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Revisiting universalism in the Finnish education system

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Abstract

The aim of the article is to revisit the principle of universalism and analyze how it has changed in the legislation on compulsory education by asking: how are different characteristics of universalism emphasized in the basic education legislation and parliamentary discussion (in 1968, 1982 and 1997)? The analysis portrays the varieties of universalism within the comprehensive school, produced by the four instruments used to govern education (legislation, economy, ideology and evaluatory).

According to the analysis, the foundation of the comprehensive school system in the 1960s was laid on uniform content and aims at the ideological level, emphasizing equality of education. The 1980s was a transition phase between 'old' and 'new' universalism, when instruments of legal and economic governance enabled the expansion of universalism and increased costs. Simultaneously, the aims of the comprehensive system and its contents were increasingly set at the local level. We conclude that the 'new' comprehension of universalism in the 1990s entailed issues such as the rise of the evaluation of education, local economy of education and individualism.

Keywords: universalism, comprehensive school, basic education act

Introduction

The principle of universalism, manifested in publicly funded and state-regulated welfare services, has been one of the most essential ideas behind the Nordic welfare states. Generally, Nordic welfare states are characterized by a low degree of selectivity, a high coverage of social protection and universal, publicly provided services (Kuivalainen & Niemelä, 2010; Sipilä, 1997). Citizens and decision-makers in the Nordic countries have viewed the state and the public sector as the best guarantees of citizens' social rights and of the common good (Anttonen & Meagher, 2013).

From a historical perspective, the provision of basic education at the primary level is one of the oldest and most consistent welfare services provided along universalist principles (Budowski & Künzler, 2020). Following the universalist principles of the Nordic welfare regime (Esping-Andersen, 1990) and its implementations in statutory pension insurance and unemployment security (Alestalo, 2010; Erikson, Hansen, Ringen, & Uusitalo, 1987), the aim of the comprehensive school system has been to provide equal

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educational opportunities regardless of gender, social class or geographic origin. The Nordic strategy for building high quality and equality in education has been based on the construction of the publicly funded comprehensive school system which does not select, track or stream students during their basic education until the age of 16 (Lie, Linnakylä, & Roe, 2003).

Nevertheless, just as the principle of universalism has not been stable or unchangeable, the universalism of comprehensive school has always had different degrees and formulations. It has been argued that universal institutions are vulnerable since they are under constant risk of being dissolved (Mays & Thomlinson, 2019; Virolainen & Persson Thunqvist, 2017). As Tomas Englund (2009) states, there are always particular interests that "tend to challenge universal institutions" (p. 19). Welfare systems entail constant negotiations on the coverage of redistribution of resources and opportunities, as well as calculations on the effectiveness of different models of redistribution (Kim, 2010). Comprehensive education has not been immune to global and national trends of neoliberalism and changing conditions of work and education, but have these trends challenged the institutional roots of the universalistic comprehensive school? How has the common comprehensive school adjusted to changing political and economic situations?

Our aim in this article is to revisit the principle of universalism and analyze its adjustment in the government proposals and parliamentary discussions on the basic education acts. Based on a historical overview and analysis of legislative processes from 1967 to 1998, we examine universalism in the Finnish education system and interpret what the principles of new universalism (see e.g., Mays & Tomlinson, 2019) mean in the field of education policy. Analytically the aim is to portray the varieties of universalism within the comprehensive school, as produced by the four sets of instruments used to govern education (legal, economic, ideological and evaluatory). We asked how the distinctive characteristics of universalism are emphasized in the in the legislation and parliamentary discussion.

Universalism and comprehensive schooling

The Nordic countries have traditionally shared, at least to some extent, the aspiration of universalism: the sentiment that the same publicly funded and publicly provided services should be offered to all social groups according to need, not based on individual financial capacity (Antikainen, 2002; Kalalahti, Silvennoinen, Varjo, & Rinne, 2015; Szebehely & Meagher, 2013). According to the social democratic tradition, public services must be of such a high quality that people from the middle classes are also willing to use them. Middle-class involvement is expected to lead to better quality services for all.

A narrow definition of universalism emphasizes welfare and benefits, while a broad conception of universalism focuses on the nature of the entitlements (Cox, 2004). Hence, over the course of time, universalism has been perceived as being a resolute source of security for people with low incomes, as social integration (Anttonen, Häikiö, & Stefánsson, 2012), and as a just way to provide education (Kalalahti et al., 2015). According to Alan Gewirth (1988) the concept of universalism, as a doctrine, is that all people ought to be treated with equal and impartial positive consideration in terms of their respective good and interests. In broad terms, the Nordic welfare model has had several distinctive features: center-left coalition governments, a high level of redistribution, strong support for investment in primary and secondary education, active labor market programs, as well as high-quality public day care and preschool services (Iversen & Stephens, 2008).

Within the field of compulsory education, the notion of universalism is manifested in the development of the 'Nordic school model' (Telhaug, Mediås, & Aasen, 2006). It is important to note that social services such as basic education were inclusive in the Nordic countries, and education became mandatory before the term 'universal' was commonly used (Budowski & Künzler, 2020). Although there is considerable variety among the Nordic welfare states and their schooling, they share certain characteristics, which involve universalistic features. Following the ethnic, linguistic and cultural homogeneity of the countries, as well as the 'golden era' of social democracy (Telhaug et al., 2006), the Nordic comprehensive school systems

became 'uniform' to some extent. In Finland, this has especially meant the homogeneity of schools and learning outcomes as well as non-selective admission policies (Kalalahti et al., 2015). Part of the overall strategy has also been to spread the school network so that pupils have a school near their homes – or if this is not feasible, as in rural areas, to provide free transportation to school. Inclusion of special education and instructional efforts to minimize low achievement are also typical in Nordic educational systems (Lie et al., 2003).

Changing the premise of universalism

Although universal welfare systems have gone through significant changes, the de-universalization may vary between different areas of welfare systems (Béland, Blomqvist, Goul Andersen, Palme, & Waddan 2014). The welfare state is an institutional process, through which national emergencies, economic challenges and political transitions shape institutional adaptations (Kim, 2010; see also Budowski & Künzler, 2020). Following Taekyoon Kim (2010), we have approached the welfare state and its education system as a constant institutional process, in which institutional adaption to societal and political forces takes place – every new institutional demand is set against old institutional settings. To be able to analyze such processes of the welfare state, we considered "the advent of historical contingencies; the emergence of new political and economic demands; and institutional responses to those challenges" (Kim, 2010, p. 498). In this approach the welfare system is considered to have its origin in three institutional adaptions; (1) to emergency demands, e.g. wars and economic crisis, (2) to economic demands and (3) to political demands (Kim, 2010), which alter the comprehensive systems within other welfare state institutions.

During the 1980s, the universalist perspective came to be questioned due to rapid economic change and high rates of unemployment in OECD countries (Ellison, 1999). From the pluralist standpoint, the welfare state had created false uniformity, which eliminated or even reduced "the diversity of identity, experience, interest and need in welfare provision" (Williams, 1992, pp. 206–207). According to Anneli Anttonen and Gabrielle Meagher (2013), the emergence of the new public management doctrine reframed public service users as consumers or customers, who should have more choice. Hence, there was an economic and political call for policies that seek to individualize or personalize services through consumer choice and voucher models. The benefits of co-ordination through competition were advocated through policies that re-organize the supply side or offer consumer choice on the demand side of the service system.

Along with the new doctrine, the balance between (1) the universal, centralized and (2) the local, decentralized forms of welfare systems were re-adjusted (see e.g., Trydegård & Thorslund, 2010). Universalistic institutions have local diversity in service provision, which enhances the successful responsiveness to the needs of the local population, as well as the empowerment of local government (Powell & Boyne, 2001; Sellers & Lidström, 2007; Trydegård & Thorslund, 2010). The new doctrine with strong municipal autonomy nevertheless enhanced diversifying services in a manner, which questions the previous universality and equality of the welfare system. Although universalism cannot be defined through diversity, there has been an ideological shift towards diversity and de-universalization, which in practice alters the universal systems. This shift has been conceptualized in terms of particularism and selectivism (Anttonen, Häikiö, Stefánesson, & Sipilä, 2012; Kuivalainen & Niemelä, 2010; Thompson & Hogget, 1996), individualization (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002), and marketization and privatization (Dovemark et al., 2018).

The institutional adaptations to political and economic demands, designed and undertaken by the state tend to drive the 'institutional isomorphism' (Kim, 2010, p. 499). Policy processes develop into new institutional processes of policy transfer, through which knowledge, policies and arrangements shift between policy domains or nations (Dolowitz & March, 1996; Kim, 2010). Following this thinking, one might expect the Finnish system to adopt the international and national tendencies of diversification and de-universalization (see e.g., Anttonen et al., 2012; Béland et al., 2014).

The provision of basic education that has taken place in Nordic countries has seen profound diver-

sification – in particular with regard to choice and privatization – although the scope and forms of these reforms have varied. Denmark has had a tradition of supporting parents' right to choose education for their children; attending publicly funded private schools has been more common in Denmark than in the other Nordic countries. In Sweden, there has been a rapid growth of tax-funded free schools, and the number of children attending them has increased. Currently, most of the Swedish free schools are owned by corporations, which can make profits. In contrast, Finland, Norway and Iceland still have less private education and do not allow for-profit private provision of education (Arnesen & Lundahl, 2006; Lundahl, 2016; Telhaug et al., 2006.)

It has been argued that the Finnish comprehensive school has proved to be resistant to these common trends of altering the principles of universalism (Simola, Kauko, Varjo, Kalalahti, & Sahlström, 2017). For instance, in Sweden the introduction of independent schools and other forms of particularism has "both questioned and partially transformed" the nature of comprehensive school as a universal institution (Englund, 2009, p. 24). In Finland, school markets, competition and selectivism have been opposed, and parents as well as local education authorities have recognized the negative effects that segregation of school markets may cause (Varjo & Kalalahti, 2019; Kalalahti et al., 2015).

Methodological considerations

Our historical-institutional methodology borrows from the ideas of process tracing and developing middle-range discussion (Kim, 2010; Kaidesoja, 2018a, b). As Tuukka Kaidesoja has argued (2018a), theory-building process tracing offers analytical research frames which make feedback loops and other non-linear interactions detectible. Based on the textual analysis of government proposals (HE1967/44, 1982/30, 1997/86) and related parliamentary discussions (Minutes from the Parliament 1967–8, 1982–3, 1997–8 / Transcribed addresses of the Members of Parliament) on the basic education acts (Law on the Comprehensive School System 1967/467, Law on the Comprehensive School 1983/476, Basic Education Act 1998/628), we have constructed the political processes of comprehensive education, which determine the universalism of the comprehensive system in practice. On the one hand, we comprehend legal norms as shared plans that legal institutions implement in order to exercise social control and governance. On the other hand, we emphasize the significance of legislative process in Parliament as a public forum for debate where choices for education policy are justified and explained. Our aim is to portray the varieties of universalism within the comprehensive school, as produced by the four sets of instruments used to govern education (legal, economic, ideological and evaluatory). We ask: how are the characteristics of universalism emphasized in legislation and parliamentary discussion?

We analyze the changes taking place in the legislation by looking at the 'steering' instruments of education. According to Ulf P. Lundgren's (1977) original idea, educational systems have three sets of instruments that are used to govern education: legal, economic, and ideological. The instruments of legal governance consist of laws, acts, governmental decisions and other legally binding norms. The instruments of economic governance refer to ways in which resources are allocated to the providers of education. Ideological governance instruments concern the aims of education and its contents. As we see it, ideological governance is built on two levels. On one level, the political debate in parliament sets the core principles and functions for the comprehensive system. On the other level, the details on the contents of various subjects are stated in the national core curriculum. Later, Lundgren added a fourth set of instruments to his model: the evaluation system, to promote for improved policy-making and better-informed pedagogic school practices (Lundgren, 1990). We consider changes in basic education acts and their manifestations in light of the typology created by Lundgren. The four instruments of governance are presented as four mechanisms that have constructed and reconstructed the universalistic principle of Finnish comprehensive school. In our thematic analysis (see e.g., Bowen, 2009) we analyzed the changes in universalism in three eras of comprehensive school from the four analytical viewpoints of the instruments used to govern educa-

tion. The documentary analysis was conducted first by thematizing the text into four categories following the governance instruments, and secondly by constructing the rationalities within these instruments by coding the key characteristics manifesting the universalization and de-universalization of comprehensive school. Finally, the rationalities were re-read from the data with the historical context and interpreted as three eras of universalism. The quotations from the government proposals (HE 1967, 1982, 1997) are translated from Finnish by the authors.

The Finnish education system prior to the comprehensive school reform

The 1866 Basic Education Act obligated cities and towns – but not rural municipalities – to provide basic education. It also gave municipalities the right to obtain state subsidies for the provision of basic education. The 1898 School District Act prescribed rural municipalities to design school districts, so that the pupils' travel distance from home to school would not exceed 5 kilometers. Nevertheless, it was not until 1921 that attending basic education became compulsory for all children. (Risku, 2014; Sarjala, 1982.)

According to Mika Risku (2014; see also Ahonen, 2003; Huuhka, 1955), before the 1970s, the Finnish education system bore medieval characteristics. It consisted of two separate tracks that originated in the Middle Ages: basic education and grammar schools. The education system maintained the social structure of the class society, and particularly with grammar schools, caused social injustice between the towns and rural municipalities. Moreover, parents' socio-economic status had a significant effect on children's education: prior to World War II, less than ten per cent of grammar school students came from farming and working-class homes.

An education reform in the 1950s included a uniform four-year basic education in the basic school. After the fourth grade some students continued their studies in grammar school, while the others remained in basic school – and later, in the civic school – for three to five years. (Risku, 2014; Ahonen, 2003.) The reform did not eliminate the social injustice between rural municipalities and towns: in 1960, only 20 per cent of the pupils in rural areas attended grammar schools, while the percentage in cities and towns was 47 per cent (Kivinen, 1988).

The foundations of universalism in the Finnish comprehensive school in the 1960s and 1970s

Due to the societal and geographical inequalities of the old dual model, in the 1960s and 1970s, compulsory education in the Nordic countries was extended to nine years, and this comprehensive model was adopted as the starting point for developing the whole education system. This reform took place under conditions of strong industrialization, the development of a service society and seemingly stable economic growth, inspired by a social-democratic ideology that stressed equality. (Antikainen, 2002; Blossing, Moos & Imsen, 2013.)

Along the pan-Nordic welfare state building process, remarkable changes in the architecture, functions and procedures of Finnish central administration occurred. The state's sphere of operations expanded in education, healthcare and social insurance. The rapid growth in the number of civil servants and administrative bodies indicated a completely new phase of national development (Kananen, 2014; Varjo, 2007). The political situation in the mid-1960s set a tradition for the next 20 years to have a representative from the Social Democrat Party heading the Finnish National Agency for Education and a representative of the agrarian Centre Party as head of the Ministry of Education.

Alongside these changes, perceptions of how the state could and should be governed were being developed. Pertti Alasuutari (1996) describes Finland between the Second World War and its membership

in the European Union in 1995 as a planning economy, convinced that social problems could be solved best by 'scientific' planning and organizing. Solutions to problems concerning the national economy or the functionality of state administration were found solely through better planning. (p. 108.)

Following these developments, a need to revise the legal, economic and ideological instruments of compulsory education emerged. Following the planning economy logic, national education policies were to be enacted and regulated through strict and detailed legislation, a state subsidy system and a national core curriculum. The implementation was assigned to the Ministry of Education and the Finnish National Agency for Education at the national level, and regional state administrative agencies and municipal education authorities at the regional and local levels.

The instruments of ideological governance of the 1970s: uniformity in the content and aims of comprehensive schools

In April 1967, the Government proposal for the law on the comprehensive school system (HE 1967/44) and the related parliamentary discussion (Minutes from the Parliament 1967–8) emphasized the universalist premise of the forthcoming school reform. According to the proposal, the overall aim was to enable the whole population to participate in common and uniform basic education. Therefore, all social classes were entitled to equal access to high-quality basic education, regardless of their place of residence. Moreover, special measures were required for those who were in the need of support.

The school reform was understood as a social question aimed at the integration and inclusion of all social classes. Common school was seen as a way to enhance social integration and people skills in democratic society:

> *Due to pedagogical reasons, the social composition of teaching groups in comprehensive school should be equivalent to the demographics of the country* (HE 1967/44, p. 5).

According to the parliamentary discussion, the same curriculum should be taught in a similar manner at every school in Finland in order to guarantee the same standard of education. There was generally a shared understanding about a common, adequate entity of knowledge and skills, which provides the basis for further education and work. Nevertheless, the question about compulsory foreign language teaching for each pupil, including those aiming for vocational education, was politicized during the legislative process.

As a result of the political debate in Parliament, the aims and coverage of education were strengthen when the Ministry of Education ordered the comprehensive school curriculum to be introduced at all schools. The government came to determine how much instructional time to allot to each subject as well as the general goals of education, while the National Agency for Education decided on the content of the national core curriculum. The ideological premise was universalistic comprehensive education, in which everyone is taught with similar goals in mind and for a similar duration.

The instruments of legal governance of the 1970s: equality of educational opportunities

In the 1967 government proposal, and in the related parliamentary discussion, the underlying principle was that compulsory education must be equally accessible and uniform for all. In terms of legislation, the principle of universalism was built on two pillars: First, the duration of compulsory education must be extended to nine years. In practical terms, this meant that the scope of education was now wider for the entire age cohort. Second, the general eligibility for further schooling provided by comprehensive education must be stated in the law.

> *The foundation of the education system must be nine-year common, compulsory comprehensive schooling, meant for every child* (HE 1967/44, pp. 6–7).

Legislation defined all the educational services to which a citizen was entitled, as well as how they should be provided. For example, subjects, curricula, teachers' qualification requirements, schoolbooks, the rights and duties of students and staff and the architecture and procedures of local school administration were all prescribed in the laws, decrees and normative decisions of the central administration.

Ability grouping was introduced in the teaching of mathematics and foreign languages at the lower secondary level with the launch of "the short course". Students completing "the short course" were not eligible to continue studying at upper secondary school. The decision can be interpreted as a compromise made in order for the new education system to be acceptable to all political parties.

The instruments of economic governance of the 1970s: the new redistributive state subsidy system

The whole legislative process emphasized the dominant principle of resource allocation within the Nordic welfare state model. With the reform, the provision of comprehensive education should be financed entirely through taxation, like health insurance or the statutory pension insurance.

Nevertheless, in terms of economy, the principle of universalism had more nuances in the debate. First, it was understood in Parliament that the reform would be an expensive task – for both the state and the municipalities. Therefore, the new state subsidy system, and the financial classification of municipalities as a vital part of it, had to recognize inter-municipal disparities in wealth.

> *The division of costs must be arranged in such a manner that the impoverished municipalities are also able to execute the education reform* (MP Uusitalo, Minutes from the Parliament 1967, p. 490).

Second, in the discussion one aim of the reform was to support the education of the low-income families financially by allocating resources according to a high redistribution model. Hence, according to the government proposal, the comprehensive school must be completely free of charge and offer the same welfare benefits to everybody (HE 1967/44, p. 7). As a result, the allocation of resources was implemented uniformly. For instance, the money that municipalities received from the state was clearly earmarked for each administrative sector with a strict purpose of use, such as teachers' salaries.

Between 'old' and 'new' universalism in the 1980s

The belief in centralized governance was abandoned in Finland during the 1980s. The former sector-based planning systems, with their highly detailed and focused regulations, were all rapidly brushed aside. Among the defects of the former sector planning were the poor implementation of state planning, the bureaucracy, the waste of time, and the futility of detailed and inflexible regulations. In general, measures to strengthen local decision-making capacity were taken in education policies along with other sectors of social and public policy. (Simola et al., 2017.)

The centralized planning system in education, which reached its peak during the comprehensive school reform, was dismantled in the late 1980s through a government resolution to reform the entire management of the state. Still, it is important to note that comprehensive school did not lose its universalist features in these developments. In our analysis, the 1980s appear as a transition phase between the 1970s and 1990s – a period of time when some of the aspects related to universalism in comprehensive education were revisited, whilst other issues continued to evolve in a more universalist direction.

The instruments of legal governance of the 1980s: the expansion of universalism

In March 1982, the Government proposal for the law on comprehensive school (HE 1982/30) and the

addresses of the Members of Parliament (Minutes from the Parliament 1982–3) set two vital legal norms in order to advance universalism in comprehensive education: the abolition of the ability grouping system and a municipal obligation to provide comprehensive education to all children, regardless their special educational needs.

First, since the 1970s, the ability grouping system in languages and mathematics, which defined the student's eligibility for further education, came under question at the lower secondary level (grades 7–9). The pressure to abolish the tracking system grew soon after the social selectivity of the system was confirmed during 1970s. According to the 1982 government proposal:

> *Some unintended consequences have emerged. When the eligibility for further study has been defined by courses with different breadth, it has become in practical terms a restrictive mechanism.* (HE 1982/20, p. 4)

The parliamentary discussion generally emphasized the universalist nature of comprehensive school – especially from the point of eligibility to undertake further study. The shared sentiment was that the comprehensive school-leaving certificate must entitle all pupils with the qualification to continue into upper secondary education.

Second, according to the government proposal, disabled pupils were to be included in compulsory schooling. Minister of Education Kalevi Kivistö emphasized inclusion as a vehicle of universalism in his introductory speech. According to Kivistö, the new reform saw the no pupil could be exempted from compulsory education, and municipalities were obliged to provide compulsory education for all children of respective age, except for those who were severely disabled. The Minister of Education's address manifests the expanding notion of universalism by means of legislation in the 1980s.

Simultaneously, a more devolved conception of universalism was introduced in the form of a so-called time credit system, which set the maximum number of lessons for a school. Schools were given a fixed number of teaching hours based on the number of students in different grades and they were allowed to decide on how to use their resources to fulfill them. In his opening speech, the Minister of Education appeared to balance between safeguarding sufficient national uniformity and promoting the conditions for municipal originality in comprehensive education. Different optional subjects, teacher resources and school facilities were mentioned as examples of local conditions to be considered in the allocation of resources at the local level.

The instruments of ideological governance of the 1980s: towards a more devolved system

The time credit system had an effect on the aims and contents of comprehensive education. In the 1980s, the National Agency for Education started to prescribe the national framework, but obliged providers of education (that is, municipalities) to prepare their own curricula. The municipalities were also given the right to choose textbooks, select instructional methods, and to determine the best way to implement the curriculum.

The parliament unanimously emphasized issues such as local cultural heritage, economic life and nature as premises for syllabus content. These should be taken into account while deciding on the local curriculum, but within the nationally given framework. It is interesting to note that when the national control of the curriculum was being relaxed, the capacity to produce universalism in practical terms was shifted to the local level.

The Minister of Education announced that the government believed that the development of municipal education services could only occur if local people felt they belonged to local schools and wanted to participate in developmental work. Engagement and participation, enabled by universalist policies, were now considered to be built at the local level, with local contexts in mind.

The instruments of economic governance of the 1980s: advance of universalism despite increasing costs

In 1982, when the government proposal was presented to the Parliament, the old state subsidy system, integrated with comprehensive school reform (1972–1977) was still in effect. In practical terms, the state subsidy system was still based on real costs. It subjugated local education authorities under strict central control through regulations, inspections, and financial arrangements, all aimed at keeping expenses in check and books balanced.

The government proposal did not include any amendments concerning economic governance as such. Moreover, the government explicitly stated that the reforms introduced in the law on comprehensive school will inevitably increase costs:

> *The implementation of the government proposal will increase the costs of the education system* (HE 1982/30, p. 12).

The Government's principle to make improvements to advance universalism was not subjected to any severe criticism during the parliamentary discussion.

New comprehensions of universalism in basic education since the 1990s

Changes in educational legislation, funding and governance were among the more extensive developments in Finnish administration during the 1990s. As a result, normative centralized government control over schools and teachers was replaced with a management-by-results approach and quality assurance. (Simola et al., 2017; Varjo, 2007.)

As the former Secretary General of the Ministry of Education Vilho Hirvi put it, genuine management by results in the educational sector has two fundamental elements: first, an administrative unit that sets the goals and provides resources, and second, a level that creates the products and services, i.e. the schools. The National Core Curriculum sets the central objectives for learning and education that define the teaching objectives for obligatory, optional and elective subjects. In turn, the municipal (or school-specific) curriculum expresses how these objectives are to be achieved. The evaluation of efficiency means assessing how the main idea and the main objectives in the area in question have been realized. (Hirvi, 1996.)

During the 1990s, the evaluation of education came gradually to be considered a fundamental element of governance, because it "replaces the tasks of the old normative steering, control and inspection system" (Hirvi, 1996, p. 93). In the 1970s, it was commonly believed that the goals given for basic education could be achieved via strict and careful ex ante implementation. Nevertheless, since the 1990s it has been assumed by public authorities at the central level that it is necessary to set national core targets and to evaluate the end results ex post (Aho, Pitkänen, & Sahlberg, 2006).

The instruments of legal governance of the 1990s: the rise of evaluation of education

In June 1997, when the Parliament started to discuss (Minutes from the Parliament 1997–8) the Government proposal for Basic Education Act (HE 1997/86), Minister of Education Olli-Pekka Heinonen stated that legislation in itself was no longer an appropriate method to achieve the new aims of the education system. Hence, legal instruments should be used only in matters that require national uniformity to increase overall effectiveness of the education system. Otherwise, all governance and control of education should be deregulated to the local level.

The idea of radical decentralization was not unconditional. From the beginning of the parliamentary discussion, it was connected to the prevailing comprehension of the distinctive evaluation system of edu-

cation as a vital instrument of governance – and as a guarantor of universalism and equality. According to the government proposal:

> *In order to safeguard the quality and national uniformity of education, regulations on evaluation of the outcomes given for education will be attached to the Basic Education Act* (HE 1997/86, p. 1).

The Parliament was unanimous in its support for the evaluation of education. In times of deregulation, it was considered as the ultimate guarantor of the realization of universalism in various local contexts. In general, evaluation and various national development projects were referred to as new governance instruments to replace traditional legal norms.

The most politicized issue in the parliamentary debate was the postponement of the one-year pre-primary education reform. From the beginning of the legislative process, pre-primary education had been considered a central part of the new basic education act. Nevertheless, this reform was postponed until further notice, due to a lack of financial resources. A considerable number of MPs protested this decision. If successful, the original plan would have expanded formal education to cover six-year-olds along the universalist principle.

The instruments of economic governance of the 1990s: towards a local education budget

In 1993, the relationship between the central government and municipal financing was re-organized. In addition to changing the basis on which state subsidies to the municipalities were calculated, this re-organization gave local authorities more freedom to decide how to use their funds. The new state subsidy system granted funding according to annual calculations per pupil, lesson or other unit, thereby liberating the municipalities from the former detailed 'ear-marked budgeting' through the introduction of 'lump sum budgeting' for schooling. (Law on Financing Educational and Cultural Services, 1992.)

In practical terms, this means that the control of the funding of the comprehensive school system by universalist means was also delegated to the municipalities. Jointly, the new state subsidy system and the economic recession meant a shift from centrally allocated resources to municipal-based autonomy – and differentiation in educational resources. In the discussion in Parliament, the intolerable variation in municipalities' resources for comprehensive education was already a well-known fact among MPs: "…currently, the municipalities have insufficient resources to fund high-quality comprehensive education" (MP Vehviläinen, Minutes from the Parliament, 1997, p. 3175).

It is also important to note that unlike in the two previous legislative processes, the state would not provide municipalities with extra resources to accomplish the reform. According to the government proposal, the changes would not have an effect on the overall state subsidy system. The intention was that the effects on municipal financing would remain minimal.

As a result, municipalities came to be in charge of the provision of comprehensive education financially as well. Simultaneously, their repertoire of means to provide comprehensive education expanded. The option to outsource (comprehensive) educational services was drafted into early versions of the government proposal; yet it was withdrawn from the final version. The issue of outsourcing became politized in the course of the debate. The Social Democrats shared the view that outsourcing, as a matter of principle, threatened the universalist origins of comprehensive schooling. According to MP Gustafsson, the Social Democrats managed "to protect comprehensive school from cold market forces" (MP Gustafsson, Minutes from the Parliament, 1997, p. 2639) and prevented the process of marketization by opposing the proposal from the beginning.

The instruments of ideological governance of the 1990s: the emergence of choice and competition

In the National Core Curriculum 1994 flexibility and freedom of choice were increased so that at the lower secondary level, approximately ten per cent of the instructional hours were left for the providers of education to decide on. This proposed national curriculum framework provided general guidelines for selecting the content and methods for teaching and served primarily as a guideline for municipal-level curriculum planning. Schools were entitled to create their own pedagogical profiles by specializing in some subjects or themes, and to emphasize them in teaching and other activities.

The government proposal for the Basic Education Act in 1997 entitled parents to choose between schools on the grounds of their characteristics and curriculum. Providers of education and the comprehensive schools were still obliged to follow national curriculum guidelines. However, within a given framework, in certain areas they were allowed to specialize to develop and express a distinctive character to meet the varying demands of parents and to cope with the varying aptitudes of pupils.

The novel issues of school choice and classes with a special emphasis soon became heated themes in the parliamentary debate. It was a common comprehension that new legislation would eventually decrease the national uniformity of the provision and contents of education. In general terms, the MPs from the political left were strictly against the freedom of choice and specialization, due to the potential to break the universalist principle. As a political compromise, classes with a special emphasis were restricted to subjects and themes like music and art, which were considered to be less important in terms of eligibility to continue studying. On the same occasion, private schools were discussed as a potential threat to common comprehensive school.

All in all, due to the changing principles and practices of universalism, governmental means to control and safeguard the universalist principle – such as having more normative and detailed national core curricula and qualification requirements for teachers – were discussed. Above all, the evaluation of education was placed on the political agenda.

The evaluation system

The essential role of evaluation in education was sealed in the parliamentary debate. The municipalities were obliged to self-evaluate the education they provide and take part in external evaluations. According to the proposal for the Basic Education Act in 1997, due to the changes in legislation, financing and syllabus, the realization of universalism has disintegrated into numerous local contexts. Moreover, the changing conceptions of universalism have also raised doubts on diversification and inequalities in the parliamentary debate. Against this background, the strong and common imperative to improve quality assurance of education becomes understandable.

The analysis of parliamentary debates proves that there were several features connected to evaluation that were meant to advance universalism: First, evaluation was supposed to provide information that was public, accessible to everybody. Second, the results from evaluations ought to be used as tools of development and ways to improve the education system, not as sanctions.

Final remarks – revisiting universalism

The aim of this paper was to elaborate how the principle of universalism is present and has been transformed in the government proposals and related parliamentary discussions on the basic education acts from 1967 to 1998. We analyzed the varieties of universalism within the comprehensive school by looking at the four sets of instruments used to govern education (Lundgren, 1977, 1990). We portrayed how the foundation of comprehensive education in 1960s was first laid out with uniform content and aims at the ideological level. This comprehensive system emphasized the equality of education and the new redistributive state subsidy

system. Between the 'old' and 'new' universalism there was a period in the 1980s when the instruments of legal and financial governance faced the expansion of universalism and an increase in costs. However, the education system moved towards more varied ideological premises. We concluded that the 'new' comprehension of universalism in the 1990s entailed the rise of evaluation, local education budgeting and individualism.

From a comparative perspective, the 'Nordic School Model' seems to have reached a point at which de-universalization is one option. Comprehensive education has faced the same state-driven changes that have changed other national welfare sectors. As Marta Szebehely and Gabrielle Meagher (2018) point out, the Finnish health sector, particularly in the case of care of the elderly, the 'institutional adaptation' (Kim, 2010) has followed the doctrines of marketization and privatization by permitting for-profit care corporations. In the context of education, most Nordic countries have introduced at least 'soft' forms of privatization into their education systems. However, it is not self-evident that universalism leads to a decline in all welfare regimes and policy arenas. Universalist features are still embedded in the comprehensive systems, and they might even expand to new areas, such as childcare in Sweden (Béland et al., 2014) and pre-primary education in Finland (Paananen, 2017).

Instead of seeking the crosscut timeline for de-universalization of universalism, we aimed to revisit the principle of universalism and discuss two outcomes of the institutional processes that have altered the comprehensive education. We wish to highlight that evaluation has indeed emerged as the fourth set of instruments used to govern education (Lundgren, 1990). According to Ozga et al. (2011), decentralization and deregulation are often accompanied by various forms of re-regulation, which aim to reassert central control in novel ways. Our analysis proves that decentralization and evaluation have emerged in tandem in Finland. Our interpretation is that the emergence of evaluation is a consequence of two separate processes: First, there is the urge to centrally control the realization of universalism in diverse local contexts in a re-regulative manner. Second, there is the tendency to follow transnational trends, such as quality assurance, in a convergent manner. Nevertheless, as Simola et al. (2017) argue, rather than controlling, sanctioning or allocating resources, distinctive Finnish features such as the developmental purpose of evaluation have turned evaluation into a 'soft' governance instrument in the Finnish context.

Second, we wished to stress the emergence and prospect of municipal-based universalism. Following the thinking of Gun-Britt Trydegård and Mats Thorlund (2010), we conclude that the decentralization and changes in the instruments used to govern education have localized the manifestations of universalism and strengthened the variation in municipal school policies.

Since the 1980s, the previously state-centered education politics have changed municipal practices of education provision. Simultaneously, they have led to new, local concepts of universalism. This resonates with Neil Brenner's (2004) idea of rescaling the statehood; emphasizing the ways in which new socio-spatial configurations and geographies of socio-political struggle are proliferating on both subnational and supranational scales. In our data, the rescaling of authority on schooling gradually started to take place in the form of novel, obligatory tasks for municipal providers of education, new issues emphasized in national curricula and the introduction of a time credit system. While decentralization and deregulation have increased local autonomy, they have also led to the fragmentation of municipalities, which has weakened the unifying structural principles on which the previous systems were built (Bogason, 2000).

Economic governance affects the rationalities of municipal education policies. Current education policies delegate legislative and financial authority to municipalities unlike at the time of comprehensive school reform in 1970s. Because of budget cuts, some municipalities are adjusting their school districts and allocating resources only to fund the minimum number of teaching hours. Since the recession of the 1990s, approximately 80 schools – mainly small schools in rural areas – have been closed each year. There were 1500 fewer small schools in 2010 than there had been at the beginning of the 1990s. There are also substantial differences between municipalities in the resources allocated to schooling and the forms of positive discrimination meant to enhance the equality among the inhabitants. (Bernelius, 2013; FNAE, 2001; Kumpulainen, 2010; Yle, 2017.) It is important to note that the diversification is not only social, it

also concerns places of residence: people in urban and rural areas face increasingly different conditions when going to school. The evident diversification that has followed the rescaling of statehood in Finland raises the question if the principle of universalism will be dissolved, or converted into multiple models of 'local universalism'.

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