

Swedish citizenship: Regulation and change in a Scandinavian perspective

The rules for becoming a citizen are today much debated in most European countries. It is simpler to become a citizen in certain countries than in others. Among the arguments that it should be simple to become a citizen, it is especially noted that those residing permanently in a country should have the opportunity to influence its politics by having the right to vote in national elections. Another common argument for a simple path to citizenship is that citizenship contributes to integration. Those who argue that the rules for becoming a citizen should be more restrictive see citizenship, to a greater extent, as the capstone in an integration process that has already been completed. Advocates of this line of thinking often emphasize that those who want to become citizens should be able to show that they share the values that the political community in a given country is assumed to be based on.

In addition to providing the opportunity to vote in national elections, citizenship also provides security. It provides an unconditional right to reside in the country, and also has symbolic content as an expression of affinity. The affinity aspect is also

emphasized in the latest overhaul of Swedish citizenship legislation. In the amendment that entered into force on April 1 2015, a new legal preamble about citizenship as an expression of affinity was introduced.

In its bill, the Government argued that the possibilities of Swedish citizenship for children whose parents are foreign citizens should be simplified and improved, which also became the Parliament's decision. This opportunity for citizenship for children who were born and are growing up in Sweden but whose parents remain foreign citizens is one example of a longer tradition of generous rules for citizenship in Sweden.

Objective

The Delmi report *Svenskt medborgarskap: reglering och förändring i skandinaviskt perspektiv* (Swedish citizenship: Regulation and change in a Scandinavian perspective) aims at contributing to a comparison of the Scandinavian countries through discussing how the rules for citizenship were formulated and developed over time. The report also attempts to explain some of the similarities and differences that exist between the countries' regulations. The focus of the report is on rules for citizenship from the perspective of immigration and integration policy. This means that matters such as naturalization become important. Issues regarding citizenship for children born in the country to parents with foreign citizenship are important in this context, as are issues of dual or multiple citizenship. The significance of citizenship for

democratic participation is also brought out in the study, which is based on previous research into citizenship.

Theoretical premises

The difference between liberalization and restrictiveness is the starting point of this report. Liberalization means that the rules for citizenship are simplified, for example through improving and simplifying the opportunities to receive citizenship through application, and simplified rules and shorter time periods for naturalization.

The antithesis to this is restrictiveness, which means that the rules are tightened and new requirements are imposed. The difference between liberalization and restrictiveness says something about how open or closed the political community is to new members.

The simpler it is to become a citizen, the more open the political community is; inversely, the harder it is to become a citizen, the more closed the political community is.

Results

The Scandinavian countries are similar to each other in several respects, and it could therefore be

expected that the citizenship rules are also similar. This was also the case from the end of the 1800s to the mid-1900s, but over the last few decades the differences have increased. In Sweden, the rules for naturalization were liberalized during the 1970s. This did not occur in Denmark, and only partially in Norway. Instead naturalization regulations became increasingly controversial in Denmark; in the last ten to fifteen years especially, several requirements have been tightened and new requirements introduced. The development in Denmark is similar to what happened in several other countries in Europe.

In Sweden the previous liberalization of citizenship rules has also continued to a great degree, through for instance recognition of dual or multiple citizenship and increased opportunities to become a citizen through application. The latter means the opportunity for children who were born and grew up in Sweden to become citizens even if their parents are not.

The situation in Denmark has changed partially over the last few years, through such developments as the recent decision that dual or multiple citizenship is to be recognized. Norway in general occupies a middle position between Sweden and Denmark, in some ways more like Sweden up

through the 1980s and more like Denmark over the last ten to fifteen years.

The explanations for these differences between the Scandinavian countries are probably numerous, but historical relations play a certain role, for example the significance of the welfare state in forming ideas of citizenship and state in Sweden. This is noted for example in political lines of argument behind reforms in the area.

Societal participation – for example through work, school, and so on – is often in focus for the idea that foreign-born persons who in many respects are integrated should not be prevented from also becoming citizens. Over the past few decades, differences in the influence of right-wing populist parties in the three Scandinavian countries are also of significance for understanding why the citizenship rules were tightened in Denmark while Swedish developments have been characterized by continued liberalization.

Conclusions and policy relevance

Swedish citizenship regulations have been liberalized over a longer period; this tendency has continued over the past decade while legislation has been made more restrictive in several other countries in Europe. Among the Scandinavian

countries the more restrictive line is especially clear in Denmark, where new rules and more restrictive applications of older rules have proliferated since the end of the 1990s. This trend has partially been broken during the past few years, something displayed in the Danish decision from 2015 to allow dual or multiple citizenship.

When the Danish legislation is amended, Norway will be the only Scandinavian country that does not allow multiple citizenship, despite the fact that it was one of the most important issues when its citizenship legislation was up for discussion at the end of the 1990s and beginning of the 2000s.

This study is relevant for public discussions of the design of citizenship legislation, among other things because it shows how the legislation has been amended over time and thus how the current regulations were created. By setting the rules for Swedish citizenship in a comparative perspective, we can gain a better understanding of the political processes and the considerations that explain the design of its citizenship rules. The relevance also

lies in clarifying the significance that rules for citizenship have from a democratic perspective. For persons residing in another country, being able to become a citizen there is of democratic significance, since citizenship yields more opportunity to influence the political decisions made by the parliament and the government – decisions that everyone, regardless of citizenship, must follow.

Citizenship makes political influence fully possible, as expressed in the right to vote in national elections. Citizenship also provides security, among other things, as a consequence of the fact that citizens have the right to both leave and reenter the country where they are citizens.

Citizenship can also facilitate people's mobility: dual or multiple citizenship, for example, can facilitate circular migration. Additionally, citizenship also has a symbolic content, since it constitutes recognition that someone is fully a part of society.



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