University of
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KINSHIP CARE IN CHILD PROTECTION

Norwegian and Portuguese Professional Social Workers' Expressed Perspectives

Master Thesis on Social Work

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Abstract

This is a qualitative study and the data is collected through qualitative interviews with Norwegian and Portuguese social workers. The aims of the study is to explore the Norwegian and Portuguese social workers' expressed perspectives with relevance to kinship care and to look for coherence between policies, professional perspectives and the current performance of the practice. Also this study aims to illuminate some of the most relevant current laws, policies and social work practices in Norway and in Portugal. Though the study must not be mistaken for a comparison, the Portuguese perspectives, laws, policies and practices allow for a new and different angle of views on the conditions in Norway. This study indicates that the child protection systems and social workers in both countries may learn useful things from each others, despite great differences in for example conditions of social work.

The analytical perspectives used in this study are The Strengths Perspectives, The New Child Perspective, Children's Participation, Social Networks, Social Captial and power. This study shows that despite law requirements about practicing kinship care as the primary placement alternative, the social workers still have power to resist it. Also this study witnesses about the time-consuming and endeavouring process of changing from a traditional paternalistic perspective to strengths- and recourse perspectives in child protection.

Key-words: perspectives, kinship care, family caretaking, foster care, power, social worker, Norway and Portugal.

Foreword

The working process with this thesis has been valuable to me in several ways. Not only because of interesting findings and the new and useful professional knowledge acquired, but also because of the many new relations established between me and colleagues in Norway and in Portugal. Through the work with this study I have also had the pleasure to live and study in Lisbon for one year, which have given Lisbon, Portugal and the Portuguese people a permanent place in my heart.

I believe that writing a master thesis cannot be done by one person without considerable help from others. This thesis is no exception and I will therefore declare that I am deeply grateful to all my helpers and first of all my informants. Without their openhearted information sharing I would not be able to write this master thesis. Although they were all very busy, they all willingly took the time to answer my questions.

Also I want to sincerely thank Maria das Dores Guerreiro at ISCTE, the University of Lisbon. During my year in Lisbon, she was my teacher and my enthusiastic supervisor on writing my final report, which was a starting point for this study.

My husband deserve a special thank for his patience with me in this process. He even accepted to sail our boat to Lisbon and live in it there for a period of time, which can only be described as an adventure.

Finally I want to express my gratefulness about my helpful and patience supervisors in the work with this study, Cecilie Omre and Liv Schjelderup at the University of Stavanger. Their help and contributions have been invaluable to me. I feel very lucky having had the opportunity to get in contact with them.

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1 Introduction

In this study I will describe kinship care and present and compare relevant Norwegian and Portuguese laws and policies. With this as a starting point, I will analyse Norwegian and Portuguese social workers' expressed professional perspectives related to kinship care practice.

In 2009 Winokur, Holtan and Valentine presented their international research report, which concludes that children in kinship care thrive more with their lives, they remain connected to their biological roots, are well nurtured and are less likely to be replaced (Winokur et al., 2009). Farmer and Moyer's study from the UK also supports these findings (Farmer & Moyer, 2009).

The most common placement alternative in Norway is foster care. The Norwegian child welfare policy focuses foster care as the primary placement alternative, for children who cannot live with their biological parents. Children in Norway put for adoption is rare and happens only exceptionally (regjeringen.no, May 2010).

The number of children placed in foster care increases every year, but break-downs in foster families are also seen (Statistisk Sentral Byrå & Synovate MMI, 2010).

In Norway the law requires the child welfare services to search for a foster family within the child's kinship and close network, prior to other placement alternatives (ref. Regulation Q-1072B of 15th July 2004 and Child Welfare Act of 17th July 1992). A considerable growth in use of kinship care has been seen since the regulation of 15 July 2004, mentioned above (ssb.no, February 2011). In Norway the demand for foster families exceeds the number of families applying for foster care duty and the child welfare services campaign for more foster families. Resent research have found that persons related to a specific child in need of a foster family are more likely willing to become foster parents for this child (Berntsen, W., 2010).

Foster care is also a placement alternative in Portugal, but not the most common one. In Portugal a recent law change causes that one cannot become a foster family if being a relative of the child (Diário da República, 1.ª série — N.º 12 — 17 de Janeiro de 2008, Chapter III, Section I, Article 35/1/a-g). Yet, many children in Portugal live with their kin when they

cannot live with their biological parents. Such placements are not defined as foster care, but family caretaking. The Portuguese child policy focuses on de-institutionalisation of children as a major priority. For that purpose they have introduced programmes to streamline the adoption processes in order to ease these processes and make them less time-consuming. It is a policy goal to shorten the period of time between adoptability and adoption (Portuguese Child Policy Social Security, Lisbon 2007).

According to Winokur et al. and Farmer & Moyer, social workers have traditionally been sceptical to place children with their own kin (Winokur et al., 2009 and Farmer & Moyer, 2009). In both Norway and Portugal juridical premises are crucial to child protection practices, but also social workers' assessments play an important role. They consider the children's situation and their families, and they suggest actions in the best interest of the child. Thus, professional social workers' perspectives in relation to kinship care should be interesting to illuminate, as their perspectives say something about which lenses they see through or how they see and understand kinship care and related subjects. The topic of this study is therefore: Kinship care in child protection - Norwegian and Portuguese professional social workers' expressed perspectives

The research questions are:

- What are the current laws, policies and social work practices relevant to kinship care in Norway and in Portugal?
- What are Norwegian and Portuguese professional social workers' expressed perspectives relevant to kinship care?
- Is there coherence between policies, professional perspectives and the performance of the practice?

Relevance of Subject

This study should be seen as an answer to a call for more research on kinship care practice and for international studies on child welfare practice (Winokur et al., 2009 and Farmer & Moyer, 2009).

To my knowledge, this is the first study about kinship care based on experiences from Norway and Portugal. Geographically, both countries are small and European, but one is often described as individualistic and wealthy, the other as family-focused and poor. There are similarities; like the fact that both these states find child protection a challenging task and that they both have measures to improve it. However, there are also interesting differences which may give ideas for improvement of the child protection systems in both countries, like for example their different focus on placement alternatives. This study should therefore be of interest to policy development on child protection in Norway, Portugal and other countries.

In 2010 the national evaluation of the Norwegian child welfare reform of 2004 started. The purpose of the evaluation is to find out whether the reform has reached its goals and served its purpose. The evaluation is to be completed in March 2012. The leader of the Child Welfare Panel of this evaluation, Helen Bjørnøy, announced on December 16, 2010, that she welcomes as many contributors as possible to share relevant knowledge with the panel (regjeringen.no, 2010). This study is also meant to be a contribution to this evaluation.

Thesis Structure

Chapter 2 is about foster care and especially kinship care. Here I describe advantages, disadvantages and present some challenges related to foster care and kinship care. Finally, I give a brief presentation of selected relevant methods in foster care work.

In chapter 3, I present contexts relevant to understand the conditions of social work in Norway and Portugal. This chapter also includes descriptions of the most relevant Norwegian and Portuguese laws, policies and practices regarding kinship care and family caretaking.

In chapter 4, I present a selection of theoretical perspectives relevant to find solutions that are in the best interest of the child when assessing placement alternatives. The selected theories represent the thesis' theoretical framework.

I will present the methodology of this study in chapter 5. In this chapter I also include an overview of the interviewees and key-persons in this study and illuminate my own background and points of views relevant to kinship care.

Chapter 6 contains renderings from Norwegian and Portuguese social workers' expressed professional perspectives relevant to kinship care and my interpretations of their statements.

In chapter 7 I discuss segments of what is presented and interpreted in chapter 6.

The 8th and last chapter in this study is the chapter of closure and conclusions. In this chapter I write about new challenges and give suggestions for further research.

2 Kinship Care – A Kind of Foster Care

Conceptual Clarifications

Expressions and terms related to the subject of foster care do not always have just one meaning. Therefore, I will clarify the terms and expressions most central in this study:

Foster care refers to a group of placement alternatives which provide care and family life for children who cannot live with their parents. There are several kinds of foster care; long term, short term, specialised to handle specific problems etc. The International Foster Care Organisation describes foster care as follows:

> "…a way of providing a family life for children who cannot live with their own parents…. (and)…..Foster care is often used to provide temporary care while parents get help sorting out problems, or to help children or young people through a difficult period in their lives. Often children will return home once the problems that caused them to come into foster care have been resolved and it is clear that their parents are able to look after them safely. Others may stay in long-term foster care, some may be adopted, and others will move on to live independently." (http://www.ifco.info/?q=what_is_foster_care , 9 May 2010)

Foster care is often used as a synonym of *foster family*, but this does not necessarily refer to a nuclear family. A foster family consists of the persons living in the household who care for the foster child (Barne- Ungdoms- og Familiedirektoratet, (2007). In this study, the term *foster parents* is used as a collective term for the foster child's main care givers. For instance, if a child is placed in foster care with his or her grandparents, the grandparents will be referred to as the child's foster parents.

Kinship care, or *kin care,* refers to foster care where the carers are related to the child through kinship. In such cases, it is most common that grandparents and aunts become foster parents, but it is possible for other relatives too (Winokur et al., 2009). Farmers and Moyer from the UK uses the term *Family and Friends Care*, which indicates that the carers are related to the child through kinship or through some kind of friendship established before the placement decision was taken. Examples of such friendship relations are; school teachers, neighbours, the child's friends' parents etc. (Farmers & Moyer, 2009). In Norway *Kinship and Network Care* is the most common term. Even if this term indicates two different kinds of foster care, it is used as one kind of foster care in Norway. *Network care*, or *friends care,* means that someone in the child's network becomes the child's foster family. *Kinship and Network Care* is synonymous with *Family and Friends Care*. In this study I will stick to the term *kinship care.*

The Portuguese child protection practice placements with the child's kin and also with a trusted and appropriate person within the child's network, but they do not define it as foster care or network care. Such placement alternatives may be characterised as *family caretaking* or *network caretaking.* These carers do not have the status or rights as those of foster carers. This will be explained further in chapter three in this study (Law 12/2008, of 17th January). It is worth noting that when this study refers to Portuguese professional social workers' expressed perspectives they are mainly based on their experiences from family caretaking.

Foster care where a relation between the carers and the child does not already exist will here be referred to as *non-related* foster care.

The expression *week-end family* is also used in this study and it refers to an arrangement which allows the foster child and the foster family to have a break from each other on a regular basis, in order to prevent exhaustion and placement break-down.

In this study the term *placement alternative* is used several times. It refers to the fact that children who cannot live with their own parents may be moved from their parental homes by the authorities, to live somewhere else, for instance to live with their grandmother.

In this study *out-of-home care* is used as a collective term for the authorities' different placement alternatives when placing children to live outside their parental homes, short term or long term, such as all types of foster care and institutional care.

Another word constantly in use in this study is *care.* To care for someone could mean that one loves or thinks and feels good about another person, and it does not necessarily mean care as a practical action. Practical care for children could mean all kinds of care for children, like for example day care, but in this study the word care is referred to as practical care round-the-clock, where the child lives.

In this study *Carer* refers to the person who gives the child practical care, physically and mentally, in the everyday life, round-the-clock. Here, carers represent the child's primary source of care for a short or long period of time. Ideologically and with reference to the UN's conventions on the rights of the child, the child's biological parents should be the carers, but for children in out-of-home care, the carer is someone else, such as foster parents.

In all types of social work one will find social workers. They may be differently educated or specialised. In this study the term *social worker* refers to persons who practice social work with child welfare agencies, child welfare services and child protection authorities.

Perspective is a keyword in this thesis. A perspective may be explained as glasses or lenses and view angles which affect what the eyes see. Social workers' perspectives may describe how they look at and understand kinship care and this may explain their actions and practices. During the interviews in this study, the professional social workers presented perspectives relevant to kinship care. Theoretical perspectives may represent an important framework for perceptions of for example what will be the best placement alternative for a certain child. Chapter four in this study presents some theoretical perspectives.

In this study I use the word *key-person*. The key-persons are trusted persons who are specialists in their field. They have submitted important information about Portugal in areas where literature was not available in English. These trusted persons are Luis, Lisa, Maria, Pamela, Paula and Priscilla. They will be further presented in chapter 5 in this study.

Kinship Care

Winokur et al. have reviewed the available research on kinship care, and in 2009 they published their report "Kinship Care for the Safety, Permanency, and Well-being of Children Removed from Home for Maltreatment". Their review indicates that children in kinship care evolve less behavioural problems, less mental problems and have more stabile placements compared to non-related foster care. Yet kinship care is not always the best placement alternative for neither the child nor the family. To assess the individual needs of children and the ability of kin caregivers to provide good care for a certain child, professional judgment from child welfare practitioners should also be used. Winokur et al. suggest that kinship care should not be implemented only to increase the permanency rates and service utilisation of children placed out of home. First of all, they suggest that practitioners should consider whether kinship care would be even more effective with increased levels of caseworker involvement and service delivery. They also emphasise that potential benefits of more financial and therapeutic support must be weighed against the independence that some care givers demand, and that policymakers must consider whether licensing standards should be required for kin caregivers and if additional financial resources should be made available to them.

There may be a component of cost-effectiveness when placing children with relatives, with regards to comparable well-being and permanency outcomes and lower payments and fewer services offered to kin caregivers. This could be of importance to how child welfare agencies view their current approach to kinship care, according to Winokur et al. Non-related foster care should still be a significant placement option, because children in such placements also experience positive outcomes, and appropriate kinship carers are not always available (Winokur et al., 2009).

Farmer and Moyers, in their recent book about fostering effective family and friends placements, emphasise the need of development of good and innovative policy and practice throughout the U.K. However, "such developments are only likely to have an impact if family and friends care is steered and prioritised at the highest levels within each local authority" (Farmer and Moyers, 2008, page 236). Their study shows that placements with kin generally ensure that children thrive, are well nurtured and stay connected to their roots. The good outcomes of children in kin care are sometimes achieved at the expense of the kin carers

themselves, as the kin carers' commitment and willingness make them continue against the odds, for the benefit of the child (Farmer and Moyers, 2008).

Traditionally, social workers have had a sceptical attitude towards the children's kin, since the children have not been well cared for by the parents. The reason for this may have been ideas about the children's relatives; that it would be impossible to find anyone capable of meeting the child's special needs in the family, that the child's relatives would not understand what such a task would demand from them, and that they would have difficulties cooperating with the child welfare authorities (Omre & Schjelderup, 2009).

Like Portugal, Spain has a family based culture. Palacios and Jimenez' study on foster care in Andalusia in Spain found that kinship care makes up about 85 per cent of foster care in Spain. The Spanish law on child protection states that out-of-home placements preferably should be within the child's extended family. 60 per cent of kinship placements had originally been started by the families themselves, with no intervention of the child protection system, but later these placements were formalised as kinship foster care. They also found that placements in kinship care tend to last longer, begin at a younger age and avoid discontinuity of care, but the carers have higher levels of strain, they are older than biological parents, have fewer financial resources, more health concerns, more problems related to parental visits and their informal support networks are smaller. Kinship carers have a lower level of education, and a consequence of this is that the children receive less stimulation in kinship care. The kinship carers get less financial and professional support and less training, and they are less likely to express their needs.

> "The undoubted advantages entailed within kinship fostering can in fact, be turned into disadvantages for carers and children if they do not receive the professional help and support they need and to which they are perfectly entitled." (Palacios and Jimenez, 2009, page 73)

Palacios and Jimenez think that it is too tempting and too cheap to take advantage of the family-based culture and the feelings of family loyalty, without meeting the children's and the carers' needs. They conclude that kinship care can cause a risk situation for the children, instead of being a way of protecting them from risk (Palacios and Jimenez, 2009).

When comparing research findings from different researchers and authors mentioned in this chapter, it is clear that kinship care is a placement alternative which has both benefits and disadvantages. However, many of the disadvantages mentioned may get weakened, or even eliminated, by using evidence-based policies and by not expecting this to be a lower-cost placement alternative. There are several premises to follow to warrant kinship care a successful placement alternative. It is important to have evidence-based methods for election, assessment, education, support and follow-ups, in order to reduce the chance of placing children in risk situations. Utilising these methods social workers will sometimes find that kinship care will not be the appropriate placement alternative to a certain child, hence, other alternatives must be available (Broad & Skinner, 2005, Farmer and Moyers, 2008, Winokur et al., 2009 and Palacios & Jimenez, 2009).

Foster Care Break-Downs and the Importance of Relations

According to IFCO, the International Foster Care Organisation, many countries, including Norway and Portugal, have taken measures to move away from their traditional practice of placing children in care institutions. Foster care is seen as a gentler placement (ifco.info, February 2011). However, foster care may also represent risks, like children losing connection with their biological roots, break-downs of foster care placements and the consequential losses the children may suffer (Broad & Skinner, 2005).

If a child suffers one foster care break-down, the risk for the child to experience the best interest of the child, by finding an appropriate placement the first time, and by preventing break-downs (Barne- Ungdoms og Familiedirektoratet, 2010). For this purpose, methods like Family Group Conference and PRIDE may be applied. These strategies will be described briefly later in this chapter.

Recent Danish research on break-downs of young people's placements in care institutions may also be relevant to the issue of break-downs in foster care. Tine Egelund found that just a few of the young people in the research can point out that valuable relations with a professional adult have been created during the placement period. She says this is about adults who with a strong personal fingerprint have managed to build up a relation to the young person, which is marked by reciprocity and equivalence. However, the general picture is that creations of relations do not take place, even if many professionals acknowledge it as

important. Whatever the reason for that is, Tine Egelund considers this to probably be the most essential reason for placements to break down. (Egelund et al., 2010)

In order to prevent break-downs of young peoples' placements, Egelund et al. suggest that the child welfare authorities pay more attention to the biological parents, as the young person's most important network and safety net. Young people should also be allowed to participate more in the preparations made ahead of a placement, and they should be given correct information and options. What is best for the young person should be considered more important than budget limitations. In young people's processes of development, they are dependent on viable relations to adults. Therefore, it is crucial to create conditions where such relations may be developed (Ibid.).

Social Workers Assessment

Laws and policies leave important assessments and decisions to be made by the social workers. For example, court systems make decisions about removing children from parents against the parents will, but it is the social workers who propose a case to the court systems (Christiansen & Andersen, 2009). Such proposals are based on the social workers' assessments and will often suggest a certain placement alternative too, which also is based on the social workers' assessments (Omre & Schjelderup, 2006).

Øivin Christiansen and Norman Anderssen have analysed how the Norwegian child welfare services reach decisions about out-of-home care. In this article they refer to the moving of children from their parents and placing them out of home, as one of the strongest public interventions in families. According to Christiansen and Anderssen, definitions of child abuse, neglect and antisocial behaviour depend on time and place.

They emphasise that normative views have a strong influence on social workers' assessments, and these normative contributions, whose purpose is to clarify definitions, represent a wide range of interpretations, and make it difficult to distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable care (Christiansen & Anderssen, 2009).

Christiansen and Anderssen also refer to several researchers who claim that child welfare workers lacking professional competence in proportion to their tasks end up relying on their own moral opinions. There are significant normative and moral elements in the child welfare

workers' assessments. The child welfare workers' position when performing their work, representing the authorities face-to-face with the persons affected by their actions, can be categorised as "street-level-bureaucrats". Such positions include conflicting expectations, and at the same time a considerable amount of power. According to Christiansen and Anderssen, more than 50% of the 430 Norwegian municipalities have fewer than 5000 inhabitants. The child welfare services in one of these small municipalities will typically have three child welfare workers, and there are no guidelines for how the challenge of assessments should be solved. This leaves the child welfare workers with a great deal of discretionary freedom (Christiansen & Anderssen, 2009).

Christiansen and Anderssen conclude that the child welfare services' decisions on out-of-home care are normally taken in a demanding context. That is because child welfare workers most often lack the knowledge needed to see a clear direction for action. Typically for many cases ending up in out-of-home care, the parents' characteristics have been more focused than the child's. Christiansen and Anderssen suggest more careful assessments to evaluate children, and to be attentive and reflective about the impact the interaction with the parents has on the decision making process. They think it is necessary that the child welfare services at all levels, and politicians, acknowledge the contradicting positions the child welfare workers' experience, so that they can be given time, support and advice on how to handle the pressure they are exposed to (Christiansen & Anderssen, 2010).

Assessments will probably continue being an important part of child welfare work in all future, but the values the assessments will be based on are most likely to change with time and place. Carefully developed guidelines may warrant the quality of the assessments, but attentiveness and reflection will still be important to make decisions in the best interest of the child. Later in this study we will uncover some social workers' personal opinions and look for what influences the assessments they make.

Methods for Foster Care Work

Methods that may help to ensure the quality of foster care are developed and have been applied in many countries for several years. One of the methods relevant to this study is PRIDE, which is a shortening for Parents, Resources, Information, Development and Education. It is originally an American program, but it may be adapted to the society and country in which it will be applied. A specialised program is developed for kinship care,

because of the peculiar challenges that may occur in such placements. PRIDE has become an important method in Norwegian foster care work, but in Portugal it was unknown. As we will see later in this study, the Portuguese social workers call for methods like this. PRIDE is a program for preparing and investigating families who consider becoming foster families, and it is also a follow-up program. The purpose of PRIDE is to give children a safe childhood, give the foster families the possibility to succeed and to increase their status by level-up their competences. PRIDE is based on the five skills:

- Bring up and give good care
- Support children's development and handle deficiencies in their development
- Support the relationship between children and their families
- Give children possibilities to establish safe and lasting relations
- Ability to cooperate (fosterhjem.no, 2010)

Another method used to ensure the quality of foster care in several ways is **Family Group Conference.** The method was developed in New Zeeland in the early 1980's for the purpose of discovering good actions for the Maori children represented in the child welfare services. The method has achieved good results and is now commonly used in many different countries in the world (Horverak, 2006). Family Group Conference is a concrete way of working to make decisions about children and young people who suffer from a lack of care, or have great behavioural problems. Family Group Conference is also a cooperative partnership which has the intention of balancing the power in child welfare cases, conflicts in families and conflicts between families and the child welfare services (Schjelderup & Omre, 2009).

According to recent research, Family Group Conference has been found to be a success and an appropriate method for involving children and family in the work of foster care placement. The method has been found to be useful in all phases of the work with foster care placements; placing children in foster care, following them up and moving them out. Family Group Conference increases the possibility of placing a child within kin or network. The method's processes have been found to give the participants opportunities and time for maturation and reflection. The child welfare services, children, foster parents and biological parents consider kinship care as successful (Buer, 2010).

3 Context

Knowledge of social structures, social politics and culture is necessary to understand a country's conditions for social work. Therefore, knowledge of the Portuguese and Norwegian conditions for social work is important when comparing the two countries' practice on child welfare and kinship care. Furthermore, this knowledge is also of significance to our perception of the Norwegian and Portuguese social workers' expressed opinions on kinship care, which will be presented later in this study. Thus, for the meaningfulness of this comparison, I will throw some light on these issues and take a look at similarities and differences between Norway and Portugal.

Welfare Models and Societies

Even if it has some well known limitations, Esping-Andersen's "The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism" is constantly being used to categorise different countries' welfare models. These are: 1) The Liberal Model: Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the UK and especially the USA. 2) The Conservative/Corporatist Model: Continental "Western" Europe and especially Germany 3) The Social Democratic Model: Nordic countries and especially Sweden (Esping-Andersen 1990).

According to Esping-Andersen, Norway has a social democratic welfare model and Portugal has a conservative/corporatist model, even if not much developed. The most important criticism levelled against Esping-Andersen is that many countries are difficult to categorise by his typology. Several authors have developed alternative typologies to the existing classifications, or added a separate model for the Southern European countries, such as Ferrara in 1996 and Leibfried in 1992 (Arts and Gelissen, 2006). Another important criticism against Esping-Andersen's original typology is that it pays little attention to the significance of the family, gender and non-paid activities in the welfare states. He answered this criticism by introducing the de-familialization concept. This concept refers to the extent to which welfare states ease the burden of care for families. A typical de-familialized welfare state regime has public work and family policies like childcare and statutory leave arrangements. In a familialistic welfare state regime, care is considered a responsibility of the family or private households (Den Dulk & van Doorne-Huiskes, 2007).

A significant difference between the two countries' welfare systems relevant to this study is that Norway is a typical de-familialized welfare state regime, individualized and with low degree of impact from the church, while Portugal is a typical familialized country with a high degree of impact from the church. As Table 1 below illustrates, child care is seen as a public and a private issue in Norway and there is a high level of support from the state. In Portugal child care is seen as a family issue and the level of support from the state is low.

Figure 1 Contribution to child care in Norway and Portugal.

	State	Workplace	Partner	Wider family	Community/friends	Access to childcare
Norway	High level support. Childcare is a *public* and a private issue	Colleague and some manager support. Many mothers work part time	Ideals of gender equality. Mothers do more domestic work. Fathers do some childcare	Some practical support for parents' leisure time	Not mentioned	Publicly funded. Expensive. Demand exceeds supply
Portugal	Low level support	Public sector 'continuous working day' – i.e., a shorter day but without a break (mothers or fathers of children under 12). Full time norm for all	Traditional gender ideology. Mothers responsible for domestic arena.	Practical everyday *support in addition* to formal and informal childcare	Some exchange of childcare	Some publicly funded.

(Lewis, Brannen and Nilsen, 2009)

The table above illuminates differences and similarities of child care contributions which are important to the understanding of Portugal as a familialized country and Norway as a de-familialized country.

Another important factor in relation to the conditions of social work is the population's situation when it comes to wealth and poverty. Table 2 below shows the numbers of population, unemployment rate and population below poverty line in Norway and Portugal.

Figure 2 Population, Unemployment- and poverty rate in Norway and Portugal

	Population	Unemployment rate	Population below poverty line
Norway	4,858,199 April 2010 (ssb.no, May 2010)	3.2% est. 2009	NA
Portugal	10,707,924 July 2009	9.2% est. 2009	18% in 2006

(indexmundi.com, 2010)

As the table above indicates, the populations' economical situation differs a great deal between Norway and Portugal. The fact that nearly one fifth of the Portuguese population lives below the poverty line tells us, among other things, that parents' ability to fulfil their children's materialistic requirements and what is seen as obvious requirements will differ between Norway and Portugal. The importance of remuneration and cost coverage offered to foster parents, which I will get back to later in this study, is also related to the wealth and poverty issue.

There are similarities and differences in Portugal and Norway also when it comes to what people consider important in life. The statistics delivered by European Social Surveys (Guerreiro Et al., 2009) shows that 86 percents of the Portuguese population consider themselves to belong to a religion, but in Norway only 53 percents do. On a scale from 0 to 10, the Portuguese rank the importance of religion between 6 and 7, while Norwegians only rank it between 3 and 4. However, about the importance of the topic of family, all the twenty-one European countries included in the referred research, rank it on top of the list. In the same research, on the question about how important they consider the family to be in their lives, both Norway and Portugal rank it to almost 10. Families are in change and new types of families evolve as the social evolution continues in both countries, but the families' care responsibilities differ in the two countries (Guerreiro Et al., 2009). This is crucial to how the states build and develop child welfare. Later in this study I will look at how Norway and Portugal have developed child welfare.

The Portuguese families are responsible for a significant part of the care work and this is deeply rooted in the Portuguese traditions and culture. The table below says something about the Portuguese families' openness or closeness.

Figure 3 Karen Wall's axe of integration

The openness or closeness of the family to exterior life; kinship; network; friends; neighbours; paid work	
OPEN FAMILIES No clear boundaries between the inner family and the outside. Many social relations. Sociability and a large amount of social capital	CLOSED FAMILIES Clear boundaries between the inner family and the outside. Few social relations outside the inner family. A small amount of social capital

(Wall, 2005)

On the axe of integration presented in the table above, with *open families* on the one end of the scale and *closed families* on the opposite end, the average of Portuguese families tends to be more closed toward exterior life.

Laws, Policies and Practices

As this chapter will show, Norway and Portugal have different laws and policies on child welfare, but they also have some important decisions in common. In the whole world there are only two countries that have not signed the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child, which are Somalia and the USA. Both Norway and Portugal have implemented the convention in their laws (globalis.no, 2011). Articles 3, 12 and 20 are the most relevant articles to this study. Article 3 is about the best interests of the child:

> "1. In all actions concerning children, whether undertaken by public or private social welfare institutions, courts of law, administrative authorities or legislative bodies, the best interests of the child shall be a primary consideration.
>
> 2. States Parties undertake to ensure the child such protection and care as is necessary for his or her well-being, taking into account the rights and duties of his or her parents, legal guardians, or other individuals legally responsible for him or her, and, to this end, shall take all appropriate legislative and administrative measures.
>
> 3. States Parties shall ensure that the institutions, services and facilities responsible for the care or protection of children shall conform with the

standards established by competent authorities, particularly in the areas of safety, health, in the number and suitability of their staff, as well as competent supervision." (2.ohchr.org, 2010)

Article 12 is about children's right to state his or her opinions and to be heard:

"1. States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.

2. For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law." (2.ohchr.org, 2010)

Article 20 is about children who do not live with their biological parents:

1. A child temporarily or permanently deprived of his or her family environment, or in whose own best interests cannot be allowed to remain in that environment, shall be entitled to special protection and assistance provided by the State.

2. States Parties shall in accordance with their national laws ensure alternative care for such a child.

3. Such care could include, inter alia, foster placement, kafalah of Islamic law, adoption or if necessary placement in suitable institutions for the care of children. When considering solutions, due regard shall be paid to the desirability of continuity in a child's upbringing and to the child's ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic background. (2.ohchr.org, 2010)

The two countries' laws and regulations on out-of-home care are not the same, but they both prefer to place children with kin, when in need of out-of-home care. In the following I will illuminate the laws, policies and practices most relevant to the subject of foster care and kinship care in both countries.

Part 1 - Norway

The Child Welfare Act and Guidelines for Foster Care

The Norwegian Guidelines for Foster Care (Rundskriv Q-1072B/2004) and the Norwegian Child Welfare Act of July 17th 1992 are the most central guidelines to the subject of foster care, and especially kinship care.

The Regulations on Foster Care starts out defining foster home, by referring to the Child Welfare Act, Section 4-22, and first paragraph:

> In this Act, "foster home" means
> (a)   a private home that accepts children for fostering on the basis of a decision of the child welfare service regarding assistance pursuant to section 4-4, or in connection with a care order pursuant to section 4-12 or section 4-8, second and third paragraphs,
> (b)   a private home that is subject to approval pursuant to section 4-7.

Regulations on Foster Care, section 2, points out the actual geographical region of State Child Welfare Authority (Bufetat) to be responsible for recruitment and intermediation of foster families, and also responsible for ensuring the foster families appropriate education and general guidance. Section 3 is related to general requirements of the foster parents.

Section 4 is about election of a foster family:

> "…. The Child Welfare Services (municipal level, my comment) must evaluate if the foster parents have taken the required precautions for providing for the child's specific need, among other factors, regarding the child's distinctive character, the purpose of the placement, expected duration of the placement, the child's need of being together with his or her family and the child's need of other kinds of contact with his or her family…" (My translation)

The Regulations of Foster Care, Section 4 also requires the child welfare services primarily to search for a possible foster home within the child's family or close network. The child's parents must, if possible, be allowed to state their opinion about the choice of foster family. Their opinion must be included in the child welfare services' assessment. Section 6-3, first paragraph states as follows:

> "A child who has reached the age of 7, and younger children who are capable of forming their own opinions, shall receive information and be given an opportunity to state his or her opinion before a decision is being taken in a case affecting him or her. Importance shall be attached to the opinion of the child in accordance with his or her age and maturity." (My translation)

The Regulations on Foster Care include the child's right to state his or her opinion, as quoted above, before the choice of foster family has been made, and also before the child welfare services appoints a supervisor for the child in foster care.

"Children at risk" is an international term constantly in use, among others by UNICEF, which upholds the Convention on the Rights of the Child (un.org, 2010). Surprisingly enough, in Norwegian laws and policies the term "children at risk" is not applied. Instead, the word "concern" (bekymring) is being used, which covers both the children who actually are in danger, those actually at risk, and those about whom the child welfare services are concerned. What the Norwegian social workers' concerns are based on is not clearly defined, as it also includes child welfare workers' assessments (Christiansen & Anderssen, 2009). However, to protect children from danger, The Norwegian Child Welfare Act states that a care order may be made:

- if there are serious deficiencies in the everyday care for the child,
- serious deficiencies in the personal contact and security the child needs, according to age and development,
- if the parents fail to ensure a child with special needs for treatment, training or assistance
- if the child is mistreated or subjected to other serious abuses at home
- if parents are unable to take adequate responsibility for the child, so that it is highly probable that the child's health or development may be seriously harmed

If satisfactory conditions can be made by placing the child in foster care for a short time and with the parents' agreement, a care order cannot be made (regjeringen.no, 2010).

The Regulations on Foster Care also include rules for agreements, the child welfare services' responsibility of follow-ups and control and how to execute inspection and reporting.

Foster families receive remuneration and cost coverage. The maximum remuneration for Bufetat's foster care is set to NOK 437,286 for 2010. The recommended monthly rates (KS-satser) for municipal foster care from 1 July 2010 are NOK 6.370, - (NOK 76.440, - a year). Recommended cost coverage rates vary according to the child's age from NOK 4.478, - to NOK 6.611, - per month (fosterhjemsforeningen.no, 2010). According to the Regulations on Foster Care, kinship carers and non-related foster carers are treated equally economically.

The Norwegian child welfare is organised into two main divisions; the municipality child welfare service and Bufetat.

State Child Welfare Authorities

Bufetat was established in 2004 to take over the county's responsibilities for child welfare, for the purpose of

- ensuring a more professional and better financial management of child welfare
- ensuring equal service in the entire country for children and young people in need
- developing better cooperation and better services to municipalities
- ensuring good quality in all aspects of child welfare
- actively contributing to professional development of services in child welfare
- contributing to better cooperation with related services

The reform is now being evaluated according to the purposes mentioned above. This was announced on 4th May 2010. The final reports from this evaluation will be finished in March 2012. (regjeringen.no, 2010)

In order to draw a picture of the Norwegian child welfare system, I will refer to figure 4 below.

Figure 4: The Norwegian state welfare authorities.

Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion

The Norwegian Directoreate for Children, Youth and Family Affairs (Bufdir)

5 Regions (Bufetat)
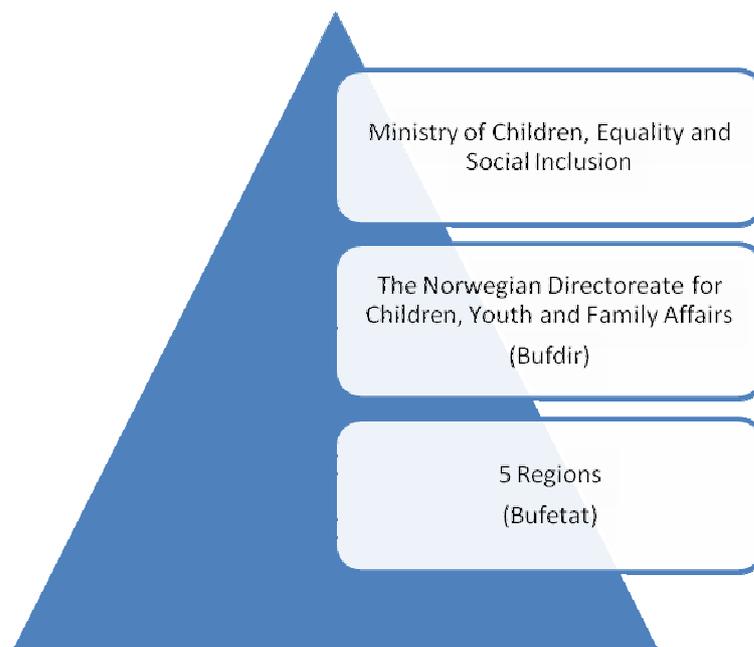
Each region has

- Response and consultation teams

- Assisting programs in the home with state funding
- Foster care services
- Child welfare institutions
- Family counselling offices

  (Barne-, Ungdoms og Familiedirektoratet, 2007)

The figure above has very briefly illustrated Bufetat, which is the state child welfare authority in Norway.

Municipality Child Welfare Authority

The Norwegian municipalities are responsible for performing those functions pursuant to the Child Welfare Act, which are not assigned to a central government body. In each municipality there shall be a child welfare administration lead by a person who is responsible for functions pursuant to the Child Welfare Act. The child welfare services shall perform the day-to-day child welfare work, which includes:
- Providing advice and guidance
- Making administrative decisions in accordance with the Child Welfare Act
- Preparing cases for consideration by the County Social Welfare Boards
- Implementing and following up child welfare measures

  (regjeringen.no, 2010)

County Social Welfare Boards

In Norway there are twelve County Social Welfare Boards. Each board covers one or two counties. These are responsible for decision making with regard to child welfare services. The County Social Welfare Boards comprise a national body which are independent of both the Ministry and the County Governor on matters of social welfare (regjeringen.no, 2010).

The Ombudsman for Children

Norway was the first country to establish an Ombudsman for Children. The Ombudsman has statutory rights to protect children and children's rights. Since 1981 The Ombudsman for Children in Norway has worked continuously to improve national and international legislation affecting children's welfare. The Ombudsman is independent of and neutral to party politics (barneombudet.no, 2010).

Foster Care Practice

The primary out-of-home care alternative in Norway is foster care. There are different types of foster care, like long term, short term, emergency and foster care for children or young people with special needs. Kinship and network care has the status of foster care. The number of children placed in institutions is to be decreased further, and the number of placements in foster care is to be increased further, a change which has been going on for some years already.

In 2009 Bufetat had a national campaign on recruiting new foster families on the basis of the idea that anyone with a good care competence can become a foster family. The campaign focused among other things, on the need for foster families to non-ethnical Norwegian children and young people, and on searching for foster family candidates among the children's kin or close network. There is still a great need for new foster families.

A report on a survey made by Synovate in 2010, for Bufdir, gives interesting indications on where some of the new foster families they need may be found. To the question "If a child in your family or close network needs a foster home, would you consider suggesting yourself to become a foster home for this child?" (my translation) approximately 70% answer "yes" (Wenche Berntsen, 2010).

In 2009 a triennial project on research on foster care started, conducted by Bufdir. Bufetat has had, and will maintain, a strong focus on foster care research, targeting knowledge-based child welfare. PRIDE-education for foster parents will still be an important focus. (Barne-Ungdoms og Familiedirektoratet, 2010)

By the end of 2009, 86% of all children in out-of-home care lived in foster families and 22.8% of them were placed in kinship and network care. Since the Regulations on Foster Care came into force in 2004, the number of children in kinship and network care has increased annually. Of all new foster care placements in 2009, 38.3% were with kinship care (ssb.no, 2010).

The number of unintended placements of children in foster care is unacceptable to the Norwegian child welfare authorities, and this is something they want to combat. Therefore, in 2009, Bufdir has worked out routines for the purpose of hindering unintended placements. In

order to create good and lasting foster care placements, and for the cause of children's participation, Bufetat focuses on implementation of Family Group Conference (Bufetat, Annual Report, 2009).

Part 2 – Portugal

Laws and Policies

To promote and ensure the effective exercise of children's rights, based on prevention and protection, the reform of Children's Rights was implemented towards the end of the nineties. The reform was incorporated in law as the Protection of Children and Young People in Danger, law no. 147/99 of 1st September, and as the Educational Guardianship, law no. 166/99 of 14th September were passed. This consolidated the perspective of community intervention with the recognition of the child's right to be heard and the right of opposition for children and young people (Portuguese Child Policy, Social Security, 2007). The Portuguese policy measure called DOM – Challenges, Opportunities and Changes, includes children and parents in the decision making process (Eurochild, January 2010).

The Portuguese child policy has several measures in the area of social security in order to:

- promote active citizenship and social inclusion,

- improve the birth rate and support families with a large number of children,

- promote the conciliation of work and family life,

- support families in exercising parental functions,

- streamline adoption,

- promote the de-institutionalisation of children,

- improve social responses,

- improve the system of protection of children and young people.

    (Portuguese Child Policy, Social Security, 2007)

The Protection of Children and Young People in Danger Law is

> "…implemented by the competent public or private entities related with infancy or youth by Children's and Young Person's Protection Commissions (CPCJ) and in the last resort, by the Courts. Technical monitoring related with the protection of children and young people in danger and the Courts is the responsibility of the Social Security implemented through Multi-disciplinary Court Counselling Teams (EMAT)." (Portuguese Child Policy Social Security, Lisbon 2007, page 18)

The Portuguese child protection system's levels of intervention can be described as in the figure below.

Figure 5, Subsidiary intervention pathways
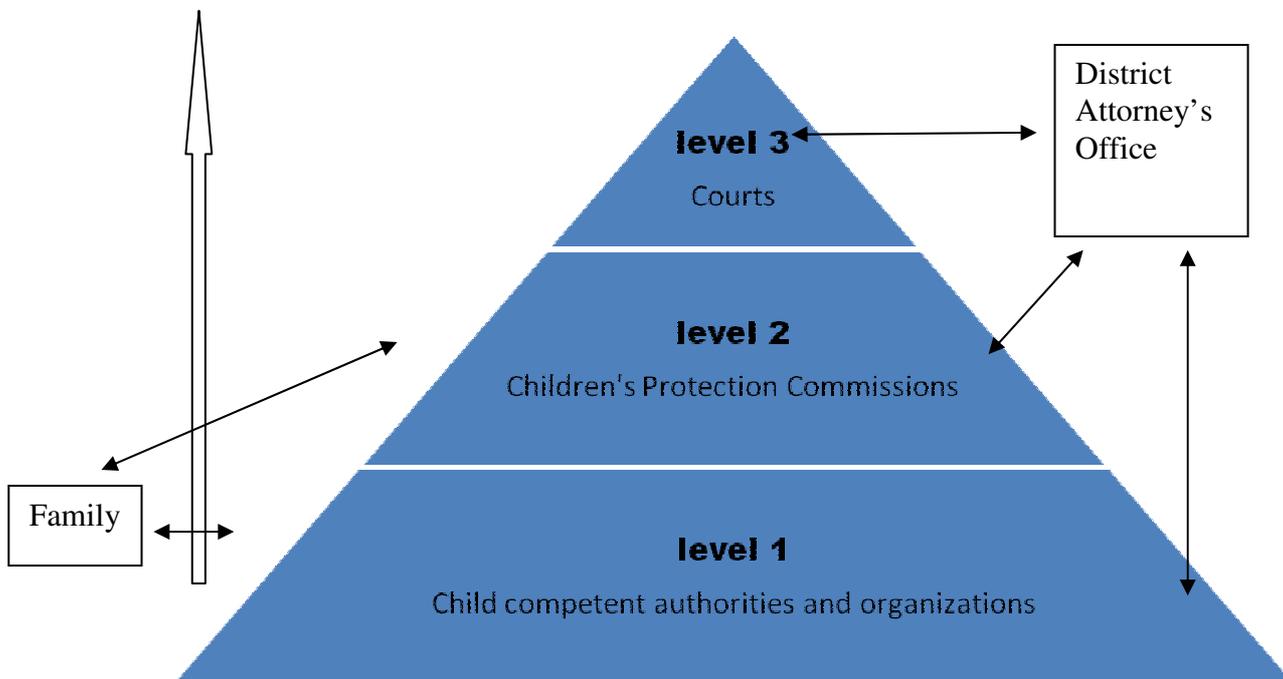
"The basic purposes of the different levels are:

Level 1:   Prevention and child maintenance in the family
Level 2:   Community prevention, action in high risk situations and child maintenance in
             the family
Level 3:   Intervention in high risk situations
             In the absence of children's protection commissions
             When parents do not cooperate
             Adoption

Legal advisers on child protection matters are social security staff. " (DGSS, Manual Nomenclaturas Respostas Sociais, 2006, my translation)

The figure above draws a brief picture of the different levels of intervention in the Portuguese child protection system and it illustrates the communication and cooperation between the child protection authorities, the child's family and the district attorney's office.

The recent laws in relation to the subject of foster care in Portugal are:
1. Decree law 12/2008, of January 17th, for promotion and protection of the rights of children and young people, according to the concepts of law number 147/99, of 1st

September, Law on Protection of Children and Youth in Danger, which defines the legal status of social and community interventions.

2. Decree law 11/2008 is specifically about foster care.

Principles for interventions in situations where children are in danger are listed in the Decree Law 12/2008, of 17th January article 4/a-j and these principles can briefly be mentioned as;

a) The best interest of the child,
b) Respect for privacy and intimacy,
c) Early intervention,
d) Minimum intervention,
e) Proportionality,
f) Parental responsibility,
g) Prevalence of family – to integrate the children in their family or promote adoption,
h) Information requirement,
i) Children's right to be heard and participate
j) Subsidiarity

Children at Risk

The Portuguese department Desenvolvimento Social, (Social Development Department, my translation) consider children to be at risk if they are under 18 years old and if they for example

- "Live in socio-economic need (in poverty or in situations of social exclusion);
- Are abandoned or live alone;
- Are subject to physical or psychological ill-treatment, or are victims of sexual abuse;
- Are neglected;
- Are forced to carry out activities or work that is inadequate to their age, dignity and personal situation, or harmful to their development;
- Are submitted, directly or indirectly, to behaviours that seriously affect their security or emotional balance;
- Adopt behaviours or addictions that seriously affect their health, security or development, without their parents or guardians opposing them in a way that is appropriate to overcoming the danger." (Departamento Desenvolvimento Social, Glossary, ISS, IP, 2010, page 1, my translation)

Law number 12/2008, of 17th January article 35/1/a-g, gives a sequence list of measures for intervention in situations where children are in danger, starting with the smallest intervention.

> "The promotion and protection measures are;
> a) support among parents;
> b) support for another family member;
> c) Confidence in appropriate person;
> d) Support for independent living;
> e) Foster family;
> f) Reception at the institution.
> g) Trust the person selected for adoption or the institution with a view to future adoption."

As listed above, we can see that "support for another family member" is considered a small intervention. To place a child with kin and support the kin carer is seen as the second-smallest intervention. "Confidence in an appropriate person" (my translation) is similar to "network foster care" or (family &-) "friends care", which is ranked the third-smallest intervention. It is noteworthy that the ranking list above excludes "other family members" and "appropriate persons" from getting the status of a foster parent (Key-person 1, Luis, 2010).

Luis explains the application of the two articles above this way:

> "If we think that the danger can be removed by less intervention, the 'prevalence to the family' allows us to think that the preferential measures ought to be the ones that maintain the child with the family, but there are judges not exactly following that order. If we see that we'll not succeed by applying one of the four measures (a-d) it is better to go for an adoption, not a foster family or an institution." (Key-person number 1, Luis, 2010)

In the Decree Law 11/2008 of 17th January the requirements to become a foster family are listed in chapter IV, Section 1, Article 14/1, a-h. Letter e) requires the foster parents not to be candidates to adopt.

The different foster care arrangements that exist, regarding the duration of placement, are described in law number 12/2008, of 17th January article 46-48.

Adoption or Temporary Care Alternatives

De-institutionalisation of children is one of the major priorities in the Portuguese Child Policy. In order to achieve that measure, a major investment is being done in the area of adoption. According to the policy program, strategic guidelines for action are drawn to ensure children their right to live in a family environment, in their family of origin or another alternative (Portuguese Child Policy, Social Security, 2007).

Adoption is still a time-consuming procedure in Portugal and it is important to have temporary placement alternatives. Foster families cannot be composed by persons who are candidates to adopt, which means that foster families cannot adopt their foster child (Decree law 11/2008). When the Portuguese child protection system has decided to go for adoption, the child should not be placed with the child's family, but in residential care with other children in the same situation or in a foster family. Foster care is a temporary placement alternative in Portugal (Key-person 1, Luis, 2010).

Foster Care

In the Portuguese Child Policy, foster families are described as qualified and technically prepared families. They provide children, or youngsters, proper care for their needs, while biological family cannot guarantee that (Portuguese Child Policy, Social Security, 2007).

> "The priority for this response is based on the regulation of the "Foster Care" Legal System which strengthens the need to improve the process of selection and the existence of a major component of initial and continuous training of foster families and the need for a greater investment in the creation of specialised family shelters intended for children with special needs (social, educational and psychological)." (Portuguese Child Policy Social Security, Lisbon 2007, page 20)

As we have already seen, a child's kin or close network cannot become a foster family, but the child's kin are the primary out-of-home care alternative and "appropriate person", someone in the child's close network who is in a good and reciprocal relation with the child, is the second out-of-home care alternative. Such placements are defined as "in the natural environment" and not as foster care. The child's kin or close network relations do not get the status nor the rights of a foster family, such as information, training, remuneration and support as listed in the Decree Law 11/2008, Chapter V, Article 20. It is interesting that the Convention of the Rights of the Child, article 20.1, says that it is children who do not live in their family environment, who are entitled to special protection and assistance provided by the State.

Remuneration and Cost Coverage

In Portugal, the remuneration for foster families for each child in care is € 176.89 or € 353.79 for a child with disabilities or behaviour problems. Allowance to support expenses is € 153.40 for each child.

If a child is taken care of by the child's kin or people in his or her network, they do not receive any remuneration, but if the child needs it, they can receive an allowance of € 153.40 to support expenses for a period of 18 months (Despacho nº 20045/2009, 1 – 2).

Residential Care

Residential care is still an important placement alternative in Portugal. The Portuguese Child Policy describes the residential care system as different types of institutions. There are emergency units, temporary residential care centres, "children's homes" and autonomy-building apartments. "Children's homes" are small institutions with ways of life as close as possible to those of families (Portuguese Child Policy, Social Security, 2007).

The practice of family law in Portugal

Portugal cooperates and compares with Spain on many juridical issues, but not very much when it comes to the specific parts of the family law above. Surprisingly enough, these parts of the family law are seen very peripheral to the faculties of law in Portugal. These laws are also very recent, thus, they are not very well known, not even among the specialists. Portuguese laws relevant to the subject of foster care are primarily studied by people who are not specialised in law, thus the studies may yield some incorrect interpretations. Among jurists, these laws are traditionally seen as connected to the area of sociology and psychology and not to the family law. Luis was the first lawyer to teach these parts of the family law to post graduate students and he was strongly criticised by the students. The students did not agree with him that it belonged to the curriculum (Key-person 1, Luis, 2010).

Child Protection in Different Areas of Portugal

Both context and social workers' practice of out-of-home care placements in Portugal differ from Norway, and also vary within Portugal. In lack of available literature on the situation in Portugal, especially in English, the Portuguese social workers who I interviewed give vital information to the understanding of the practice in Portugal in their descriptions of their work situation.

Lisbon

Lisa, key-person number 2, is a social worker with a commissionaire for child protection in Lisbon.

In 2009 Lisa placed 80 – 90 children away from home, and from January to March 2010 she placed 35 children. She emphasises that this part of Lisbon is a rough area, which in 1998 was a slum area, and then the whole area was erased. New blocks of flats were built rapidly and the people in the area were forced to live in them. In Lisbon there are no available non-related foster families and therefore foster care is not an alternative at present time. Children in Lisbon who are in need of out-of-home care are being placed with kin, someone in their network or in institutions. Social workers are committed to follow up the children in any placement alternative. Because of a serious shortage of available placement alternatives, the social workers do not have the situation of choosing the best alternative for the child, but they have to take the placement alternative that is ready (Key-person 2, Lisa, 2010).

The social workers are sometimes offered to attend seminars and courses, to keep updated and have new professional knowledge, sometimes for free and sometimes not, but to Lisa the problem is that she does not have the time to attend these courses. She is the only full-time employee at her office and she does not have a stand-in, but they do have cooperation meetings every week where they also get up-dated (Key-person 2, Lisa, 2010).

Portugal still has huge institutions "like military camps" and she mentions especially the emergency institutions as "really damaging to children". However, improvements have been made, she says and mentions that the number of big institutions is decreasing and the number of small units, with few children, is growing (Key-person 2, Lisa, 2010).

Madeira

Key-person number 3, Maria, is a social worker and group leader with the child protection at Madeira.

Maria explains that it is much easier to be a social worker at Madeira compared to on the mainland, because it is a small place where everyone knows each other. At Madeira they have 39 foster families (non-related), 90 children in foster families, and they have 12 child care institutions, of which 3 are small and can receive only 12 children, and the rest are big and have 40 – 60 children in each. Unlike Lisbon, they do have available foster families and they do apply for foster care placements when they consider there is a future chance of moving the

child back to his or her parents. Maria does not know how many children who are placed with kin or network, but it is a small number. If a child placed with kinship or network is in need of it, the family in which he or she is placed may receive the same financial cost coverage as non-related foster families (Key-person 3, Maria, 2010).

Social workers at Madeira work in teams consisting of social workers and psychologists, and they follow the law requirements about searching primarily for placement alternatives within the child's kin or network. To get information about the child's kin and network, the social workers pay them a visit and talk to them. If the visits result in finding people who are willing to care for the child, the social workers assess their skills and the abilities required from care givers and then they send information to the court (Key-person 3, Maria, 2010).

The main reason for choosing a placement alternative for a specific child is that it is in the best interest of the child. According to Maria they prefer to place children in institutions when moving the child back to their parents is considered to be very unlikely. The three last children she placed in out-of-home care were put in institutions. The reason for placements is mainly maltreatment and neglect. Poverty and lack of money is not a reason for placements, because it can be solved by financial support. Maria thinks that alcoholism is the biggest problem at Madeira (Key-person 3, Maria, 2010).

To get new professional knowledge and up-dates, the social workers at Madeira attend courses and seminars. Most often they have lecturers coming from the mainland to Madeira, but sometimes the social workers go to Lisbon. Courses and seminars they attend sometimes have lecturers from outside of Portugal as well. Reading professional literature and updated information on the internet is also an important source to new knowledge and up-dates (Key-person 3, Maria, 2010).

Porto

The Porto Team consists of key-person number 4, 5 and 6. They are respectively Pamela, psychologist, Paula, social worker and Priscilla, social worker.

The Porto Team works with child protection in the central part of Porto, managing and supporting the seven other social workers in different areas of the Porto region. Each of them

has the responsibility of follow-ups of approximately fifty children. They work with both foster families and biological families. The Porto Team does not have available statistics on the number of children in other placement alternatives, nor how many per cent which are foster care placements. Foster care is more often practiced in Porto than in the rest of the country, but there are far more children placed in institutions than in foster care. After the law change in 2008 (Diário da República, 2008), the Porto Team changed their practice of using children's kin for foster families. They practice placements within the children's kin as the primary alternative on out-of-home care, foster care as the second alternative and finally, as the absolutely last alternative, is placements in institutions (Key-persons 4, 5 and 6, Porto Team, 2010).

In Porto they now are in a position of waiting for instructions from the central services in Lisbon. Porto is in a special need of available foster families. In the last four months a hundred and forty new children are registered in need of an out-of-home placement and they have a hundred and ninety seven active foster families. As a result of advertisements in the mass media, thirty families signed up as candidates to become foster families, and their total list of such candidates is one hundred. They have no approved new foster families ready to receive a foster child, but they have some existing foster families with "available space" for another child. According to the Porto Team, their problem is that they do not have methods for selection of foster families (Key-persons 4, 5 and 6, Porto Team, 2010).

Because of the Porto Team's unanswered call for standardised methods for selection of foster families, they are in a situation of expectancy in relation to the central services in Lisbon. As they wait for directions from central services, and also for a budget to run a promotion campaign on foster care, the practice differs between the different local agencies in Porto and in Portugal (Key-persons 4, 5 and 6, Porto Team, 2010).

In Porto they have not selected new foster families since before the law change in 2008. Until 2008 they used to select from a group of families which had signed up as foster family candidates and give them an informative session, and then the candidates were interviewed by a social worker and a psychologist. The Porto Team also visited the candidates at their homes and met all the family members. However, because they assessed the candidates to be in lack of the required skills or not to have the right profile, the material quality of the house to be

inadequate or the economical resources to be insufficient, they ended up approving very few families as foster families (Key-persons 4, 5 and 6, Porto Team, 2010).

Pamela referred to what her previous American colleague in Lisbon said about the Portuguese society:

> "You don't know how lucky you are to live here in Lisbon, because you still have a tradition of friendship and family. - And I would like to believe him."
> (Key-person 4, Pamela, 2010)

Pamela, Paula and Priscilla have all been working in the Portuguese child welfare system for many years. All of them stated that they recently had their very first experiences of a cautious optimism about the Portuguese child welfare system developing in the right direction. To concretise this, they listed that they have a new procedure manual, that they now have got specialised workers and the fact that they now work in teams and not singularly anymore. "It's a new start!" They also expressed a belief in the state's ideological willingness to focus on child welfare and foster care, but that the practice is difficult because of economical problems (Key-persons 4, 5 and 6, Porto Team, 2010).

4 Theoretical Perspectives

Kinship care and all out-of-home-placements must be based on what is considered to be in the child's best interest. In order to find the very best alternative available for each child in need of out-of-home care, the theoretical perspectives I refer to below may be useful.

The Strengths Perspective

To see the clients through the strengths perspective implies recognizing that all human beings have strengths and unique valuable knowledge, knowledge that the social workers probably do not possess. It is impossible to have the strengths perspective and at the same time have a paternalistic perspective implying that the professional social workers' knowledge is more valuable than the clients' own knowledge regarding finding good solutions for the clients. To take a strength perspective in social work is about moving the eyes from focusing on problems and obstacles towards focusing on possibilities. Doing so, one will see "blooms of hope and transformation" among the troubles and difficulties. Dennis Saleebey's formula is to mobilise the talents, knowledge, capacities and resources of the clients in the service of

achieving their personal goals. This way the clients will have a better quality of life and on their own terms (Saleebey, 2005).

The recipe above is simple, but the work is hard. Like other helping professions, social work has had a disease- and disorder-based thinking. Suppositions that clients become clients because they have deficits, problems and pathologies and that they are essentially weak are the basis of many of the theories and practices in social work. Focusing on the client's problems creates pessimistic expectations of the client, of his or her environment and his or her capacity to cope with that environment. Pessimistic expectations repeated over time may change how the clients see themselves and how others see them (Ibid.).

Saleebey emphasises the value of hope and he states that the rousing of hope is the central dynamic of the strengths perspective. The revolutionary possibilities of hope, realised through social relationships in family, neighbourhood, community, culture and country is what the strengths perspective is about.

The best way to serve clients, in order to achieve changes, is to collaborate with them, and it is important to meet clients with the assumptions that they have knowledge, that they have learned from experiences and that they have hopes, interests and skills. It is well documented that people going through adversity in life do not inevitably develop pathology, but they rather demonstrate resilience. Clients want to know that the social workers actually care about them, respect them and believe that they are capable of building something of value with the resources within and around them, but most of all, clients want to know that the social workers believe they can defeat adversity and move towards transformation and growth (Ibid.).

Social workers working with child protection should adapt a positive and sympathetic attitude when approaching a family and strive to reveal the family's strengths and capabilities. Their perspectives should balance risks against strengths. The social worker must cooperate with the family and should work to protect the child and his or her family.

Solution orientation in child protection implies recognising the children's and their families' superior knowledge about their own situation, recognising their capability of formulating their own ambitions and of finding their own solutions. Social workers in child protection must

understand and acknowledge that families normally do their very best in stressing and demanding situations, and that solutions found by the families themselves tend to be more sustainable than those found by others. The family must be seen as a partner of the social worker and in need of the social worker's support. As a direct consequence of assistance, the family will improve the children's welfare. An attitude of positive expectations, rather than suspiciousness and doubt, is important to develop a good cooperation with the family[1].

The New Child Perspective

To take the new child perspective may be challenging, because it requires absence from paternalism, which has long traditions within social work. It is not possible to combine the new child perspective with a paternalistic perspective.

> "While the patriarchal attitude in previous social work practice was connected to a professional attitude, that science was the owner of knowledge and solutions and that clients were to be helped by following certain treatments, the present idea about knowledge is that the professionals have to get to know the other, i.e. the client, as a starting point." (Omre & Schjelderup, 2009, page 21, my translation)

The child perspective, which contains important issues from the strengths perspective (Saleebey, 2005), moves from a traditional focus on the child's problems and limitations towards strengths, abilities and possibilities. Resilience - human beings' experience from handling difficult situations, power of resistance or perseverance - should be seen as an important strength and a reason why children do not always develop problems in their future when they have had a difficult childhood. The child perspective can be described as based on the following dimensions' presence:

- "The child's perspective is found and allowed for
- Adults concentrate on the child's situation
- The child's best interest is in focus and clarified
- The child is included in processes of planning and implementation over time
- Adults' way of thinking includes children as subjects and acknowledges children's experiences, competences and meanings." (Omre & Schjelderup, 2009, page 39, my translation)

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[1] From lecture by Omre, C. & Schjelderup, L at ISCTE in Lisbon, 27 November 2009.

The issues above do not protect from paternalistic decision making if one interprets and ignores what the child says, because one thinks that children are immature and will have difficulties acknowledging, understanding or expressing their own best interest (Omre & Schjelderup, 2009).

Children's Participation

From the UN's Convention on the Rights of the Child, we can derive that children's right to participate in issues concerning themselves is seen as being in the "best interest of the child". This is settled in the convention's article number 12, which gives the child a right to state his or her opinions, to be heard and given due weight in accordance with age and maturity. The child's experience of participation produces competence of being in command, which in turn, is of great value for the child to develop more self-confidence and a feeling of quality in life (Schjelderup Et al., 2005 and Omre & Schjelderup, 2009).

There are arguments against children's participation, the stated reason being that the child could suffer another loss if the chosen solution turns out not to be so good. Answering this, it is important to remember that it is not the child, but the child welfare authorities that are responsible and that are to make a final decision. Most arguments against children's participation are claimed to be for the children's need for protection, but there are no contrasts between children's participation and the children's need for protection. Children have a right to both participation *and* protection (un.org, 2010 and Omre and Schjelderup, 2009).

Social workers have a powerful and demanding role as interpreters of what is in the best interest of the child. To ask for the child's opinion and not only search for answers with adults in relations to the child will ease this demanding role (Kampmann, 2000 and Omre & Schjelderup, 2009). It is important that social workers are conscious about and reflect on this power structure when they are going to make decisions in the best interest of the child. In order for social workers to consider the child an adequate participant and the child's opinions as important to make a good assessment, they must give up some of their traditional power (Omre & Schjelderup, 2009). However, the power structure between children and adults will continue to be asymmetrical, because children are always in relations to adults (Schjelderup Et al. 2005 and Omre & Schjelderup, 2009). Roger Hart's ladder of young people's participation, a tool originally developed to assess young people's citizen participation in

development of communities, is also suitable for measuring children and young people's participation in child welfare questions. There are eight steps on the ladder, but the three first steps are not considered as participation.

1. Manipulation of young people
2. Young people used for decoration
3. Young people "tokenized" (appearance of participation)
4. Assigned and informed
5. Consulted and informed
6. Adult-initiated, shared decisions with young people
7. Actions led and initiated by young people
8. Shared decision-making between young people and adults.
(Omre & Schjelderup, 2009)

Power in Social Work

The subject of power is very comprehensive and many contributors have studied and discussed it in several ways. The sociologist Steven Lukes is one important contributor regarding this subject. He describes three types of power: the power to make decisions, the power to set agenda and ideological power or definition power. Definition power is exercised among others via the power to make decisions and the power to set agenda, but by applying specific methods for describing reality, like for example language, to define truths (Lukes, 2005 and Næss, 2010).

In other words, an occupational group with definition power have acceptance for their perception of reality as the correct perception. Definition power is not as observable as other types of power and it is parallel to what Bourdieu describes as symbolic power. Symbolic power is the power to constitute reality by making statements about it, to make others see and believe one's view of the world, and through changing the view of the world, also the action in the world and hence the world itself will change (Bourdieu, 1996 and Næss, 2010).

Scandinavian political systems are based on an understanding that decisions are made through democratic processes. This may be categorised as a legal execution of power, which is observable, as it is based on announcements and the decisions may be re-examined juridically.

According to Foucault, the power in modern society goes through delicate branches and is not noticed by those exposed to it (Järvinen & Mortensen, 2005).

The social political area constitutes a "universe of help", where the decisions are based on an idea to help the client, with the very best intentions. The professional helpers are seen as experts on the field and as organs for the realisation of the welfare states. This is an important aspect of the non-discussed micro-power, which is a power that is very difficult to resist as the clients meet professionals who fundamentally "want to help" them to live a life as good as possible. The system's representatives are seen, by themselves and others, as being in the possession of the correct, neutral and professional knowledge in the current field. The different groups of professionals are not seen as exercising power in their work with clients, but as performing their professional practice. This performance is seen as controlled by the professionals' knowledge and experiences which are acknowledged as good social work (Ibid.).

Järvinen and Mik-Meyer refer to welfare institutions and how they "create" clients, which exemplifies the social workers' powerful role, when they describe four different paradoxes in social work. In their description of these paradoxes, the professional social workers' definition power emerges clearly. The client has to fit into the welfare institutions' system in order to for example have the rights to receive different kinds of help or services (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2003).

Firstly, Järvinen and Mik-Meyer point out that there is a conflict between a "holistic view" and the focus on the individuals in social work. Because of the individual focus, the clients must be interested and focused on going through a personal change, a change in accordance with the goal of social work. Despite the social workers' professional ideal to have a holistic perspective, the focus is the clients' personality, attitude and "moral condition" in many welfare institutions. The second paradox is the social worker's dual function, as the "helper" and also the diagnostician and controlling part. The client has to adapt to the welfare institution as no welfare institution can focus a "whole person". The client must be shaped to fit the categories, rules and routines of the welfare institution. When the individual has been labelled with a problem-identity which fits the welfare institution, the "collaboration" can start. Bureaucratic language also complicates dialog with the clients. The fine line between

treating all clients equally and at the same time allowing for the individual client's unique situation is described a third paradox (Ibid.).

Finally they describe the social workers' ambitions about working in accordance with an ideal of providing service to their clients. The welfare institutions endeavour to treat and rename the clients as utilisers is positive but very difficult because of the bureaucratic anchorage of social work and the well-known asymmetry in the relation between the service provider and the service recipient (Ibid.).

Social Networks

Contact between human beings is a natural and necessary ingredient in human beings' lives. Through contact with other human beings, we are all being shaped as human beings. Such relations are important to human beings' health, quality of life and future life. When human beings interact, more or less durable relations evolve. These relations may be described as lines between actors and constitute a network of contacts. Having social networks is a premise for human beings' socialisation. Small children will typically develop relations to their mothers, fathers and family and a nuclear family is typically the first social network established.

The anthropologist John Barnes introduced the concept of social networks early in the nineteen fifties when describing the contact net between the citizens of the Norwegian island Bremnes. He found that the individual citizens were involved in different roles and relations. Also he found two types of social structures: the territorial and the occupational system. The territorial system is characterised by a stable social structure, which consists of the human beings' surroundings and durable social relations. In the occupational system the social structure were connected to the trading activity. The social structure in the occupational system was looser, more functionally structured and less stable than the territorial system (Bø, 1995).

Another important contributor to the development of the social network theory is the anthropologist Elisabeth Bott, who applies network terminology to describe human beings' social relations. She found, as Barnes that social networks were divisible in subgroups with peculiar subcultures and that network contacts could be formal or informal. Formal relations are those which are more external, and informal relations are relations with for example

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family and friends. The informal network contacts are emotionally more important than the formal network contacts (ibid.).

Social networks are often described as consisting of nodes and ties. The nodes are the individual actors involved and the ties are the relations between them. Social networks exist on many different levels, from family to for example huge organisations or states.

Social networks can be distinguished as person-centred or total. In the person-centred social network the ego is in the centre with lines of connections to various relations, for example family and friends. Total social networks may be unlimited and the ties may cross borders in world-wide networks. The person-centred and the total social network may also be combined, as for example in a job-network (ibid.).

A social network's structural qualities describe type and composition of a network. A social network's functional qualities give information about interactions, balance of relations (equal, reciprocal or unilateral), intensity and emotional attachment, frequency, duration and geographical distance (ibid.).

In social network analysis, the nodes and ties are often displayed in social network diagrams. Social network analysis may explain how a network is run, how problems are being solved and may give information about individual goal achievements. Also it may be used to measure social capital. A human being's social network, such as a family, may give access to valuable resources and hence be of great value as social capital. Belonging to a family network may produce a feeling of security, which is of important to develop resilience (Saleebey, 2005).

Social Capital

Pierre Bourdieu is often cited and referred to in relation to social capital and perhaps in particular in relation to social capital on an individual level. Social capital on an individual level is something that individuals can build up, keep to themselves and apply to promote their own interests (Hvinden & Gissinger, 2005 and Sund, 2010). Bourdieu defines social capital as:

> "...the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group – which provides each of its members with the backing of the collectivity-owned capital..." (Bourdieu, 1986 p. 51 in Hvinden & Gissinger, 2005).

Children's social capital may be the relations they have with their own kin and other social network of which they are members. A child in need of an out-of-home care may have valuable social capital if she or he is in possession of grandparents who are willing and able to provide the care he or she needs. This way the child's social capital may be applied to promote the child's own interests.

According to Robert Putnam social capital is the very foundation of a healthy society, because it makes individuals cooperate for the best of the community. The social capital created in inter-human relations becomes a productive element on community level. Putnam defines social capital as:"….features of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated actions" (Putnam et al., 1993, Hvinden & Gissinger, 2005 and Sund, 2010).

5 Methodology

Kinship care is a kind of foster care which has been paid public attention to in Norway the last few years, mainly because of research results indicating that children thrive more when they live with their own kin, compared to non-related foster care (Winokur et al., 2009 and Farmer & Moyer, 2009). Since 2004 the Norwegian foster care regulations (ref. Regulation Q-1072B of 15th July 2004 and Child Welfare Act of 17th July 1992) requires the child welfare services to primarily place children in foster care in their own kin or close network. However, previous Norwegian research by Bente Moldestad (Omre & Schjelderup, 2009) has revealed social workers' negative attitude towards kinship care and cooperation with kin. As I have had the pleasure of being a foster mother myself and have experience from foster care work with Bufetat, I inquired about the present Norwegian social workers' professional perspectives on kinship care, and I wanted to illuminate the practice with perspectives of professional social workers belonging to a different culture. To explore this, I initiated and carried out this study.

Selection of Methodology

In social science, qualitative methods are often identified with participant observations, fieldworks, ethnographic studies and interviews (Ragin, 1994). The method I have used to bring forth scientific knowledge is interviews, which also was a familiar method to me, as I have experiences from conducting interviews in my work. Using interviews is an applicable method when the purpose is to get information about people's reflections on a subject for application in scientific work (Thagaard, 1998).

The Qualitative Interview as a Method of Getting Information about Professional Social Workers' Perspectives

The research interview is a professional conversation (Kvale, 2007) which may be conducted to collect the interviewee's opinions and perspectives on a subject. For the collected data to constitute empirical knowledge, the conversations must be conducted scientifically (Dalland, 2000). The researcher has to be aware of and prepare for the data analysis, the verification and the report as she is conducting the interview (Kvale, 2007).

When conducting qualitative interviews it is important to be aware of several challenges:
The context of the interview will affect the interview. An interaction is taking place between the researcher and the interviewee. How the researcher conducts the interview and how the questions are formed may have an impact on the answers (Kvale, 2007). The interviewee may not necessarily express her or his actual opinion as she may want to veil it. There could be a reason for the interviewee to pretend having an opinion or attitude different from the one she actually has (Ringdal, 2001).

As my intention was to collect information about social workers' perspectives, hearing their own words about the phenomena is the closest and most natural way to get this knowledge. In this study, the qualitative interview has been conducted in a phenomenological perspective (Ryen, 2002).

Qualitative Research and Criticism towards it

Social science research is often criticised by natural scientists for not fulfilling the requirements of scientific research. The fact is that natural science research and social science

research represent different and conflicting scientific perspectives. Social science reflects society (Ragin, 1994).

The constructivist science perspective is based on the idea that the social reality of human beings is constructed through their interaction and communication (Kvale, 2007). Qualitative research is most often connected with social science. A positivist perspective, which is often represented by natural scientists, would for example require that scientific data are objective and quantifiable and that the researcher must be neutral and avoid influencing the research. In qualitative research it is not a goal to quantify objective data, but to interpret meaningful relations. Qualitative research operates with a small number of cases and many aspects of these cases (Ragin, 1994). A common criticism from quantitative researchers is that because of the small number of cases, the results cannot be generalized. However, according to scientific history, one must focus a few intensive cases if the purpose of the research is to produce general knowledge (Kvale, 2007).

The starting point for this study, in the light of theories of science, is that social workers' opinions are social constructions in their individual life-world. The fact that all these social workers were working with child protection is the reason why theories derived from their expressed perspectives may concern more than one social worker. My intention with this study has been to get more knowledge about Norwegian and Portuguese social workers' perspectives relevant to kinship care. If theories derived from this study inspire others to explore the subject, it could contribute to the improvement of child protection in the best interest of the child.

Hermeneutics

In this study, I have chosen the qualitative interview and a hermeneutic approach in the work of analysis. The idea that meaningful phenomena must be interpreted is the basis of a hermeneutic perspective. Hermeneutics is highly relevant to social science, as many disciplines of social science consist of meaningful phenomena. Interpretation and comprehension is crucial in the disciplines of social science. The idea that a researcher never meets with the world without assumptions is basic in a hermeneutic point of view (Gilje and Grimen, 1995). The concept of conversation and text is essential in a hermeneutic

comprehension and the interpreter's comprehension of the text subject is emphasised (Kvale, 2007).

The hermeneutic circle illustrates that every interpretation consists of constant movements between the whole and parts of the object, between the object and the context of the object and between the object and the researcher's own comprehension. Interpretations are always being explained by referring to other interpretations. For an object to be qualified as a study object, it has to be meaningful, the meaning and the expression must be distinguishable and the object must be meaningful to social actors (Gilje and Grimen, 1995).

My starting point for this study was my own presumptions about kinship care and social workers working with child protection in Norway. These presumptions influenced the questions I prepared for the interviews. Through the work of analysis, I have been oscillating between analysing one specific interview and the total of all the interviews. Before I started the work of analysis I decided that my goal for the interpretation was to make the interviewees' real viewpoints emerge, which was important to my consciousness of their perspectives. In this study the interviewees' actual opinion is of importance, though my interpretation of their statements was influenced by different theoretical perspectives. There is a risk of "digging too deep" using the principles of the hermeneutic circle when interpreting, so it is important to be aware of how to stop in time and avoid moving away from the actual meaning.

Criticism of the Sources

In order to avoid incorrect interpretation of the collected data, I have studied and classified the sources of the data in accordance with the requirements of the method source criticism.

I have found the sources of the data in this study to be genuine, as the professional social workers own expressed perspectives became the data for this study. The sources in this study are observable, and are therefore seen as more secure than for example narratives.

Because interviewees may leave out things or distort their answers, I also had a critical focus when interpreting the social workers' statements. The fact that it is seen as "politically incorrect" to have a paternalistic perspective in social work in Norway, the interviewees may

consciously or unconsciously have tried to hide or tone down reflections that could indicate such points of view. Though, I did not find any indications that the sources tended to angle the information in one particular direction.

I have interviewed eight social workers and they are first-hand sources. The interviews are not intensive case studies, yet I found that the interpretations of what the interviewees said during the interviews represent examples of professional social workers' expressed perspectives relevant to kinship care. However, this study cannot claim to describe the general perspective of all the professional social workers in Norway and in Portugal.

Concerning closeness in time, the sources are close to the course of the events as the interviewees expressed their perspectives relevant to kinship care at present time.

Verification

Qualitative research has a special challenge regarding finding what is defined as true knowledge. Although the applicability of qualitative research is much discussed, a method to examine the truth value in a research report is to evaluate the findings' possibilities of generalising, reliability and validity (Kvale, 2007).

There are several ways to generalise or universalise scientific knowledge, however, in social science analytic generalising is applied, which is an evaluation of the findings for the purpose of finding out if they can be used to indicate what may happen in similar situations. The collected data in this study may indicate the professional perspectives of social workers in Norway and in Portugal regarding kinship care, because I have analysed similarities and differences as analytic generalising requires. All the interviewed social workers expressed their individual points of views, but they were all social workers in child welfare. In addition, I have discussed the collected data regarding theories and perspectives and presented it in a way which makes the data accessible for readers' discussions. It is important to emphasise that this study must not be generalised as describing all the Norwegian and Portuguese social workers' general perspectives on kinship care, because the number of interviewed persons is too small for such purposes. Nevertheless, this study may still give some interesting and valuable information.

Reliability is among other things about the role of the interviewer and the performance and the transcription and interpretation of the collected data. From my work as a social worker for many years, and also as a leader of a department of foster care for youngsters in Norway, I have experiences as an interviewer and I have had different roles in the interviews. My experiences have been valuable in the sense that I felt comfortable with the role of being an interviewer in the work with this study, but I am also aware that the very same experiences are challenging, particularly because I have undertaken a study within my own working field. Through the interviews, the transcription and the analysis of the data, I have tried to be constantly aware of this challenge with regards to the reliability of this study.

All the interviews were tape-recorded and then carefully listened through and written down in the languages that were used for the interviews. Because the language used in the Portuguese interviews was English, translation was not needed. Limitations of my own and my Portuguese informants' knowledge of the English language could mean a limited reliability of the data collected in Portugal. Being aware of this risk, I carefully used a simple language and allowed for the informants to deepen their answers by explaining and exemplifying. I have also had their information verified by a Portuguese colleague with excellent English knowledge and long experience from basic and superior child protection work in Portugal. The Norwegian interviews were carried through in Norwegian, written down in Norwegian and then translated into English. The fact that I translated these interviews myself could weaken the reliability in this study. In order to avoid mistakes, I have had the translations verified by a Norwegian expert of the English language. These documents constituted the basis of my analysis in this study. In the work with the analysis, I categorised the renderings from the interviews in main issues, and because of the difference in context between the two countries' social workers, I treated the Norwegian and the Portuguese separately.

The fact that I performed the interviews and also performed the analysis could be a weak point, because the researcher could be too powerful compared to the interviewees and hence influence the research results. Through the whole research process I have been aware of this risk and tried to counteract such influence, by for example having regular contact with teaching supervisors in Norway and in Portugal. This way we have been several researchers collaborating through the whole research process which should strengthen the reliability and assure the quality of the research process, which again is relevant to the issue of validity (Kvale, 2007).

According to S. Kvale, the validation of research depends on the craftsmanlike quality of the research, in which the findings constantly must be checked, inquired and theoretically interpreted. In order to evaluate the validity of the statements' interpretation, it should be clear whether the researchers see the interviewees as informants or witnesses or as representatives or objects of analysis (Kvale 2007). In this study I have evaluated the interviewees as representatives of the professional social workers in Norway and in Portugal expressing their professional perspectives on kinship care.

In order to present the most relevant Portuguese laws, policies and practices, I saw the interviewees as informants. I found this necessary as very little of this information is available in English, and my Portuguese knowledge is rather limited. To avoid mixing the interviewees' roles and purposes, I have referred to the informants as key-person 1 - 6. The key-persons' information is also verified by my Portuguese colleague as already mentioned.

To what extent a method is investigating what it aims to investigate is important to the issue of validity (Kvale, 2007). By looking at this study's process and results in proportion to the thesis and the research questions, I consider having achieved the intention, namely to:

- Present the laws, policies and social work practices relevant to kinship care in Norway and in Portugal.
- Reveal Norwegian and Portuguese social workers' expressed professional perspectives relevant to kinship care.
- Analyse the data to find out whether there is coherence between policies, professional perspectives and the performance of the practice.

Utility Value

The purpose of this study's interviews was to reveal social workers' professional perspectives relevant to kinship care in Norway and in Portugal and to find out if there is coherence between the policies, the interviewed social workers' perspectives and the performance of their practice. A research study should have utility value, especially when human beings are being interviewed for the purpose of being objects for analysis (Kvale, 2007). Even though the findings in this study cannot be generalised to all the Norwegian and Portuguese social workers' perspectives relevant to kinship care, the knowledge from this study may be utilised

in order to develop and maintain a successful kinship care practice. Also this study may be seen as a contribution to a more equal practice among the different child welfare agencies in Norway. Because this study is written in English, it is accessible internationally and may be utilised for the purpose of developing successful kinship care practice also in other countries and perhaps most of all in Portugal.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher's professional secrecy is one of the most important issues in order to protect the interviewees. A researcher should constantly be aware of the fact that the interviewees always have the right to integrity and dignity. It is important that the researcher considers carefully if interviewing a human being can in any way be harmful to him or her. In addition, it is important to carefully assure the interviewee that he or she is not obliged to answer all the questions and that they may interrupt the interview at any time. The interviewee must agree to be interviewed and be informed of the purpose of collecting these data (Trost, 2005). In order to protect the interviewees in this study, I have treated their identities and their information with confidentiality. Their names used in this study are not authentic, I have tried not to use renderings that could be harmful to them in any way and I have made the renderings anonymous in order not to let the readers trace the information.

Being aware of the need to protect the interviewees' integrity and dignity, I have not used only direct quotation from their spoken words, yet I have not in any way distorted their statements. Direct quotation could reveal manners of speaking which could harm the confidentiality and also the dignity of the interviewee (Trost, 2005). This is particularly a problem when the renderings include thinking breaks and hence emphasise incoherent talk, which naturally is even more seen when the language of the interview is not the interviewee's primary language.

Another important ethical issue is that group interviews may represent a great group pressure regarding a conformed behaviour among the members of the group (Trost, 2005). My interview in Porto was a group interview, but the choice was their own. Prior to the interview they asked me to let them perform the interview together, because they were so close colleagues and always work together as one team.

The interviewees were contacted by email and telephone and I informed them about my project. None of the social workers that I contacted rejected or showed unwillingness towards my request of making interviews with them for my data collection in this study. My impression was that all the interviewees showed a great interest in the subject and thus were genuinely motivated to contribute with their experiences, and they openheartedly expressed their professional perspectives.

Preparations, Selection and Performance of the Data Collection

The preparations for this study started with reading late research reports concerning the practice of kinship care and in particular the review of Winokur, Holtan and Valentine from 2009, "Kinship Care for the Safety, Permanency, and Well-being of Children Removed from the Home for Maltreatment". I prepared interview guides in order to avoid losing focus during the interviews.

The performance of the interviews implied some travelling in Norway and in Portugal, which made a time schedule essential. Thanks to benevolence among all the interviewees and their managers, I managed to keep within this schedule. In Norway, the first contact with the interviewees and their managers was initiated by me. In Portugal, I was a foreigner and not very familiar with the usual procedures for requesting interviews, therefore my supervisor initiated the contact and then allowed for me to contact them.

All the interviews were performed in the interviewees' working places. All the interviewees were unknown to me before our first contact and I did not meet them in advance of the interviews. Except the group interview in Porto, I interviewed all the social workers one by one.

For the interviews with the Norwegian social workers, I used the same interview guide. This interview guide did not completely serve its purpose in Portugal, because the out-of-home-care practice there differs so much from Norway. Thus, I prepared another interview guide for use in Portugal. My interviews were only partially structured and the main purpose of the interview guides was to help me not losing focus. As an interviewer, I encouraged the interviewees to speak freely and open in order to let them express their perspectives relevant

to kinship care without restricting them. Both of the interview guides are attached in this study. All the interviews were tape-recorded and then transcribed.

At the starting point, I had a wish to find out the social workers' opinion about kinship care, in addition to illuminate the Norwegian and Portuguese laws, policies and practices regarding kinship care. As I started to get some knowledge of the Portuguese laws and policies, it appeared not to be a good idea because of a law change in 2008 which hindered the children's kin to become foster carers for them. On the other hand, they do practice kinship placements, though not in the sense of foster care, but as family caretaking. Also it appeared to me that to ensure that the social workers' genuine opinion about kinship care would emerge was impossible, but to render what they actually expressed was easier to ensure. Considering this, I decided to focus on presenting Norwegian and Portuguese laws, policies and practices important to kinship care and family care taking, and to reveal Norwegian and Portuguese professional social workers' expressed perspectives on kinship care. I was aware of the fact that this choice implied that the Portuguese interviewees to a great deal would base their perspectives on their experiences with family caretaking according to the Portuguese practice. However, because kinship care and family caretaking also have many similarities despite the differences, I found that the Portuguese professional social workers' expressed perspectives would still be relevant for the subject of this study. This way the formulation became more precise and still allowed for seeing kinship care in the light of both Norwegian and Portuguese practices, without making this study a comparison.

Regarding the selection of interviewees for this study, I intended to interview four Norwegian social workers in four different agencies and four Portuguese social workers in four different agencies and I managed to stick to this plan concerning the Norwegian interviews. Among the four Portuguese social workers whom I intended to interview, one of them appeared not to have experience from child protection and thus I relinquished the interview with this social worker. Another Portuguese social worker brought her two colleagues and members of her working team, to the interview. They explained that they constitute a working team and work very closely and asked me to allow them to be interviewed together. All together, I ended up with four interviews, one male and three female interviewees, in Norway. In Portugal I carried out three interviews with one male and four female interviewees. In this study I have not focused gender among the professional social workers; therefore all the interviewees are named by female names in order to protect them from being traced. All the interviewees gave

their approval for me to use their interview statements in this study. The Norwegian interviewees are:

Heidi:

She is a social worker at the child welfare service in Norway. Her current job tasks are assessing children's situation, parents', kin's and networks' abilities and skills, placements, follow-ups etc.

Randi:

She is a social worker at the child welfare service in a middle-sized municipality in Norway. Her current job tasks are to lead the social workers in their work of assessing children's situation, parents', kin's and networks' abilities and skills, placements, follow-ups etc.

Rita:

She is a social worker at the child welfare service in a large municipality in Norway. Her current job tasks are to work with a team for children in care, do follow-ups, assessments etc.

Bente:

She is a social worker with long and varied experience from foster care and kinship care work. Her job tasks are to lead the social workers at the foster care service in their work of supporting the municipalities' child welfare agencies within their region.

Because of great differences of poverty and wealth within Portugal and thus different conditions of social work in child protection, I have chosen to not only concentrate the interviews to the capital Lisbon. The Portuguese interviewees are:

Lisa:

She is a social worker at the child protection commission in Lisbon. Her current job tasks are assessing children's situation, parents', kin's and networks' abilities and skills, placements, follow-ups, etc.

Maria:

She is a social worker at the social security at Madeira. Her current job tasks are working with and lead her team in tasks as assessing children's situation, parents', kin's and networks' abilities and skills, placements, follow-ups etc.

The Porto-team, which consists of Paula, Priscilla and Pamela:
Paula and Priscilla are female social workers and Pamela is a psychologist working with social security in Porto. The team's current job tasks are leading and supporting other teams within child welfare and foster care service, assessing children's situation, parents', kin's and networks' abilities and skills, placements, follow-ups etc.

As already mentioned, I found it necessary to utilise key-persons to contribute to illuminating and to explain the Portuguese laws, policies and practices relevant to foster care and family caretaking.

Key-person 1 is Luis. He is a law teacher at the Faculty of Law at the University of Lisbon. He has long experience and his current main task is to teach future lawyers, jurists and judges.

Key-person 2 is Lisa from Lisbon, key-person 3 is Maria from Madeira and key-person 4, 5 and 6 are Pamela, Paula and Priscilla from Porto.

Preconception

All perceptions are theory-laden. Without realising it, what we see is affected by our beliefs (Godfrey-Smith, 2003). In hermeneutics, a basic idea is that we never meet the world without presumptions. According to the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer, it is impossible to observe and analyse without being affected by one's background, history, education etc. Interpretations will always, to some extent, be affected by the interpreter's previous experiences and prejudices (Gilje & Grimen, 1995). Even the choice of subject for a study is affected by the researcher's experiences and prejudices.

My experiences, and hence my special interest for the subject foster care, obviously have influenced my choice of thesis for this study. For the last 21 years I have been a mother for my adoptive son and for my foster children and for the last 5 years, I have also had the pleasure of being a stepmother.

As a foster mother, I have experienced collaboration with my foster children's families and with different child welfare agencies, which has been both a pleasure and sometimes very frustrating. In addition, I am a social worker with working experiences from grassroot levels and from manager levels from the working fields: children and youngsters, alcohol- and drug addicted clients and psychiatry. My experiences as a leader of a department of foster care for youngsters at Bufetat allowed me to see foster care from an angle different from a foster mother and my current role as a probation officer on behalf of children in non-related foster care and kinship care gave me yet another perspective.

I have seen children in non-related foster care thrive and feel included, and I have seen children in non-related foster care who do not thrive and feel excluded. I have seen successful and non-successful kinship care placements, but I also have an impression that more children thrive in kinship care compared to no-related foster care and that those who thrive in kinship care normally do not see themselves as foster children, but living with their own family. From many angles, I have experienced different kinds of foster care for good and for bad. I have heard a child's heart-rending scream and I have seen the pain in her eyes when being removed from those whom she loved and I have seen the relief in the eyes of a child removed from scaring conditions. I have seen children grow strong and sound apparently against all odds, and I have seen children struggle and suffer from previous experiences for a long, long time.

A summary of my experiences could be that I have a million reasons to believe that every human being has valuable strengths and good qualities and that people who believe they do also develop hope, though they sometimes may need another individual's help for making it emerge. On the basis of my experiences, I believe that hope is the most powerful impetus to a human being's achievements of goals and for experiencing life as meaningful despite difficulties in life. My experiences also have given me a belief in the idea that there are many good reasons to primarily search for a foster home within children's kin and perhaps most of all because of the feeling of belonging and unconditional love.

My experiences and presumptions obviously have affected me in the work with this study as I already had much knowledge about the subject. To perform a research within my own working field includes a risk of biases. However, despite my experiences relevant to the subject, I have never been a social worker at the child welfare service and I had a genuine

wish to explore social workers' perspectives regarding kinship care. The fact that I also studied in Portugal gave me the opportunity to acquire some knowledge about the Portuguese child protection system. I did not acquire much knowledge, though enough to become interested in exploring their out-of-home care practices, their professional perspectives relevant to kinship care and to see the Norwegian practice of kinship care also in the light of the Portuguese out-of-home care conditions.

The Process of Analysis and Processing the Collected Data

When the interviews were carried out, I transcribed the interviews by listening to the recorder and writing down word by word what I found relevant to the purpose of the study and to the interview guides. The secondary material was written down in the sense of a summary. According to J. Trost, creativity and curiosity is important to any researcher and especially within qualitative research (Trost, 2005). Already during the interviews the researchers make some analysing and interpreting thoughts, though it is a good idea to divide the work into three main phases, data collection, analysis and interpreting. Especially there ought to be a certain distance between the interview and the analysis, yet some working-up of the data automatically happens without the researcher is aware of it. As J. Trost recommend, I open-mindedly read the transcripts over and over again, with curiosity and over time, and I tried to illuminate that the interesting empirical data really is interesting (Trost, 2005). When analysing the data I got ideas and took notes for later interpretation.

Because of the differences between the conditions of the two countries' social workers' whom I interviewed, I found it most suitable to divide the collected data in two parts; namely the Norwegian and the Portuguese. In order to present the data in a clear and easy accessible way, I categorised the data in subjects and contents. The categories in the Norwegian part are:

I   Turning Points in Mindset
II   Positive Impetuses to Retain Kinship Care Practice
III   Challenges
IV   Success Criteria for Kinship Care
V   Professional Power

The categories in the Portuguese parts are:

I   Positive Perspectives on Family Caretaking

II   Critical Perspectives on Family Caretaking

III   Collaboration with Children and Parents

IV   Criteria for Successful Out-of-Home Care Practice in Portugal

V   Suggestions for Improvement of the Portuguese Child Protection

VI   Optimism

By using the categories above, I present renderings from the interviews, analysis and interpretations of the renderings. In the interpretations, I used theory presented in the chapter of theoretical perspectives, namely the Strengths Perspectives, The New Child Perspective, Children's Participation, Power in Social Work, Social Networks and Social Captial.

6 Professional Social Workers' Expressed Perspectives

This chapter contains renderings and interpretations of the Norwegian and Portuguese professional social workers' expressed perspectives during the interviews. As this study has already revealed, there are great differences between the two countries conditions of social work.

In cases where the future chances for the child to move back to their parents are considered unlikely or impossible to happen, foster care is the preferred placement alternative in Norway. If a child in need of an out-of-home care cannot be placed in foster care for some reason, they may be placed in an institution for a period of time, but adoption is hardly seen within Norway though many professionals are inquiring about that. Norway practices kinship care in the sense of foster care, which is the primary placement alternative in Norway, when out-of-home care is required (Regjeringen.no, 2010).

The situation is different in Portugal, where adoption is a policy measure in cases when children are considered very unlikely to move back to their parents. According to the Portuguese child policy children awaiting adoption are preferably placed in an institution or in non-related foster care. As I have pointed out in chapter three, the Portuguese law contains a

sequenced list of preference when out-of-home care is needed. According to this priority list, children who are not going to be put for adoption, but are in need out-of-home care primarily are to be placed with kin. Placements with kin in Portugal must not be seen as kinship care. Portugal practices placing children with kin, though *not* in the sense of foster care, but as family caretaking.

The conditions of child welfare differ a great deal between Norway and Portugal (indexmundi.com, 2010). The Norwegian child welfare may be described as having a satisfactory supply of resources, a high number of professional social workers and a wide range of relief measures. This becomes extra evident when bearing in mind the conditions of child welfare in Portugal, where the scarcity of supply of resources is great, there are few social workers, and they may have the responsibility for more than fifty child welfare cases each and there is a limited range of relief measures. Also the population's standard of living is considerably higher in Norway. In my interviews with the Portuguese child welfare workers, their focus on and concerns about poverty have been central.

Part 1 – Norway

By working up the collected data from the Norwegian professional social workers I found five main categories of perspectives. They are:

I   Turning Points in Mindset
II   Positive Impetuses to Retain Kinship Care Practice
III   Challenges
IV   Success Criteria for Kinship Care
V   Professional Power

All of these five categories consist of several issues and will be presented below in an analytic perspective.

I   Turning Points in Mindset

All the Norwegian social workers said that social workers' attitude towards kinship care has changed radically during the last 15 years, from a negative to a more positive attitude. So

what have caused this change of attitude? When going through the collected data, I found seven reasons for this change. These reasons are:

1. New perspectives on "who is to blame when children have severe problems". From an individualistic to a social context perspective.
2. International experience of a new type of practice
3. Weakening of the psychodynamic tradition
4. Political orders
5. Pressure from the child welfare committee (Barnevernsnemda)
6. Own experiences from a new type of practice
7. Pressure from Bufetat, specialist department

Through the subcategories listed above, the interviewed Norwegian social workers expressed perspectives will be presented in the following.

1. New perspectives on "who is to blame when children have severe problems". From an individualistic to a social context perspective:

> "Now we don't blame the parents and the family for the difficult situation the child is in, but we think that there is an understandable and reasonable explanation, such as difficulties because of a divorce. " (Randi)

Randi explains that one reason for the change of social workers' perspective is that there has been a change in professional social workers' understanding of what the causes of children's problems are. Her statement above is particularly interesting because it indicates the way the social workers used to look at the child's family and it gives a hint about a reason that perhaps has restricted the practice of kinship care in the past.

Randi's explanation of social workers' change of perspective on the children's parents and family is interesting. She revealed that the previous prevailing approach among social workers was to blame the parents for the children's severe difficulties and that they did not look at the parents' explainable and understandable reasons for causing their children's problems. She described a previous attitude of condescension and condemnation towards the children's parents among social workers in Norway (Winokur, 2009). According to Randi, this perspective is not prevailing in the Norwegian social workers' mindset anymore. Now, social

workers acknowledge that parents suffering from different kinds of stress, like for example a divorce may be going through a difficult time as parents, something that could happen to anyone, and this is a situation that most likely will not last forever.

2. International experience of a new type of practice:

> "I have been totally on the other side myself. I looked at using these grandparents as just a waste of time." (Bente)

Bente claimed having "seen the light" on a study tour to the Netherlands in 1995. She spoke openheartedly about her experience of this change in mindset. In the Netherlands, Bente got to meet with a foster care practice different from the Norwegian. Her great discovery, which she compared with a religious revelation when claiming having "seen the light" was the fact that the Netherlands had succeeded in using the children's kin for foster families. She got insight into another country's practice of kinship care which had been going on for many years and with good results for the children. Bente understood that practicing this kind of foster care required a change of attitude, as the social workers had to start looking at the children's family as capable and valuable (Næss, 2010). It is interesting that she was outside her usual context when she realised and admitted to herself that her attitude as a social worker in Norway had to change.

3. Weakening of the psychodynamic tradition:

> "...We, the professional social workers, were *against* it and the previous child care departments were positive to it. They were so soft-hearted and thought that grandma should have the kid and we thought that they *over-identified* themselves." (Bente)

Bente described how she and her colleagues, before the study tour to the Netherlands, used to look at using the children's kin as foster families. Her description above shows how they used to think within the psychodynamic tradition and that they did not welcome another and conflicting way to work. A psychodynamic and diagnostic way of thinking has long traditions in Norwegian social work (Omre & Schjelderup, 2009). Focusing on problems and difficulties does not bring out the children's or the families' strengths or social capital, but emphasises the problems and deficiencies, and this may cause them not to develop their own capabilities, which is of importance in relation to how they meet things later in life. It is important that

social workers focus on the children's and the parents' strengths and social capital in order to help them to a good and meaningful life (Putnam et al., 1993, Hvinden & Gissinger, 2005 and Sund, 2010). Emphasising strengths and social capital is crucial to develop belief and hope, which is one of the most important strengths a person can have when struggling with the strains of life (Saleebey, 2006). When considering the parents' or the family's strengths as important to the children's social capital, a social worker with an attitude of condescension and condemnation towards the children's parents may harm the children instead of helping them to a better life.

Bente's description above also illuminates another issue of what led to a turning point in the professional social workers' mindset in Norway.

4. Political orders:

The Norwegian government's child care department has ordered the child welfare services to look for placement alternatives within the children's kin. This order has been important for the social workers' change of perspective and attitude, though it was not quite welcomed by them. Bente even said that the social workers in the child welfare services "were *against* it" and they thought disparagingly that the child care department's positive look on kinship care was caused by their soft-heartedness and that they over-identified themselves. A change in the professional social workers' attitude came only reluctantly and their attitude endured for as long as they wanted it to. Professional social workers have a powerful role (Järvinen & Mortensen, 2005 and Lukes, 2005). They resisted political instructions because their own definition of what was in the best interest of the child did not correspond with the definition of their superior authorities. The child care department used their power to enforce a practice of kinship care and the professional social workers answered by using their power. Enforcements may not be welcomed, but they may serve the purpose:

> "…when one is being forced to work with it, the change of attitude follows."
> (Bente)

Bente said that she thought it might have been easier for the social workers to accept a change if they had discovered the positive sides of it themselves, as she did when she "saw the light" and converted from her reluctant attitude towards kinship care. This experience led to her

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initiation and conducting of a project in the late 1990's, of which goal was to change the attitude of social workers in the child welfare services.

However, not only Bente, but all the Norwegian social workers whom I interviewed referred to the law requirements, the Regulations on foster care, to primarily search for a placement alternative within the child's kin, as the most important factor behind the increase of kinship care practice which is seen in Norway, and they all claimed to work in accordance with this requirement.

5. Pressure from the child welfare committee (Barnevernsnemda):

> "The Family Law Court has refused cases and required the child welfare services to do a more thorough search within the children's kinship and network" (Rita)

With reference to the Norwegian Child Welfare Act and the Regulations of Foster Care, Q-1072B, Section 4, the court put pressure on the child welfare services. The rendering from the interview with Rita above indicates how strong the legal pressure is on the child welfare services. She was surprised that the court actually re-examined the professional social workers' evaluations. The court really inspects the child welfare services' work, that they have made every endeavour to find possible foster carers within the children's kin or close network. If they find it unsatisfactory, the court refuses the case and the social workers have to do the job over again and do a more thorough search for possible foster families in the child's kin or network. As we have already seen, the professional social workers are powerful, and in spite of the law requirements, some social workers have prepared cases for the court witnessing that they still have a law-conflicting practice. The law requirements are important in contributing to a new practice, but the court's practice is essential in order to enforce the powerful social workers in child welfare services to work in accordance with them (Lukes, 2005).

6. Own experiences from a new type of practice:

> "But now we can ask, what was the most professional attitude? Some of the placements with grandparents, that I was absolutely against, I have now seen were very good placements. The children have got good lives and have developed in a good way." (Bente)

Bente's description of her change of attitude also emphasises the importance of experiences through her own practice after the study tour to the Netherlands. She experienced that previous placements with kin in Norway had turned out successfully, even though she did not agree with it in the first place. The positive experiences from practice nourished her new attitude towards the children's family and kinship care. The professional social workers were forced to practice kinship care. They did not do it without hesitation or reluctance, but the enforcement resulted in professional social workers having personal experiences with kinship care in Norway. The data from the interviews with the Norwegian social workers indicates that three out of four of the interviewed Norwegian social workers are positive to the practice of kinship care and one showed a more sceptical attitude towards the practice of kinship care. All of them based their expressed perspectives on their personal or their colleagues' experience from practicing kinship care.

7. Pressure from Bufetat, specialist department:

> "And if we haven't tried out family group conference or network meeting in a specific case, they ask 'why' and might want us to at least try." (Heidi)

Bufetat takes orders from the directorate Bufdir, which again takes order from the government's Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion. The specialist department Bufetat puts pressure on the child welfare services to practice kinship care. Bufetat also puts pressure on the child welfare services to practice the method family group conference in order to discover possible foster carers in the children's kin or close network. The method requires cooperation between the social worker and the child's kin, which implies that the social worker has to look at the child's kin as valuable and capable (Kampmann, 2000 and Saleebey, 2005). The social workers, who also said that they find this method too time-consuming, have hesitated to practice it. Heidi has experienced that Bufetat does not accept any explanations like for example that all family members have difficulties and therefore are unsuited to be employed as foster parents. They force the social workers to practice family group conference, which in the next turn will give the social workers experiences and knowledge about this way to discover possible kinship carers.

II   Positive Impetuses to Retain Kinship Care Practice

In the information from the interviews with the Norwegian social workers, I also found four different kinds of impetus of importance to retain kinship care. They are:

1. Practical facts – scarcity of non-related foster families
2. Emotion-handling competency
3. Responsibility appeal – the family is valuable
4. Political support and goodwill

The four items listed above will in the following be presented as subcategories of positive impetuses to retain kinship care practice.

1. Practical facts – scarcity of non-related foster families:

Bente and Rita mentioned the scarcity of non-related foster families as an important reason for the need of a kinship care practice. The state authorities in Norway have decided foster care to be the main out-of-home placement alternative, but there is already a shortage of foster families. In order to achieve the goal of enough foster families for all the children in need of one, it is an absolute necessity to employ more foster families. However, the response from the Norwegian population to the call for new non-related foster families has not been satisfactory, but surveys have found that persons in the family or in the close network of children in need of a foster home are much likely to undertake the job as foster carer (Barne-Ungdoms og Familiedirektoratet, 2010). Almost pragmatically Bente said that the great need of foster families in Norway is one good reason to search for a foster home within the child's kin and network. She referred to the gap between the need of and the number of available foster families for teenagers, and that creativity is required to find good placements for this group, because most non-related foster families want younger children, but half the children in need of an out-of-home care are more than twelve years.

Another important impetus for retaining kinship care in Norway is illustrated through Bente's statement.

2. Emotion-handling competency:

> "Many of the children who are to be placed in foster families have this problem, and this is an extra challenge to a non-related foster family. Love is not enough. Kinship carers, who have as a starting point a particular goodwill for this particular child, and the child has also a wish to stay with them, they start out with an attachment." (Bente)

Kinship carers start out with an attachment. The foster parents and the child already know each other and have a feeling of belonging to each other (Bø, 1995, Broad & Skinner, 2005, Buer, 2010 and Egelund et al., 2010). The child already has a bond with the foster family, which is important to feel a profound trust and to evolve emotion-handling competency. Bente expressed a concern that children in need of an out-of-home care have developed attachment problems and thus have difficulties bonding with new people. She referred to the many placement breakdowns, and said that many of these are connected to the child's attachment problems (Söderström, 2009 and Egelund et al. 2010). Also kinship carers will meet with challenges as foster parents, but to start the foster care employment with a child who is already attached to them is an obvious advantage of kinship care compared to non-related foster care.

3. Responsibility appeal – the family is valuable:

> "Then I would think they mean *I* have something to contribute to this particular child's welfare. Do I, really? Then I'll have to consider it. If it was my sister's daughter, I could be willing to receive her even if I'd had to quit my job.... It is like headhunting. It feels good to be asked." (Rita)

Rita's description about what happens to people when they are being asked to become foster parents for a child in their kinship is also an impetus to retain kinship care. She was talking about turning to the family and asking for their help to a child who is in their family, a child whom they know and love. This is an appeal for their responsibility for one of the family's children. In addition, Rita describes the typical positive reactions from a person who has been personally asked to become foster parents for a particular child. The feeling of being the chosen one, of being preferred ahead of others and of being extra special may not be far from euphoric, especially if a feeling of social discredit was the starting point.

When parents are evaluated not to be capable of taking care of their children, they may feel social devalued and discredited. With reference to Ervin Goffman's theory of stigma, persons

who are deeply discredited and are rejected by their society because of an attribute experience stigma. The process of stigma is caused by other persons' reactions and hinders normal identity. Also the family and kin of the stigmatised parents may feel labelled by the same stigma, a phenomenon of which Goffman called honour stigma (Goffman, 1975). When suffering from this kind of stigma, it is comprehensible that "it feels good to be asked", as Bente said, because it implies a social elevation of those who are being asked and their attributes. When someone in a child's kin are being asked to have him or her in foster care, they get pleased about being given the trust and being evaluated capable of giving good care for the child, which makes them easily accessible as foster parents.

4. Political support and goodwill:

> "They won't accept it if we say we have checked it out and considered it to be impossible. We have to give them a reason why we made such a consideration." (Heidi)

Heidi here described the function of another effective impetus to retain kinship care practice. She pointed out that Bufetat is good at offering their support, which she thought had resulted in an increase of the practice of kinship and network care. Bufetat provide specialist assistance to the child welfare services, they encourage them to practice kinship care and they supervise that they actually practice kinship care and use the methods required to ensure a good kinship care practice. Bufetat constitutes support and an offer to help, but also an essential pressure on the child welfare services. The child welfare service is obliged to follow the policy, but they have a strong professional power. We see that despite heavy pressure from Bufetat and policies instructing them to practice kinship care, they use their power to define that this placement alternative is inappropriate or impossible in several cases (Lukes, 2005 and Næss, 2010). The change of attitude of the social worker's, of which all the Norwegian social workers spoke, did not happen voluntary.

III   Challenges

Apparently, all kinds of out-of-home care meet challenges, and kinship care is not an exception (Farmer & Moyers, 2008 and Broad and Skinner, 2005). I found that the data from the interviews with the Norwegian social workers in this study illuminated five specific challenges regarding kinship care practice. They are:

1. Rub-off effect when a kinship foster home does not succeed

2. A tradition of problem-focus in child welfare

3. Duty as pressure

4. Economic retrenchment measures

5. Hesitation over moving a child when needed

The challenges mentioned by the interviewed Norwegian social workers will in the following be presented by the five subcategories above.

1. Rub-off effect when a kinship foster home does not succeed:

> "It is not difficult to find negative stories about for example a grandmother who should never have become a foster mother or a fifteen year old for whom this did not succeed.....Negative experiences with one case easily affect the next case." (Bente)

Bente was the one among the Norwegian informants who was most experienced in the practice of kinship care. In her statement above she emphasised a challenge to the kinship care practice which is important to be aware of. It is a fact that a failure has a rub-off effect also concerning the practice of kinship care. Examples of unsuccessful experiences with kinship care easily spread. Though Bente has "seen the light", despite the political pressure on the child welfare service and despite all the accessible experience-based knowledge that advantages the practice of kinship care, it looks like the negative experiences with kinship care nourish and strengthen a constant underlying scepticism or reluctance about kinship care. Negative experiences are being used as arguments against kinship care and referred to as general facts. It is not difficult to find examples where kinship care was not a success, but generalising out from one single case is wrong (Kvale, 2007).

If a social worker has a sceptical attitude towards kinship care, the challenges may be emphasised more than the benefits.

2. A tradition of problem-focus in child welfare:

> "We don't know where the mines are! .... If a child is placed in kinship care on the mother's side of the family, there is a risk for the father's side of the family to be squeezed out. ...." (Rita)

Obviously there is a chance of the child getting more connected with one side of the family, when he or she is placed in foster care with someone from one side of the family. However, a child placed in non-related foster care may also have lopsided contact with his or her family and perhaps have even less contact with their family. This is in fact a challenge to all kinds of foster care and in a particular way a challenge with kinship care, but it is not insuperable. Another statement relevant here is this:

> "If there is a crash in the relation between parents and foster parents, it will be just like sending the child directly into war. Neither can we accept that the mother takes the wheel and is in control of the foster mother." (Bente)

Bente's caution above brings up one of the most important tasks of a professional social worker, namely the professional assessment (Christiansen & Anderssen, 2009). Again, this is not an insuperable job, but it is important to have good assessment methods and to carefully carry through professional assessments to discover and become aware of possible conflicts in the family relations that may affect the child in an undesirable way.

When looking for problems, it is not difficult to find them, but it is difficult to discover positive aspects when focusing problems[2]. The social workers' focus is crucial to what they see. Considering all the experienced based knowledge about positive sides of kinship care, if an out-of-home care is required, social workers in the child welfare service should endeavour to find a good foster home within the child's kin (Winokur et al., 2009 and Farmer & Moyers, 2009)

3. Duty as pressure:

> " It is not for the good if the grandmother undertakes the job as a kinship carer just because of a feeling of duty to do so." (Rita)

Rita here mentioned what she considered a challenge to kinship care concerning the kinship carer's motivations for becoming foster parents. Social workers' professional assessment is also important to find out about the motivation to become foster parents. Rita defined "a feeling of duty" to be an undesirable motivation to become a foster parent. However, even if a sense of duty should be a factor of motivation it is not necessarily the only motivation that

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[2] From lectures by Omre, C. & Schjelderup, L at ISCTE in Lisbon, 27 November 2009.

person has (Söderström, 2009). If a grandmother says that she feels obliged to have her grandchild in foster care, it would be interesting to find out why. What causes a grandmother's feeling of duty? Is her feeling of duty based on a feeling of belonging and love for the child? If she feels obliged to care for the child because of love and strong family bonds, it could actually mean something very positive to the child (Broad & Skinner, 2005 and Farmer & Moyers, 2009).

Another aspect is also that the Norwegian welfare state depends on people taking responsibility and actually feeling obliged to care for a child. Without this human quality, foster care could hardly have been practiced. Nevertheless, motivation alone is not enough to become a good foster home, but all social workers know that capacity and capability are indisputable necessities also.

4. Economic retrenchment measures:

> "Money and politics controls, even if they don't say so, and the professional's knowledge doesn't seem to be heard."
> (Rita)

The rendering from Rita above points out another of her concern and challenge connected to kinship care practice in Norway. Out-of-home care is expensive, but kinship care may be some less expensive compared to the alternatives. This of course may be one of the reasons why kinship care is "a winner" in politics, but also late research results and experienced based knowledge makes it "a winner" (Farmer & Moyers, 2008). Politics is about money, but to shut down child care institutions just to find out that they have to rebuild them is not economical. Rita said that she and her colleagues are worried about the on-going shut downs of child care institutions and she emphasised the importance of maintaining a variety of placement alternatives.

> "...the need for new foster families enforces a practice which is not always good, and many families are approved as foster families, but should never have been approved as such." (Rita)

It is challenging for the social workers not to let the desperate need for new foster families compel hurried solutions (Palacios & Jimenez, 2009). A great deal of the challenges of kinship care and all kinds of child protection work depend on the professional social workers' evaluations (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2003). When the goal is to find the best placement

alternative to each individual child, it is important not to make shortcuts in the evaluation procedures. Bente cautioned against making kinship care a superior goal to any child in need of out-of-home care and acting like kinship care is in the best interest of any child, irrespective of their needs. That would be to "fall into the other trench", she said. Sometimes there are weighty reasons for not placing the child in kinship care. For these children it is crucial that other out-of-home care placements also exist (Winokur et al, 2009 and Farmer & Moyers, 2009). A painful childhood because of placement breakdowns is expensive in a twofold sense. Economy and politics together with the professionals' knowledge is crucial to have a good child welfare service and a have various out-of-home care alternatives in the best interest of every child in need.

5. Hesitation over moving a child when needed:

> "To prevent unintended moves is a goal for the child welfare services in Norway, but perhaps we are too stressed about this."
> (Randi)

This challenge mentioned by Randi may in one way cohere with the political economic retrenchment measures in Norway. Randi said that she thinks the child welfare services wait too long to remove a child from kinship care, even when they have an idea that the child is not very well off. Randi mentioned the considerable number of unintended moves from foster care, and that the chance for the child to meet with several unintended relocations increases when having been through one unintended move.

Unintended moves from foster care are expensive and resource consuming in several ways and it is straining and risky for the child (Egelund et al., 2010). Thus, the economic and the professional concern agree about the idea of preventing unintended moves. Preventing unintended moves from foster care is a policy measurement, yet it is important primarily in order to protect the child from the undesirable consequences from unintended moves. Social workers have a demanding role and have to be aware of this and of the fact that sometimes to move the child is exactly the right thing to do (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2003). By assessments and by repeated contact with the child and the foster family, the social worker should be able to have constant updates about the child's situation in the foster home.

IV Success Criteria for Kinship Care Practice

The information from the Norwegian social workers whom I interviewed resulted in a list of seven criteria for a successful kinship care practice. These are:

1. Economic support to kinship carers
2. Children's participation in decisions
3. Collaboration with the children's families
4. Training programmes
5. Professional recruitment processes and follow-ups from social workers
6. Awareness of accessible support and entitlements as foster carers
7. Trust

In the following I will present renderings from the Norwegian social workers whom I interviewed and my interpretations in accordance with the subcategories listed above.

1. Economical support to kinship carers:

Bente said that Norwegians of today contributing to community development are more focused on their rights than they were in the past. Thus, economical compensations are important in order to have a good kinship care practice. She illustrated this by stating the following:

> "People don't want to undertake the job and then suffer from a huge economic loss. Grandmas are not at home in their rocking chair, waiting to have a foster child. They are a part of the working population too and might need to be bought free from their jobs to be able to become foster parents." (Bente)

The good feeling of being headhunted and elevated to a level of partner does not qualify as "payment" alone. A grandmother's love for her grandchild may be a weighty motivation to become a foster parent, but it does not replace her economic loss from quitting her job. Economical support is important for a good kinship care practice in Norway.

2. Children's participation in decisions:

"It is important that this subject (client's participation) is not only a matter of principles! Ask the young people themselves about who they can imagine as foster parents, who they would like to have as foster parents!"
(Bente)

This is an essential criterion for a successful kinship care practice in the best interest of the child, emphasised by Bente. Children's participation just as a phrase and a matter of principles does not contribute a more successful kinship care practice. Children must actually participate in the decision making processes in child welfare questions concerning themselves and they also have a legal right to be heard in all situations affecting themselves (Omre & Schjelderup, 2009). Children's participation represents an important part of the new child perspective. Social workers have a long tradition of defining what the best interest of the child actually is, without asking the child. Late research results shows how competent participants children are and how capable they are of defining their own needs. According to the new child perspective children must be included in processes of planning and implementation over time, social workers' mindset must include children as subjects and children's experiences, competences and meanings must be acknowledged. When children get involved in situations concerning themselves, take part in defining their situation and needs and seek for solutions in cooperation with adults, they may evolve valuable strengths (Omre & Schjelderup, 2009). Though the social workers always are those who are responsible for the final decisions the children's opinions and reflections is crucial. The possession of power will always be biased between social workers and children, but children's participation contributes diminishing the inequality (Omre & Schjelderup, 2009, Lukes 2005 and Järvinen & Mortensen, 2005).

3. Collaboration with the children's families:

"Ask also the parents! Develop collaboration!" (Bente)

Bente's practice with kinship care for many years has given her experience about how essential children's participation is concerning a successful kinship care practice. She encourages social workers' collaboration with the parents and also regarding their children's out-of-home placement. When it is decided that a child is in need of a foster home, the parents may contribute with useful information and also good suggestions about possible foster parents. Though it is decided that a child cannot live with his or her parents for a justified reason, social workers should have as a starting point that the parents still love their children and wish them all the best in life (Bø, 1995). A good relation between the social workers and

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the parents is a good basis for further contact and collaboration. To ask for the parents' suggestions may be a good start even if they are not able to come up with any possible foster parents and even though their suggestions should not be preferred. As we have already seen "it feels good to be asked", also about information and suggestions.

4. Training programmes:

For a successful kinship care practice it is not enough to employ a foster family and leave the child with them. All kinship carers also need education and training (Broad & Skinner, 2005, Palacios & Jimenez, 2009 and Winokur et al. 2009). Randi and Bente especially mentioned the training and education programme in PRIDE, which is a specialised and structured programme that also allows the kinship carers to meet and connect with other kinship carers. Through the training programme in PRIDE, the kinship carers learn among other things about how to handle challenges as foster parents and how to handle challenges typical for kinship carers. Feedback from PRIDE-course participants shows that this education is appreciated as useful and interesting.

5. Professional recruitment processes and follow-ups from social workers:

Rita, Bente and Randi emphasised the significance of making thorough assessments and follow-ups. Bente expressed it this way:

> "Then, it is very important not to leave out the process of recruitment and follow-up. We have examples of this where the placement broke down after a short time. It is too easy to say "the family solved it."(Bente)

Bente cautioned against making shortcuts in the processes of recruitment and follow-up. In order to evaluate the possible foster parents, to find out if they have what it takes to become foster parents, Randi and Bente especially recommend following the "Five Skills" in PRIDE. The foster parents must be able to:

> 1) Bring up and give good care
> 2) Support children's development and handle deficiencies in their development
> 3) Support the relationship between children and their families
> 4) Give children possibilities to establish safe and lasting relations
> 5) Ability to cooperate

This list of skills constitutes basic issues for assessments in the process of recruitment of foster parents and also for a follow-up checklist.

A grandmother may be very happy to be asked to become a foster mother and the grandchild may be very happy about it as well. This may look as a "happy ending" but now it is important that the professional social worker does not leave and "forget" about the family (Farmer & Moyers, 2008, Palacios & Jimenez, 2009 and Broad & Skinner, 2005). Though the kinship carers start out with an attachment, they will meet challenges. Through continuous follow-ups with the kinship foster family the professional social worker should be able to see how the kinship foster family develops and how they manage to meet with the child's needs.

Sometimes the kinship carers need extra support and sometimes a week-end family is necessary to prevent too much stress in the foster family, Bente said. She stressed that it is better for the child not to have to go to a week-end family at all, according to her knowledge about attachment problems and to let the child feel included in the family. The feeling of being sent away because the foster parents need a break from them is the opposite of feeling loved and included. However, less harmful ways to allow for such breaks do exist. Bente said that the best way is to find a week-end family within the child's kin or network, as it is less stigmatising "to visit aunt for the week-end".

6. Awareness of accessible support and entitlements as foster carers:

> "It is important for the social workers to be more intensive in their offering of support for kinship care families, because they demand less." (Rita)

Different needs of support may be discovered through follow-ups in foster homes, but the professional social workers should pay a special attention to kinship foster homes. There may be different reasons for kinship carers to demand less help and support. However, also recent research has found that kinship carers ask for less help and support than non-related foster carers do. To have a successful kinship care practice, it is necessary that the professional social workers are aware of this fact and that they do not lean back awaiting the kinship carers' demands. Moreover, it is essential that the kinship carers are aware of what challenges they may meet, what is expected from them and what kind of help or support they may ask

for. The social workers should make sure that the kinship carers get information about these issues, but lack of information is not necessarily the reason that they demand less (Farmer & Moyers, 2009). If the family bonds are strong and the "family pride" is strong, the kinship carers may hesitate asking for help because they think it is humiliating. Another reason may be that the kinship carers are so grateful about being found worthy enough to become foster parents that they may be afraid of losing the professional social workers' trust if they complain or demand too much (Goffman, 1975). Irrespective of what the reason is, it is important that the social workers are aware of the fact that kinship carers demand less than non-related foster carers and that they exert themselves in discovering needs and offering support.

7. Trust:

> "If we entrust grandma to have custody of the child, we must also be able to believe that she has what it takes and will ask for help when things get too difficult." (Bente)

The social workers have to trust the kinship carers and to show them their trust. This is important to the development of an openhearted relation between the professional social workers and the kinship carer. As we have already seen, the professional social workers are powerful and much more powerful than the kinship carers. Trust is a key-word in order to diminish the difference in power and thus essential to make good conditions of collaboration between the professional social worker and the kinship carers (Järvinen & Mortensen, 2005). The trust has to be reciprocal between the two collaborating partners. Distrust will affect the relationship and the collaboration in a negative way. If kinship carers feel mistrusted by the social workers, they are likely to try to avoid contact with them, which makes poor conditions for collaboration and follow-ups. The kinship carer's feeling of being trusted contributes to self-reliance and good conditions for collaboration (Saleebey, 2005 and Goffman, 1975).

V   Professional power

The professional social workers' great power is conspicuous in the data from the interviews with all the social workers in this study. They have a powerful role in their relation with the children, parents and the foster carers, but also regarding superior authorities (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2003). The collected data from the Norwegian social workers especially points out:

1. Power used to pretend acting in accordance with instructions

2. Power in change processes

Some of the statements from my interviews with the Norwegian social workers exemplifying the professional social workers' power regarding the two subcategories listed above will be presented and interpreted in the following.

1. Power used to pretend acting in accordance with instructions:

> "It may happen that these methods are carried through more as a matter of form, just to make them able to document their attempt." (Heidi)

Bufetat puts pressure on the child welfare services to practice family group conferences in order to search for foster homes within the children's kin (Buer, 2010). The rendering from Heidi above exemplifies the professional social workers' power. This is an example of how social workers can fake accomplishment in accordance with instructions from their authorities. The professional social workers in the child welfare services are instructed by state authorities to apply the method family group conference and because the professional social workers' power to resist instructions is well-known, the social workers have to document that they actually have applied the method. However, the professional power is sometimes even being used to bypass the actual purpose of the instructions and the family group conference is carried through as a matter of form (Lukes, 2005).

2. Power in change processes:

> "...We, the professional social workers were *against* it and the previous child care departments were positive to it...." (Bente)

Referring to what Bente said about her own change of attitude towards kinship care, the professional social workers have the power to resist political and legal instructions and they have the power to follow these instructions.

According to Bente, there are great differences in how many children the different child welfare agencies and the individual social workers have placed in kinship care and that the highest numbers belong to those who are most positive toward kinship care:

> ".... and those that are really good at finding solutions in the child's kin or network, also find solutions there in emergency situations when it is of great benefit for the child to come to someone they already know." (Bente)

When being creative and positive towards kinship care, the social workers contribute to the development of kinship care practice, because they have the power to do so. On the other hand, if they are negative towards kinship care, they may use their power to restrain development of kinship care practice (Bourdieu, 1996 and Lukes, 2005).

The collected data in this study illuminates that the professional power is strong enough for the social workers to maintain their attitude against kinship care practice for as long as they want. There has been a change in attitude among social workers in child protection, but they have not changed willingly. The state authorities have had to use heavy pressure from several angles in their "struggles" with the professional social workers' reluctance towards practicing kinship care.

A rendering from Randi's statement about the specialist department Bufetat's pressure on the child welfare services to practice kinship care exemplifies the use of "weapon" in the ongoing "struggle" on a professional level:

> "And Bufetat should be neutral as a starting point, which I don't think they are. Neutral professionals should investigate the relations in the family, like Elaine Farmer suggests in her last book about kinship care." (Randi)

This is an accusation against Bufetat that they do not have a professional attitude in their job. They are not neutral (Järvinen & Mortensen, 2005). According to Randi, they should look at each case individually, without any ideas of preferred placement alternatives. To emphasise her accusation, she also referred to professionally approved knowledge.

Through my work with the collected data in this study, I have found that a strengths-based perspective is seen as essential in order to develop a successful kinship care practice. Considering the heavy pressure on the child welfare services, and also all the research-based knowledge about how important a strengths-based perspective is for social workers to give

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their clients help of durable value (Saleebey, 2005), many social workers still are reluctant. Drawing a parallel to the theory of paradigms of science, this could be just another example that a shift of paradigms does not happen without opposition and resistance (Gilje & Grimen, 1995).

By elaborating on the categories "Turning Points in Mindset", "Positive Impetus to Retain Kinship Care Practice", "Challenges, Success Criteria for Kinship Care" and "Professional Power", I have now presented the interviewed Norwegian professional social workers' perspectives relevant to kinship care and my interpretations of their statements. Some main findings will be further discussed in the next chapter, but before that I will present the findings from Portugal.

Part 2 – Portugal

Portugal does not practice kinship care in the sense of foster care, but family caretaking. Their expressed perspectives below are based on their experiences from the Portuguese child protection practice and hence not on experiences with kinship care. When the Portuguese social workers referred to foster care they did not mean kinship care, but non-related foster care. All the Portuguese informants claimed to follow the law's requirement to primarily search for a placement within the child's kin, but none of them want a practice of employing someone from the child's kin or close network as foster parents and hence entitle them to the foster carers' financial and professional support and training. It is my intention that the differences between the practice in Norway and Portugal will throw light on each other's practice in a way that is useful to the out-of-home-care practice in both countries.

When going through the collected data from my interviews with Portuguese professional social workers in this study, I found six categories of statements. These are:

I   Positive Perspectives on Family Caretaking

II   Critical Perspectives on Family Caretaking

III   Collaboration with Children and Parents

IV   Criteria for Successful Out-of-Home Care Practice in Portugal

V   Suggestions for Improvement of the Portuguese Child Protection

VI   Optimism

The five categories are presented in an analytical perspective below.

I   Positive Perspectives on Family Caretaking

The Portuguese social worker's positive viewpoints on family caretaking are few, but I have distinguished two subcategories from statements on this issue. These are:

1. A good alternative in a few cases
2. Emotional bonds and relations

Two of the interviewed Portuguese social workers expressed positive perspectives on family caretaking, which will be described below.

1. A good alternative in a few cases:

"....but placement with kin sometimes, in a few cases, can be good." (Maria)

Maria, who has been a social worker in the Portuguese child protection system in Madeira, said that she had some positive experiences with family caretaking. She did not specify which cases that might be, but she had clear opinions about in what cases family caretaking would not be a good idea. She thought that the social conditions in the Portuguese population may be the reason why family caretaking only exceptionally is a good alternative for out-of-home placements (Dores Guerreiro et al., 2009).

2. Emotional bonds and relations:

"I believe that children placed with kin have a stronger feeling of belonging to the family they live with, compared to those placed outside kin". (Paula)

Paula acknowledged that family caretaking have some advantages. What she pointed out here is about emotional bonds and relations in a family, speaking about feeling of belonging. The feeling of belonging is an important aspect for a child to develop a feeling of trust and security. Emotional bonds and a feeling of trust and security is vital for the child to develop self-confidence (Saleebey, 2005, Söderström, 2009). This is also in accordance with Bente's

statement that the children's kin have an advantage compared to children in non-related foster care, because they start out with an attachment. They do not have to start with getting to know each other the same way as the non-related foster parents. The relation is already there and they may already have known each other for many years, thus they have a "history" together.

II   Critical Perspectives on Family Caretaking

The Portuguese social workers referred to negative experiences with family caretaking when explaining their critical perspective. I have grouped the critical perspectives into three categories. These are:

1. Social inheritance and diagnosis belief
2. Distance in relations means respect
3. Scarcity of recourses

The above categories of the interviewed Portuguese social workers' critical perspectives on family caretaking will be further presented below.

1. Social inheritance and diagnosis belief:

> "They all have the same problems as the children's parents, like alcoholism and psychiatric problems". (Maria)

Maria said that except from a very few cases, family caretaking are not a good placement alternative and here she explained her opinions about that. Maria generalised the family situations of the children in need of out-of-home care in Madeira. The diagnosis or label "alcoholism" and "psychiatric problems" are attached not only to the parents, but to the whole kinship (Goffman, 1975). Maria also said that these problems endure for generations:

> "…if the parents drink too much, also their own parents drink to o much. In these cases the children are better off in a foster family or an institution." (Maria)

Maria spoke about social inheritance, as she said the same problems are being transferred from parents to children for generations. In order to break this undesirable repetition and give children in situations like this a new start, Maria thought that it is a good solution to move the children from their families, despite the risks connected to uproot children from their families. Maria suggested placement in non-related foster families and/or institutions, but her goal for

those children would most likely be adoption. Adoption is a political measure in Portugal used when children are not likely to move back to their parents, but awaiting the clarifications to be adopted, the children are being placed in non-related foster care and in institutions (Segurança Social, 2007).

Social inheritance was mentioned also by the Porto Team and Lisa. Destructive patterns of similar problems occurring in several generations are more difficult to break in poor societies where the social security systems also suffer from poverty. However, a dominant perspective of social inheritance may also impede empowerment and a strength-based focus (Saleebey, 2005). What Maria said above also reflects the situation of poverty in Portugal (Dores Guerreiro et al. 2009). Also history witnesses that alcoholism and poverty are connected, and there are many examples of societies were both the poverty rate is high, and alcoholism is widespread. In the post-war period in Norway a strategic approach against poverty was to start combat alcoholism in areas with the highest rate of poverty.

2. Distance in relations means respect:

> "...parents are more likely to respect, look up to and therefore, cooperate with non-related foster families..." (Maria)

Maria showed a belief in formal relations in order to expect respect from the children's parents towards the foster parents. She thought that the distance between children's parents and the foster parents was desirable because the parents would show more respect and admire the foster parents then (Järvinen & Mortensen, 2005). In Maria's opinion, the close relation between the children's parents and the family members who have got custody of the children is a disadvantage compared to nonrelated foster parents (Holtan, 2010).

Another category regarding the Portuguese professional social workers' critical perspectives on family caretaking is among others mentioned by Paula.

3. Scarcity of recourses:

> "There are not enough social workers to work with three generations of the children's families........the children's biological family need more training and follow-ups than the social workers are able to give." (Paula)

Paula described a scarcity of recourses. She is a social worker in the region of Porto in Portugal, which is known as an area where the poverty rate is higher than in the rest of the country. Because of poverty and social inheritance, Paula thought that practicing family caretaking in Porto would be very difficult. This statement from Paula also witnesses about the same opinion as Maria's. The children's extended families represent three generations and they all have problems that would have to be treated by the social workers, if any of them should be able to become good carers. Paula did not say that family caretaking is impossible in general, but because of the poverty it would be a bad solution. Because of the poverty, they focus on the child and not the whole family, to work with three generations would require more social workers than they have.

III   Collaboration with Children and Parents

This category I have divided into the two subcategories:

1. Children's participation
2. Collaboration with parents

Perspectives expressed by the Portuguese social workers interviewed in this study, in accordance with the subcategories listed above are presented below.

1. Children's participation:

> "When the child is twelve, thirteen years or older, we ask the child about the child's preference of placement, but usually the decision is already made." (Maria)

Also in Portugal children have a legal right to be heard in situations affecting themselves, but the Portuguese social workers do not have a pressure similar to the pressure that Bufetat puts on the Norwegian child welfare services. For example, none of the Portuguese social workers recognised family group conference, a method which to a large extent requires children's participation, and none of them mentioned any change of attitude among social workers regarding opinions of collaboration with parents and kin or about children's participation.

Considering Roger Hart's ladder of young people's participation, this is not participation at all (Omre & Schjelderup, 2009). The practice Maria described witnesses of the great difference

in possession of power between the professional social workers and the children. The professional social workers are very powerful and they may use their power without much interference, because there is a lack of pressure and control from their authorities (Lukes, 2005).

> "In principle one should always listen to what the child says, though it should depend on the age and maturity of the child how much they say is emphasised... everything should circle around their needs, but in Portugal it sometimes takes very long time for a child to get help and when they finally get help they are so messed up that one shouldn't really emphasise what they are saying...and sometimes we have to make the decision for them. Sometimes it is our job to understand that whatever they are saying it is because they don't know any better than that." (Lisa)

Lisa's reflections on children's participation indicate a perspective that has very much in common with the perspective that the new child perspective should replace. Surely, the social workers are responsible for the decision, but the children should be seen as competent participants and not as "so messed up" that they do not know what they are saying. Social workers' power to interpret is clearly exemplified in Lisa's viewpoints and when there is little or no pressure and control from the state authorities, the power becomes even more extensive (Bourdieu, 1996 and Luke, 2005). Again this should be seen together with the poverty that marks the Portuguese society.

To some extent, the Portuguese social workers seem to be aware of their powerful role and how important it is to make thorough evaluations in the best interest of the child. Both Lisa and Maria emphasise the danger of moving a child from their parents' home, thus they make such actions only when strictly necessary. However, this way of looking at children may also be described as a traditional and paternalistic perspective in child protection, seeing the child primarily as vulnerable and in need of protection instead of a competent participant and partner (Saleebey, 2005, Putnam et al., 1993, Hvinden & Gissinger, 2005 and Sund, 2010). The new child perspective allows seeing the child as in need of protection but also as a competent participant.

2. Collaboration with parents:

When I asked Lisa about her opinion concerning collaborating with the children's parents, she answered promptly "We have to!" If the parents do not want to collaborate with the social

workers, they have to apply to the court in order to place the child in out-of-home care. Lisa finds it difficult when parents do not agree to collaborate, and then they have to evaluate whether the child's situation is severe enough for them to move the child from the parents forthright, against the parents will, or whether they have to bring the case to court for a decision (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2003).

Maria said she finds it difficult to work with parents who have alcohol problems and to make them understand that they have to "get better" in order to have their children back. Again, this exemplifies how alcoholism and poverty keep the inhabitants in a destructive pattern. The social workers in Portuguese child protection said that they try to collaborate with parents because the law requires it from them, but they do not have positive expectations about the collaboration because their experiences have taught them that their chances of success are minimal. These negative expectations may contribute to maintain a problem-focus, and when focusing problems and deficits, discovery of possibilities and strengths rarely happen.

IV   Criteria for Successful Out-of-Home Care Practice in Portugal

Based on their experiences from child protection practice, the Portuguese social workers came up with several different criteria for a successful out-of-home care practice in Portugal, which I have grouped into eight subcategories. These are:

1. Skills of parenthood
2. Social workers' skills
3. The legal system's role
4. Increase of the number of out-of-home-care places
5. Emergency Units
6. Standardised methods
7. Political involvement
8. Elevation of the status of child protection work

In the following I will present how these categories were expressed through my interviews with the Portuguese social workers.

1. Skills of parenthood:

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> "It is important that they have the skills needed to be a mother and father. If they already have children, this can tell us about their skills." (Maria)

Maria spoke about her opinions of what she thought was the most essential criteria for successful family caretaking and foster care. She emphasises the importance of foster parents' parenthood skills, which the professional social workers must look for when making their thorough assessments. Maria's statement above is in accordance with the Norwegian social workers' opinions about what is of importance in the assessments of the kinship carers. With reference to the "Five Skills" in PRIDE, it is not enough to love the child or to have a wish about caring for a child; they also have to have the skills to be parents.

2. Social workers' skills:

> "But it is not enough to become a good social worker. It is also necessary to be a balanced person." (Maria)

This statement from Maria makes another issue of importance in order to have a successful out-of-home practice in Portugal. Education and experience alone is not enough to do a good job as a social worker in child protection work, but to have the right personality is also necessary. Maria also emphasised experience and maturity as important features in order to make good assessments in child protection work, and that the social worker must have the will and ability to work in team with other social workers. Social workers should never make decisions alone, but collaborate in teams. Maria shows firmness in her reflection, and no dwell. She has a superior role at her office and it is likely to believe that her opinions are crucial to the child protection work in her department.

The next subcategory has many aspects, thus it is divided into five criteria.

3. The legal system's role regarding;

- Consumption of time
- Ideology of the principle of biology (Det biologiske prinsipps ideology)
- Elevation of the legal professions' knowledge about children
- Adoption
- Allowing children continuity and stability in the out-of-home care

The Porto Team and Lisa underlined the need of improving the legal system concerning child protection decisions in order to have as successful out-of-home-care practice in Portugal.

- **Consumption of time:**

> "It takes at least three months before the court acts and during this time we risk losing the child and the parents as they move to another address."(Lisa)

Lisa is frustrated because of the court's time-consuming processes. As a professional social worker she performs her job in closeness to the children and she sees them suffer from the court's time-consuming processes. As the work of lawyers and the work of social workers in child protection are essentially different, there is typically limited comprehension about each other's work (ref. Key-person 1). However, a situation of uncertainty and waiting can be very harmful for children who already suffer from for example maltreatment. To have a successful out-of-home-care practice, the processes in court should be simplified and shortened (Segurança Social (2007).

- **Ideology of the principle of biology:**

> "The court believes that children should live with their biological parents...." (Priscilla)

This issue is about the different perspectives between the social workers and the legal professions. In Priscilla's opinion, when a child's situation is serious enough to be treated in court, the children very often would have been better off in an out-of-home-care. She thought that the principle of biology is emphasised too much in court decisions. Priscilla thinks that the court waits too long and gives the parents too many chances. In her opinion, the children are punished for the benefit of their parents. This is also a constant discussion in Norway, and at present a committee appointed by the Norwegian government is investigating the principle of biology in Norway (regjeringen.no, 2010a). Priscilla thinks that the principle of biology should not be attached as great importance as it is today in order to have a successful out-of-home-care practice in Portugal. In relation to this, Priscilla also mentioned another criterion for improvement of the legal system.

- **Elevation of the legal professions' knowledge about children:**

> This juridical area is not very desirable among lawyers and solicitors; it is not very well paid and there is no professional knowledge about children."
> (Priscilla)

In Priscilla's opinion, legal professions' interest in, engagement in and comprehension of child protection work should be elevated.

Also in Norway, it is more profitable for people in legal professions to do business work than child protection work, but still there are some lawyers who become experts on child welfare cases, because they fin child welfare interesting. Yet, the legal professions in both countries are very different from the social work profession, and interdisciplinary work typically has some challenges. However, Priscilla's statement above is a call for politicians to prioritize elevating the status of child protection work in order to improve the legal professions' knowledge of, interest and engagement in the best interest of the children.

- **Adoption:**

> "We are consultants for the court. Every 3 or 6 months we must give updated information about the family, e.g. that the parents have now tried an alcohol treatment, but the court always require more information! It is very difficult to change the court's decision and make them allow for the child to be adopted."(Paula)

In Portugal adoption is a goal for children who are placed in foster care or institutions and are not likely to move back to their parents. The Porto Team was concerned that the time-consuming legal processes destroy the children's possibilities for being adopted. Paula described one of the reasons why the court processes consume so much time. The professional social workers inform the court about the children's and their families' situation, why they think the child has to be placed in out-of-home care and about what has been tried out in order to solve the problem. Priscilla had already said, "The court believe that the children should live with their biological parents" and Paula pointed out that it is very difficult to convince the court that they should allow for the children to be adopted (den Dulk & Doorne-Huiskes, 2007).

> "When the parents have been properly investigated and assessed not to have the qualities necessary to be parents, they make new attempts to get their child

back all the time. But very often they never get better, and then it is too late for adoption…" (Pamela)

The goal is adoption, but the legal system allows the parents to make new attempts to get the children back over and over again, the children grow older and when they are finally allowed to be adopted, it is difficult or impossible to find a qualified couple who are willing to adopt them. The court allows the parents to get new chances repeatedly, as for example of getting rid of their alcohol addiction, while the social workers, who may argue but not re-examine the court's decisions, focus on the child and the child alone. This is an example of contradicting perspectives and of conflicts in interdisciplinary work, which could be aligned if the level of knowledge about children in legal professions was elevated. Surely, the two groups of professions should not conflict, but cooperate in the best interest of the child. Pamela's statement is one more argument for shortening the time-consuming legal processes and one more call for a limit for how long the children should live in temporary homes in uncertainty awaiting for a final decision, but in particular, it is a call for limiting parents' rights of repeated trials in order to achieve the Portuguese child policy's measurement about "streamlining adoption" and thus develop a successful out-of-home-care practice in Portugal Segurança Social (2007).

- **Allowing children continuity and stability in the out-of-home care:**

> "The institutions try to help the children in order to let them have personal progress in different ways, but when they go back to the parents for another trial, they come back to the same situation that caused the placement in the first place. Very often the parents don't change even if there has been made efforts to help them change. This problem is not caused by the law itself, but more by the judges." (Pamela)

The children are repeatedly being disrupted and reversed in their positive development because the court gives the parents right to retry being parents, over and over again (Egelund et al. 2010). This procedure is damaging to the children. Pamela described the institutions' work as positive and useful to the children's development. In her opinion, they do a good job with children who have lived under damaging circumstances, but when the children have started on a positive development they are not allowed to get rooted and to continue their positive progress, because their parents' repeated chances to try parenting their children. If the parents' situation has not changed for the better, the chances of the children having to experience the same story over and over again are great. This is a call for evaluating the legal processes for the benefit of the children. However, it also reflects Pamela's perspective

regarding parents' situation and their abilities or disabilities to change and improve as parents, paralleling Randi's description of how Norwegian social workers in the child welfare service used to look at parents before they came to their "turning point in mindset".

4. Increase of the number of out-of-home-care places:

> "He has waited for over 9 months and it isn't because he is so difficult to place, but the authorities have considered him to be at a medium level of risk. The capacity of places is scarce and we really just have to take whatever place is available. We don't have a situation where we can choose the best placement for one specific child." (Lisa)

The Porto Team and Lisa focused improvement of the Portuguese legal system as a many-sided criterion for a successful out-of-home-care practice in Portugal, but they also stressed the lack of available places in the different out-of-home-care alternatives. The children have to wait for available places after the decision that they need out-of-home-care has been made, and it is even worse if they are considered to have a situation "at a medium level of risk". The rendering above from my interview with Lisa reflects the situation of poverty in the country. The lack of resources forces the child protection system to focus on the most severe cases and postpone the other cases. Yet, this is not only a consequence of poverty, but it is also about political priority. Both Lisa and the Porto Team are frustrated because of the lack of available places in foster care and in institutions, therefore the call for actions from politicians and from the superior child protection authorities.

5. Emergency units:

> "Trying to avoid placing the child in an emergency unit, we postpone the moving of the child awaiting a long term placement to become available.... The emergency units are really, really damaging" (Lisa)

Lisa brings up the circumstances for children in emergency situations. She is worried about the bad conditions in these institutions and about the fact that to be placed in them is damaging for the children. The situations of emergency may be damaging alone, but the institutions are not qualified to give good care for children in these situations. To care for children in emergency situations is a demanding job. Also in Norway we recognise this problem. It seems difficult to develop institutions that are qualified enough to care for children in emergency situations also in a country that does not suffer from poverty.

According to Lisa, the social workers hesitate to remove children from their homes, even if they are in an urgent need of an out-of-home placement because they want to protect the children from suffering the damaging emergency institutions. Putting it this way, Lisa obviously also sees the paradox, but the distressed situation causes decisions like this. It is likely to believe that an improved situation concerning available long term places and streamlined adoption processes would diminish the need of placements in emergency institutions.

6. Standardised methods:

> "…we are always depending on central services. We said that we need tools and methods for selection of foster families...." (Paula)

This statement from Paula constitutes another important criterion for a successful out-of-home-care practice in Portugal. Standardised methods for assessing the applicants for foster care employments are important in order to qualify the foster care and family caretaking practices (Broad & Skinner, 2005 and Farmer & Moyers, 2009). Paula and the Porto Team experience that they wait continuously for the central services in Lisbon to give them standardised methods and accompanying forms for selection of foster parents. Considering the great need for foster families in Porto and the fact that many applicants for foster care employment are waiting for an answer, providing standardised methods and accompanying forms required for the social workers' assessments should be given high priority. Paula described how they feel hindered in doing their job by their own superiors (Smith, 2008). The Porto Team are creatively trying to solve children's difficult situations of life, but their superiors do not pay them the respect of giving them the approval they need to carry out their ideas:

> Even if we have ideas, we can't go ahead to develop them without having the authorisation from Lisbon…They always say that Porto is a good place of testing things and so on, but afterwards we don't get their permission to go ahead." (Paula)

Frustrations similar to the one described above could also be seen in Norway, especially if there is a great geographically distance between an agency and the agency's superior authority, but the situation in Portugal is more serious (Ibid.). The Porto Team see themselves as able to help more children, but they depend on the central services in Lisbon. Paula calls for action and a faster progress in casework at the central services in Lisbon, because it would

contribute to shortening the wait for children in need of out-of-home care in Portugal, and Lisa also calls for action.

7. Political involvement:

> "The state should *do* something more than just *say* that they will pursue the goal of recruiting foster families and build up a foster family bank. They have to *act*." (Lisa)

Lisa is impatient. She was enthusiastic about the measurements in the Portuguese child policy, but she calls for more than just words (Segurança Social (2007). She calls for the state authorities to involve and act in accordance with the revealed needs and thus the policy measurements. She calls for the politicians to involve and prioritize the children at risk in Portugal.

8. Elevation of the status of child protection work:

> "It is not about the money, but it is about how the state values the protection of children." (Lisa)

Lisa's argument above should be seen as a request to the politicians in Portugal. She recognises the country's economical difficulties and that she has to work hard for a small salary, but she calls for indications of the state authorities' valuation of her hard work. She asks for the state authorities' recognition of the social workers' exerting work, which at present has a low status in Portugal. In order to elevate the status of child protection work, which is of great value in order to have a successful out-of-home-care practice in Portugal, she also said that the economical framework and conditions for foster families should be improved.

The most conspicuous in the renderings from my interviews with the Portuguese social workers, from Norwegian social workers' points of view, is perhaps the poverty issue and how it pervades the population and the society (Dores Guerreiro, et al., 2009). It is interesting to see how the social workers recognise the poverty in Portugal as a rational and comprehensible reason for not having an optimal child protection system and low wage budgets. However, Lisa had this comment about the social workers' devoted and almost altruistic work and the state authorities' way to deal with it:

> "There is a lot of good will, despite bad salary and lack of equipment and methods. The state relies on the kind, poorly paid and responsible social workers and they are almost always women. (Lisa)

The social workers perform their work enthusiastically in order to help children to have a better life. They work passionately and creatively for long hours and small salaries and they understand and accept the fact that the poverty in the country causes that their salaries cannot be much increased, their working hours cannot be reduced and the state cannot undertake expensive building projects. Social workers have low status and it is up to the politicians to elevate their work to another level, though only through a token payment increase.

V   Proposals for Improvement of the Portuguese Child Protection

The Portuguese social workers really involved themselves in suggesting improvements for the child protection in Portugal. Their six different proposals are:

1. Education in parenting
2. Restrict alcohol sales
3. Create alternative schools
4. Make people get more involved in each other in the community
5. Qualify the intervention
6. Create a proper mental health service

The different proposals for improvement of the child protection in Portugal above will be presented in the following.

1. Education in parenting:

> "Educate parents about how to be good parents." (Maria)

Interestingly, Maria's proposals were about how to reduce the Portuguese children's need of action from the professional social workers. She was concerned about the many parents lacking skills of parenting. However, the fact that she suggested the state to offer parenting-education indicates that a belief in the idea that many of the parents who at present are assessed not capable of parenting would become able of parenting if they could have such education (Broad & Skinner, 2005 and Palacios & Jimenez, 2009).

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2. Restrict alcohol sales:

"Stop selling alcohol to everyone!" (Maria)

Maria is concerned about the big consume of alcohol among youngsters in Madeira. According to her this is a problem especially in Madeira. Youngsters are being served alcohol in the many small local bars over the island, without hesitation concerning their age. Maria would like to improve the youngsters' conditions for evolving good health and better quality of life. Thus she also has another proposal to accomplish this.

3. Create alternative schools:

"Create schools for the many teenagers who don't thrive with their schools. If they don't go to school they will stay uneducated and then they will go to these bars, drink, and have problems with alcohol." (Maria)

The low level of education in Portugal is a great challenge and many young people drop out of school because they do not thrive (Dores Guerreiro et al., 2009). Maria explained that young people in Madeira who drop out of school very easily get trapped in alcoholism, and in this way contribute to maintain the negative social inheritance.

Maria's proposals are not only suggestions of how to improve child protection in Madeira and in the rest of Portugal, but it is also a suggestion of how to improve the social conditions for the population in Madeira and in the rest of Portugal.

4. Make people get more involved in each other in the community

"...change from being so closed and silent and start to inform the agencies when they know about a child living under poor circumstances!" (Lisa)

Lisa is calling for a change in the Portuguese population, as she finds them too closed, and she does not think they act responsibly when it comes to children's situations. Lisa said that she wanted the individual Portuguese men and women to take more responsibility for the children they meet (Wall, 2005). In her opinion, the Portuguese population have too much of the thinking "it's a family matter". With reference to chapter three in this study, Lisa describes here an undesirable aspect of a typical family-focused society (den Dulk & Doorne-Huiskes, 2007). If the Portuguese people got more involved in each other, the social workers would be

able to discover the children who suffer at an earlier stage, and thus prevent the children's situation to worsen further.

5. Qualify the intervention:

> "In Portugal there are sometimes people of four or five different professions working together as partners in one family, but they don't work *together*. They all follow their own opinions of what is the best way to go and they all work in different directions." (Priscilla)

This is a call from the Porto Team, for improving the interdisciplinary work and about a qualified early intervention in child protection work. The different professions and each individual person should work together in harmony as a team and the different professionals, like social workers, teachers, doctors and judges, must be enabled to recognise and to act on early signs of children being at risks. The Porto Team expressed a concern that children's signs of suffering in risk situations are overlooked. They called for the different professionals in child protection work to get educated and trained in methods of early intervention in order to hinder the damage of growing bigger.

6. Create a proper mental health service:

The Porto Team also mentioned a need for a proper mental health service in order to improve the child protection system in Portugal. However, their awareness of the economic crisis in the country and because they do not want to fragment the focus, they emphasised that the primary focus of improvement should be on qualifying the intervention.

VI   Optimism

Despite a situation of poverty and lack of resources, the Portuguese professional social workers involved in suggesting how to improve and develop the Portuguese child protection system. Their working days were long, but they prioritised spending time doing these interviews and they expressed a passionate attitude to their job. The Portuguese social workers expressed hope in their reflections about a future and improved child protection system in Portugal, and hope is a creative and effective power to have in order to achieve goals (Saleebey, 2005).

Social work in child protection in Porto is hard work and there are few successful cases according to themselves, yet they stay in their jobs for many years and they also claim to thrive. So what encourages them to stay in their jobs, what causes their optimism? The Porto Team showed me a new procedure manual they just had received from the central services in Lisbon. "It's a new start!" they said. They also expressed a belief in the state's ideological willingness to focus on foster care and child protection, but because of the present economic crisis in the country, it is difficult for them to put it into practice. Despite the lack of resources they seemed to able to focus solutions more than problems and limitations[3].

Paula, who had been a student in the USA, found it encouraging comparing their working situation in the Portuguese child protection services with the situation in the USA, which she described as a country that "apparently has everything":

> "Their success or happiness is not bigger than ours! We work with a lot of difficulties in the field, for example lack of foster families or we don't have a proper team to work in an area, but still we manage to find good solutions." (Paula)

Lisa, a social worker in the child protection in Lisbon, expressed frustrations about the present situation in Portugal, but despite her frustrations she spoke about developing a good child protection system in Portugal in an optimistic way:

> We are always 10 -15 years behind in development. We will get there, but it takes time…." (Lisa)

Lisa had experienced that the child protection system in Portugal already had improved, from having only large child care institutions to presently also having small units. This experience is probably significant to her trust in the Portuguese child policy measures, and hence, gives her hope about attainment of the other policy measures, though she thinks it will take some time for them to be implemented.

I have now presented the Portuguese social workers' positive and critical perspectives on family caretaking, viewpoints on collaboration with children and parents, criteria for successful out-of-home-care practice in Portugal and proposals for improvement of the Portuguese child protection. Finally, I have illuminated the optimistic attitude that prevails among social workers in Portugal.

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[3] From lectures by Omre, C. & Schjelderup, L at ISCTE in Lisbon, 27 November 2009.

Principal Findings

The principal findings in this study may be summarised as follows:

- Great differences between Norway and Portugal concerning laws, policies and practices relevant to kinship care, despite the fact that both countries have implemented the UN's conventions of children's rights in their law and social workers in both countries are required by law to primary search for placement alternatives within the child's kin.

- There has been a turning point in Norwegian social workers' mindset regarding kinship care.

- The interviewed Portuguese social workers did not describe a change in mindset like the Norwegian interviewed social workers did.

- The interviewed Portuguese social workers' perspective on kinship care or family caretaking have similarities to the perspective which were prevailing in Norwegian social work before the turning point in mindset as described in this study.

- Perspectives are important to social workers practice and social workers' seem to change their perspectives only when they allow the change.

- Experiences affects social workers perspectives and hence the performance of the practice.

- Despite lack of recourses the interviewed Portuguese social workers were enthusiastic in their work. They expressed understanding and acceptance about Portugal's economical limitations and they believed in improvement of their child protection system.

In the following chapter I will discuss some of the main findings above.

7 Discussion

Attitude-Change and Professional Power

This study has in several ways illuminated the many difference between Norway and Portugal regarding social work in child protection and perhaps most of all the differences in their perspectives on children and children's participation, parents and the children's kin and hence

kinship care. The Norwegian social workers described a change in mindset and an attitude change, but the Portuguese social workers did not mention any changes in their mindset or attitude. The current perspective of the Portuguese social workers seems to be similar to the perspective prevailing in Norway before the turning point in mindset of the professional social workers, namely the paternalistic and psychodynamic perspective or a diagnosis-mindset. This is interesting regarding the fact that both Norwegian and Portuguese laws order social workers to primarily search for placement alternatives within the children's kin and both countries have implemented the UN's convention of children's rights in their laws, which among many important issues requires children's participation. The professional social workers in both countries claim to work in accordance with the laws' orders, then why has this change of attitude only been seen in Norway and not in Portugal?

To a great extent, it seems like kinship care is being successfully implemented in the Norwegian child welfare service and there has obviously been a change in perspectives and attitude among the professional social workers in the child welfare service that has made this implementation feasible, though the required change is not completed yet. The explanation why this paradigm shift is seen in Norway is obviously not the law requirements alone and neither that the Norwegian professional social workers have given up their perspectives and mindset without reluctance (Gilje & Grimen, 1995). On the contrary, the Norwegian social workers have used their professional power to fight the pressure they have been exposed to; a fight which to some extent is still going on and perhaps never will stop (Järvinen & Mortensen, 2005, Lukes, 2005 and Bourdieu, 1996). In my opinion, there is reason to believe that the political power and the pressure and control from Bufetat have been crucial to initiate and maintain the change in practice and hence the change of attitude. It seems like the professional social workers' own experiences have been very important to their involvement in the development of a successful kinship care practice and gradually a change in attitude, though it appears to me that professional social workers had to be forced to start the practice that yielded these precious experiences. In Portugal the professional social workers have not been exposed to a pressure like we have seen in Norway and most likely therefore, they have not had any change in their perspectives or way of thinking.

The strengths perspective and the new child perspective are crucial criteria for a successful kinship care practice. Paternalism, psychodynamic perspectives and a diagnosis-mindset contradict a strengths-based and solution-focused perspective and the new child perspective.

For social workers to move from a paternalistic perspective towards a strengths-based perspective is very easy *and* very difficult. It is easy because the recipe is simple, and difficult because the social workers have to let go of some of their power. Though the social workers hand over some power to their clients, the balance of power in their relation will still be biased (Saleebey, 2005 and Omre & Schjelderup, 2009). However, the client will feel more comfortable and the social worker may feel more vulnerable.

Social workers in child protection have a powerful role in their relations with their clients. They have the power to assess and define their clients' problems, their needs and what is the best way to solve their problems, to reveal and intervene in families' private spheres, and they have the power not to intervene. They also have the power to elevate and to pull down the feeling of dignity and social acceptance of the children's family. Despite all the power the professional social workers are in possession of, the power is not necessarily recognised as power, neither by the social workers nor others. However, the social workers may be seen and may see themselves in the possession of the correct, neutral expert knowledge about what is the best for children. In their work with clients, they are not necessarily seen as performing power, but as performing their professional practice, which is guided by their knowledge and experiences that are known as good social work (Järvinen and Mortensen, 2005).

However, the professional social workers are not only powerful in the direct relations to their clients, but also regarding other professions and in political matters. Professional social workers have definition power and symbolic power, which is not as conspicuous as other types of power, though it is strong (Næss, 2010). The professional social workers have the power to define what unacceptable living conditions for children is, how the situation can be solved in a best possible way, and to make others see and believe their comprehension as a given fact. They also have the power to confirm or change their comprehension. The power of the professional social workers in child welfare services makes them in control of the out-of-home-care practice (Næss, 2010 and Lukes, 2005). Interestingly, according to Bourdieu, the symbolic power only functions when it is recognised (Næss, 2010). The use of political power and Bufetat's pressure towards the professional social workers in child welfare services and their reluctance and use of professional power in return may be described a tug-of-war and it started when the professional social workers' definition was contradicted. An example of this tug-of-war and an example that this war is still going on is Rita's complaint about "money and politics controls". This is an argument in the fight between professional social workers'

perspectives and political instructions, as she accuses the politicians and Bufetat to value economic retrenchment more than vulnerable children's need of appropriate care. Rita's complaint may also reflect social workers' feeling of decreased power. However, although it may look like the professional social workers have "lost a battle" and have to practice in accordance with instructions, Heidi's information about carrying out family group conference more as a matter of form, illustrates that the resistance still may be strong and long-lasting. The power and ability to bypass political instructions may also be confirmed by the information from Bente that there are great differences in number of placements in kinship care among the different child welfare agencies and among the individual social workers. According to Bente, those who are most positive towards kinship care have the highest number of placement in kinship care and they show creativity in order to place children in kinship care also in emergency situations.

Professional social workers must have power in order to perform their work. One of the most important tasks the professional social workers in child welfare have is to make assessments. Critical voices are inquiring about what the professional assessments are based on and suggest more focus on this important issue (Christiansen & Anderssen, 2010). For the purpose of retaining and developing a successful kinship care practice it also seems necessary to uphold the pressure and control of the professional social workers in the child welfare services, because it seems like there will always be someone who incline towards non-related foster care and paternalism despite the research-based knowledge about children's thriving better in kinship care compared to other out-of-home placements (Winokur et al., 2009 and Farmer & Moyers, 2009). One could almost wonder if there is a congenital instinct that causes professional social workers inclination in the direction of paternalism and if they are not exposed to education, training and hence own experiences from successful kinship care placements, their practice will not be in accordance with the strengths perspective or the new child perspective.

About possible benefits of looking at other countries practices

Both Norway and Portugal are European countries, but the difference between them is huge. Portugal is a poor country in Europe, and Norway has developed from being a poor country right after the Second World War to becoming one of the wealthiest countries in the world.

However, it is possible that we in Norway have lost something important on our way (Dores Guerreiro et al., 2009, den Dulk & Doorne-Huiskes, 2007 and indexmundi.com, 2010).

The Portuguese social workers in this study expressed hope and belief in the development of the Portuguese child protection despite the poverty and economical crisis their country is in. They seemed almost altruistically involved in their work, they suggested improvements creatively, and they accepted their working conditions to a large extent although these conditions did not correspond with their efforts. They explained and accepted the work overload and lack of in-service-training by the country's financial crisis and showed an attitude of understanding towards it. According to the Portuguese social workers, many Portuguese families want to undertake the responsibility of caring for others' children because their need of money.

The Norwegian social workers in this study were also involved in their job and they met me with obligingness. Norway is a wealthy country and many of the problems the Portuguese social workers are exposed to are unknown to the Norwegian social workers. The Norwegian social workers in this study spoke about finding the best placement alternatives for every individual child, and concern about costs is hardly mentioned compared to the Portuguese social workers' statements. The whole population in Norway has become more focused on their rights, thus both the professional social workers and kinship carers focus on their rights in the sense of payment, and too few families are willing to become foster parents. Rita also said that it was not a good thing if a grandmother becomes a foster mother for her grandchild only because she feels obliged to. However, to feel obliged could also mean that she feels the responsibility to care for her grandchild, and a sense of responsibility among the population should be seen an inalienable value also in Norway (Putnam et al., 1993, Hvinden & Gissinger, 2005 and Sund, 2010). Is it possible that the rights-focus in Norway can become too expensive and on the cost of the sense of responsibility? Nevertheless, wealth causes new and different challenges to deal with and the rights-focus, also on behalf of the children, reveals a belief in the Norwegian state's willingness to pay what it costs to work for the children's best interests.

In my opinion, this study also illuminates that despite the fact that Norway is a developed and wealthy country, there are weighty grounds for showing humility and to recognise that other

countries, regardless of their levels of development and wealth, may have something essential to teach us.

8 Closure and Conclusion

This study is about kinship care in child protection and Norwegian and Portuguese professional social workers' perspectives relevant to kinship care. Though this study must not be mistaken for a comparison, some comparison elements are implemented for the purpose of having useful angles of views. The research questions in this study are:

- What are the current laws, policies and social work practices with relevance to kinship care in Norway and in Portugal?
- What are the Norwegian and Portuguese professional social workers' expressed perspectives with relevance to kinship care?
- Is there coherence between policies, professional perspectives and the performance of the practice?

By reading laws and policies and having them explained by specialists, interviewing social workers and analysing the collected data, I have tried to carefully answer the questions above.

One of my aims in my work with this study has been to illuminate the current laws, policies and social work practices relevant to kinship care in Norway and in Portugal. Because of the very fact that Norway and Portugal differ in so many ways, I found it useful to present the current context regarding the two countries' conditions of social work. The greatest differences between the two countries' laws regarding kinship care, I found to be that kinship care is the primary placement alternative in Norway, but in Portugal family caretaking is the primary placement alternative and that kin related to the child cannot become the child's foster carers in Portugal (regjeringen.no, 2004 and Segurança Social (2007). In addition to present the laws, policies and practices relevant to kinship care practice in Norway and in Portugal I also presented theory relevant to kinship care practice.

Another one of my aims has been to present the interviewed professional social workers' expressed perspectives on kinship care and on issues relevant to kinship care. In order to do so

I have presented renderings from the interviews and I have interpreted and discussed them. I have emphasised that the Portuguese social workers have experiences from placing children with kin, but since the law change in 2008, they have not practiced kinship care in the sense of foster care. It emerged that although both Norwegian and Portuguese laws require social workers to primarily search for placement possibilities within the children's kin, and both countries have implemented the UN's convention of children's rights, their practice and especially the social workers' perspectives and attitudes are very different in the two countries.

Finally, I have analysed the data in this study aiming to find out if there is coherence between policies, professional perspectives and the performance of the practice. On the basis of the findings in this study, my conclusion is that there is coherence between the policies, the professional perspectives and the performance of the practice. However, laws and policies alone do not make a thorough change in the social workers' practice. Social workers' perspectives on kinship care and family caretaking, which are based on their experiences irrespective of their extent of such experiences, has great impact on the practice of kinship care and family caretaking. It seems like the most crucial issue, in order to get implemented and to maintain a successful kinship care practice, is to provide for the professional social workers to get this experience. Because of the social workers' strong power, and as some of them almost seem to have a paternalistic mindset as a natural instinct, it seems like the superior authorities must use enforcement and strong supervision in order to ensure the social workers such experiences (Järvinen & Mik-Meyer, 2003, Järvinen & Mortensen, 2005, Lukes, 2005 and Næss, 2010).

Future Challenges

To ensure maintenance and development of a successful kinship care practice seems to require the professional social workers in child welfare services to be exposed to constant encouragement, pressure and verification from their superior authorities, because otherwise it is always possible that paternalism re-flourishes and the pendulum returns back to the very starting point. However, it is also crucial to good professional social work in child welfare that the social workers do not lose all their power by being micromanaged on every single issue. A feeling of being powerless can harm vitality and initiative. Social workers also need a sense of professional independence in order to perform good professional social work (Smith,

2008). In my opinion, it is a demanding but not insuperable challenge to the superior authorities of child welfare to always balance their use of pressure and control without destroying the social workers' professional freedom, while upholding and developing a successful kinship care practice.

The Portuguese social workers' explanation of why they could not practice kinship care with success in Portugal was the poverty. They also mentioned that the families had too few skills, but the main problem was the scarcity of resources. However, it is not given that kinship care practice in Portugal would demand more resources and become more expensive than child care institutions, especially when considering the profit of children's thriving. It would have been interesting to see some serious estimates on that. If the estimates turn out in favour of a kinship care practice, a research should also have been carried out among Portuguese children in out-of-home care in order to find out about the thriving of the children in the different placement alternatives, and to look for congruence with research which has found that children thrive more in kinship care compared to other out-of-home-care alternatives (Winokur et al., 2009 and Farmer & Moyers, 2008).

Suggestion for further research

In my opinion, this study emphasises the usefulness of international exchange of experience-based knowledge. Both Bente's experiences of "having seen the light" on a study tour to the Netherlands and my own experiences of fieldwork in Portugal should confirm that. I will hereby take the opportunity to call on further international research on the issue of child protection work in a much larger extent than what is currently seen and to make the research reports internationally accessible by writing them in English. This way the new knowledge can be of advantage for development of child protection practice in the children's best interests on an international level.

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APPENDIX

Interview guides

INTERVJUGUIDE 1

Hvilke tanker har du om fosterhjemsplassering i barnets egen slekt?

Egne erfaringer over tid?

Tendens nå?

Hva er bra? Hva er minus? Eksemplifiser.

Hvilken fremgangsmåte bruker du/dere for å finne et nytt hjem til et barn som ikke kan bo hos sine foreldre?

Hvilken fremgangsmåte bruker du/dere for å vurdere barnets slekt sin evne til å bli fosterhjem? Kriterier som legges til grunn?

Ditt inntrykk av barnevernets holdning til slektsfosterhjem og ev. holdningsendring?

Hva kan årsaken være til at slektsfosterhjem nå benyttes så mye?

Hva syns du om familieråd som rekrutteringsmetode?

Hvilke kriterier mener du bør ligge til grunn for å kunne vurdere slektsfosterhjem?

Hva vil du som om opplæring, støtte, avlastning i forhold til slektsfosterhjem?

INTERVIEWGUIDE 2

Please tell me about your job.

When the decision about removing children from their parents' home, how do you practically work?

How many placement cases do you have?

Please make a ranking list of placement alternatives, starting with the one you most often use.

What do you think is the most important reason for placing a certain child at a certain placement?

What were your three last placements that you performed?

Did the children agree with the placement?

What do you think the children would have preferred?

How important do you think it is to ask the children about what kind of placement would they prefer?

How do you like to collaborate with the children's family?

How do you evaluate family caretaking?

When do you think kinship placement is a good/not so good/bad alternative?

Could kinship care become a good alternative in Portugal?

What do you think has the most important impact on your assessments?

What do you think it takes to be a good social worker?

What would improve the child welfare in Portugal?