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Balancing Interests or Promoting Competition? Swedish Policies on Former Public Officials Joining the Private Sector

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Abstract

As one of the last countries in the OECD, Sweden enacted the Restrictions Act (2018:676) in 2018, restricting ministers and state secretaries from joining private sector entities for up to 12 months. The present study employs Bacchi and Goodwin's (2016) policy analysis *What's the Problem Represented to be* (WPR) and finds that policies on public officials joining the private sectors after public service represent the problem through the lens of neoliberal governmentality. The policies' conflicts of interest problematization does not seek to protect the public sector and enforce clear boundaries between public and private interests. Instead, ensuing advantages for former officials and their new employers and consequentially, potential distrust in public institutions, is represented as akin to a competitive imbalance (a demerit as far as neoliberalism is concerned), which accordingly necessitates self-regulatory remedies such as self-reporting, media scrutiny and ethical provisions rather than enforceable legal sanctions.

Key words

Public officials; private sector; conflict of interests; neoliberal governmentality; restrictions

Resumen

Suecia fue uno de los últimos países de la OCDE en promulgar en 2018 la Ley de Restricciones (2018:676), que prohíbe a ministros y secretarios de Estado incorporarse a entidades del sector privado durante un período de hasta doce meses. El presente estudio emplea el análisis de políticas de Bacchi y Goodwin (2016) titulado «What's the Problem Represented to be» (WPR) y concluye que las políticas sobre la incorporación

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de funcionarios públicos al sector privado tras el servicio público representan un problema desde la perspectiva de la gubernamentalidad neoliberal. La problematización de los conflictos de intereses de las políticas no busca proteger el sector público y establecer límites claros entre los intereses públicos y privados; en cambio, las ventajas que ello supone para los antiguos funcionarios y sus nuevos empleadores y, en consecuencia, la posible desconfianza en las instituciones públicas, se representan como un desequilibrio competitivo (un demérito en lo que respecta al neoliberalismo), lo que requiere, en consecuencia, soluciones autorreguladoras, como la autoinformación, el escrutinio de los medios de comunicación y disposiciones éticas, en lugar de sanciones legales exigibles.

Palabras clave

Funcionarios públicos; sector privado; conflicto de intereses; gubernamentalidad neoliberal; restricciones

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1. Introduction

Recent decades have seen the topic of top government officials moving between public office and the private sector, an issue referred to as the "revolving door", become a subject of media attention and legal consideration in Sweden (Sima 2016, Expressen 2016, Interpellation 2015/16:495). For a long period however, unidirectional moves from top positions in the government or the state to the private sector was a scarcely addressed problem by lawmakers and researchers alike. Specifically, these involved politicians and public officials who, after leaving government and state positions, have been appointed to important positions in the private sector, such as executives and board members of companies, or have started consultancy businesses (Svallfors and Tyllström 2018, Selling and Svallfors 2019).

Significant attention to the issue came after the 2014 election defeat of the Fredrik Reinfeldt liberal-conservative government where several cabinet ministers moved to top positions in the private sector. Göran Hägglund, former health and social welfare minister, joined private healthcare company Aleris; minister of finance Anders Borg became board member of investment giant Kinnevik and its subsidiary Millicom; and minister of business and industry Maud Olofsson joined the board of Swedish wind power company Arise Windpower (SvD Näringsliv 2014). The revolving door has been framed as a problem whereby top officials with privileged knowledge and information use their previous office to gain lucrative positions in the private sector, creating power elites at the intersection of politics and industry and thus contribute to a democratic deficit (Etzion and Davis 2008, Blanes i Vidal *et al.* 2012, Cerrillo i Martinez 2017). In Sweden, critics pointed out the fact that the country was one of the last in the OECD without any regulation of high-ranking officials moving from public office to join the private sector (Lindström and Bruun 2012, Expressen 2016), until the introduction of the Restrictions Act in 2018 which regulated the moves of ministers and state secretaries (Lag 2018:676). Critics contended that the long-term problem of failing to enact legal restrictions on these moves would be a democratic problem of increasing distrust towards public officials and institutions (Mathisen 2015, Allern and Pollack 2017).

Moreover, it is important to distinguish between corruption, i.e. public officials abusing their public authority for personal gain or to benefit friends and/or family members *while* in office (Andersson and Erlingsson 2012, p. 146), and "revolving doors" or transitions of officials from the state to the private sector after public office. Sweden consistently ranks among the least corrupt countries in international rankings, notwithstanding criticism from international bodies e.g. on lack of transparency in how political parties fund their activities and recurring corruption scandals at the local or municipal level (Andersson and Erlingsson 2012, pp. 143-144). The issue of transitions from public to private sector or "revolving doors" is also a concern of how to preserve the integrity of public institutions and public officials, but in situations when officials *leave* office with sensitive information and contacts in public office and how to secure objective decision-making when former officials *re-enter* office after being in the private sector (Lindström and Bruun 2012, p. 22; Allern and Pollack 2017, p. 28; Cerrillo i Martínez 2017, p. 357-358). Transitions from the public sector to the private sector has however received less attention in Sweden than corruption, both legally and academically.

The present study seeks to capture how the issue of top public officials leaving office and joining the private sector has been problematized in Swedish policies and legislative debates, and the legal remedies that have been proposed and enacted. Departing from Bacchi and Goodwin's (2016) poststructuralist policy analysis that asks What's the Problem Represented to be (WPR), the aim of the study is to explore how the problem of public officials leaving the state and joining the private sector has been represented in Swedish legal discourse, over time and by different policy actors, and to understand the ideas about the state, the market and public officials that underpin these representations.

The following research questions guide this study:

- How have Swedish policies represented the movement of top public officials to the private sector?
- What underlying ideas about the state, the market, and public officials have shaped these policy representations?

The findings indicate that the issue of officials moving to the private sector was initially considered to be adequately addressed by existing rules on conflicts of interest, secondary occupations of officials and bribery. However, following several high profile moves from the departing center-right government of Fredrik Reinfeldt, intensified parliamentary debates and criticism from international organizations, the issue became prominent on the legislative agenda and eventually became subject to legislation through the Restrictions Act of 2018. This law introduced "cooling-off periods" (i.e. prohibition to begin a non-state employment or assignment) of up to two years for ministers and state secretaries, post-public office.

To contextualize the development that led to the current legal framework, a Foucauldian analysis of the policy debates and legal initiatives on the matter is employed. Specifically, the policies are analyzed as being constructed according to neoliberal governmentality. Namely, the policies reflect the will to "conduct the conduct" of actors, both officials wanting a move to the private sector and those recruiting them, to ensure competitive balance and maximization of the officials' human resources for the benefit of both public and private sectors (Foucault 2007, 2008; Gane 2012).

2. The "Revolving Door" Literature

Previous international literature has examined the revolving door of politicians and officials moving between the upper echelons of the state and the private sector and the problems associated with the matter (Etzion and Davis 2008, Blanes i Vidal *et al.* 2012, Cerrillo i Martinez 2017, Blach-Ørsten *et al.* 2020). For instance, some research argues that an important aspect is the improper and corruptive influence on officials' previous office and "regulatory capture", where industries or corporations gain beneficial decisions by public institutions through their political connections and knowledge of the inner workings of politics (Lee and Rhyu 2008, Zheng 2015, Shin *et al.* 2017, Shughart and Thomas 2019, Vauchez and France 2021, Pons-Hernández 2022). Furthermore, the problem of revolving doors is that extensive movement between industry and the state puts into question whether politicians and public officials make decisions with the public interest in mind or if they make decisions to curry favor with future employers in the private sector (Hong and Lim 2016, Pons-Hernández 2022).

Other researchers have focused on legislation on revolving doors, such as Cerrillo i Martinez's (2017) study of the Spanish regulatory approach of financial penalties in the form of pension losses, returning undue amounts and companies that illegitimately recruit former officials being prohibited from working with government. Scott and Leung (2008) found that Great Britain and Hong Kong use self-reporting and a committee issuing recommendations such as cooling-off period in revolving door situations. Similar to Mulgan (2021), Zaring (2013) and Alfonsi (2020), Scott and Leung (2008) argue that harsh restrictions in revolving door laws entail breaches against constitutional rights, contract and labor law and they advocate instead for "values-training" and transparency procedures on private influence on public institutions.

The limitation of general revolving door research is often its heavy focus on descriptive analyses of revolving door activities and legislation on curbing the problem, which lacks a structural analysis on the social and political conditions leading to the revolving doors (see, for example, Etzion and Davis 2008, Cerrillo i Martinez 2017, Baturo and Arlow 2018). This leaves room for the current study to explore the politics behind the budding revolving door regulation of Sweden.

2.1. Switching Sides in Sweden – Revolving doors, Lobbying and Neoliberalization

There is scarcity of revolving door literature on the Swedish case that addresses the movement of public officials and politicians moving between prominent state positions and private sector engagements. There are studies on the career paths of former political advisors and officials who have become so-called policy professionals, i.e., leaving public office and moving to consulting or lobbying organizations that try to influence government policies (Selling 2015, Svallfors and Tyllström 2018, Selling and Svallfors 2019, Tyllström 2021). Selling (2015) and Selling and Svallfors (2019), for example, found that the increased presence of these policy professionals who move between the private sector and the public sector can be attributed to the evolution of political decision-making in Sweden, from the previous corporatist system where politicians, trade unions and employer organizations were the three main entities at the policy-making table to a fragmented system where the private sector and social movements resort to lobbying due to being distanced from politics. Accordingly, former officials that move to the private sector have networks in and knowledge of the political scene that is important to assist different industries in lobbying for industry-beneficial legal reforms such as privatization of former public services (Selling 2015, Svallfors and Tyllström 2018, Selling and Svallfors 2019).

Although the literature on policy professionals and lobbyists moving through the revolving door provides a surface-level insight into the dynamics of how private interests can influence policies in government and legislative offices (e.g., Selling and Svallfors 2019), this type of research tends to emphasize the individuals' career choices and motivations, which could obscure the structural level analysis on the relationship between government and the private sectors (e.g., see Selling and Svallfors 2019, Tyllström 2021). Research on privatization and neoliberalism in Sweden could be a remedy for the lack of a structural-institutional explanatory lens through which the question of officials switching sides can be analyzed. For instance, literature showing the efforts of public intellectuals, policymakers, media figures, lobbying organizations (or think tanks) and representatives of industries to normalize the neoliberal state and the

New Public Management approach in Sweden, through public discourses and policy initiatives (Kinderman 2017, Svallfors and Tyllström 2018, Pressfeldt 2024) is important, however these studies do not explore the issue of key officials moving from the public to the private sectors as a neoliberalism influenced phenomenon, highlighting the role of former officials in this public-private relationship.

3. Conceptualizing Neoliberal Governmentality

This article utilizes the Foucauldian concept of "governmentality" (Foucault, 2007, p. 108) to analyze the politico-legal technique of producing discourse and discursive subjects in the policy documents on former officials moving to non-state activities. Governmentality is an umbrella term covering an indeterminate number of exercises of knowledge and power over populations in modern societies (Foucault 2007, p. 108). In contrast to Foucault's analysis of other paradigms of power exercise and their main attributes – i.e. the direct imposition and authoritarian rule of the "sovereignty" paradigm and the monitoring and surveillance mechanisms of the "discipline" paradigm – the idea of governmentality is to create incentives and conditions to bring about the desired conducts or actions in the population through accompanying institutions, procedures and knowledges and apparatuses (Foucault 2007, p. 108, Hamann 2009, p. 38, Valverde 2017, p. 81, Pyysiäinen *et al.* 2017, p. 216). Pyysiäinen *et al.* (2017) summarize governmentality as focusing "on the rationalities, technologies and ethical problematizations, through which governance and rule (often by the state) can be exercised remotely, indirectly and via a specific mode of 'subjectification'" (Pyysiäinen *et al.* 2017, p. 216).

Foucault (2007) uses the concept of governmentality to show similarities linking different governing practices that work impersonally, ranging from the calculation of efficient ways of managing collective risks to incentivizing self-management and self-control, e.g., by promoting certain programs, policy regimes or consuming patterns (Foucault 2007, p. 108, 193, Valverde 2017, p. 80). Thus, in the present study, governmentality as governing practices and way of constructing subjects is placed within the political framework of neoliberalism since governmentality contributes to the objectives of neoliberalism in different ways, notably by paving the way for the logics of competition, marketization, commodification and fostering entrepreneur-citizens (Foucault 2008, p. 118, Gane 2008, p. 358; 2012, p. 657). It is in Foucault's analysis of the emergence of neoliberalism that he narrows in on the most important aspects of its distinction from classical liberalism of *laissez-faire*; its mode of governance and exercise of political power is "government [that] is active, vigilant and intervening" (Foucault 2008, p. 133) in ensuring the essential organizing element of the market and society, namely competition (Foucault 2008, pp. 118-119). In short, the ideas and practices of privatization of public services, reduction of public expenditure and de-regulation of industries normally associated with neoliberalism (Ryner 2002, pp. 174-175, Pressfeldt 2024, p. 78) are underpinned by an active governmentality regime where institutions and individuals are produced as autonomous subjects, regulated for and through logics of market competition (Foucault 2008, p. 121).

3.1. Neoliberal governing through freedom, responsibility and trust

When discussing the construction of subjects through neoliberal governmentality, Foucault (2008) emphasizes that this rests on constructing a *homo oeconomicus* that is entrepreneurial and responsible for his own production *and* consumption (Foucault 2008, p. 226) and that, in contrast to the classical liberal idea of pursuit of pure self-interest, rationally responds and adapts to an (artificially) altered, external environment and therefore is malleable and governable (Foucault 2008, p. 270). Governance of subjects through neoliberal governmentality thus takes place in the continuous reinforcement or conditioning that should result in a certain behavior or action while granting the subject the illusion of freedom and autonomy of action (Foucault 2008, p. 270-271, Hamann 2009, p. 42, Pyysiäinen *et al.* 2017, p. 216). Governmentality as an instrument in neoliberal art of government can be examined by neoliberalism's tendency to place responsibility on and entrust the subject in governing themselves such as in the "appeals of freedom" (to produce, consume and self-realize) (Pyysiäinen et al 2017, p. 230) and in "empowerment" discourses where individuals assume responsibility for their own well-being (Hache 2007, p. 5). Briefly, these are different "technologies of the self" which "permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and semis, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (Foucault 1988, p. 18). It is in these "technologies of the self" of granting subjects "responsibility", "freedom" and "trust" that neoliberal governmentality entails a historical shift in governing, by moving away from the coercive and authoritative exercise of power to an arms-length, stimuli-based art of government (Lemke 2001, pp. 203-204, Foucault 2008, p. 270).

4. Methodological approach

4.1. What's the Problem Represented to be (WPR) – a critical policy analysis

This article departs from the Foucauldian, poststructuralist approach to policy analysis put forward by Carol Bacchi (2009) that asks What's the Problem Represent to be (WPR) in policy texts. WPR posits policy as "how order is maintained through politics… the heterogeneous strategic relations that shape lives and worlds" (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, pp. 5-6), and the authors propose the approach as a theoretical and methodological way to examine closely, practices and regimes of truth, i.e. the said as much as the unsaid (see the Foucauldian concept of *apparatus*) (Foucault 2008, p. 19). Thus, policies are the ensemble of judicial decisions, policy papers, expert statements, legal debates, scientific conceptualizations and organizational files. Rather than seeing policies as answers to societal problems, the WPR approach focuses on how in policy these "problems" are constructed in certain terms, with certain politics driving them, in order to be prescribed certain remedies that ultimately contribute to how a problem can be viewed and discussed (Bacchi 2009, p. xxiii; Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, p. 14). The WPR approach, then, follows in a Foucauldian tradition of "critique" as the act of questioning the unexamined ways of thinking that guide certain practices and interrogating how these practices have come to be the "accepted" ways of viewing, speaking or doing (Foucault 2000, p. 456, Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, pp. 15-16). Theoretically, it falls in line with

Foucault's (2000) proposition that thought exists behind all behaviour, institutions and edifices of discourse and critique serves to uncover such thought (Foucault 2000, p. 456).

Bacchi and Goodwin (2016) proposes a set of methodological questions or "steps" from which analysis of policies should depart: question 1 is "what's the problem representation to be in a specific policy or policies?". The goal in this first step is to identified how an issue is posed as a problem by looking and the proposed remedies for that "problem" (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, p. 21). Question 2 is "what deep-seated presuppositions or assumptions underlie this representation of the "problem" (*problem representation*)?" and seeks to examine implicit and taken-for-granted notions, concepts and discursive practices guiding such the problem representations in the policies (*ibid*.). Question 3 asks, "how has this representation of the 'problem' come about?" and the goal is to map out how the problematizations of the policy have come about and highlighting the alternative developments rather than presenting a linear and coherent evolution of problematization (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, p. 22).

Question 4 is "what is left unproblematic in this problem representation? Where are the silences? Can the 'problem' be conceptualized differently?" and aims at critically assessing what is left out of the current problematizations and contrasting with other policy problematizations on similar issues that have produced different discourses and practices (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, p. 23). Question 5 asks, "what effects (discursive, subjectification and lived) are produced by this representation of the 'problem'?" and the objective here is to dissect the effects on discourse surrounding the "problem", the kinds of subjects produced through these problem representations and how these policy representations "play out" in the quotidian lives of people (*ibid*.). Question 6 is "how and where has representation of the problem been produced, disseminated and defended? How has it been and/or can it be displaced and replaced?" with the goal being to question and critique the prevailing problematizations of policies and offer alternative ways of viewing the "problem" (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, pp. 23-24). The last "step", Bacchi and Goodwin (2016) proposes to reflexively apply the six questions/steps to one's own analysis, to problematize the fact the one's own analysis and understanding of a "problematization" is located in a specific social, temporal and/cultural setting, thus engaging in Foucauldian, poststructralist ethics of destabilizing even one's own analysis (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, p. 24).

I depart from these questions or steps to methodologically guide my analysis of how Swedish policies represent the problem of officials leaving office to join the private sector (question 1), how these problem representations have come about (question 3) and the assumptions and taken-for-granted notions underlying these problematizations[1] (question 2). As well as the unproblematized and silenced aspects or concealed (neoliberal) politics driving the problematizations (question 4), I examine the discursive and subjectification effects created by and through these problem representations (question 5), such as the discursive constructions of Swedish public institutions and public officials as legal subjects. Finally, I analyze the instances, avenues and practices where these problematizations have been produced, promoted and reinforced and discuss how these problematizations can be questioned, destabilized and reimagined

[1] As in, designating it or making it a problem (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, p. 16). In this article, I use problem representation and problematization interchangeably.

(question 6). Lastly, I reflect in the concluding section what implications the analytical lens of neoliberal governmentality carries for how we can understand transitions from public to private (step 7).

4.2. Material and Method of Inquiry

In the search for relevant documents[2] that chronicle the development of the legal landscape of officials moving from the state to the private sector, I combed through the digital archives of the Swedish Parliament (*Riksdagen*) and Government (*Regeringen*). These sources contain public inquiries and reports; parliament motions and government propositions; written questions from members of parliament to the government; parliamentary debates and legal statutes and regulations; Ministry Publications Series and ministry memorandums; government decrees; commissions of inquiry; Council on Legislation referrals; and government communiqués. To detect connections between public sentiment, media narratives and the legal initiatives in parliament and government, I used Retriever Research, a media database that contains archived material from Swedish media outlets.

In the parliament archives and government archives, the search departed from the following keywords and search strings: "revolving door" (*svängdörr*); "conflict of interest + public procurement" (*intressekonflikter + offentlig upphandling*); "transition restrictions" (*övergångsrestriktioner*); "cooling-off period + politicians + business sector" (*karens + politiker +näringsliv*); "cooling-off rules + politicians" (*karensregler + politiker*); and "revolving door + politicians" (*svängdörrar + politiker*). Using these search strings and keywords cast a wide enough net to capture the different terms used to refer to officials moving from the public sector to the private sector. The search strings used for Retriever Research were "politicians + revolving door" (*politiker + svängdörr*), "business sector + politicians" (*näringsliv + politiker*), and "politicians + cooling-off period" (*politiker + karens*). These generated both news articles (media narratives on the topic) and public statements made by public officials on conflicts of interest in revolving door situations.

Subsequently, I proceeded to select relevant documents according to the aim and research questions, which resulted in two types of documents: 1. Documents that discussed revolving doors and conflicts of interest between state and private sector, involving politicians and public servants; and 2. Public investigations, reports and inquiries on the role of public officials in conflicts of interest between public and private. While reading all the documents, I adopted a snowball sampling strategy to find relevant documents that my search strings were not able to capture. I read the documents in reverse chronological order, starting by the latest produced documents and going backwards in time, in order to detect when past policies acted as reference points for future legislation, policy documents or guidelines. This also meant that it was fruitful for tracing the evolution of portrayals of the "revolving door" issue in Swedish policy.

From the documents that were identified by the initial search, I excluded documents that discussed conflicts of interest and corruption without the context of revolving doors between public and private sector and those that only discussed the role and conditions

[2] Similar to Bacchi (2009), I use the terms "policies", "documents", "policy documents", "policy texts" and "texts" interchangeably to refer to the legal documents, government communiqués, recorded parliamentary debates, interviews, legal statutes and public inquiries and reports that form the basis of the present study.

of politicians, public servants and officials without discussing their post-public trajectories. Finally, I excluded documents treating the adjacent subjects of undue influence on public officials while they are still in office, such as corruption (e.g. bribery or public officials recused from cases due to conflicts of interest). This resulted in the selection of 41 documents, totaling 1,158 pages, and the period of the issuing of the documents spanned from 1996 to 2023.

I coded the documents according to "decisional" instances in the texts. Decisional coding refers to coding instances when the policies assess legal provisions, interpret legal concepts and propose amendments rather than merely referring to the topic. As discussed by Bacchi and Goodwin (2016), this helps to exacerbate when policies "create" a problem and then propose ways of "dealing" with the problem and this approach distinguishes itself from traditional policy analyses that take for granted an "existing problem" that policies address (Bacchi and Goodwin, 2016, pp. 60-61).

The coding procedure generated several major themes, with accompanying sub-themes that elaborated on and contextualized the main theme. The identified themes were as follows: (a) *Situations of officials transitioning from public to private by official*, which includes coding for how policies explain their symbolic and material significance; (b) *Legal enforcement and regulation of transitions* (or sanctions), the theme of which would highlight instances of proposed penalties or sanctioning of breaching regulations; (c) *Reporting systems when officials switch sides* and (d) *codes of conduct or ethical guidelines in different state institutions* to look for self-regulatory or soft-law approaches; and (e) *the roles and positions of public officials* to see how policies contrast post-public sector activities with the role of public servants. Furthermore, (f) *conflicts of interest between the public and the private sector* was identified as an overarching theme or discourse, which was then categorized into three sub-themes: 1) *economic harm for the state*, 2) *reputational damage or harm to trust in public institutions* and 3) *undue advantage for an individual, a company or an industry sector*. These three sub-themes also serve as the Restrictions Act's main criteria for assessing the risk of conflict of interest between the state and the private sector. These themes reflect the six first questions in the WPR approach since they helped to exacerbate how the policies identify and name the "problem" and propose policy "solutions" (themes A, B, C, D and F corresponding to WPR questions 1, 2, 3, 4 and 6 of examining how the problem is represented and the underlying assumptions and politics behind it) and how the policies construct the subjects of the regulation, namely officials and public institutions (theme E corresponding to WPR question 5 to the constructions of subjects in the policies).

5. Development of the Swedish Legal Framework on Officials Leaving Public Office

5.1. The First Steps toward Legislation

As early as 2002, the question of high-ranking officials moving from the state to the private sector sparked a debate, when former minister of business and industry Björn Rosengren left office to join the Stenbeck media conglomerate, a direct competitor to the state's own major telecommunication company, Telia, whose affairs Rosengren oversaw (Ridderstolpe 2002). The prime minister was reported to the parliamentary Committee on the Constitution for his role in "approving or accepting" Rosengren's move to the

Stenbeck conglomerate. In a reply from the Prime Minister's Office, it was argued that any information obtained by Björn Rosengren during his time in office was obsolete and did not affect the future competitive edge of or was harmful to Telia (Committee on the Constitution 2002/03:KU30, p. 125).

The Committee on the Constitution concluded that the prime minister had no reason to criticize Rosengren's move because there were no rules that prohibited ministers from taking any assignment or employment they want. However, there was cause to assess or introduce further conflict of interest rules for ministers in the future (Committee on the Constitution 2002/03:KU30, p. 127). This stance continued throughout the next decade despite motions in parliament demanding to impose "quarantine" or cooling-off periods for ministers and other government officials after they leave office (Motion 2007/08:K368; Motion 2012/13:K211) as both social democratic (Committee on the Constitution 2002/03:KU30) and liberal-conservative governments (e.g. Parliament Enquiry 2012/13:238) referred to existing legal frameworks' preventive effects.

In the following years after the Rosengren affair, key reports from national and international organizations captured the attention of the Swedish legislature. One such example, in 2010, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) released a report on post-public employment of officials in member countries, its potential consequences and different regulations enacted in the member countries (OECD 2010), showing Sweden as one of the countries with least developed rules in this area. This report became instrumental for the Swedish discourse, as it was one of the main reference points for detractors that argued that Sweden was one of the countries with the least developed legislation on key officials' post-public careers.

In a landmark 2012 report by the Swedish parliamentary committee The Expert Group on Public Economics (*Expertgruppen för studier i offentlig ekonomi, ESO*) led by Eva Lindström and Niklas Bruun, the committee echoed the message of the OECD. It emphasized that although exchanges between the state and the private sector are often positive, it was necessary to enact cooling-off period rules to prevent corruption in cases of transitions from state office to the private sector (Lindström and Bruun 2012, p. 107). Chief among its recommendations, the ESO proposed a one-year quarantine period for ministers, state secretaries and director generals of public agencies, a review board for ministers leaving office and an obligation for these officials to report a new appointment or assignment that could entail a conflict of interest with their previous public office. Additionally, the ESO recommended rules that obliged lobbying organizations to reveal any clients and interests they represent. The quote below from leftist MP Mia Sydow Mölleby and colleagues shows that the ESO and reports from international organizations served as cases in point for those demanding legislation and that legislation in this area was long overdue in an international context:

> According to the [ESO] report the exchange between the public and business sector is in many ways positive but the exchange can also lead to conflicts of interests. The report also points to the fact that Sweden has been criticized by the Council of Europe's organizations for monitoring corruption and been recommended to enact rules or guidelines to avoid conflicts of interests when public servants move to the private sector. (Motion 2012/13:K211, Mia Sydow Mölleby *et al.* [Left Party])

This quote illustrates the shared notion among lawmakers that internationally Sweden had become an exception by neglecting preventative measures of corruption and conflicts of interests. Such a development incurred not only reputational damage internationally but risked corroding the otherwise positive exchanges between the private and public sectors.

Following the election loss of the center-right government of PM Fredrik Reinfeldt in the fall of 2014, the issue of "revolving doors" would once again come to national attention. Several ministers in the Reinfeldt cabinet moved to the private sector, with detractors sounding the alarm on the pitfalls of these "revolving doors" and unrestricted moves from the state to the private sector (Dagens arena 2015). The incoming Social Democratic government, referring to this increasing criticism against the lack of restrictions of these moves, promised to launch an investigation that would lead to a legal proposal (Johansson 2014, Göteborgsposten 2015).

5.2. A Legal Framework Takes Shape – Restricting Transitions from the State

In 2016, the Social Democratic government then issued Directive 2016:26 to inquire into the existing rules for ministers and state secretary when leaving office for other employments or assignments. The resulting public investigation (SOU 2017:3) proposed several rules for ministers and state secretaries. The officials would report a move to a non-state position within 12 months of appointment, a 12-month cooling-off period before starting the non-state position or a restriction of working with subjects that conflict with the interests of the official's previous office (subject restriction), as well as an obligation of ethical conduct in post-public office moves.

Additionally, the investigation proposed a new committee or board (the Board of Transitionary Restrictions) in charge of assessing officials moving to non-state activities. The government approved these proposals with the addendum of three criteria guiding the assessment of the board on whether a move potentially entailed a conflict of interest. These criteria were: a) if the move risked causing economic damage for the state; b) if the move risked resulting in undue advantage for the individual or the non-state entity; or c) if the move risked eroding public trust for the state. The inquiry elected to preclude sanctions for officials breaching the Restrictions as they argued that in such cases the ensuing media and peer criticism was potentially a more proportionate sanction for transgressors of the legislation, something that would require the law and its enforcement to be transparent (SOU 2017:3, p.162). In 2018, the Swedish parliament approved these proposals and passed an act concerning restrictions in the event of ministers and state secretaries transitioning to non-state activities (i.e., the Restrictions Act).

Five years after the enactment of the Restrictions Act, a public investigation report (SOU 2023:45) concluded that although the act had had "a certain self-regulating effect" on individual officials and that the individual reporting of transitions had been followed (SOU 2023:45, p. 126), a series of revisions in the legislation were in order. The report suggested a general code applicable to all public sector positions (state, government, region and municipality) where the public employer, prior to appointing an official, would decide if the official's position would be subject to transition restrictions. The criteria for the public employer's assessment of whether a position would be subject to

restrictions would hinge on if the public official obtains information or knowledge that would risk economic harm for the state or damage public trust in the state and/or yield undue advantage for an individual or employer. This report also found no need to impose sanctions for breaching the proposed legislation. As of August 2025, however, this proposed reform has yet to be enacted in law.

6. Analysis: What is the Problem of Officials Moving to the Private Sector Represented to be in Swedish Policies of Former Officials Leaving Office?

The above is an inexhaustive historical overview of the passage of legislation and legal debates and proposals that cover how to restrict the movement of key officials from the state to the private sector. The overview neither serves to illustrate causal connections between events nor a linear process for the current Swedish legal framework. Rather, this overview reflects what a Foucauldian genealogical process (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, p. 22) of drawing out the different inflection points of the legal discourse on public officials moving from the state to the private sector in Sweden. This opens the question of how a potential legal vacuum, i.e. an absence of rules for key officials moving to the private sector, was eventually filled with a specific legislation and its accompanying "discursive edifices" (Foucault 2000, p. 456). By employing Bacchi and Goodwin's (2016) critical analysis of What's the Problem Represented to Be we can begin to uncover the presuppositions, hidden politics and silenced discourses that drove the development of the legal discourses on "revolving doors" in Sweden and destabilize these by critically engaging with alternative problematizations and developments (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, pp. 21-22). The policies analyzed in the present study, as we will see below, represent the problem of officials moving from the state to non-state activities in ways that produce certain discursive effects and accordingly constricts which policy actions are undertaken (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, pp. 20 and 23).

6.1. Defining "Conflicts of Interest"

When posing the first question about what the problem is represented to be in policies concerning transitions from the state to the private sector (WPR question 1), the first problematization encountered in the policies is that these transitions entail "conflicts of interest. These policies broadly represent the problem as "conflicts of interest" situations where they identify risks in the encounter between public institutions and their public servants and the non-state sectors. This problem representation is also applied in situations where the individual public servant may possess interests that are in disharmony with the interests of their state employer. While the former can be found in the discussions surrounding a public servant potentially engaging in activities "harmful to their integrity as public servants" (Government communication 1996/97:56, p. 3; Committee on the Constitution 2002/03:KU30, section 3; SOU 2017:3, p. 80), the latter concerns the rights and obligations of a public servant contra the interests of the state (Lindström and Bruun 2012, p. 9; SOU 2017:3, p. 11). This problem representation of "conflicts of interests" refers to an assumption or a "truth" (WPR question 2) about conflicts of interests (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, p. 21), that there are competing interests that must be managed and that involve at least three different interests at the state level, i.e. the interests of the public institution, the interests of the public official and a non-state actor.

As pointed out Bacchi and Goodwin (2016, p. 22), WPR question 3 serves to understand how a problem representation has come to be, making it important to trace the mobility of discourses across different policies and different problematizations. The following quote from the public investigation of the Restriction Act illuminate this by showing that "conflicts of interest" as a problematization is employed to bridge the gap from the discourse on the undue influencing of sitting officials, to which there is an established legal framework and dominating discourses that stipulate how it is problematized (for example concepts such as corruption), to the new discourse on the risks of post-public employments of former officials.

> Simultaneously, transitions between sectors lead to risks of conflicts of interest… the first kind of risk exists when an individual is still working at their old workplace. This person could, due to promises of or discussions about a new employment elsewhere expose their current employer to undue influence. (SOU 2017:3, p. 124)

Following Bacchi and Goodwin's (2016, p. 22) fourth question in the WPR analysis, what is left unproblematized in this representation of the problem? The overarching label of "conflicts of interest" deployed in this problem representation of officials leaving the public sector is that it is conflated with a problematization of undue influence of officials or misuse of office by officials whilst they are still in office (e.g., corruption and bribery). This fusion of two distinct scenarios blurs the legal parameters in the policies because attempting to regulate the conduct of sitting officials is different from regulating persons with the free rein to choose their employer on the labor market. The first form of regulation would fall under the legal parameters of public administration laws while the second form of legislation involves labor law and constitutional questions such as freedom of business and trade as well as right to property protection. Moreover, problem representations in policies produce certain effects (see WPR question 5) and this non-distinction of regulating sitting officials and departing officials by designating both as conflicts of interest issues produces a particular legal discourse. For instance, as corroborated by previous studies such as Mulgan (2021), Scott and Leung (2008), Zaring (2013) and Alfonsi (2020), regulating officials moving to non-state activities is singular in that it often leads to soft-law approaches (e.g., "values-training", transparency procedures, self-reporting etc.) because of concerns of breaching constitutional rights of individual former officials as well as contract and labor law. Misuse of office by incumbent officials, although an area that has experienced increased soft law provisions in the last decades, remains largely a criminal offense in most jurisdictions (Hough 2013, p. 31, Nicholls *et al.* 2024, p. 42).

What are the implications of conflicts of interests as the problem representation operating in policies of these distinct legal areas? One way to understand such a development is to put it in the context of neoliberal governmentality as a discursive practice that seeks to regulate "problems", whether social or legal, by seemingly erasing the boundaries between regulation of public affairs and regulation of individuals and non-state entities that are not under the purview of public administration. Neoliberal governmentality can be regarded as a mode of governance with a holistic approach, that does not make a distinction between regulating sitting officials (i.e., internal affairs of the state) and regulating departing officials (i.e., individuals on the labor market) (see for example, Pressfeldt 2024, p. 32). This is because the logics of neoliberal governmentality is a society-wide standardization of autonomous subjects, individuals

and institutions with their own interests (Foucault sees this subject as a neoliberal *homo oeconomicus*), operating on a competitive market and where state intervention is only permissible to ensure that the rules of the competition are followed (Foucault, 2008, pp. 118 and 226 ; Gane, 2012, p. 628).

6.2. Balancing Interests or Ensuring Competition?

Having identified conflicts of interest as the main problem representation through the promotion of a policy solution (see WPR question 1) (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, p. 21), the reports preceding the Restrictions Act of 2018 (notably the ESO report and government report SOU 2017:3) elaborate on the objective of legislation regulating moves from the public sector to the private sector as having to balance diverging interests. On the one hand, a former public official has the right to represent and work for anyone of their choosing or engage in business with whomever they want, rights constitutionally guaranteed by the freedom of trade and the right to property protection. Yet, on the other hand, there is the interest of the state to safeguard state secrets and information from falling into the wrong hands and therefore unduly benefiting certain individuals, companies or industries at the expense of the state and fair competition in the private sector. Consider the following from the Expert Group on Public Economics (ESO) report on what potential legislation of moves from the state to the private sector should consider and what the main objective of such legislation is:

> The challenge is to handle the risk for conflicts of interests between the individual's desires and right to choose employment, and the public sector's requirement to ensure democratic and economic values for the good of the public. In essence, it is about confidence in the public sector. (Lindström and Bruun 2012, p. 23)

Upon scrutiny of the discourse in the government report (SOU 2017:3), preceding the 2018 Restrictions Act, the stated commitment to balancing interests reveals how the policy has a particular understanding or what Bacchi and Goodwin (2016, p. 21) call an "unexamined way of thinking" (see WPR question 2) of these interests. In this report, the contention is that inhibiting individuals' possibility to move to the private sector after public service through legislation could make future potential public servants hesitate to work for the public sector (SOU 2017:3, p. 178). This could in turn lead to the state losing important competence and weaken the public services and the public trust in the public sector, which would be contradictory to the interests of the state. The policies seem to be employing a supply-demand calculation, where market mechanisms would "punish" the state for imposing restrictions on individuals operating with freedom of choice. This sentiment is further crystalized in the inquiry´s reasoning about the negative aspect of restricting legislation, as seen in this quote:

> The recruitment of ministers and state secretaries could become more difficult, if the potential recruits are under the impression that there is a risk that they are too limited the day that they wish to do something else. It is also not unthinkable that the legislation could be seen as a limitation of the freedom of trade according to chapter 2, section 17, first paragraph of the [constitutional] Instrument of Government. (SOU 2017:3, p. 125)

This quote, ending with an appeal to the constitution, makes an argument that signifies that the priority of the legislation is to protect state interests by *not* restricting officials in a significant way. Here, the policies seem to fall in line with a neoliberal idea of the state being embroiled in a competition for human resources and that must adhere to the logics

of the market competition. It is therefore not acceptable that the state imposes hindering mechanisms in the environment of free competition for competent labor. In the context of neoliberal governmentality, this problematization of the state being "punished" for any attempts to regulate potential harms to its interests seems to take for granted that the market law of competition is the only legitimate regulating mechanism (Foucault 2008, p. 131) and that public institutions, individuals and "employers" (an often-used synonym for private industries) are competing on an equal playing field. This merits to ask the fourth question in Bacchi and Goodwin's (2016, p. 22) WPR analysis, i.e. "what is left unproblematic" in this representation of the problem? One aspect is that such a stance misses the point that the state or public institutions *ideally* represent the public good and therefore does not operate with the same objectives as non-public entities or individuals with special interests.

Furthermore, several legislative initiatives preface their advocacy for regulating moves from the state to the private sector by stating that "exchanges" between the public and the private sectors are in essence positive, as these exchanges contribute to enhance competence on both sides (Lindström and Bruun 2012; SOU 2017:3; Interpellation 2015/16:495). For example, in the investigation of the Financial Supervisory Authority (*Finansinspektion*, FI) conducted by the National Audit Office, NAO (*Riksrevisionen*), NAO point to FI's 2018 annual report that stated that regulators from FI (especially in the area of Banking) are recruited often by the financial industry as they can assist companies in complying with new regulations (Swedish National Audit Office 2020, p. 20). However, to avoid corruptive elements such as conflicts of interests, undue influence of officials and quid-pro-quo situations between individual officials and private sector entities, these exchanges would require legislation, according to the investigation.

To evoke Bacchi and Goodwin's (2016, p. 23-24) WPR question 6, this posture of "exchanges" between public and private sectors being inherently positive, needs interrogating, because it once again does not seem to make a distinction between the objectives and end goals of public institutions vis-à-vis other non-public entities and individuals but rather treats all these actors as autonomous agents or entrepreneurs, which are free to operate and engage with each other so long as the rules of the market reign supreme (Foucault 2008, p. 121, Hamann 2009, p. 38). These representations also show that neoliberal governmentality, as governing practices, does not seek to undermine state intervention through law or the retreat of the state. Rather, the state creates conditions for the market to operate and guarantee the harmonious game of the economy whereby competition between autonomous actors, e.g., public institutions, individuals and private sectors, is not distorted and all parties can benefit (Foucault 2008, p. 120, Hamann 2009, p. 41, Morrison 2017, p. 198, Sunnercrantz 2017, p. 285, Pressfeldt 2024, pp. 281-282).

7. Discussion: Neoliberal Governmentality and the Politics of "Trust" in Swedish Policies of Former Officials Leaving Office

7.1. Individualization, Trust and the Self-Regulation of Former Public Officials

In a WPR analysis of policies, Bacchi and Goodwin (2016, p. 20) stress that policy texts often contain more than one problem representation and thus the first step of WPR may

reveal multiple representations and this is the case in the current policy analysis. In both the preparatory works of the Restrictions Act (SOU 2017:3 and Proposition 2017/18:123) and the 2023 government inquiry for the revision of the Restrictions Act (SOU 2023:45), the discourse of "balancing interests" reveals a new problem representation when it comes to discussing possible punishment for breaching the act. In these policy texts, there is emphasis on the fact that officials are bestowed with confidence or trust in acting as ethically as possible when leaving office, therefore legislation is only a safety measure. For example, the following quote from the government inquiry for the Restrictions Act proposing a "prudence provision", i.e. a sort of ethical code in the proposed law instead of penalties or sanctions for breaching this law, highlights this perspective:

> We believe that ministers and state secretaries already do their best to make sure their post-assignment and post-employment actions as ministers and state secretaries are not perceived in a harmful way for the state. However, we wish to inculcate the importance of trying to avoid conflicts of interests and therefore accompanying risk for harm or undue advantages. (SOU 2017:3, p. 170)

Analyzing this statement that justifies the preclusion of sanctions or penalties using WPR analysis question 2 on the presuppositions operating in this problem representation, we see that the problem seems to be seen as one of individuals and their behavior. Within these presuppositions there is also unspoken politics that view governing and governed subjects in a certain way (see WPR questions 4 and 5, on silenced aspects and subjectification effects of problem representation, respectively) (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, pp. 22-23). Here, the neoliberal discourse operates to individualize the question, placing faith in personal ethical conduct without legal impositions. It also uses trust as a privilege enjoyed by officials and thus as a governing technique, that the neoliberal subject (i.e. the neoliberal *homo oeconomicus)* (Foucault 2008, 270) will recognize and try to retain. Such an approach corresponds to a neoliberal idea of placing personal responsibility before state-imposed sanctions (Hache 2007, p. 8, Foucault 2008, p. 270, Pressfeldt 2024, p. 50) because it relies on what Foucault (1988, p. 18) calls "technologies of the self", i.e. the kind exercise of power that relies on the individual's self-imposed control. This regulatory approach however also points to a neoliberal governmentality that presupposes the state and its actors as no longer being exempt from the market logics that govern other sectors and are inside the scope of the surveilling mechanisms of governmentality (Foucault 2008, p. 131, Lauri 2016, p. 32, Morrison 2017, p. 198, Pressfeldt 2024, p. 49). Hence, loyalty to public service is now loyalty to an organization engaged in competition with other organizations to maximize efficiency (Lauri, 2016, p. 205) and in extension; self-regulation is exercised in service of following the rules of neoliberalism, i.e. "fair" market competition (Foucault 2008, p. 118).

7.2. The Significance of Distrust in Public institutions

To analyze the presuppositions and unspoken politics behind a problem representation, one can also look at the operation of binaries, as proposed by WPR question 2 (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, p. 21). Identifying trust as an important issue meant that perhaps the policies inversely saw distrust as a potential problem. In the present study the policies represent the problem of distrust in public institutions as a potential consequence of conflicts of interest situations – i.e., transitions to the private sector, revolving doors,

unethical secondary occupations and corruption– that are not legally restricted (SOU 2017:3, Proposition 2017/18:123, Swedish National Audit Office 2020:18, Statement 2018/19:URF2). In the 2018 Restrictions Act, for example, one of the criteria used to determine whether a move to a non-state activity should be subject to legal restrictions is if the move "risks eroding public trust of public institutions". The mere suspicion or perception of these moves as public officials using public office to gain lucrative positions in the private sector is enough to cause distrust of public institutions, according to these policy documents (SOU 2017:3, p. 11; Proposition 2017/18:123, p. 22).

Juxtaposed with the policies' own affirmation that these transitions between the sectors are mostly positive in nature as they contribute to "enhance competence" on both sides (see section 6.2), however, it is uncertain that distrust in institutions due to the perception of the inappropriateness of transitions to the private sector is to be expected. Instead, encouraged by WPR question 4 and 5, on how problem representations can be challenged and how we can understand the subjectification effects of a problem representation (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, p. 22), this framing of distrust in public institutions can be explored by looking at public institutions under neoliberal governance. Under the premises of neoliberal governmentality, this fear of loss of trust in public institutions is related to the fact that public institutions are subject to the same "conduct of conduct" as other societal actors. The neoliberal subject (individual citizen or non-state entity) is empowered "to monitor the government, thoroughly inform themselves of its activities, and correct it through a democratic process when it does not adhere to the normative principles of 'good government'" (Hong and Allard-Huver 2019, p. 4). According to Hong and Allard-Huver (2019, p. 5), this is indicative of transparency as governmentality in the pursuit of "governing governments". In other words, the state's legitimacy lies in being accountable to market forces (Foucault 2008, p. 131) as well as to citizens that are encouraged to engage in surveillance of the state to ensure it both complies with and fulfils its functions in an efficient manner.

8. Conclusion

This article seeks first to inquire into how Swedish policies represent the problem of public officials transitioning to the private sector and the underlying politics that guide such problem representations. By utilizing Bacchi and Goodwin's (2016) policy analytical tool, What's the problem represented to be, the article concludes that the policies use a "conflicts of interest" discourse to problematize former officials joining private industry after public office as both an issue of outside influence on public office and as an issue of sitting officials breaking the confidentiality of public office by joining the private sector. However, the seemingly inconspicuous use of this conflict-of-interest discourse blurs the boundaries of regulating public and private sector affairs. This problem representation is employed conforming to a regulatory approach of neoliberal governmentality where matters concerning the state and its representatives are addressed in the same manner as issues concerning individuals and institutions in the marketplace. Such an approach prioritizes freedom of competition between employers of former officials and individualizes the "problem" of transitions from state to private sector by seeking self-regulatory mechanisms for individual officials and their employers as the appropriate legal solution.

When analyzing the policies' emphasis on "conflicts of interest", the guiding principle in both the problematization of and the solutions to the "problem" of officials moving to the private sector is the law of free competition among autonomous actors, conducted to self-govern and adhere to the reality of the omnipresent market. The problem of officials moving to the private sector without restrictions is constructed as one of possible illicit competitive advantages of some individuals, industries or companies. However, the state intervening with repressive legal mechanisms would entail breaching its authority, i.e., ensuring competitive balance among actors, and the "punishment" it would receive from the market is being unable to recruit competent public servants. This conceit of the state as being unable to interfere with the career trajectories of future officials through restrictions is an indication of lawmakers being aware that the state is but one of several players in competition for competent labor on the market.

Furthermore, the present study seeks to understand the policies' ideas and politics behind different problem representations, specifically, assumptions and taken-for-granted ideas about the roles of public officials, the state and the market (second research question). The policies regard public trust as a key element possessed by officials and institutions as long as they behave "ethically" and the policies preclude sanctions in cases of breaches against regulation since penalties (a coercive mechanism) might make it difficult for public institutions to recruit future public officials on the labor market. Thus, the policies utilize a responsibilizing and individualizing discourse, relying on so called "technologies of the self", i.e. exercise of power through individuals' self-imposed control (Foucault 1988, p. 18). This approach is emblematic of neoliberal governmentality in its treatment of officials as rational actors, responding to reinforcement mechanisms rather than coercive control (Foucault 2008, p. 270).

Despite remaining convinced that "exchanges" between the public and the private sector are essentially positive, the policies also stress the importance of regulating transitions to the private sector to avoid public distrust in public institutions. As indicated by the unwillingness to enact sanctions and instead opt for self-regulating mechanisms, the fear of public distrust signals a governmentality epoch in which the state or public institutions do not have a monopoly on surveillance of the population and all institutions, but conversely the public and other societal sectors are empowered to monitor the efficiency, ethical and "good governance" of public institutions (Hong and Allard-Huver 2019, pp. 4-5). As indicated by Foucault (2008, pp. 131-132), the advent of neoliberalism has modeled the general art of government after market principles (the supremacy of competition) and the state's main role is to intervene only on behalf of market competition while being governed by market principles.

As Sweden continues to grapple with the implications of the last decades' neoliberal development, with increased links between the public and the private sectors in Sweden (Lauri 2016, Kinderman 2017, Svallfors and Tyllström 2018), it is important to understand the policy mechanisms that are intertwined with such a development. The results of this article's policy analysis show that discursive tools of neoliberal governmentality have advanced their positions in such a way that even policymaking with the objective of restraining the exploitation of state-granted privileges cannot do so at the expense of private interests. Instead, the state can only intervene to stabilize and perpetuate market mechanisms of competition. This is especially important in the

context of Sweden's evolution from a universal welfare-oriented society, with a strong state, to (increasingly) a society in which the market is pronounced as the vessel through which social, political and economic relations must be regulated (Ryner 2002, Lauri 2016, Sunnercrantz 2017). What is at stake here is that neoliberal governmentality as the regulating structure of transitions from the state to the private sectors increasingly blurs the lines between the state and the private sector, making it difficult to locate where public and private interests begin and end. However, in a Foucauldian sense of problematizing our own analyses (last step of WPR) (Bacchi and Goodwin 2016, p. 24), strong delimitations between public and private in terms of strict regulation do not always correspond to the elimination of potentially corruptive elements at the intersection of public and private. Other factors such as the organized interests of the private sectors and their impact on public institutions (Svallfors and Tyllström 2018) and the ability of the public to scrutinize public and private institutions also play a decisive role in accountability of both public and private institutions.

Finally, the findings in the present study suggest the need for more empirical studies on the frequency of public officials moving from the state to the private sector in Sweden to discern which positions in the state and which private sector industries are implicated in the lion's share of these moves. Such studies would move the focus away from the discursive level and deepen our understanding of the historical transformation of how state institutions and public officials became neoliberal subjects. It also calls for future studies that involve public officials to understand the effects of these policies on their careers, the impact of legal restrictions on institutions whose key officials are subject to the legislation, as well as the approaches of those tasked with enforcing legislation on this matter.

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