patterns of internal differentiation. Representatives of this perspective argue that different environments place different requirements on organizations; environments might cause uncertainty for the organization. Uncertainty affecting the organization of intake can be specified along several dimensions. One dimension is the inquirers’ local environment. Municipalities differ with respect
to size, population structures, labor markets, economic conditions, and composition of local government, all of which are factors of potential relevance for the design of local social service agencies. Another dimension of uncertainty refers to the available technology for working with social assistance recipients. Technologies are generally defined as whether the clients are perceived to be stable and uniform, or unstable and non-uniform, and whether knowledge of the intervention procedure is complete or incomplete (Hasenfeld 1983). Thus, important technologies are methods or models used in the work with social assistance clients. To cope with the uncertainty organizations adapt their internal structure, for example by creating specialized subunits with structural features designed to handle the demands from the environment (Galbraith 1973).

Thus, aspects capturing the environment of the organizations complement the studies about formal organizations. Some examples of such aspects are socio-economic characteristics, methods and models in how to work with social assistance clients, and the social workers’ possibility receiving further education. The choice of a contingency perspective implies that other possibly important aspects are not included, such as aspects relating to informal structures at the social welfare offices or the individuals’ characteristics and behavior. The omission of these perspectives does not mean that they are irrelevant; instead it reflects a necessary restriction. The choice of theoretical perspectives is mainly based on the belief that they may constitute a fruitful approach when studying formal organization.

6. METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The organization of intake is a quite unexplored research field and the studies presented here therefore have an explorative character. The intake has previously mostly been studied indirectly, with respect to those becoming clients, while those not becoming clients have been left outside the picture. Little experience therefore exists regarding how to study these help-seeking people. Different ways of collecting data and thus different data sets are used to examine the organization of intake from various perspectives. In the following a brief description of the data is given. A more detailed description can be found in the articles. After that, advantages and disadvantages of the methodological design with the studies will be discussed.
STUDY 1 AND 2

- Before starting the investigation the design of the study and the questionnaires were tested in a pilot study\textsuperscript{10}.
- The population of both studies consists of social assistance units. The non-random sample includes seven social assistance units in four municipalities. To achieve diversity among units, different types of municipalities were strategically chosen. The choice of the municipalities was influenced by the requirement that the offices should be easy to reach and that they should not be concentrated to the Stockholm area. In both studies incoming social assistance inquirers and new personal visits are analyzed to examine how the seven individual offices handle intake.
- The data collection period covers four weeks in the autumn of 1997, divided into two periods to avoid a bias due to systematic variations in workload during a month, as well as circumstances such as further training of some staff, holidays, or office reconstruction.
- Data was collected by documenting all incoming telephone calls of social assistance inquirers to the social assistance intakes. At the same time all personal visits of new clients at the same offices were documented. The documentation of incoming new inquirers and that of the first personal visit was not about the same person. Both surveys were performed with the help of structured questionnaires\textsuperscript{11}. Furthermore data on the formal organization of the social assistance units, case processing, intake routines, information policies, routines concerning first personal visits, local benefit standards and delegation was collected through personal interviews with all staff. To obtain a picture of the total number of incoming calls, that is also calls not concerning social assistance, we asked intake officers to make a list of all incoming calls irrespective what they were about.
- The non-response rate was rather low. For five personal visits we lack questionnaires because extra staff did not receive information about the study or because of illness among the staff. The internal non-response includes five more questionnaires, some due to language problems or others where the visit did not concern economic problems.
- In Study 1 the inquirers and the social welfare offices are analyzed. Inquirers are distinguished according to background factors and the seven offices according to how often appointments are given to the inquirers and clients receiving the benefit but also according to intake routines and organizational aspects. In Study 2 the offices are distinguished according to the degree of selection, the social workers’ assessment of the inquirers’ needs.

\textsuperscript{10} A description of the pilot study can be found in Appendix A of study 1.

\textsuperscript{11} The questionnaires can be found in Appendix I of the introductionary part.
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need and the information given at the end of the conversation. These aspects are analyzed as indicators of the organization of work with intake and first personal visits.

- The data was analyzed using cross tabulations and logistic regression analysis.

The combination of a pilot study, personal interviews with the whole staff and documentation using structured questionnaires seemed to be an appropriate design to explore the issue of intake organization. But, every design has its strengths and weaknesses.

The strength of this design is that we come rather close to the work performed when handling social assistance inquirers and first personal visits at social welfare offices. The pilot study was important to get a deeper understanding of what happens at the intake and provided an opportunity to test the design of the main investigation. The structured questionnaires tested in the pilot study were modified according to the conditions at the offices participating in the main study. Thus, we can be rather certain that we capture important issues regarding intake. The questionnaires contained questions the officers are supposed to ask anyway. The kind of data we asked for cannot be described as very sensitive and the risk of systematic bias seems rather small. Furthermore, it was always possible for us to contact the staff and ask for supplementary information when it was necessary. Since we received completed questionnaires once a week, the intake staff could easily remember the conversations. In addition, the staff handling personal visits could always go back to their case documentation. Still, one can of course never neglect the risk that simply the fact that we studied a part of the social workers’ activities may influence their work and, especially in this case, may lead to an increased ambition to investigate the inquirers’ situation.

The personal interviews with the individual staff members also focused on hard facts, such work routines and the organization of the unit, and we see little risk for an idealization of the working conditions at the units. An advantage with collecting data on organizational structure through personal interviews is that we obtained information on what the organization actually looks like and not how it is supposed to be. Disagreements between the actual and the formal organization could be found, mainly in aspects such as cooperation between different units (intake and other parts of the social assistance unit) and the possibility of guiding supervision and case discussion. In the analyses variables capturing formal organization are based on actual routines and organizational structures, and thus, in some respects differ from the official descriptions.

The seven offices defined new social assistance inquirers differently. This is an important routine affecting the intake that we intended to study. The definition of new inquires is also methodologically important since it affected the composition of the callers and of the new clients. We tried to
handle this by describing the routines for defining new social assistance inquirers as carefully as possible.

As a consequence of the design we had no control over what questions the officers asked to the inquirers/clients and in what sequence. Since the circumstances of potential clients differ, also conversations vary. Different questions have to be asked to different people. We consequently decided not to specify which questions the officers should ask. All officers had the same questionnaire but should only fill in the answers for those questions that arose naturally during the conversation. Questions not touched upon during the contact were supposed to be marked by a special response alternative ("was not asked") in the questionnaire. That mostly occurred in situations where for example an older person called and the issue of children living at home was not discussed. The share of “was not asked” for the individual questions is presented in Study 1.

Another related aspect is that we had no control over to what extent the officers handling the intake completed all questionnaires. This was easier to control regarding the personal visits, since the intake staff normally registers all appointments and we regularly checked the completed questionnaires with the number of appointments for each officer. Regarding the intake we do not know to what degree the officers neglected to fill in a questionnaire, but there is no reason to suspect a more extensive non-response. On the contrary, most intake officers really appreciated the fact that the study shed light on their work. More problematic were however the questionnaires regarding personal visits in the bigger cities. Here some officers after a while refused to fill in the questionnaires because of a pressed working situation, other forgot it or new staff was not informed. At these offices we decided to extend the investigation period with one to two weeks. Intensive contact with these offices improved the situation noticeably (a table showing the non-response rate can be found in Appendix B to Study 1).

A third consequence of the chosen design is the fact that we had no control over multiple calls from the same inquirers during the investigation period. This is not necessarily a problem since our intention was to document the intake as closely as possible. It can be assumed that at every office some persons call several times because his/hers situation has changed since the last contact or because the person was not satisfied with the contact and tries once more. It is likely that this will occur less frequently at offices where most inquirers got an appointment for a further investigation at the initial contact and it is likely to be more common at offices where a first means test is performed. Like the definition of new social assistance inquirers, it is an expression of a certain way to deal with social assistance inquirers.

Some questions were excluded from the analyses. One was a question about the inquirers’ reason for seeking help. Although we asked the staff to document the reasons for the need as carefully as possible, the reasons documented in the questionnaires are often the intake officer’s interpretations of
the person’s history. We tried to avoid categorizing peoples’ need in the questionnaire by using an open-ended question but the responses provided by the social workers often consisted of categories (for example “lies beneath the guideline standard for social assistance”). In addition it was extremely difficult to work with the responses to this question. They were difficult to categorize and since none of the individual categorizes showed a clear effect on the individuals’ chances of an appointment, we decided to exclude the question from the analysis. Another question excluded dealt with the inquirers’ income. We excluded this question from the further analysis since we judged the validity of the answers as questionable. Information received about income situation during the first telephone contact can both be biased by the help-seeking persons’ desire to convince the social worker of their difficult economic situation and by the fact that the information probably is based on the persons assessment’ and not yet verified.

The variables included in the analyses in these two studies are based exclusively on information collected in the questionnaires and information collected at the offices. Some characteristics of the seven catchment areas are presented but serve as background information to the discussion of the results. Since both studies examine work routines and organizational settings in the seven offices when handling social assistance inquirers, the analysis only contains variables exclusively focusing on internal aspects of the work at these offices.

**STUDY 3 AND 4**

- Both studies are based on data collected in the *Individual and Family Services Project*, a study of the content, organizational setting and structural conditions of social work in Swedish municipalities. As a part of this project, personal interviews with the head of the social assistance units were carried out with help of a structured questionnaire\(^{12}\). The study was conducted in 2001.

- The population consists of medium sized Swedish municipalities (between 13,000 and 65,000 inhabitants). For the study a random sample of 100 municipalities was drawn.

- Questions were asked about the organization in general, about the staff, simplified case processing, intake, labor market measurements, certain projects, cooperation, methods and further education. The questions regarding intake are the result of the experiences from findings in study 1 and 2\(^{13}\).

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\(^{12}\) I carried out interviews in five municipalities.

\(^{13}\) The questionnaire can be found in Appendix II of the introductionary part.
Administrating poverty

- Low non-response rate since all municipalities participated and in case respondents were uncertain about a particular question, it was possible to discuss that directly during the interview or to get the information from a person in the unit more familiar with this task.
- Register data drawn from databases at Statistics Sweden, the National Board for Health and Welfare and the National Labor Market Administration are also used.
- Several methods of analysis are used including cross tabulation, logistic regression analysis, and pooled cross-section time-series analysis.

This design also has strengths and limitations. Restricting study 3 and 4 to medium-sized municipalities was the result of both practical and methodological considerations. Social services in large municipalities are normally provided through sub-divisions, that is city districts. Since the organization of services may vary between districts, and furthermore there is no register data pertaining to the districts, large municipalities were excluded from the survey. The exclusion of also the very small municipalities in turn creates a relatively homogenous population and increases the possibility of catching the pure impact of organizational structures. More than 40 percent of the Swedish population lives in medium-sized municipalities. It can be assumed that specialized organizational designs are relatively common among the larger excluded municipalities, whereas the small excluded municipalities more often work with integrated solutions. On the other hand one has to be aware that the expected variation of social assistance costs within this population will be smaller than if municipalities irrespective of size would have been included, since social assistance costs are positively correlated with the size of municipalities.

A clear advantage of personal interviews is the possibility to clarify problems already during the interview or to collect information from other persons in case the head of the unit could not answer a question. As a result of this, the non-response rate is very low. All municipalities participated in the study and the internal non-response is also minimal. In case information was missing or unclear it was possible to contact the municipality again to clarify the question.

One problem with the way the data was collected might be that the information does not reflect how the work actually is done, but instead how the work ought to be done. It can be assumed that the heads of the units are not always informed about details in the day-to-day activities and, as the experience from Study 1 and 2 shows, the official organization does not always correspond with the actual. However, since the focus here lies on general routines and organizational structure we do not judge disagreements between formal and actual framework to be a major problem.

Another aspect worth discussing is the use of register data, normally regarded as having high quality. This type of data can also contain problems.
When examining local social assistance costs, “single mother with children” is a potential important variable. Yet, Statistics Sweden judged the validity of the variable as problematic. Based on the National Registration (folkbokföring), there is no control over whether these single mothers actually are single or whether they live together with somebody. The same problem applies to the almost equally important variable “single men 18-39 years”.

The variables included in study 3 and 4 are based on information in the questionnaire and on register data. Register data is used to include local socio-economic conditions and to relate the internal organization to its local environment. The question of which variables should be included is here in a more direct way linked to theoretical considerations than in the first two studies (see section 5 about theoretical considerations).

**INTERPRETATION OF THE FOUR STUDIES**

The interpretation of the results from these four studies of intake organization in Sweden can be discussed in a geographical context but also in the context of the time period that the studies refer to.

Geographically the examined intake organizations derive from a broad spectrum of municipalities. The first two studies include metropolitan areas but also a small and a medium sized town. Study 3 and 4 are limited to medium sized municipalities. Thus a broad range of municipalities is covered. Still, despite the strategic selection of municipalities in Study 1 and 2, the non-random sample limits the possibilities for generalizations. The results of Study 3 and 4 are also only possible to generalize to medium-sized municipalities.

In terms of the time period, the surveys cover various periods during Sweden’s economic crisis in the 1990’s. The first two studies refer to 1997, the year when the economic crisis in Sweden reached its culmination with a social assistance recipient rate of 8.5 percent. The third study in contrast deals with the year 2001 when social assistance recipiency had decreased to 6 percent (National Board of Health and Welfare 2002). The fourth study then covers the whole period from 1997 to 2001.

Intake units have now existed in Sweden since the beginnings of the 1970s and have displayed a remarkable increase during the last decades – in 1989/1990 only 27 percent of Swedish municipalities had an intake unit compared to 62 percent in 2001. The dissertation covers only a limited part of this period and it is furthermore a period characterized by a dramatic development in social assistance recipiency. In what way the results of the four studies are affected by this timing is difficult to say.

In the following the four studies shall be presented with focus on the aim of the studies, the data used and results.
7. PRESENTATION AND RESULTS OF THE STUDIES

ON THE THRESHOLD TO BENEFIT - INTAKE OF SOCIAL ASSISTANCE INQUIRERS AT SEVEN SOCIAL WELFARE OFFICES IN SWEDEN\textsuperscript{14}

The general purpose of this study is to examine the very first contact between help-seeking people and the social welfare offices in Sweden. Since this was the first study of its kind, we wanted to describe the people calling to the intake, what proportion of inquirers received an appointment for further assessment and how many of the new clients received social assistance. The more specific purpose was then to explain differences in the share of appointments and the share receiving social assistance by relating the findings to the offices’ work routines and organization, characteristics of the inquirers, and offices’ catchment areas.

Data was collected on initial intake contacts and first personal visits at seven Swedish social welfare offices in four different types of municipalities spread across the country. All 549 incoming telephone calls from inquirers and all 357 visits by new clients during four weeks in the fall 1997 were documented in questionnaires by the social workers in charge. The data consists of two cross-sectional data sets. The first contains information on all individuals making phone calls to inquire about their eligibility for social assistance. The second data set consists of those who had an appointment with a social worker during the same period as the telephone calls were logged. Thus all calculations of chances are estimated and based on rates from these two different data sets. In addition to the questionnaires, we collected information on the formal work organization by interviewing the staff, investigated the social workers’ case processing routines and examined policy documents, applications and other documents.

Among those who phoned, 67 percent received an appointment with a social worker for further assessment. However, the variation between the seven offices was large, with the highest “appointment rate” being 98 percent and the lowest 36 percent. Among those granted an appointment, an average of 76 percent received social assistance. This rate varied between 70 and 96 percent. For inquirers making a phone call to the social welfare offices, the estimated chance of receiving social assistance was on average 51 percent. The estimated chance of receiving social assistance varied considerably between the seven offices, from 35 to 78 percent.

\textsuperscript{14} This study is published in Swedish: Minas and Stenberg (2000). På tröskeln till bidrag – Mottagningen av nya socialbidragsansökningar på sju socialkontor i Sverige. Socialstyrelsen, Cus-skrift 2000:1.
The Social Service Act allows a certain local political discretion for municipalities to decide on means-tested benefits like social assistance. Thus some variation can be expected. However, the differences between the seven offices that we discovered were greater than one would expect from differences in local socio-economic circumstances. A multivariate analysis showed that the inter-office variations persisted even after controlling for a number of characteristics of the inquirers including factors such as age, sex, citizenship, household composition, housing conditions, and economic situation. The inter-office variation in “appointment rate” for first-time callers were much greater than the variation in “recipient rate” among those who turned up for an appointment. Thus, the initial phone call seems at least as important for inquirers’ chances of ultimately receiving social assistance as the interaction during the personal visit. When examining the offices’ work procedures and organization we found that intake by telephone was given different priority in terms of staff size, staff competence and accessibility. Although the findings must be treated with caution, there were indications of lower “appointment rates” at offices where the telephone intake plays a very important role in the initial separation of eligible versus non-eligible potential clients.

SIFTING THE WHEAT FROM THE CHAFF – THE ORGANIZATION OF TELEPHONE INTAKE AND THE SELECTION OF SOCIAL ASSISTANCE INQUIRERS IN SWEDEN\textsuperscript{15}

The aim of the second article is to analyze the link between intake organization and the degree of selection taking place at the intake at seven Swedish social welfare offices. This is done by focusing on those help-seeking people not becoming clients and examining the relationship between intake organization and the social workers’ grounds for selecting among the dissuaded inquirers. An additional purpose is to distinguish different selection strategies.

The data is the one on initial intake contacts collected in the first study (n= 548) and more specifically pertaining to the 177 dissuaded inquirers. In some analyses, the data from the other 371 help-seeking persons who became clients has also been used for comparison.

The average share of dissuaded inquirers, i.e. help-seeking persons who did not get a personal appointment and where the case was not processed in any other way, was 33 percent. However, this share varied between the offices, from two to more than 60 percent and the offices could be divided in three

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\textsuperscript{15} An earlier version of this study is published in Swedish: Minas R (2001). Att skilja “agnarna från vetet”, in Socialvetenskaplig tidskrift 8 (3) 201-219.
\end{flushleft}
groups according to the degree of selection at their intake. In the first group, called highly discriminating offices, more inquirers are dissuaded than in the other offices. At these offices the intake had a high priority and was allocated considerable resources. The inquirer had to go through a rather detailed means test during this initial contact. In a second group, the non-discriminating offices, the intake worked more as a switchboard, almost all inquirers getting an appointment. Finally, in the third group, called fairly discriminating, inquirers were dissuaded, but not to the same extent as in the first group.

Contrary to expectations, some dissuaded inquirers had been judged by the social worker as entitled to social assistance. Only in 57 percent of the dissuaded cases did the social worker classify the inquirer as probably not entitled, whereas 43 percent either were regarded as probably entitled or else the social worker could not judge the applicant’s needs. The reasons given by the social workers for their assessment of the last group was very similar to those given for inquirers who did get an appointment and became clients, namely: ‘too low income’. In a next step, the differences in how the telephone call ended were studied, that is the recommendations, advice or help given to the inquirer. Here four different groups emerged. Some inquirers were just dissuaded, others were referred to different organizations, a third group could not get help just now but could come back later and the fourth was advised to apply for social assistance directly. Although, these four groups were of similar size in the population as a whole, their members were not equally distributed across the offices. Instead different “office profiles” emerged. A more detailed description of these four groups revealed the connection between inquirer selection and local work procedures, and some selection mechanisms could be classified with the help of organizational theory. These included factors related to difficulties to apply because of organizationally built barriers, referrals to other organizations, the staff’s lack of competence and the message to return with more information. Selection at the social office telephone services is a balancing act, neither overestimating nor underestimating the inquirers’ needs. Characteristic of the highly selective offices seemed to be that they used several selection mechanisms simultaneously. The results also point to the clear risk of dissuading potentially eligible inquirers at the initial contact.

**INTAKE STRATEGIES: ORGANIZING THE INTAKE OF NEW SOCIAL ASSISTANCE INQUIRERS**

The purpose of the third paper is to analyze the choice of intake organization in a sample of social welfare offices. Factors of potential importance for the establishment of the intake such as socio-economic, professional and institutional factors are analyzed by combining interview data with register data.
The study is based on data collected in the Individual and Family Services Project, a study of the content, organizational setting and structural conditions of social work in Swedish municipalities. Personal interviews were carried out with the head of the social assistance units in 100 Swedish municipalities in the fall of 2001. These 100 municipalities are a random sample of 145 medium sized Swedish municipalities that is municipalities with between 13,000 and 65,000 inhabitants. The data is combined with register data on socio-economic factors from the National Board of Health and Welfare and the National Labor Market Administration.

The analyses are done according to three different types of intake organization; organizations with a special intake unit, organizations with an intake function, and organizations with an integrated intake type. A particular intake unit and an integration of intake in the activities of the whole social assistance unit are two contrasting forms of organizational specialization. A third intermediate solution is to assign an individual officer within the social assistance unit with the task of handling incoming inquirers as a part of the officer's work. Special intake units are distinct from the other intake types in that they give the first contact between citizens and the social assistance unit a higher priority visible in that more competent staff handle incoming inquiries.

In the second part of the paper factors affecting the organization of intake into intake units are examined. The results of the analysis show that mainly factors related to the structure of the whole social assistance unit co-varies with specialized intake organization but that factors related to the professional social work done in social assistance units also are of some importance. There are rather strong associations between cooperation with external partners and internal organizational aspects on one hand and the existence of intake units on the other. Another result is that cooperation with partners focusing on the labor market seems to be important for the existence of intake units.

Intake units seem to be a common strategy in larger municipalities where the social assistance unit regularly cooperates with agencies related to the labor market, where the number of staff is rather high in relation to the number of inhabitants and the work within the office is partially specialized. Using the terminology of contingency theory, larger municipalities can be assumed to experience greater uncertainty with regard to the inflow of potential social assistance clients than smaller ones because of differences in demographic and socioeconomic structure. Creating subunits – like intake units – and establishing institutionalized cooperation is a way to adapt to uncertain environments. Highly qualified personnel at intake units can be characterized as a strategy to limit uncertainty by increasing the ability to handle uncertainty.
SOCIAL ASSISTANCE COSTS IN SWEDEN, A MATTER OF ORGANIZATION?

The purpose of the fourth study is to examine the link between organizational factors and local social assistance expenditures in Sweden. Factors related to the organization of the social assistance unit and in particular to the intake of social assistance inquirers and its potential implication for local social assistance costs are emphasized.

The study is based on the same data as study 3, that is interview data from 100 medium sized Swedish municipalities. These data are also here combined with register data on local socio-economic factors and social assistance expenditures from the National Board of Health and Welfare and the National Labor Market Administration. Since the survey data provides information on the number of years various forms of social assistance organizations and intake designs had existed the social assistance costs in the years 1997 to 2001 are analyzed in this study.

The analyses showed that certain combinations of specialization show a negative association with social assistance expenditures. The impact of special intake units by itself co-varies not significantly with lower social assistance costs but in combination with other types of internal specialization and taking account for the number of social assistance officers and socio-economic factors a significant negative association appears. Analyses taking account of the changing economic situation in Sweden, dividing the sample in “economic hard” years (1997 and 1998) and “economic better” years (1999-2001) show also for a cost reducing effect of both these types of specialization irrespective of the economic circumstances.

8. CONCLUDING DISCUSSION

The aim of this dissertation is to study the causes and consequences of the formal structure of intake of potential social assistance clients at Swedish social welfare offices. The focus has been on the formal organization but also on routines related to the initial contact. The different aspects highlighted are related to how social welfare offices handle help-seeking inquirers who contacted the intake by telephone and the way the offices handle the first personal visits of new clients. Not all inquirers however obtain the possibility of meeting a social welfare officer personally. At many social welfare offices intake functions as a selection instrument categorizing inquirers according to their eligibility for social assistance, a process that results in some inquirers not becoming clients. The manner in which inquirers are dissuaded can however also be related to intake routines and administrative settings. Other themes examined were the impact of environmental factors for
the establishment of certain intake organizations and the impact of intake and other organizational factors on local social assistance expenditures. I will discuss and summarize the main results with regard to the issue of access to benefit and specialization of work.

ACCESS TO BENEFIT

For people with insufficient income who are dependent on the help of society, social assistance is of crucial importance and it is essential that the social assistance units distributing the benefit are accessible. The accessibility of services and benefits is of course generally important but in the case of the last resort it can be assumed to be even more essential. The way the individuals get in contact with the social assistance units is however to a great extent determined by the municipal offices’ internal work organization.

The share of inquirers who contacted the intake by telephone and obtained an appointment for further investigation varied enormously between the offices investigated in study 1 and so did, to a somewhat lesser extent, the share of clients who were granted social assistance at the personal visit. By comparing the offices’ organization and routines with respect to the share of potential clients getting an appointment, interesting differences could be observed which, to a large extent, can be assumed to explain the variation. The priority given to intakes by the social welfare offices varies. In some municipalities well-established intakes with highly qualified personnel can be found, while in other municipalities the intake functions like a switchboard with nearly all help-seekers getting an appointment. The routine of carrying out preliminary means tests during the initial contact is also likely to affect potential clients’ likelihood of meeting a social worker personally. Furthermore, it is possible to distinguish patterns or strategies of intake organization and routines regarding those who were dissuaded. Strategies distinguished were referrals to a variety of different organizations, creating organizational barriers, demanding more information, and the staff’s lack of competence.

What kinds of intake organization thus exist in Swedish social welfare offices? Intake types that can be distinguished are special intake units, an integration of intake in the activities of the whole social assistance unit and to assign an individual officer within the social assistance unit with the task of handling incoming inquirers as a part of the officer’s work. Special intake units are distinct from the other intake types in that they give the first contact between citizens and the social assistance unit a higher priority, visible through more competent staff handling incoming inquiries. Intake units can here be seen as an expression of an explicit priority with respect to the inflow of new clients. These are a common strategy in larger municipalities where the social assistance unit regularly cooperates with local labor market
units or employment office (but without cooperation with local insurance office), where the proportion of staff is rather high in relation to the number inhabitants and the work within the office is partially specialized.

The results confirmed that the Swedish municipalities have great autonomy in designing the social services. Additionally, it is obvious that offices within the same municipality may choose different organizational solutions. Located in the same municipality, offices not only differ with regard to their organizational framework but also used different strategies in dissuading inquirers. Furthermore, the studies show a large variation in access to social assistance among the investigated social welfare offices and point also to a risk that work settings and routines around the initial contact can determine take up and contribute to non-take up of social assistance. Social assistance is an important part of the Swedish social security system and fills an essential function as a complement to the social insurance programs. Limiting access to this last resort also limits the citizens’ rights to an equal standard of living and thus risks harming essential principles of legal rights.

**SPECIALIZATION**

The focus of this dissertation is on the specialization of intake activities in distinct organizations. Specialization, however, can look rather different and, as it was shown, intake can be organized in quite different ways. In the following discussion I will present some findings of the studies and discuss the possible impact intake units as a prioritized activity performed by more qualified staff may have for the individual inquirer and the municipalities.

**The perspective of the inquirers**

A special intake unit is meant to function as formalized “entry” for inquirers who eventually may receive social assistance. Here, qualified and individualized information is to be given in a dialogue (over telephone) in which inquirers have the opportunity to relate the social assistance scheme’s regulations to their personal situation. Often giving information about other help alternatives and referring inquirers to other organizations is also included among the tasks the intake officer is obliged to carry out. Inquirers can thus receive information about possible solutions of their problems rather quickly without having to wait for a personal visit. Different kinds of information, information concerning the social assistance system, the inquirer’s eligibility as well as also other alternatives for help, are of course important for the inquirer’s decision regarding how to continue in the help-seeking process.

An important advantage for the inquirers when contacting a special intake unit is the greater likelihood of equal assessment and treatment compared to organizations where intake is just one activity among others.
Routines such as guiding supervision and case-discussions are intended to guarantee similar handling of inquirers.

Thus, intake organized in special intake units offer inquirers service in form of information on other help alternatives and provides a preliminary investigation of the inquirer's eligibility. On the other hand, special intake units also provide greater opportunity for dissuading inquirers at an earlier stage of the contact, a stage out of sight of legal control mechanisms. This is possible since a frequent task at this initial contact is the performance of a means test and to inform about alternative support possibilities. Expressed differently, the citizens’ right to apply runs the risk of being subordinated to the task of selecting eligible from non-eligible inquirers.

In sum, it seems as if special intake units provide inquirers a larger variety of possibilities for solving economic problems than other intake organizations, through means such as information, referrals and means testing before the inquirer actually has handed in an application. The advantages are clear in obtaining a quick “first help” performed by professionals and avoiding social assistance receipt in cases where other solutions exist. Disadvantages may lie in the risk that it becomes difficult to pass this entry point and needy people likely to be eligible to social assistance are forced to develop other strategies when failing to receive entry to social assistance scheme.

The perspective of the municipalities

Specialization of certain activities within an organization also has an impact on other parts of municipal work. In the case of special intake units, it mainly affects that part of the social assistance unit processing clients but may indirectly also affect other parts.

Organizing activities in special units, is for example related to the organizations’ efficiency, that means the organizations’ capacity to economize with its resources. Here intake units play a key role. Like other bureaucratic organizations the social assistance units are specialized to limited areas and focus only on certain aspects of the citizen’s life. This specialization makes it necessary to draw boundaries, both within the organization and towards other organizations but also towards the inquirers. A lot of this delimitating work takes place at intake units and, it can be assumed, in a more systematic way than in alternative intake settings. The task to inform about other help alternatives can be seen in the light of protecting the area of responsibility of the social assistance units. Sorting and categorizing of inquirers are key tasks of the intakes supposed to result in an inflow of new clients limited to those likely to be eligible for the benefit. Other inquirers may be referred to other units within the social services or to other organizations.

Another affect of specialization on the organizations’ efficiency is the evidence of a cost reducing effect of some types of specialization in study 4 on local social assistance expenditures. The focus of the study is on factors
related to the organization of the social assistance unit and in particular on the intake of new clients and its potential implication for local social assistance costs. In fact, the results show a cost reducing effect of special intake units when analyzed together with additional specialization and taking account for staff resources and socio-economic factors, both in harder times as well as in better times. The results thus show cost reducing effects of certain combinations of organizational specialization irrespective of the changing economic circumstances in Sweden under the 1990’s.

This should not be understood such that specialization in general reduces expenditures; instead, cost-reducing effects of organizational design - are a matter of the type of specialization.

An additional aspect of intake specialization is that it is a way to observe and inform about the local environment. Special intake units are mostly to be found in larger municipalities, characterized by a high concentration of social problems. Like a thermostat reflects changes in the temperature, one can say that the intake reflects the degree and content of actual social and economic problems of the inhabitants in the local environment. Through the existence of special intake units the reports on inquirers’ economic and social problems are gathered in one place and it is one channel through which the social welfare offices obtain systematic information about the local milieu.

**FUTURE RESEARCH**

The results presented in the dissertation indicate for some new issues of interest for future studies. Seen from the perspective of the individuals and the municipalities it would be essential to know how those dissuaded at the first contact manage to support themselves and if various dissuasion strategies result in different support strategies on the part of the individuals. What happens to those being referred to other organizations? Did they receive help there, were they forced to return again or did they end up in a kind of “roundabout” between different organizations? To legitimate the sorting taking place at the intake it seems to be essential that people not only are sent away, but also get the help they really need.

In the same way, it would be vital to relate organizational work settings characterized by specialization to outcome measures describing the recipients’ chances of becoming self-supporting. Efficiency in terms of reduced expenditures is one important measure but outcome measures in terms of the recipients’ possibilities of becoming independent of social assistance is another one. Here little is known about the impact of organizational setting for patterns of clients’ benefit dependency.

A third issue where additional research is necessary is the importance of formalizing access to benefits in a comparative perspective. In several European countries a modernization of the social assistance scheme is in pro-
gress, or has already been implemented, resulting in several benefits being administered by one authority. Thus, administrating access is an issue of even greater importance in the future.

A last issue of interest for further research is the impact of organizational settings in other areas. Intake can be seen as just one example and other situations are imaginable where individuals get in contact with public agencies.
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Governments Bill 1918:135 Kungliga Majestäts nådiga proposition till riksdagen med förslag till lag om fattigvården m.m. given Stockholms slott den 8 februari 1918.


Government Bill 2000/01:80. Ny socialtjänstlag m.m.


Swedish Government Offices, Information Department, the Swedish Parliament. www.riksdagen.se


APPENDIX I

QUESTIONNAIRES FOR STUDY 1 AND 2

Klientformulär för telefonmottagning
Formuläret används endast vid samtal som handlar om ekonomiskt bistånd och där personen just nu inte är aktuell på socialkontoret
Socialkontor: ________________________________
Protokollförare: ____________________________
Sektion: ___________________ Datum: _____

1) Vem ringer?
Sökanden själv
Annan

Frågor om sökanden
2) Sökandens kön
Kvinna
Man

3) Sökandens födelseår 19___ eller ålder _____ år
Togs inte upp vid samtalet

4) Sökandens hushållstyp
Ensamstående
Sammanboende
Hemma hos föräldrar
Annan
Togs inte upp vid samtalet

5) Sökanden
har hast bostad (med eget kontrakt eller med kontrakt som sammanboende har)
har andrahands kontrakt
har tillfällig bostad t.ex. inneboende (inte med kontrakt som hyresvärd godkänt)
bor på institution
saknar fast eller tillfällig bostad
Togs inte upp vid samtalet
Appendix 1

6) Antal barn i hushållet
   Permanent hemmavarande barn _____
   Umgångesbarn som regelbundet bor någon tid i månad i hushållet ___
   Togs inte upp vid samtalet

7) Sökandens medborgarskap
   Sverige
   Annat nordiskt land
   Europeiskt land utanför de nordiska länderna
   Utomeuropeiskt land
   Övrigt (t.ex. klienten är statslös)
   Togs inte upp vid samtalet

8) Sökandens kunskaper i svenska?
   Talar förståelig svenska
   Talar dålig eller ingen svenska
   Vet ej, annan ringde

9) Har den sökande någon gång under 1997 fått socialbidrag?
   I den här kommunen ja nej
togs inte upp vid samtalet
   I någon annan kommun ja nej
togs inte upp vid samtalet

Frågor om hushållet
10) Vad uppger sökanden som skäl för hjälpbehovet?
    OBS! Försök återge precis vad sökanden sa

___________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________
Togs inte upp vid samtalet

11) Hushållets försörjningskällor den senaste månaden
    OBS: Flera svarsalternativ möjliga!

Lön
A-Kassa
KAS
Pension
Bostadsbidrag
Sjukpenning
Föräldrapenning
Underhållsstöd/bidragsförskott
Studiemedel
Andra bidrag/ersättning
Eget kapital
Återbetalning av lån
Annat. Vad

Ingenting
Togs inte upp vid samtalet

12) Sammanlagd hushållsinkomst efter skatt den senaste månaden inklusive alla bidrag ______ kronor
Togs inte upp vid samtalet

13) Hur höga är hyres/boendekostnaderna (brutto)?

__________ kronor
Togs inte upp vid samtalet

14) Finns det egna tillgångar i hushållet?
Ja, vilka?
Nej
Togs inte upp vid samtalet

Frågor om handläggarens bedömning
15) Hur bedöms sökanden? Som
Troligen berättigad till socialbidrag
Troligen ej berättigad till socialbidrag
Kan ej bedömas, utredning krävs
Blev ej aktuell

16) Motivering till bedömningen att sökanden troligen är berättigad till socialbidrag
troligen ej är berättigad till socialbidrag

Akut nödsituation (t.ex. inga matpengar, avhysning)
Personen står inte till arbetsmarknadens förfogande
För låga inkomster, klarar ej försörjning
Behov tillgodoses genom egna inkomster
Behov tillgodoses genom egna tillgångar
Behov tillgodoses genom andra bidrag
Socialbidrag utgår inte till det begärda
Annat, vad

17) Handläggarens information till sökanden vid samtalets slut
Sökanden rekommenderas att ansöka om socialbidrag
Sökanden rekommenderas att ansöka men med kompletterande handlingar
Sökanden rekommenderas återkomma om inte hjälpbehovet kan lösas på annat sätt
Sökanden informeras om att hon/han/hushållet troligen inte är berättigad till socialbidrag men får en besöktid om så önskas
Annan. Vad?__________________________________________

18) Bokas sökanden in till besök för biståndsbedömning?
Ja Nej

19) Hänvisas klienten till annan instans
a) för att lösa biståndssituationen?
Ja, till ____________________________________________________
Nej

   b) av andra skäl (t. ex. hälsoproblem, missbruk)
Ja, till ____________________________________________________
Nej

20) Efter samtalet får klienten
en ansökningsblankett hemskickad ja nej
information om socialbidrag hemskickad ja nej
komma till kontoret och fylla i en
ansökningsblankett ja nej
Annan. Vad?____________________________________________
Ingenting

Hur lång tid tog hela samtalet?
0 - 2 minuter
3 - 5 minuter
6 -10 minuter
11-15 minuter
16-20 minuter
21-30 minuter
31 och mer minuter

Klientformulär för nybesök

Socialkontor:_____________________________________________
Sektion:_________________________________________________
Handläggare:______________ Datum:_____________________

Appendix 1
### Frågor om den/de sökande

**sökanden** | **medsökanden**
--- | ---
1) **Kön**
Kvinna
Man

2) **Födelseår**
19___ | 19___

3) **Medborgarskap**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>sökanden</th>
<th>medsökanden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sverige</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annat nordiskt land</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europeiskt land utanför de nordiska länderna</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utomeuropeiskt land</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Övrigt (t.ex. klienten är statslös)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Togs inte upp vid samtalet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4) **Sökandens kunskaper i svenska?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>sökanden</th>
<th>medsökanden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Talar förståelig svenska</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Talar dålig/ ingen svenska</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vet ej, var inte med vid samtalet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**OBS!** Om sökanden/medsökanden talade dålig/ingen svenska:
Anlitades en tolk vid samtalet?  ja  nej

5) **Hushållstyp**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>sökanden</th>
<th>medsökanden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ensamstående</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sammanboende</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hemma hos föräldrar</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

6) **Sökanden**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>sökanden</th>
<th>medsökanden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>har fast bostad (med eget kontrakt eller med kontrakt som sammanboende har)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>har andrahands kontrakt</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>har tillfällig bostad t.ex inneboende (inte med kontrakt som hyresvärd godkänt)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bor på institution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>saknar fast eller tillfällig bostad</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7) **Antal barn i hushållet**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>sökanden</th>
<th>medsökanden</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Permanent hemmavarande barn</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Umgångesbarn som regelbundet bor någon tid i månad i hushållet</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---

---
Appendix 1

8) Har den/de sökande någon gång under 1997 fått socialbidrag
I din kommun? ja nej
togs inte upp vid samtalet
I någon annan kommun? ja nej
togs inte upp vid samtalet

9) Har den/de sökande fått skriftlig information om socialbidrag före besöket?
Ja, på svenska
Ja, på annat språk
Nej
 Vet ej

10) Har den/de sökande fått en ansökningsblankett före besöket?
Ja Nej

Frågor om hushållet
11) Vad uppger klienten som skäl för hjälpbehovet?
OBS! Försök återge precis vad sökanden sa
____________________________________________________________________________
____________________________________________________________________________

12) Hushållets försörjningskällor den senaste månaden
OBS! flera svarsalternativ möjliga!
sökanden medsökanden
Lön
A-Kassa
KAS
Pension
Bostadsbidrag
Sjukpenning
Föräldrapenning
Underhållsstöd/bidragsförskott
Studiemedel
Andra bidrag/ersättningar
Återbetalning av lön
Eget kapital
Annat. Vad? __________________________________________
Ingenting

13) Sammanlagd hushållsinkomst den senaste månaden inklusive alla bidrag ___________ kronor
Appendix 1

14) Hur höga är hyres/boendekostnaderna (brutto)? _____ kronor

15) Finns det egna tillgångar i hushållet?
Ja, vilka?__________________ Nej

Frågor om handläggarens bedömning
16) Kan behovet tillgodoses på annat sätt än genom bistånd?
Ja, genom:
- Egna inkomster
- Försäljning/utnyttjandet av egna tillgångar
- Privata lån
- Fonder/donationer
- Avbetalningsplaner
- Bo kvar hos, respektive flytta hem till föräldrar
- Annat, vad______________________________
Nej

17) Beslut blir att
ansökan beviljas helt
ansökan beviljas delvis, i vilka delar?______________________
ansökan inte beviljas
ansökan beviljas inte, men annan form av bistånd erbjuds. Vad?

18) Motivering till beslutet att
ansökan beviljades ansökan beviljades ej

Akut nödsituation (t.ex. inga matpengar, avhysning)
Personen står inte till arbetsmarknadens förfogande
För låga inkomster, klarar ej försörjning
Behov tillgodoses genom egna inkomster
Behov tillgodoses genom egna tillgångar
Behov tillgodoses genom andra bidrag
Socialbidrag utgår inte till det begärda
Annan. Vad? __________________________

19) Fick den/de sökande socialbidrag mot återbetalning?
Ja  Nej

20) Fick den/de sökande socialbidrag i form av rekvisition för mat, kläder eller dylikt?
Ja  Nej
Appendix 1

21) Redovisa alla krav som ställs för att klienten skall få socialbidrag.
OBS! Gäller både när ansökan beviljades helt, beviljades delvis eller avslås helt!
___________________________________________________________
_______________________________________________________

Frågor om det formella beslutet
22) Vem fattade det formella beslutet om bistånd?
Handläggaren
Gruppledaren/1:a socialsekreterare
Sektionschef/IFO-chef
Nämnd
Annan

23) Hur formulerades beslutet (inklusive motiveringen)?
OBS! Återge det som du skrev i journalen!
___________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________

24) Vid avslag -helt eller delvis. Hur delges klienten beslutet?
Enbart muntligt
Enbart skriftligt
Muntligt och skriftligt
Skickar enbart pengar

25) Om ansökan helt eller delvis avslogs, fick den/de sökande information om möjligheten att överklaga?
Ja, enbart muntlig
Ja, enbart skriftlig
Ja, muntlig och skriftlig
Nej
Vet ej

26) Hänvisas den/de sökande till annan instans
för att lösa biståndssituationen?
Ja, till ________________ Nej
av andra skäl (t.ex. hälsoförmåga, missbruk)
Ja, till ________________ Nej

Hur lång tid tog hela besöket?
1-15 minuter
16-30 minuter
31-45 minuter
46-60 minuter
61 och mer minuter
APPENDIX 2

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR STUDY 3 AND 4

IFO-PROJEKTET Socialbidrag

Datum:............................
Kommun:..........................................................
Intervjuare:.......................................................

A Organisation och Personal
Jag tänkte börja med fråga dig om hur arbetet med ekonomiskt bistånd är organiserat och hur många som arbetar inom området? Välj enligt alternativ 1, 2 eller 3.

ALTERNATIV: 1 Generalister (ingen funktionsuppdelning inom IFO)
Uppskattad andel (omräknat i årsarbetare) av arbetet som socialbidrag handlar om ekonomiskt bistånd
Antal årsarbetare ................

ALTERNATIV 2: Ingen gruppindelning efter funktion, men olika ansvarsområden bland personalen
Antal personer som arbetar med socialbidrag
Antal årsarbetare ................

ALTERNATIV 3: Särskild grupp/särskilda grupper
a) Ekonomienhet/socialbidragsgrupp o dyl ................
b) Mottagningsgrupp ........................
c) SOFT/EGT/Förenklad handläggning ..................

ALTERNATIV 4: Endast i socialförvaltningar med organisatorisk uppdelning efter beställar- utförarmodell
Särskild enhet för myndighetsutövning ..................
Särskild enhet för behandling/insats ..................

16 The original questionnaire consists of more questions than presented here. This part only includes those questions that are used in study 3 and 4.
Appendix 2

Finns det i övrigt personal inom IFO som arbetar med socialbidrag eller med åtgärder som syftar till att göra bidragstagare självförsörjande?

ange avdelning/beteckning (.................) ...............
ange avdelning/beteckning (.................) ...............  

När genomfördes den senaste större förändringen av socialbidragsarbetets organisering?

Ånge år .............  
Vad innebar den?........................................................................................................

OBS! Följande fråga besvaras endast om ni har en särskild ekonomi- eller socialbidragsenhet (enligt fråga 1, alternativ 3 a)

a) Hur stor del av socialbidragsärendena handläggs inom denna enhet (flera alternativ möjliga)?

I praktiken allt
Allt utom nybesök
Allt utom ärenden som är aktuella på andra delar av IFO (missbruk, barn/fam.)
Allt utom bidragen för klienter som deltar i särskilda projekt (arb.sökgr mm)
Allt utom bidragen för ungdomar i ungdomsgarantin
Annat, vad……………………………………………………………

Hur länge har er ekonomi-/ socialbidragsenhet existerat i nuvarande form?

Mindre än två år
2-<5 år
5 år eller mer

Har ni någon typ av förenklad handläggning i form av sk SOFT eller EGT-ärenden?
Ja, inom ramen för en särskild SOFT/EGT-grupp
Ja, dessa ärenden handläggs integrerat av ordinarie handläggare
Nej

Mottagning av nya ärenden

Hur är mottagningen av nya ärenden organiserad?

Vi har en mottagningsgrupp som enhart är koncentrerad på ekon. bistånd
Vi har en mottagningsgrupp som utöver socialbidrag också behandlar annat,
Vi har en mottagningsfunktion som upprätthålls av särskilda handläggare
som en begränsad del av deras arbetsuppgifter
Inom socialbidragsgruppen (el mostv) turas alla handläggare om att ta emot samtal av nya klienter
Hela socialbidragsgruppen tar emot samtal av nya klienter på vissa tider
På annat sätt, ange hur.................................................................

Hur är kompetensen i mottagningsgruppen jämfört med övriga
handläggare av socialbidrag (avser socionomer)?
Mottagningsgruppen innehåller mer av erfarna och kvalificerade handläggare
Mottagningsgruppen innehåller mindre av erfarna och kvalificerade handläggare
Ingen större skillnad

Hur ser fördelningen mellan socionomer (eller motsvarande) och
kanslister (eller motsvarande) ut i mottagningsgruppen?
Antal socionomer...................
Antal kanslister.....................

Handlägger mottagningsgruppen egna ärenden?
Ja, allt ekonomiskt bistånd vid det första ansökningstillfället
Ja viss typ av ekonomiskt bistånd, ange vilket.................................
Ja, också andra typer av ärenden, ange vilka....................................
Nej/Endast undantagsvis

Är personalen där med på:
ärendedragning? Ja Nej Förekommer ej
handledning? Ja Nej Förekommer ej

OM MOTTAGNINGSGRUPP FINNS: Vilka är mottagningsgruppens funktioner?
OM MOTTAGNING SKÖTS AV HANDLÄGGARE: Vilka uppgifter vilar på handläggarna vid mottagningen?
(flera alternativ möjliga)
Att fördela besöksstider
Att hänvisa sökande till/info. om andra former av ek. stöd eller annan hjälp
Att göra en mer ingående första behovsprövning
Att fungera som växel, dvs slussa samtal till berörda enheter utan att ha med
själva handläggningen att göra
Annat, ange vad.................................................................

Hur länge har er mottagning varit organisierad på detta sätt? (till
form och innehåll)
< 2 ÅR
2 - 5 ÅR
> 5 ÅR
Appendix 2

Hur görs definitionen av ”Nytt ärende” eller ”Ej aktuell” (dvs vilka som räknas som nybesök)?
Ansökningar från personer som inte erhållit socialbidrag de senaste ........ mån
Ansökningar från personer ut tidigare handläggarkontakt/för vilka akt ej finns
Annan, ange vad.................................................................

Arbetsmarknadsåtgärder
Finns det i er kommun en kommunal arbetsmarknadsenhet?
Ja Nej

Har ni – i övrigt – inrättat någon särskild arbetsmarknadsavdelning el dyl inom ramen för socialförvaltningen (dvs ej en kommunal arbetsmarknadsenhet utan en egen, intern konstruktion)?
Ja – egen
Ja, i samverkan med annan/andra kommun(er)
Nej

Institutionaliserad Samverkan (det vill säga regelbundet, utöver spontana kontakter i enskilda ärenden)
Förekommer samverkan med arbetsförmedling?
Ja Nej

Förekommer samverkan med arbetsförmedling – rehabilitering (fd AMI)?
Ja Nej

Förekommer samverkan med kommunal arbetsmarknadsenhet?
Ja Nej

Förekommer samverkan med försäkringskassa?
Ja Nej

Förekommer samverkan med missbruksenhet inom den egna förvaltningen?
Ja Nej Ej relevant, arbetar normalt i samma grupp

Förekommer samverkan med barn/ungdom/familjarbetet inom den egna förvaltningen?
Ja Nej Ej relevant, arbetar normalt i samma grupp
Metoder
En metod för socialbidragsarbete som kommit att tillämpas i många kommuner är den så kallade ”Uppsalamodellen”. Används den av er?
Ja, vi tillämpar den fullt ut
Ja, men i modifierad form/endast vissa delar
Nej

Ett annat inslag som förekommer i arbetet med socialbidrag är så kallat motivationsarbete. Tillämpas det hos er?
Ja, efter en särskild teknik/metod (ange vilken).............................................
Ja, men mer i betydelsen att handläggarna allmänt försöker motivera klienterna till självförsörjning
Nej, inte i någon betydande omfattning

Satsar ni i övrigt på någon eller några särskild(a) metod(er) eller teoretisk(a) inriktning(ar) i arbetet med socialbidragen?
Ja
Nej
Om ja, vad (fler än ett alternativ möjligt)?
Nätverksarbete
Lösningsfokuserat arbetssätt
Systemteoretiskt arbetssätt
Anrat,……………………………………………………………………..

Bland åtgärder för att hjälpa socialbidragstagare till självförsörjning märks också ekonomisk rådgivning av olika slag. Förekommer systematiska insatser av sådant slag hos er eller förmedlar ni sådan hjälp?
Ja
Nej

Utbildning
Har ni under de senaste tre åren anordnat eller bekostat någon form av utbildning för personal som arbetar med socialbidrag, utöver deltagande i konferenser eller liknande som varat en dag eller kortare?
Ja
Nej
Om ja, vilken form av utbildning har det rört sig om?

Har ni under de senaste tre åren på något sätt bekostat universitets- eller högskolekurser för personal som arbetar med socialbidrag?
Ja
Nej
Appendix 2

Har den personal som arbetar med socialbidrag regelbunden handledning?
Ja, alla
Ja, alla utom SOFT/EGT handläggare
Ja, fast i flera olika grupper ange vilka, _____________
Nej