

Tracking algorithms in the social welfare system

Dataharvest 2020

Anne Kaun, Södertörn University

@akaka15

Two projects

- Own large-scale mapping of the use of automated decision-making across public agencies in Sweden (published in Algorithm Watch Report Automating Society 2020)
- Analysis of two litigation cases (the Parliamentary Ombudsmen and regional Court of Appeals in Gothenburg)

Freedom of information request/ principle of public access to official records

Hello,

In connection with a research project that is currently conducted at Södertörn University we would like to know in which areas xxx [insert name of public agency] is making use of automated decision-making (ADM). We are interested in all automated decisions with direct effects for a person that are based on specific data of this person (including Robotic Process Automation). In which process is your agency using ADM?

(...)

With kind regards...

- Sent to all public agencies (in total 321)
- Received 213 responses; 84 did not respond within our timeframe, 24 could not be reached
- Only 15 said that they are using some kind of ADM, most often robotic process automation RPA or automated process flows

Suing the algorithm

- Trelleborg automation project of social benefit payments
- Journalist: Court of Appeals; access to the source code of the algorithm based on principle of public access to official records
- Union: access to meaningful information (specified as decision tree and screenshot of the interface); reported the municipality to the Parliamentary Ombudsmen

Conclusion

- Unstable definition and understanding of what algorithms in social welfare are
- Process of domesticating the algorithm: ongoing negotiation process with different actors involved