The overall aim of this study was to analyse the structure of decision making in the domain of Finnish social and health care services legislation from the policy network perspective. This perspective connects both public and private organisational actors into the policy-making process. These actors have varying interests and policy preferences which they try to bring into the process so that the final decisions that are made are as close as possible to their own goals. Actors also vary in their resources which affects their ability to realise their aims. According to the policy network perspective, advantageous positions in the policy networks are instrumental in the actors’ pursuit of political influence. It is the combination of network positions and other resources that define the overall extent of the actors’ political influence.

The data for the analysis was collected from 45 organisational actors involved in the decision-making process. The interviews were primarily based on questionnaires with close-ended multiple-choice questions. The questionnaire included (among others) questions about inter-organisational network relations among actors, their interest in chosen law proposals, their support for these proposals and their assessment of which actors are most influential in the domain.

The results show that the bargaining environment in the domain from the mid 1980s to the turn of the decade was very friendly for reforms in the social and health care services. The "policy space" was multidimensional i.e. there were several cross-cutting cleavages that divided the domain actors into overlapping groups. In the early 1990's the same policy space suddenly polarised, which was manifested in the dramatically falling overall level of support for the government proposals. Now there were only two groups of actors that rarely agreed on anything. Because there was only one dimension that divided these groups, finding consensus on anything became difficult.

It was also shown that a central position in the policy network is related to the overall satisfaction in the new legislation. Interestingly, this relationship was stronger in the time of expansion than in the time of cut-backs. One probable reason for the decline of the importance of the policy network was the government's increased decision-making power that was due to the change in the constitution in 1992. However, this change did not result in major changes in the overall power structure of the domain. It is possible that the policy network works as a buffer, which to a certain extent suppresses the effects of changes in the distribution of other resources in the policy domain.