

To: Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Bergen

Report of the PhD evaluation committee

on the PhD thesis

“Welfare collaboration in Norway: something old, something new, something borrowed, something to pursue?”, submitted by **Hilde Svrljuga Sætre**

1. Committee

The following committee was appointed by the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Bergen, to evaluate the PhD dissertation submitted by Hilde Svrljuga Sætre:

- **Dr. Micaela Mazzei**, Yunus Centre for Social Business and Health, Glasgow Caledonian University, United Kingdom (*first opponent*)
- **Research Professor Bernard Enjolras**, Institute for Social Research (Institutt for Samfunnsforskning), Norway (*second opponent*)
- **Professor Regine Paul**, University of Bergen (*committee leader*)

On 30 June 2022, the committee received the article-based dissertation and a link to the “Guidelines for evaluation for the PhD degree at the Faculty of Social Sciences, UiB.”¹ The guidelines state that the committee shall evaluate the degree to which the dissertation fulfills “high academic standards” for a PhD, “with regards to the formulation of the research topic, conceptual clarity, formal presentation, ethical considerations, and the use of methods, theories and empirical material”. The guidelines state that the thesis should “hold an academic standard appropriate for publication in the scientific literature of the field”.

The “requirements for article-based theses” specify that the introduction of an article-based thesis (*kappe*) should demonstrate the coherence of the thesis, “demonstrate how the thesis relates to the existing research in the field, indicate its contribution to the field, outline the broader theoretical framework of the study, and provide an in-depth methodological discussion”. In terms of scope, the guidelines specify that an article-based thesis usually consists of three full-length articles. To be considered for evaluation, it is assumed that the PhD candidate is the sole or main author of the articles, with a comprehensive academic responsibility for the majority of the articles included in the thesis.

2. Overview of the dissertation & assessment of the *kappe*

The PhD thesis is structured around three three-journal articles and the *kappe*. Two of the three articles (1 and 2) are under review in international academic journal, while the other (3) is published in a Nordic specific journal. One article (2) is single authored, while the other two

¹ <https://www.uib.no/en/svf/128653/regulations-and-guidelines-evaluation-committees>

(1 and 3) are co-authored and accompanied by a specification of the contribution to the research within the “co-author declaration and confirmation” documentation.

The thesis explores how global ideas are *adopted* and *adapted* by modern welfare states and how their institutional settings (i.e. historical and cultural legacies) may affect these processes. Acknowledging the growing demand for public sector innovation, to which modern welfare states are subjected to, this thesis focuses on new forms of multi-actor intersectoral collaborations as exemplars of global reform strategies (i.e. ideas) to guide public sector innovation, and it questions how these are *adopted* and *adapted* in the specific context of Norway. Operationalising new forms of collaborations through the medium of social enterprise and collaborative public sector innovation, the thesis adopts a threefold analytical approach to investigate the development of social enterprise policy within the Norwegian context; the institutionalisation of social enterprise within the welfare policy field; and the experience of developing and implementing a cross-organisational public sector collaborative innovation. Through an historical institutionalist lens, and a convincing explanation of the findings from three distinct (yet interlinked in the narrative of the *kappe*) research projects, the author seeks to contribute to the understanding of how global ideas are ‘locally’ absorbed and shaped by contextual determinants. Reflecting on the specificity of the Norwegian welfare state regime, and the role of those involved in its implementation, the author provides some original and interesting contributions to longstanding debates in public administration and translation theory.

The *kappe* consists of 125 pages inclusive of references and supporting documentation related to the research underpinning the three articles. It introduces the topic of the thesis, the state of the art, the theoretical frame, research design, findings and conclusive discussion.

The introduction to the *kappe* frames the ‘problem’ coherently. That is: it illustrates how public sector innovation has increasingly become a globally accepted idea on how to solve both enduring and emerging societal challenges, as well as contributing to cost efficiency. It also highlights, without, however, providing evidence of such a statement, the scarcity of empirical evidence as to how the process of ‘translation’ is undertaken in different contexts. By invoking the New Public Management and the New Public Governance paradigms, the author focuses on the innovation in the public sector as collaborative processes among relevant actors. The introduction therefore sets the scene for the focus on context, the organisations and the individual actors, which later we learn constitute the analytical lens/levels through which the author organises the discussion of the findings. The articles are also introduced here as a way to exemplify the operationalisation of the research questions through three levels of analysis (i.e. policy, field and applied levels). However, **an explanation as to the choice of social enterprise policy and organisational levels is missing in this section (and should be added)**, where the focus now rests more on the intuitional trajectories in embracing and transforming global ideas.

Moreover, the wordings presenting the first two articles appear contradictory. In a first instance, the author suggests a reluctance to develop policies dedicated at promoting social enterprise as a new form for collaboration in Norway. However, when describing the second paper, the author states (albeit without referencing) ‘in Norway, there is an expressed policy intention highlighting social enterprise as relevant actors that can stimulate new forms of

collaboration [...]’ (page 8). We recommend the author reconsider and make more consistent their conceptual language throughout (see next point).

Drawing from different strands of the literature, the author then presents the key conceptual groundings of the thesis. Through a promising start, the *kappe* relates public sector innovation to changes in governance paradigms which have resulted in the widespread understanding of the requirement of collaborative approaches to tackle the social challenges the welfare system hopes to address (policy field), as well as an efficient way to reorganise public services (organisational stance). The results of a systematic review on public sector innovation leads the author to acknowledge the relevance of antecedents at various levels comprising (beyond the already mentioned policy and organisational levels) individual and procedural, as well as justifying the use of neo-institutional theories to study public sector innovation.

The initial three sections of the literature review frame the thesis by justifying the theoretical choices of the author, thus understanding global ideas as innovation in the public sector as collaborative processes among relevant actors and investigating this through the case studies of social enterprise and collaborative innovation. Perhaps less convincingly, the following two sections explore the complexities of co-terminology within collaborative innovation, social innovation, and social enterprise. While collaborative innovation, co-creation, co-production and social innovation are used, in some cases interchangeably, to define multi-actor collaborations, the grounding definitions of co-creation and co-production appear too instrumental to the argumentation of the thesis, without acknowledgement of the wealth of literature on the topic. For example, the claim that “compared to co-production, co-creation does not require the engagement of citizens and civil society” (page 21) appear to force the understanding of the two concepts along the lines of who is involved, rather than the process it entails and which also gives meaning to the concepts. Voorberg et al (2015)² cited in the thesis, had defined co-creation as an attempt to define collaboratively a problem, while co-production is more about collaboratively implementing a proposed solution to the problem. In addition, the concepts of co-creation and co-production do not feature in the empirical work at all – so we recommend the author develop a better match of the used concepts with the empirical work, both by narrowing down the conceptual framework in the *kappe*, making conceptual language more consistent throughout, and by operationalizing concepts more explicitly and effectively for empirical work (see comments on individual papers).

The emphasis on the actors involved (particularly citizens) is also slightly misplaced since the involvement of the third sector in public policy and service delivery processes is thought to have increased in recent years (Brandsen and Johnston 2018³, Williams et al. 2015⁴, Osborne and McLaughlin 2004⁵).

² Voorberg, W. H., Bekkers, V. J., & Tummers, L. G. (2015). A systematic review of co-creation and co-production: Embarking on the social innovation journey. *Public management review*, 17(9), 1333-1357.

³ Brandsen T., Johnston K. 2018. “Collaborative Governance and the Third Sector: Something Old, Something New”. In: Ongaro E., Van Thiel S. (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Public Administration and Management in Europe*. Palgrave Macmillan, London

⁴ Williams, B.N., Kang S-C and Johnson, J. 2016. “(Co)-Contamination as the Dark Side of Co-Production: Public value failures in co-production processes” *Public Management Review*, 18(5): 692-717.

⁵ Osborne, S.P. and McLaughlin, K. 2004. “The cross-cutting review of the voluntary sector: where next for local government-voluntary sector relationships?” *Regional Studies* 38(5):573-82

Similarly, when tracing the meaning and development of social enterprise (page 26), a reason as to why social enterprise is chosen is yet to be given. While the discussion exhaustively summarises the literary debates around the concept and its origins, it does not provide a justification as to why this form of market engagement represents a good case in point to study the process of adopting and adapting some global ideas in different contexts. Moreover, a perspective that is missing, and should be added, in this section is that of previous studies exploring the institutional determinants of social enterprise policy and organisational development. Take for example the seminal work of Kerlin, here only briefly cited, or indeed the findings of the International comparative social enterprise models (ICSEM) demonstrating the institutional processes behind social enterprise models across various contexts. The final two sections (2.4 and 2.5) would benefit from a focus on those contributions from the literature review that justify the author's theoretical lens for the study, rather than an excursus on their meanings.

After the study context (chapter 3), the *kappe* presents neo-institutionalism and historical institutionalism as best placed to frame theoretically the thesis. To explain and conceptualise the overarching problem of understanding adoption/adaptation of global ideas, the author concludes that institutional logics and actor-network perspectives shape the processes of idea translations and implementation. This means that in the process of adopting, adapting global ideas, gradual institutional changes are expected, as policymakers, organisations in the welfare field, and public sector organisations attempt to implement them. The proposed theoretical frame commendably reconciles with individual papers theoretical frameworks offering a novel and in-depth approach to processes of ideas/policy translations and implementation, even if there is a lack of discussing alternative approaches in the individual papers (see discussion of individual articles below)

Using an adaptive research design, the author explains the research process of gathering empirical evidence, connecting the case selections (i.e. articles) to the three analytical levels of policy, field and application. The reader learns that there is an overt intention in policy documents to highlight cross-sectoral partnerships with social enterprise as a means tackle wicked problems and innovate sustainably the Norwegian welfare system. While this acknowledgement in the policy field clarifies why social enterprise policy was chosen as exemplar for public sector innovation policy (this must be introduced earlier on in the *kappe*), questions remain as to the meaning of social enterprise policy. Is the reluctance to develop policies dedicated at promoting social enterprise as a new form for collaboration in Norway more focused on legal frames/organisational forms? The author should clarify, in the *kappe* and in the articles (see below), how her research questions relate to the specific Norwegian legal/organizational context and to what extent she explores the meaning of a concept, a specific legal setting, an organizational setting and/or policies. The analytical relationship between these different factors and levels of analysis should be made clearer.

In the operationalisation of the key concepts it appears that underpinning the discussion around social enterprise policy is the propensity by policymakers to attribute different meanings to these hybrid organisations, reflecting the ongoing debates around private welfare provision. The second paper is presented as focusing on the field level, that is the experiences of social enterprise entering the field of welfare provision in Norway. In

researching how these hybrid organisations manage institutional complexities, the article aims to highlight the adaptation practices enacted in entering the welfare provision. Finally, the third article offers reflections as to how in practice (applied level) public sector organisations adopt and adapt to new forms of collaborations by focusing on the experiences in implementing a collaborative innovative project.

The *kappe* ends with the presentation of the findings from the three articles and their discussion. Drawing from the findings of the three articles, the author states that path dependency and the strong institutional framework of Norway appear to dampen the potential of new forms of collaborations as exemplified by social enterprise. Firstly, at policy level, the author argues, there is an intention to absorb social enterprise in a welfare mix, as a way to use market mechanisms to maintain good quality and services at low cost; or indeed also the idea that the existing welfare provision is sufficiently addressing social needs. These two reasons are not mutually exclusive. Secondly, at field level, the highly institutionalised context in which new ideas are incorporated tends to uniform the responses to adapt to the status quo rather than engaging in processes that might lead to institutional change. This is further exemplified by the applied level findings from article 3, which indicate that despite the calls for cross-sectoral and organisational collaborations, tensions arising during the implementation determine a maintenance of the status quo. In conclusion, the author states that contextual determinants affect the pace of change, reflecting path-dependent trajectories shaped by the institutional environment, the organisational potential and ultimately the individuals participating in these processes of collaborative innovation. **As the next section details, there are some issues of clear research focus, case selection, and operationalization of key concepts in the individual articles, some of which require revision.**

Overall, the thesis offers a novel and nuanced understanding of policy translation. In recognising the complexity surrounding the process of ideas adoption and adaptation, the thesis offers a sober account of the tensions originated by implementing new ways of thinking and doing in different contexts. The author points to contextual determinants as factors necessary to account for the potential tensions to be expected in a process of translation/adoption and also recognises the role that individual actors play in enacting these new ideas. In doing so, contrasting the dominant narrative of successful, harmonious collaborative innovation, it reveals the complexity of policy development and implementation, thus the mismatch between policy and practice. Against this background, the thesis offers an insightful and novel contribution to public administration, translation, and organisation theories.

3. Evaluation of the articles

The PhD consists of three articles, one of which (2) is single authored, while the other two (1 and 3) are co-authored with the PhD candidate as the lead author. Two of the three articles (1 and 2) are under review in international academic journal, while the other (3) is published in a Nordic topic specific journal.

The first article investigates the political reasons for the lack of existence of specific policies dedicated to promoting social enterprise in Norway. The second article examines social

enterprises, considered as hybrid organizations, strategic responses to competing institutional demands, while the third article focuses on the collaborative innovation process between two public sector organizations for the establishment of a new program for refugees. All articles are theoretically-informed and provide an empirical analysis in a small-n set-up. Overall, the articles display a strong focus on theory and conceptualisation – similarly to the very extensive *kappe* – but are weaker as to operationalization of concepts, case selection, and empirical analysis (especially 1 and 2). Some of the conclusions seem untenable without some further reflection and discussion. In addition, the dense conceptual language from the *kappe* does not match the empirical work. We detail the article’s contributions and weaknesses below and point to specific revision requests in yellow markup.

Article 1: Policymaking for social enterprise in a social democratic welfare state: Exploring consequences of institutional trajectories and political controversies

This article investigates national policymakers’ conceptions of social enterprises in Norway. Norway is considered an interesting case because of its long-standing history of collaboration between the state and the voluntary sector, its neo-corporatist institutions, and its belonging to the Nordic universal welfare state regime. The study is based on 11 interviews with MP representatives from eight of the nine parties in the Norwegian Parliament 2017-21. The article lays out an institutional theoretical framework, singling out path-dependence explanations, for interpreting policymakers’ positions. Policymakers’ conceptions are reported as answers to the three questions: What are SEs doing? What role can SE play in the Norwegian welfare mix? What policy measures, if any, should be developed for SE?

The main reported finding is that policymakers chose policy inaction (when it comes to providing social enterprise with a recognized institutional form). Two not mutually exclusive possible interpretations are provided: institutional path dependency that explains the lack for action by the dominance of public sector solutions and the no-needs-hypothesis that explains inaction as a result of no perceived need for social enterprise in the context of the welfare state.

The article reports interesting findings, but presents several shortcomings some of which require revision. First, the framing of the article and research question—linking path-dependency influences on policymakers and policymaking towards social enterprises— is not straightforward and difficult to investigate without a theoretical model establishing a link between policy positions and existing institutions. In spite of this ambition being stated in the abstract (“*Purpose:* To analyze how path dependency influences top-level policymakers in a social-democratic welfare state’s understanding of social enterprise (SE), its relation to existing welfare institutions, and their intentions of policymaking towards SE”), the introduction puts forward a broader research question: “This article explores specifically the

reasons given by policymakers at the national level in Norway for their reluctance to develop policies dedicated to promoting SE”.

It is unclear whether the article investigates a theoretical question (how does institutional path-dependency influence policymaking) or an empirical research question (why are policymakers reluctant to develop policies for social enterprises). **A theoretical research question would require a more elaborated theoretical section while the rationales for the empirical are not well sustained.** Additionally, the conclusion (policymakers chose policy inaction) is already present in the (empirical) research question, leading the reader to wonder whether there is any findings to this contribution. An alternative framing could have been to ask why Norway has not a specific legal status for SEs while most European countries have one. Are there historical, political institutional and ideological factors that explain Norwegian exceptionalism? **The author should revise the article’s framing accordingly.**

Second, there is a contradiction between the narrative of section 3, showing that since 2010 there has been several governmental initiatives directed towards SEs, and the conclusion establishing that policymakers opt for inaction. It becomes also clear in the rest of the text that policy inaction is about adopting a specific legal status for social enterprises. Yet, policy directed to social enterprises encompass a broader set of tools and actions than adopting a legal status. **The author should specify why the issue of a legal status is central?**

Third, the theoretical perspective adopted in this article—a broad institutional perspective emphasizing path dependency—is insufficient for the stated purpose of the article without spelling out the mechanisms through which institutions affect policymakers’ positions and decisions. **The author should harness the rich diversity of policymaking theories in order to explain why policymakers chose not to act in this field – or reframe the articles of that is not their intention.** In particular, the author should emphasize how policies and political debates related to social enterprises are related to the broader welfare-mix debate in Norway.

Fourth, in terms of method, the choice of informants exclusively among Members of the Parliament presents serious limitations. Not all policies are subject to parliamentary deliberations and interviews with politicians in charge of the executive as well as bureaucrats would have allowed to confirm or nuance the findings. **Since the author cannot change their empirical design anymore, they should at least reflect upon this limitation.**

Article 2: How hybrid organizations respond to institutional complexity: The case of Norway

The article investigates how social enterprises, considered as hybrid organizations, manage conflicting institutional logics. Hybrids are defined as “organizations that draw on at least two different sectoral paradigms, logics and value systems”. Building on organization theory, two types of hybrids are distinguished: “blended hybrids” (a single entity embodying multiple *in-*

use logics throughout the organizations) and “structural hybrids” (hybrids where different “compartments” of the organization operate according to different logics). The theoretical framework distinguishes, additionally, three institutional logics—two “in-use” logics (commercial logic and social welfare logic) and one “at-play” logic (public sector logic). In-use logics are the institutional logics that the organizations embody while at-play logics are logic present in the environment. This rather complex vocabulary differentiates, thus, internally enacted institutional logics and external institutional environmental pressures. The main question is whether different governance structures adopt different strategies (decoupling, compromise, and selective decoupling) to tackle institutional complexity.

The empirical analysis is based on 5 cases of social enterprises, all operating within the field of migrant and asylum seeker integration, receiving public funding and differentiated according to their legal status. The main finding is that depending on the conflicting demands, SEs mix decoupling and selective coupling when responding to these demands. Compared to the blended hybrids, the structural hybrids experience less internal tension when managing institutional complexity since logic compartmentalization allows the organizations to attend both to their *in-use* logics and *at-play* demands. The article raises theoretically grounded relevant questions. Yet, the empirical operationalization of the theoretical framework is not entirely convincing.

Conceptually, the existence of a plurality of institutional logics within the same organization is not a phenomena reserved to social enterprises, but that is almost ubiquitous in all types of organizations. This being the case, the author needs to invest more effort justifying the value-added of using the concept of hybridity for investigating tensions between institutional logics. The same goes for the analytical focus exclusively on the governance structure of social enterprises and not on other instruments, such as statutes, board, stakeholders, etc., that can contribute to addressing institutional complexity.

In terms of operationalization of the concepts, the legal status of the organization is used as a proxy for the institutional logics that characterize the organization’s institutional environment (market vs. voluntary). Yet, given the sample of organizations constituting the basis of the empirical analysis, this equivalence is not warranted and would need to be better substantiated. Indeed, the sample of organizations considered is composed of two structural hybrids (in both cases two legal entities an association owning an ideal LLC), two ideal LLC and one voluntary organization. Given that ideal LLC are nonprofit organizations (they cannot distribute profits) and given that two of them are owned by a voluntary organization, it is difficult to consider them as operating according to the market or commercial logic (if by market logic one implies market competition and profit motive). If these organizations compete, they are most likely to compete for public funding and the institutional logic of their environment is mainly shaped by the public institutions that purchase their services, not by market forces. Why, for example, has the author not included a private SE to ensure more requisite variety in the sample? Given the composition of the sample, the institutional logics at play within these organizations would have needed to be better substantiated by further

information about their activities, “clients”, owners, statutes, board composition, governance arrangements, and internal policy documents. We suggest the author addresses case selection and its limitations more substantially when revising this article (and the *kappe*).

Article 3: “We don’t feel like we are part of the project”: An analysis of tensions in the development and implementation of a public sector innovation project in Norway

This article investigates the potential challenges facing public sector innovation processes based on interviews with seven key actors involved in developing and implementing a new introduction program for refugees in a municipality in Norway. Theoretically, the article draws on the sociology of translation or Actor Network Theory (Callon, 1986), according to which the diffusion of innovation depends upon the mobilization of support for an idea or practice, and on the concept of the ‘capable translator’— an actor with detailed knowledge of a new idea, of the context from which the idea is exported and of the context in which the idea seeks realization. In innovation processes, these approaches have revealed that innovation processes may take different shapes and trajectories depending on the collaborating actors’ diverging (or converging) perceptions of the problem.

Using Calon’s four ‘moments of translation’—problematization, ‘interessement’, enrolment, and mobilization—, the article analyzes the experiences of the key actors involved in developing and implementing the program, focusing particularly, on tensions related to *why* innovation was realized, *how* such innovation should be operationalized, *for whom* the innovation was targeted and *whose* innovation project the project was initially. The article concludes by recommending the implementation in such collaborative processes of innovation of a communicative space in which to acknowledge and potentially solve emerging challenges and oppositional views among the collaborating actors.

The article presents an interesting case study of collaborative public sector innovation and identifies, mobilizing a framework based on the sociology of translation, key-factors of success and failure. Focusing on Calon’s four ‘moments of translation’ enables a micro-analysis of the crucial interactional moments that can enhance or undermine collaboration. Yet, this micro-focus comes at the cost of overseeing other factors (than interactional) that the literature discusses as widely important to the innovation process and which should at least be noted. E.g., the literature on ‘collaborative governance’, e.g. Ansell & Gash (2007) or Bryson, Crosby & Stone (2006), has proposed different multidimensional models explaining the outcomes of collaborative processes, including factors present in the ‘four moment of translation’ framework but also considering factors such as starting conditions (power and knowledge asymmetries, incentive of conflict and cooperation), institutional design (ground rules, etc.), the collaborative process, and leadership. From such a perspective, one wonders whether, in this case, the elements that are external to the collaborative processes, may have played a decisive role in the outcome of the process. In any case, a revision of the article should include

a discussion of how the theoretical framework used in the research is situated in a wider field of alternative theoretical frameworks.

4. Recommendation

Overall, the thesis offers an insightful and novel contribution to public administration, translation, and organisation theories. It is logically structured and mainly clear in its conceptual, methodological, and empirical arguments. It is built on an extensive theory-heavy *kappe*, two article manuscripts and one published article, and there is a red thread between the articles, thematically and in the use of different empirical case studies. There is a mismatch, however, between the dense conceptual framework in the very long *kappe* and the rather narrow empirical focus, raising the issue of alignment between both parts, but also potential overstatement of some conclusions.

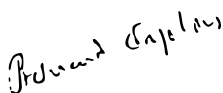
We therefore suggest that Hilde Sætre is given the opportunity to revise the thesis in several regards (see the points highlighted in yellow in our report) to solve issues of conceptual clarity and signposting, case selection and discussion of limitations, operationalization of concepts, and tenability of conclusions, which currently lower the academic quality of the research. We consider these as minor revisions since they do not require a full rewrite of the thesis. We suggest that these revisions can be completed within the equivalent of four weeks of fulltime work, proportionally more if done on a part-time basis.

28 October 2022

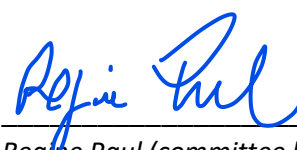
Glasgow, Oslo, and Bergen



Micaela Mazzei (1st opp.)



Bernard Enjolras (2nd opp.)



Regine Paul (committee lead)