

Chapter 8

The Nordic Social Democratic Regime in Education Colliding with the Global Neo-Liberal Regime



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Abstract Nordic countries have historically constructed the so-called social democratic welfare model with its core values and political, cultural and economic aims and ideologies. Some comparative researchers have also claimed that one of the dimensions of this model has been the Nordic or social democratic educational model, which has historically united the educational politics of the five countries (see e.g. Tjeldvoll A: Introduction. In: Tjeldvoll A (ed) *Education and the Scandinavian welfare state in the year 2000 – equality, policy, and reform*. Garland Publishing/Taylor & Francis Group, New York/London, pp xi–xviii, 1998a; Telhaug AO, Mediås OA, Aasen P: *Scand J Educ Res* 48(2):141–158, 2004), JustEd – Nordic Centre of Excellence: *Justice through Education in The Nordic Countries*).

This situation has certainly changed and the Nordic nations have made different kinds of educational political decisions especially during the latest 40 years of globalization and the mainstream of neoliberal educational politics, but still preserved some parts of their historical common core.

In this chapter I describe historically the global turn towards neoliberal educational politics and compare and research, how the Nordic countries and especially Finland have reacted and interpreted the global pressures of the supranational organizations and the reform movements in different dimensions. These dimensions or themes of global neoliberal educational politics involve e.g. new governance, New Public Management, steering at a distance, steering by numbers and privatization of education.

Keywords Neoliberal education policy · Nordic education policy · Global governance of education · Path dependence in Finland · Contingency

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Introduction

The orthodox conception of national education systems focus upon quite distinct functions, and distinct sets of rules and beliefs. Those have been:

...historically rooted in an assumption of the centrality of national economies – for instance, that the function of education systems was to provide educated labor for the national economy and that education systems would shift and separate the potential workforce, according to ability and potential contribution to the economy. Another assumption was that education systems are crucial to the construction of national culture, integration and sense of national belonging (Parreira do Amaral & Rinne, 2015, 80–81).

But it is evident that greater global interconnectedness and a nascent global educational community, mediated, translated and re-contextualised within national and local education structures is creating a certain resemblance among educational policies across nations (e.g., Lingard, 2000). The waves of global policy reforms (“travelling policies”) have a tendency to disseminate around the globe and reshape socially and politically different societies with dissimilar histories. These transnational trends and tendencies do not simply shape the regional, national or local policies but they rather collide and intertwine with “embedded policies” to be found in “local” spaces (national, provincial or local) where global policy agendas come up against existing practices and priorities (Ozga & Jones, 2006; Simola, Varjo, & Rinne, 2014, 224).

It is helpful to understand that the new strong principles of calculability and measurability, which have usually been in use in the private sector, originating from economics, are increasingly transferred to fields previously regulated by old bureaucratic statutes and professional norms, usually located in the public sector and education. Rose (1999, 152) refers to the new governing technology based on accountability and assessment to which the public sector is subjected as ‘*governance at a distance*’ (Rinne & Ozga, 2011, 67). According to Rose the new steering has consequences in terms of the shift towards an “*Audit Society*”, where every new space subjected to comparability, measurability and transparency summons its population to evaluate and measure themselves, to translate their activities into measurable and economic language in order to maximize efficiency and income, and the arbitrary rules become “*tamed, liberalized and acknowledged as neutral and objective calculation and evaluation*” (Rose, 1999, 152–154; Rose & Miller, 1992; cited in Rinne, 2001, 107).

There are strong supranational organisations like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, UNESCO, the OECD and the EU, which have a strong impact on national education politics. Now the times have changed. The OECD, previously called the “*debating club*”, the “*toothless tiger*”, the “*eminence grise*” the “*global office*” is rating and ranking nations and telling them the orthodox answers, how to classify, how to measure and how to produce “best practices”.

In relation to steering tools, there are strong ways in which e.g. the OECD’s “*knowledge-based regulation tools*” (KBRT) attempt to promote and change orthodox professional practice and increased standardization of professional formation

and development. The strength and power of these tools lie in their apparently objective nature, in the attractiveness of the space of negotiation and debate that it creates, where experts, policy makers and other knowledge-brokers meet and position themselves, and in its capacity to define the terms of that engagement (Rinne & Ozga, 2013, 97).

According to Pons and Van Zanten (2007) these tools have three main elements:

- (i) they reflect particular ‘world visions’ that represent the agenda setting capacities of particular interests
- (ii) they represent a particular and politically oriented set of beliefs concerning legitimate policy in a given domain and
- (iii) they represent a wide and growing network of actors who are constantly drawn in to the process of intelligence-gathering, audit and meditative policy-making (cited in Rinne & Ozga, 2013, 97).

In order to grasp the implications of the increasing complexity of the emerging multi-scalar/multilevel governance arrangements in each state and in Nordic states as well, we need to devise a new set of lenses to look at the issues at stake. Roger Dale sees this as a major shift:

With new forms of complex governance, the state form... loses its monopoly position in the production of collective solutions to the collective problems. Collectively binding decisions are no longer be taken by the state alone, or among sovereign states, but rather with the involvement or various types of societal actors, sometimes even without governments (Dale, 2009a, 30).

Dale and Robertson (2009, 23) also make a similar argument and emphasize, a change of the

national education system to a more fragmented, multi-scalar and multi-sectoral distribution of activity that now involves new players, new ways of thinking about knowledge production and distribution, and new challenges in terms of ensuring the distribution of opportunities for access and social mobility (See also Dale, 2003).

In similar vein, Verger, Lubienski & Steiner-Khamsi (2017, 4) are analyzing the growth of “*Global Education Industry*” and see that also the emergence of this has meant the development of the new market niches, “*that are often outside of traditional state control, such as preparation, edu-marketing, the provision of curriculum packages or school improvement services*”.

Nordic countries have historically constructed the so-called social democratic welfare model with its core values and political, cultural and economic aims and ideologies. Some comparative researchers have also claimed that one of the dimensions of this model has been the Nordic or social democratic educational model, which has historically united the educational politics of the five countries (see eg. Tjeldvoll 1998a, b; Telhaug, Mediås, & Aasen, 2004; Antikainen, 2006; JustEd – Nordic Centre of Excellence: Justice through Education in The Nordic Countries).

This situation has certainly changed in recent decades and the Nordic nations have made different kinds of educational political decisions especially during the

latest 40 years of globalization under the mainstream of neoliberal educational politics, but still preserved some parts of their historical common core.

In this chapter I describe historically the global turn towards the neoliberal educational politics and compare and research, how the Nordic countries and especially Finland has reacted and interpreted the global pressures of the supranational organizations and the reform movements in different dimensions. These dimensions or themes of global neoliberal educational politics involve e.g. new governance, New Public Management, steering at a distance, steering by numbers and privatization of education.

The Mainstream of Global Neo-Liberal Regime and Governance¹

One of the striking features of the postmodern global world is “the educational gospel”, the amazing persistence in believing in the strong connection between economic development and the growing role of education. The idea behind this way of thinking, especially in the developed countries, is that we have entered the new “knowledge economy” and the “age of human capital”. This policy mantra forecasts a knowledge economy in which most people are highly skilled, highly waged employees. The wording has changed little since the 1960s when the theory of human capital was glorified in educational and economic policy (Brown, Lauder, & Ashton, 2007, 190).

The ascendancy of neoliberal theory in policy-making has given prominence to particular ways of looking at education as human capital: as a driver of economic growth, as a private rather than a public good, and as the new service sector within the economy. This idea is also behind the creation of “New Europe” as the Europe of Knowledge (Robertson, 2009, 70).

Education has traditionally been regarded as one of the most national of public activities.

It is the institution through which new members of the society are socialized into its ways and understandings, and learn the values and the rules of appropriateness of the society (Dale & Robertson, 2007, 217).

When considering the new roles of nation states and supranational organisations, Dale (2009b, 122–127) argues three false methodological assumptions of “isms” have long prevailed in producing misunderstanding when discussing and comparing education in the old world order, and which have also been very strongly rooted in the historical tradition of all Nordic countries. These are “*nationalism*”, “*statism*” and “*educationism*”. Nationalism means that we still think that the nation states

¹This sub-chapter is strongly grounded on the article of Rinne, R., Simola, H., Varjo, J. & Kauko, J. (2013) The Paradox of the Education Race: How to win the ranking game by sailing to headwind. *Journal of Education Policy* 28 (5), 612–633.

strongly work on their own and the regions follow the nations. Statism means the thinking that the state is the source and means of all governing activity, which is taken for granted, though it is essentially contingent. Educationism refers “*to the tendency to regard education as a single category for purposes of analysis, with an assumed common scope, and a set of implicit shared knowledges, practices and assumptions.*” By these isms education is often treated as “*abstract, fixed, absolute, ahistorical and universal*” (see also Dale & Robertson, 2007; Rinne, Simola, Varjo, & Kauko, 2013; Robertson & Dale, 2008).

During recent decades a new global neoliberal policy paradigm has emerged. There are several reasons behind this. One of the most crucial has been the rejection of the ideas of the Keynesian welfare state. Governments have increasingly praised a minimalist role for the state in education, greater trust on market mechanisms and new public management principles and have become unwilling to pay the costs for ever increasing educational expansion. This new globalization policy has normalized a “growth-first approach”, naturalized the market logics and individual choices, privatization, deregulation and competitive regimes of resource allocation as the only true social imaginary or There Is No Alternative -thinking (TINA) with its images, myths, parables, stories legends and narratives (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, 3, 31–34, 37; Mundy, 2007, 26; Soguel & Jaccard, 2008, 1; Rinne et al., 2013).

This new paradigm has won considerable room to go further in Nordic countries, especially in Sweden e.g. through the reforms of privatizing public schooling, making visible and usable school rankings for parental and pupil choices and accelerating the competition between schools and pupils. Finland has stuck more distinctly to the old Nordic historical tradition and paradigm (Seppänen & Rinne, 2015).

The reasons behind the reassessment of governance might be listed as: economic recession and diminishing public expenditures, globalisation and new games without frontiers, disappointing achievements of national governments and distrust of them, an ideological shift towards the market and the rise of the new public management (NPM) movement (de Boer, Enders, & Schimank, 2008, 36–37).

According to Leuze, Martens and Rusconi (2007, 3), the changes in education can be attributed to two main trends: (1) the growing activity of international organizations (IOs) in education policy making and (2) the increasing marketization of the field of education. Education has been transferred into the field of international policy making beyond national borders and regionally or universally applicable models for education have been produced. Increasing marketization is turning education into a tradable commodity and adding private providers as well as competition for students.

Neoliberal policies have brought attempts to stimulate market forces by making schools behave more like businesses, through giving them greater autonomy and encouraging parents to behave more like customers, through relaxing admissions policies and diversifying types of schools. One of the strongest and most discussed matters has been publishing of league tables, because they expose the uneven distribution of educational attainment, organise schools in ranking lists and establish the worth of the schools in educational market (Power & Frandji, 2010, 385–386).

Now the times have changed. Previously designated with monikers like the “*debating club*”, the “*toothless tiger*”, the “*eminence grise*” or the “*global office*”, the OECD is now rating and ranking nations and telling them the orthodox answers, how to classify, how to measure and how to produce “best practices”.

The role of supranational organizations like the OECD has been most crucial in the formation of the new supranational educational politics and the new politics of “*governance by comparison*” (Martens, 2007, 40). But it is crucial, however, to recognize that

there is no zero-sum relationship between global and national or subnational forms of governance. International Organisations (IOs) do not replace nation states, but create additional and informal structure of authority and sovereignty besides and beyond the state (Dale & Robertson, 2007, 222).

As Antonio Nóvoa and Tali Yariv-Marshal (Nóvoa & Yariv-Mashal, 2003) write: “*the global eye works together with the national eye today in both education policy and governance*” (quoted in Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, 56).

There are also ambivalent effects for nation states and the role of supranational organisations has been controversial compared to the role of national governments. We might say that “*Nation states, IOs and markets might be hostile siblings in the governance of education*” (Weymann, Martens, Rusconi, & Leuze, 2007, 238). Martens and Wolf (2009) describe this controversy elegantly using metaphors in their article “*Boomerangs and Trojan Horses: The Unintended Consequences of Internationalising Education Policy Through the EU and the OECD*”.

In their example of the EU it was just the governments who wanted to ask for advice from international organizations for their educational politics and strengthen their national reformative position at home and to defuse the domestic opposition, but by no means weaken governmental influence at any level. But the boomerangs went astray from the throwers and weakened their power (See also Rinne et al., 2013).

In the example of the OECD and especially indicators and PISA, national governments wanted to make a comparison between nation states to strengthen their power, but as the unintended consequence the Trojan horse opened the gates and now these governments are in a totally new situation of regular comparative assessments of their performance in educational politics. In this respect, the new standard setting of the supranational organisations has challenged the traditional ideas of national meritocratic competition, and nation states are losing their power to define standards and to control the key features of their national education with all the nation state functions including the educational selection (Martens & Wolf, 2009; Rinne & Ozga, 2011, 68; Rinne et al., 2013).

We have stepped in to the “audit society”, “*steering at a distance*” society, where the audit culture is closely linked to new public management and accountabilities and summative assessment and evaluation (Power, 1999, 2003). This fundamental change has been analyzed through the metaphors of “*quality revolution*”, the “*evaluation industry*”, and the “*audit explosion*” (Lawn & Grek, 2012, 85). We have

become the citizens of the “evaluative state”, but all the more of the evaluative “*suprastate*” (cf Maroy, 2008; Neave, 1998). We have become “*governed by numbers*” (Grek, 2009; Rose, 1999) or “*self-capitalizing individuals*” (Rose, 1999) or “*self-responsibilizing individuals*” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, 98–99, 119; 138). A kind of “*metrological mood*” has become the mechanism through which education systems are measured and made accountable (Lawn & Grek, 2012, 119; cf Power, 2004, 766; Rinne et al., 2013).

“*Less government and more governance*” has become the widely shared creed. (de Boer et al., 2008, 35; cf. Frederickson, 1999, 705). We may take the starting point in “*governmentality*” and end up with a new imperative in neoliberal governance – “*agile bodies*” – the person as an enterprise (Gillies, 2011). We have seen the “*governance turn*” as a shift in strategy that “*is highly dependent on the appearance of deregulation, but that is equally marked by strong central steering through various policy technologies*” and sophisticated instruments of steering of policy – standardization quality benchmarking and data harmonization” (Ozga, 2009, 150, 158). “*Governing needs data and is legitimated by them*” (Lawn & Grek, 2012, 85). “*Through all of its work the OECD is part of and helped constitute the new form of global governance in education, as well as within nations*” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, 133) (Rinne et al., 2013).

Neoliberalism paradoxically re-asserts the state’s role when attempting to reduce its financial responsibilities in the public sector – it centralizes and decentralizes the state at the same time. Of utmost importance for neoliberalism is “*the development of techniques of auditing, accounting and management that enable a market for public services to be established autonomous from central control*” (cf. Webb, 2011, 736; Barry, Osborne, & Rose, 1996, 14).

In the new global audit or assessment building, we may categorize some interconnected central features of the new supranational mainstream of quality assurance and evaluation practices and technologies of educational politics on primary and lower secondary school level based on earlier literature (Ozga, Dahler-Larsen, Segerholm, & Simola, 2011, 124–125; Rinne & Ozga, 2011; Rinne, 2001; Maroy, 2008, 17–20; Power & Frandji, 2010, 385–386; Rinne et al., 2013):

1. *Strong marketization* which is understood to lead to excellence
 - large sector of independent schools
 - strive for individualisation and excellence
2. *Choice and visibility* enhancing marketization:
 - consumer and parental choice
 - high local accountability including intelligent accountability
 - large assessment enterprises
3. *Ranking and classification* supporting visibility
 - national testing systems
 - league tables, ranking lists

4. *Control* promoting visibility

- growing inspection and monitoring system
- strong quality assurance regulation
- control, sanctions and rewards on the basis of collected assessment data

The Nordic Historical Tunes of the Social Democratic Educational Politics Regime

The State has traditionally played a prominent role in the Nordic countries. With the help of large corps of State officials, the central authorities seriously set out to direct and control their citizens. The social elite and its associated professional groups were trained in public institutions of higher education and were employed in the service of the state or the public sector. There has been a very strong belief in the importance of education in building the nation. Since the Second World War there has been a particularly heavy emphasis on the ideological “social democratic” concept of citizenship, and the ideal of the egalitarian “*citizen worker*” (cf. Hernes, 1988; Kivinen & Rinne, 1990b, 1992). The social-democratic regime has relied on corporatism, a strong public sector and symbiosis between social movements and political parties, and the State professions educated by the institutions of higher learning have been entrusted with a vital role (Kivinen & Rinne, 1990a, 1998).

A comparison of the Nordic countries with other European countries still in the 1980s, before the great depression set in at the beginning of the 1990s, shows that the differences were still striking. A clearly social-democratic welfare regime was the Nordic norm: in accordance with the Keynesian policy of “full employment”, unemployment was kept low (4%), as against 10 per cent in the EU countries; more Nordic women were employed outside the home (more than 70% of women of working age compared to 50% in the EU countries), and the level of public-sector employment was higher (more than 26% in the Nordic countries compared with less than 18% the EU) (Kosonen, 1992, 17; Rinne & Kivinen, 2003; Rinne, 2004).

It was not until the late 1980s and 1990s that the deeper discussion on types, models and regimes of welfare began. Gösta Esping-Anderssen (Esping-Andersen, 1990, 1999) suggested that the different relations typically existing between welfare states, the labor market and families could be characterised in terms of three welfare regimes, the Liberal, the Social Democratic and the Conservative. Later on he elaborated on this classification. One of the regimes, the Social Democratic regime, has nonetheless remained stable. It could also be called the Nordic regime, or the Nordic welfare model. Although Esping-Andersen’s classification is socially and historically broader and he calls the model Nordic, it could also be combined with the Scandinavian model (Kautto, Fritzell, Hvinden, Kvist, & Uusitalo, 2001, 4–6; Erikson, Hansen, Ringen, & Uusitalo, 1987).

The term Scandinavia is often used by the Anglo-American world not only to refer to the peninsula itself but also to the whole north-western region of Europe which includes Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden and has the population of about 20 million people,

noted Arild Tjeldvoll in the introduction to his book *“Education and Scandinavian Welfare State in 2000 – Equality, Policy and Reform”* (Tjeldvoll, 1998a, xi–xii). He claims, as does Esping-Andersen, that a typical characteristic of all five Scandinavian countries is the kind of welfare state model adopted. At the heart of this model, as he puts it, is a striving for social justice and the ideal of a democratic society that has been promoted historically through social and educational policies.

Arild Tjeldvoll (1998b, 4–7) describes a particular *“Scandinavian education model”* as the model, the aim of which is to produce equal educational opportunities for all citizens. This educational system was in general terms nationally strongly centralized in terms of the curriculum, examinations and governance until the 1980s. Many other researchers, including Kjell Rubenson (2007) and Ari Antikainen (2008), have called this specific model the *“Nordic model of education”*.

We also have good reasons for naming the higher education systems of the Nordic countries as the *Nordic university model*.² It was a model in which the university sector followed a wider educational and state policy, and surrendered almost entirely into the hands of the nation state. Even higher learning is referred to as the institution for promoting democracy and equality among citizens in society. In Finland universities as well as all other education of the country are still almost entirely publicly funded. There are no student fees and there is very little room, if any for private institutions. The institutions were, at least officially, homogenous and equal, and there is no educational market. A centralized administration and state management guaranteed the limitations on competition. An important principle was to keep any degree-level education free of charge, in the spirit of the Nordic welfare-state model.

The Nordic higher-education model combines the features of fast expansion, strict central planning and regional policy. In a sense, the Nordic university model could be described as an inverted mirror image of the so-called Anglo-Saxon model.

For historical reasons the Nordic education model was strongly influenced by the powerful nation state up until the late 1980s. The education systems in the Nordic countries were in many ways, the inverted image of for example those in the US. The Nordic education model such as the Finnish one has long been characterised by (Rinne, 2004, 92; Kivinen & Rinne, 1993, 183; Fägerlind & Strömqvist, 2004, 45):

- Relatively small size and restricted markets.
- Strict centralization and the control of resources.
- Formal institutional uniformity with almost no hierarchy ostensibly recognized.

²When I characterise and analyse the Nordic education model here I am consciously using Finland as a representative of the Nordic countries.

- Restricted competition, exercised with respect to State-controlled resources rather than markets, students or business.
- Low institutional initiative in that conditions of strict centralisation have inhibited initiative taking, challenges to bureaucratic rule in the universities,
- The right to study in institutions of all education free of charge.
- A strong belief in fostering social equality by removing the obstacles preventing inequality of opportunities in all education.
- The education policy as a vital part of broader regional and social policies.

Transition from the Nordic Social Democratic Model to the More Western Anglo-American Liberal Model³

In 1987 the new Finnish Prime Minister Harri Holkeri's new cabinet aimed to bring about a fundamental change in Finnish politics. For the first time since World War II, the conservative National Coalition Party held the post of Prime Minister and its two decades in opposition were over. As far as education was concerned, this marked the end of the deal between the Centre and Social Democratic parties in the Ministry of Education and the National Board of Education, and the right wing was set to dominate State educational discourse. The posts of Ministers of Education also went to right-wing ministers. The changes in education were part of a general wave of decentralization and deregulation in Finland. The process started with the Free Municipality Experiment (Law 718/1988), which gave local authorities in experimental municipalities more freedom to make independent decisions.

The recession in 1991–93 heralded the deepest peacetime crisis in Finland's economy until then.

When Finland had finally joined the OECD, Finland became the OECD's "*model pupil*" in applying neoliberal innovations in education (Rinne, 2007; Rinne, Kallio, & Hokka, 2004), but through technical and incremental policy rather than through making strong neoliberal declarations. A leading ex-politician characterized it as a "*tiptoeing education policy change*" (Rinne, Kivirauma, & Hirvenoja, 2001). OECD's own account of Finland stated: "*Finland has a record of heeding the advice of past OECD education reviews. The review seems likely to continue that pattern, helping to shape the future of a dynamic education sector.*" (OECD, 2003, cited in Rinne et al., 2004).

³This subchapter has partly been grounded on the article of Simola, H., Varjo, J. & Rinne, R. (2014) Against the Flow: Path dependence, convergence and contingency in understanding the Finnish QAE model. In H. Simola, I. Carlgren, S. Heikkinen, J. Kauko, O. Kivinen, J. Kivirauma, K. Klette, S. Myrdal, H. Pitkänen, R. Rinne, K. Schnack, J. Silvonen & J. Varjo (Eds.) *The Finnish Education Mystery. Historical and sociological essays on schooling in Finland*. Oxon & New York: Routledge, 224–251.

The titles of some publications (published in Finnish only) of the National Board of Education (NBE) and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) reveal the positive and highly respectful attitude to the OECD: *Learning from the Analysis of the OECD* (Laukkanen & Kyrö, 2000); *OECD – Firm Base for Decision-Making* (, 1999); *OECD – Directions for Policymaking in the 21st Century* (, 2001); *OECD Resources for Decision Making in the Era of Globalization* (, 2005). The exceptionally receptive stance of the Finnish education policy elite towards the OECD has been noted by various commentators. Interviewees in Niukko's (2006) study, for example, refer to mutual respect especially following the recent attention given to Finland after its national success in PISA (Grek et al., 2009, 17, 14).

Among other things, PISA taught Finnish education politicians and officials the real “market value” of international comparisons. Our interview data of Finnish education politicians and officers makes it quite apparent that the OECD is seen as a transcendent carrier of reason (see also Niukko, 2006, 112). It may be seen as creating a consensual community, a discourse of truth, a style of reasoning.

Interviewees described the importance and meaning of OECD meetings and texts as follows: “*OECD-doctrine*” (Niukko, 2006, 122 and 126), “*up-dated themes*” (ibid., 111), “*magic of numbers*” (ibid., 117), revealed “*the only table where Finland can sit with the G8-countries*” (ibid., 130); “*a common council of the sages*” (ibid., 131); “*guiding member states in the same direction*”, setting “*peer and moral pressure*” (ibid., 143); “*moral commitment*”, and numerous “*indirect effects*” (ibid., 144), guaranteeing “*the economic as the primary nature of education*” (ibid., 161–164); “*tuning sentiment and sympathy*” “*modernization*” (interview 10, April 2007, Finnish policy actor 3).

Some high level politician interviewees refer to the OECD as “*the instrument, catalyst and certain framework for comparison*” for Finnish education policy (Niukko, 2006 130) and admit that *Education at a Glance* and rankings in PISA “*do have clear effects to policy, especially if you are ranked below average*” (ibid., 141). In Niukko's (2006) study, decision-makers and civil servants alike saw the most important function of the OECD in its role “*as a neutral tool of the national education policy*”. Some of them criticized OECD as “*the judge*”, and others characterized it as “*the doctor*” or “*the psychiatrist*” (Grek et al., 2009, 15–16).

But Finland still strongly adheres to its historical *path dependence* and takes into account the Nordic historical roots of Finnish education against the global mainstream trends, convergence and contingency. From the perspective of path dependence Finland was strongly bound to traditional social democratic and agrarian values of equality that make the call of neo-liberalism appear extremely contradictory. As a symptom of the symbolic power of traditional social democratic-agrarian *equality* Finnish educational discourse was very strong and hegemonic.

Embedded Path-Dependent Egalitarianism, Travelling Market-Liberalism, Contingency and Radical Decentralization

In the 2000s, the particular Finnish Model of Quality Assurance and Evaluation (QAE) in Basic Education seems to differ strongly from the mainstream of international and global evaluation policies. This has its roots in two historical developments: firstly the Finnish path-dependence in egalitarianism, which has been challenged by the converging market-liberalism, and secondly the path-dependence of deregulation, which had its spur in converging international education policies.

Given that most policy proposals have been directive rather than mandatory, it is no wonder that their implementation at the municipal level varies widely. The Finnish Parliamentary Committee for Education and Culture concluded in 2002:

The evaluation work done has had very small effects at the level of municipalities and schools. Nation-level evaluations have been implemented to a creditable extent, but there is no follow-up on how these evaluations affect the actions of the evaluated and the development of the schools. [...] Many municipalities are at the very beginning as far as the evaluation of education is concerned (CEC, 2002).

Therefore, I venture to suggest a dimension of contingency here, as well, although in a different sense than the previous one. In this case, an intervening conjunction – the deep economic recession and the radical municipal autonomy linked to it – circumvented and extinguished the reform intentions. Ironically enough, it seemed to create unintended side effects: more trust and freedom.

How do you understand the power and strength of a nearly silent or mute national consensus in Finland that was based on antipathy and resistance rather than on any articulated policy program? Something unexpected and dramatic happened in Finland in the early 1990s. The recession in 1991–93 heralded the deepest peacetime crisis in Finland's economy. According to many indicators, the Finnish crisis was the sharpest and deepest among the industrialized countries facing economic problems during the 1990s and it was comparable only with the Great Recession of the 1930s (Kiander & Virtanen, 2002; Rinne, Kivirauma, & Simola, 2002; Simola, Rinne, & Kivirauma, 2002).

The process of decentralization and deregulation started in the late 1980s, but in the depth of the recession the new legislation with the Act on Central Government Transfers to Local Government (Law 705/1992) and the Local Government Act (Law 365/1995) radically increased local autonomy and strengthened the judicial position of the municipalities. The new state subsidy system granted funding according to annual calculations per pupil, lesson or other unit, and liberated the municipalities from the former detailed 'ear-marked-money' budgeting towards the free lump-sum budgeting mechanisms for schooling (Simola, Rinne, Varjo, Kauko, & Pitkänen, 2009).

It is widely accepted among the political and economic elites that without shifting decision-making to the local level the municipalities could not have been required to cut spending as much as they did during the recession. Thus, the new

decentralized and deregulated mode of governance was moulded around the economic principles of savings and cutbacks. The Recession radicalized decentralization and deregulation:

The decentralization level of the educational administration in Finland is one of the highest in Europe, according to the information of the OECD (Temmes, Ahonen, & Ojala, 2002, 129, 92).

The Recession of the 1990s thus radicalized decentralization and deregulation:

One of the most serious institutional issues in our educational system is the unsatisfactory relation between the State and the municipalities. ... The decentralization level of the educational administration in Finland is one of the highest in Europe, according to the information of the OECD (Temmes et al., 2002, 129, 92; original emphasis).

According to a European Commission study on the evaluation of schools providing compulsory education in Europe states that Finland is one of the few European countries in which there is no direct control from the national to the school level.

The new policy created space for the *Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities* (AFLRA) to take its place as a distinguished actor in restructuring the Finnish nation–municipality relationship and in the field of education policy. While cooperating with governmental organs, AFLRA is contributing both as a lobbyist and an expert in major decision-making processes concerning education. At the local level the AFLRA produces indicators, reference values and best practices for municipal councils and officials. According the municipalities are no longer mere education providers executing top-down, national level decisions, but genuine political actors possessing an intent of their own – and, thus, a vast amount of *Spielraum* in this peculiar twofold system, where the nation-state *and* municipalities are the main actors in education policy (Kauko & Varjo, 2008; Sarjala, 2002).

The radical decentralization and deregulation spawned two competing coalitions in the national QAE field of compulsory schooling, neither of which has real normative power over the municipalities and schools. On the one hand the ME and the NBE consider QAE from the perspective of the education system and the associated legislation, and on the other the AFLRA and the Ministry of the Interior – often accompanied by the Ministry of Finance – see it in terms of municipal service production and legislation. Both of these coalitions have attempted to assume the leading role in determining the discourse of evaluation in the context of education (Simola et al., 2009).

The frustration seemed to be most evident among our interviewees from the NBE, whereas in AFLRA there appeared to be a kind of complacent acceptance of the predominant situation. One high-ranking NBE official explains his/her feelings:

(...) we have no jurisdiction to touch anything, we have no legislation about it, we have no mechanisms, we have nothing. This, in a nutshell, is our biggest weakness (Simola et al., 2009, 171).

A kind of stagnation is reflected in the most recent report of the Working Party for the Development of Educational Evaluation, set up by the ME. Virtually the only concrete proposal was to move the FEEC office to Helsinki. There are also serious

political projects on the agenda of both main coalitions: at the state level, the role of the NBE in the evaluation process is an open question, and AFLRA is currently engaged in a project for restructuring local government and services in Finland (PARAS), the aim of which is to reduce the number of municipalities (Simola et al., 2009).

It is thus obvious that the radical municipal autonomy, spurred and deepened contingently by the Recession of the 1990s, was one of the factors that have buffered the implementation and technical development of an effective Quality Assurance and Evaluation (QAE) system in Finnish comprehensive schooling. If the role of radical municipal autonomy has been prohibitive towards convergent tendencies, we may mention some other contingent factors that have supported the egalitarian path dependency. Those are a revalorization of the idea of comprehensive school and of the Finnish PISA Miracle itself.

The consequences of the Recession of the 1990s not only speeded up the change. It also strengthened and revitalized the Nordic egalitarian ethos again so far that even the idea of comprehensive school probably survived thanks to it. For example, Sirkka Ahonen (2001, 2003) argues that the recession altered the political atmosphere in favor of market liberalism back to traditional Nordic welfare values, and thus, defending common comprehensive school. Ahonen's argument is plausible when contextualised to a time when national plans were employed to restructure the education system. The deep economic recession made the value of social safety nets visible even to the middle classes. In the late 1990s, no political actors were willing to question the rhetoric of equality in education discourse (Grek et al., 2009, 12, see also Rinne et al., 2002; Kallio & Rinne, 2006; Patomäki, 2007). Respectively, no political actors in our interviews in the late 1990s and the early 2000s were willing to accept neoliberalism as an emblematic concept for Finnish policy making (Rinne et al., 2002; Simola et al., 2002).

Another totally unexpected event was the Finnish success in OECD PISA rankings. Quite controversially this success not only stifled pressures for change in municipal and school autonomy. Finland used to do pretty well in traditional school performance assessments such as IEA studies but it never came up as a top performer. It was symptomatic but also ironic that just a few weeks before publication of the first PISA results in December 2001, the Education Committee of the Confederation of Finnish Industries and Employers (CIE) organized an Autumn Seminar where the Finnish comprehensive school was strongly criticized. Even afterwards nobody has been reported for being a predictor of the Finnish PISA success. It is self-evident that this success, on the one hand, has embanked pressures for change in municipal and school autonomy and, on the other hand, buffered other (market-liberalist) innovations in the Finnish comprehensive schooling: "*if it ain't broke, don't fix it*". The success also saved the equality-aims of common comprehensive school from radical changes, which were under their way because of the political changes towards the right in Parliament.

Summing up, the Finnish comprehensive QAE model meets travelling market-liberalist steering policies and the embedded egalitarianism. To understand who wins in this sharp confrontation, the concept of contingency appeared useful. We

can say that contingent factors or events – such as radical municipal autonomy and revalorization of the idea of comprehensive education, both consequences of the Recession of the 1990s, and finally the Finnish PISA success – favored the path dependent egalitarianism rather than convergent market-liberalism.

Concluding Remarks

It seems evident that an extremely strong contradiction emerged between the converging pursuit of international acceptance among like-minded Western advanced neo-liberal countries, on the one hand, and deep rooted path dependence concerning traditional social democratic and agrarian egalitarianism, on the other hand. This contradiction has made Finnish QAE policy and educational policy remarkably double-layered. In the state educational rhetoric, the neo-liberalist reform discourse has been in a hegemonic position while in implementation and at the local level a silent consensus exists, based on antipathy and resistance against some fundamental neoliberal doctrines, first of all against ranking lists. Briefly, certain contingent factors supported embedded egalitarianism and embanked travelling market-liberalism.

Bringing the concepts of path dependence and contingency together, does assist us, at least in part, in understanding the persistence and toughness of this poorly articulated, silent national consensus that has shown its stubborn power where the municipalities have restrained themselves from implementing studies that could be used to create school based ranking lists. Here we must remark that this treatment does not underestimate the importance of agency. Accepting a certain randomness in life does *not* lead to the abandonment of a certain amount of freedom for the actors, rather the contrary (see, e.g. Simola & Rinne, 2015).

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