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## **A historical insight on Finnish education policy from 1944 to 2011**

*Mika Risku\**

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*Abstract:* This paper examines the Finnish education policy from 1944 to 2011 describing historical and social contexts and revealing underlying societal aims and approaches. The examination is based on the institutional strand of contingency theory and focuses on two key progressions. The first one deals with social justice and the second one with the relationship between the State and the municipalities. Two fundamental political eras are identified and examined. The first one, 1944-1980, comprises the State's will to achieve social justice through a centralized, norm-based and system-oriented administration. The second one, 1980-2011, involves the decentralization of administration with which the State tries to preserve and advance social justice, and to develop local autonomy.

*Keywords:* Education policy, social justice, local autonomy, Finland

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## **Introduction**

This paper examines the development of education policy in Finland from 1944 to 2011. The examination is based on the meta-analysis conducted by Risku (2011) to locate the superintendent in the historical development of education in Finland. The meta-analysis focused on the development of the environment related to superintendency: the Finnish society, education system, municipality and local provision of general education. The present paper concentrates on the two progressions that could be identified in the meta-analysis. The first one involves social justice and the second one the relationship between the State and the municipalities.

Through the two progressions one can recognize two education policy eras in Finland. Both eras correspond to the more general societal development in Finland. In fact, one could say that they were formed to meet the challenges the Finnish society encountered during the period. The first era, 1944-1980, comprises the final stage in the State's persistent aspiration to transform the class society of the Middle Ages into an egalitarian democracy and welfare state through a centralized, norm-based and system-oriented administration. The second one, 1980-2011 involves the preserving and advancing of the social justice, and the developing of local autonomy in an economically and demographically challenging context through a decentralized administration.

The eras are chronologically not clear-cut, but in the 1980s closely intertwine with each other. The first era could be regarded to extend till the end of the 1980s and then again the first indications of the second era could be discerned already in the 1970s. The year 1980 was chosen as the boundary marker, because by then the implementation of the comprehensive education system had already been completed. And, it was that implementation that abolished the parallel education system, which structurally maintained and served the medieval class society all the way till the end of the 1970s.

## **Research methodology**

This paper has been written in the spirit of Taysum and Iqbal (2012). They consider, in line with Gale (2001), that it is important to examine

educational policies through the perspective of social historiography. According to Taysum and Iqbal (2012, p. 12) as well as to Kincheloe (1991, p. 234), “social historiography enables the researcher to analyse policy documents to discover the processes of educational change and expose the possible relationships between the socio-educational present and the socio-educational past”. Taysum and Iqbal (2012, p. 13) describe education policies as ‘road maps’ which aim for the future, but must be connected to their environments and to the past.

The present paper is confined to the educational policies in Finland during 1944-2011. As alone it will offer a somewhat constricted picture of the world. Connected with other similar papers, as Taysum and Iqbal (2012) suggest, it will serve its part in the collective knowledge creation. Similarly to Taysum and Iqbal (2012, p. 25), the examination in this paper is a mixed-method one comprising both qualitative and quantitative approaches, and follows the framework by Hodgson and Spours (2006) attempting to identify ‘political eras’ to locate societal and historical meanings, contexts and movements, hegemony, and national and international debates in education.

The examination of education policies in this paper is based on Risku’s (2011) meta-analysis, which was conducted according to the principles of the contingency theory. Thus this paper, too, falls in the framework of the contingency theory. According to contingency theory there is no best way to construct an organization, but different kinds of environments require different kinds of arrangements (Lawrence & Lorsche 1986; Mintzberg, 1979). In the field of contingency theory, organizations have been studied concentrating on their environments, strategies, structures, processes (technology) and employee commitments (Morgan, 1997). The present paper is interested in how the strategies and environments affect education policies and in what kinds of structures are constructed to implement the created education policies.

This paper follows the approach of contingency theory known as “institutional theory”. Institutional theory seeks to increase our understanding of organizations in the broad historical and social context including political and cultural dimensions. Similarly to population ecology, institutional theory may concentrate on the birth, growth, development and decline of organizations. (Morgan, 1997). The focus of this examination is both to describe the education policies identified, to date them and to find out why they were created and abandoned.

The development of the Finnish society creates the general setting for the examination. The development of society is seen as the executive power for the changes in the education policies, ways of organizing administration and education systems. The examination starts with a brief description of Finland prior to 1944, continues with the analysis of the first education policy era, 1944-1980, and finishes by examining the second education policy era, 1980-2011.

### **Finland prior to 1944**

To be able to examine education policies in Finland during the period of 1944-2011 it is essential first to have a brief look at the time before 1944. In the following I will try to describe the status of the Finnish society and education policy at the brink of 1944 as well as the historical and societal developments, which lead to that status.

The history of the Finnish society before 1944 resembles to a great extent that of many developing countries today. Finland was for a long time ruled by other powers, first by Sweden from the 12th century till 1809, and then, as an autonomous grand duchy, by Russia till 1917 (Lehtonen 2004; Jussila, 2007). The Church laid the foundation for Finland as an administrative area (Kuikka, 1992); for the territorial, administrative and legislative structures of municipalities (Pihlajanniemi, 2006); and for the establishment of the education system, which long served the countryside and towns very differently (Lappalainen, 1991; Tähtinen & Hovi, 2007).

With the Reformation in the 16th century the State started to develop its own secular administration separate from that of the Church (Lappalainen, 1991; Kuikka 1992; Tähtinen & Skinnari, 2007). Independence in 1917 offered Finland the opportunity to develop its national governance without external restrictions. By 1944 there existed an established centralized state administration.

From the very first steps of its independence, Finland aspired to become a social state where the State would adopt social, educational and economic functions to establish social justice in society. Education was regarded to have an essential role in the creation of the social justice, and social justice in education was to be a fundamental presupposition for education to be able succeed in its role (Sarjala, 1982; Pihlajanniemi, 2006; Risku, 2011).

With the 1865 and 1872 Acts municipalities had been obligated to establish their own local governments (Kuikka 1992; Pihlajanniemi 2006). The 1866 Basic Education Act, on the other hand, had given municipalities the right to obtain state aid for basic education and obligated towns, but not rural municipalities, to provide basic education (Sarjala, 1982; Peltonen, 2002). The 1898 School District Act had mandated also rural municipalities to design school districts, so that the pupils' travel distance to school would not exceed 5 kilometres, and to build a school in the district, if the number of school-aged children in the school district exceeded 30 (Salmela, 1946; Halila, 1949b; Sarjala, 1982; Peltonen, 2002).

Although local authorities had to provide basic education according to the 1866 and 1898 acts, it was not until 1921 that attending basic education was made compulsory for school-aged children. Local authorities were given ample time to meet the increasing demands. Towns had to meet the mandate in 5 years and rural municipalities in 16 years (Halila, 1950; Kivinen, 1988; Lappalainen, 1991).

To extend public basic education to reach every child was the State's strong aspiration. The state mandated municipalities more and more bindingly, and subsidized the building and maintenance of schools significantly (Sarjala, 1982; Kuikka, 1992). Already in 1891 the share of education was the second largest in the state budget, and it continued to grow with the new mandates (Peltonen, 2002). Besides the teachers' salaries, the State covered two thirds of the costs for building and maintaining school houses; for school furniture, equipment and materials; and for pupils' health care (Halila, 1950).

The State succeeded well in extending public basic education to reach every child. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, merely 8% of 7-12-year-old children obtained basic education in the countryside, while in the towns basically every 7-12-year old child did (Kivinen, 1988; Peltonen 2002). By 1944 essentially all local authorities had managed to build the school districts and basic education schools that legislation obliged them to establish (Kivinen, 1988; Kuikka, 1992).

Fundamentally, the education system still bore medieval characteristics. It consisted of the two separate lines that had been created in the Middle Ages: basic education and grammar schools (Kivinen, 1988; Kuikka 1992; Peltonen, 2002). The education system continued to maintain and serve the class society and, especially concerning grammar schools, preserved the

social injustice between the countryside and towns (Kivinen, 1988; Lappalainen, 1991; Kuikka 1992).

By 1940, there were altogether 222 grammar schools. Of these 138 were located in the 38 towns, 21 in the 27 market towns and 63 in the 537 rural municipalities. Most grammar schools were private (131) or state schools (83) and only a few were managed by local authorities (8) (Kivinen, 1988; Salminen, 1995; Kuntaliitto, 2009). Parents' socio-economic status influenced children's education significantly. Merely 4,8% of grammar school students came from farmers' homes and 8,9% from working-class homes (Huuhka, 1955; Kivinen, 1988).

The State governed the municipalities with a forceful central administration. Mandates were usually followed with state aid, and both the fulfilling of the mandates and the use of subsidies were controlled rigorously. The Office of School Inspection, established already in 1861, ensured that the demands of the State and the national Board of Schooling were met. If they were not, the subsidies could be reclaimed (Halila, 1949a; Sarjala, 1982; Isosomppi, 1996; Nikki, 2001).

By 1944 the local school administration was still frail. The 1866 Basic Education Act and the 1898 School District Act had established joint school boards in towns and, mostly, individual schools' own school boards in rural municipalities. In towns, the joint school boards could well coordinate the work of the individual schools and consider issues like the social justice of pupils in various parts of the town. In rural municipalities, especially as the number of schools grew, it became more and more difficult for local authorities to regard similar issues through the individual schools' own school boards. (Salmela, 1946; Somerkivi & Laine, 1959).

At the beginning of 1944 Finland had an established state central administration that ruled the education system in a firm manner. The State had a clear vision of education providing an essential tool for social justice in society, and an understanding of social justice in education to be fundamental for that purpose. It mandated local authorities to develop their provisions of basic education and was committed to subsidize the mandates, too. The administration of municipalities had taken some consistent development steps but was still both quite thin and weak. Concerning social justice, the work in basic education was on its way, but grammar schools still continued to maintain and serve the class society. There were significant differences between the countryside and towns.

### **Striving for social justice: 1944-1980**

The Second World War in many ways interrupted the education policy processes for achieving social justice in society. After the war the work was continued, and one can claim that at the end of the 1980s the desired social justice was also achieved through the establishment of the Nordic welfare state, which the State in the 1960s determined as its model for the social justice in society. There seems to be no uniform agreement of the origin or content of the concept of the welfare state. Usually one seems to use the concept for societies where the State has taken a significant role to establish and develop welfare and equality among its citizens. Particularly the concept is used to refer to the Nordic countries, which also seems to have developed the ideology furthest (Aho, Pitkänen, & Sahlberg, 2006; Pihlajanniemi, 2006).

Regarding the other line of development I am examining in the article, the relationship between the State and the municipalities, one can note that both state and local administration were considerably expanded and developed during the period of 1944-1980. What most characterizes the period, though, is the State's comprehensive approach to direct and control municipalities through its extensive central governance, although local administration was developed during the period as well.

In 1944 Finland signed a truce agreement with the Soviet Union ending the war between the two countries. The truce agreement maintained Finland intact with no Soviet occupation. It did, however, include several heavy obligations for Finland. Finns had to expel German troops from its territory, which led into the Lapland War that did not end until 24.4.1945. (Ries, 1988). Finland also had to cede its second most populated province, the Province of Viipuri, as well as Petsamo and Salla regions to the Soviet Union. Almost 430.000 people were relocated in Finland, which at that time had a population of 3.8 million. In addition, Finland had to pay to the Soviet Union 300 million US dollars as war reparations (Kuikka, 1992; Peltonen, 2002; Aho, Pitkänen, & Sahlberg, 2006).

The consequences of the war and the truce agreement changed Finland in ways that profoundly affected the whole society and particularly the countryside. People from the ceded territories were resettled in the countryside, and about 100.000 new farms were established (Aho, Pitkänen, & Sahlberg, 2006, p. 28). There had been a migration from the countryside to towns since the 1880s, but it was now temporarily paused

(Aro, 2007a). In addition, the return home of men from war produced a baby boom with over 100.000 children born yearly, about 40% more than the yearly fertility rates of the 2000s (Statistics Finland, 2007). As a result new basic education schools were built and their number in the countryside soon nudged its peak of 5.700 (Peltonen, 2002). Furthermore, new factories had to be built and trained work force was needed to be able to pay the war indemnities to the Soviet Union (Aho, Pitkänen, & Sahlberg, 2006).

The war had ceased the discussion on the significance of education for social justice. Now that the war was over the discussion was intensified again. Official papers, which included comments on the importance of the societal role of education, were written. As one result, municipalities obtained the right to provide lower secondary education by establishing grammar schools with subsidies from the State. (Sarjala, 2008).

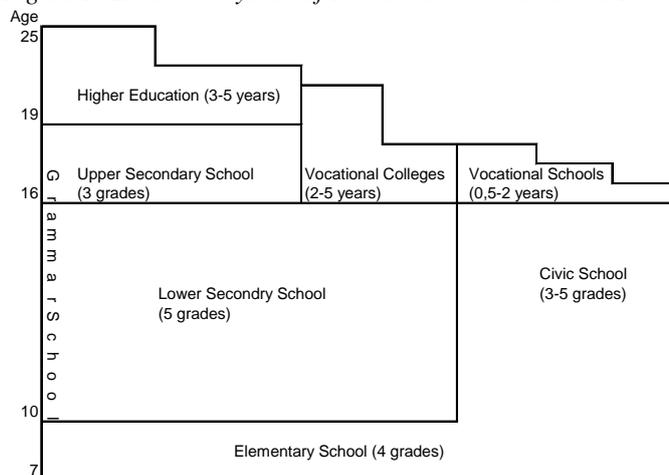
Changes were made also in basic education. Before 1945 only towns were mandated to have joint school boards responsible for coordinating the local provisions of basic education. In rural municipalities there were mainly individual schools' own school boards, which made it difficult for the local authorities to coordinate the individual schools (Somerkivi & Laine, 1959). The 1945 School Board Act established joint school boards also in rural municipalities. The act also gave inclusive and detailed instructions for the role, composition and work of the board sinewing the work of the local provisions of education. Besides, it included in the board a teachers' representative, who was to act both as a secretary for the board and as an executive manager for the local provision of basic education. (Salmela, 1946).

In the 1950s the education system was reformed to comprise three tiers as presented in Figure 1. The reform included the same four-year basic education in the primary school for all children. The parallel school system, which in essence derived from the Middle Ages, was preserved for the upper grades. After the fourth grade some continued their studies in the grammar school, while the others stayed in basic education in the civic school for 3-5 years (Kivinen, 1988; Aho, Pitkänen, & Sahlberg, 2006; Risku, 2011).

The education system was revised, because it no longer met the challenges of the changing society. Particularly, there was a need for middle managers, who were to be provided by the lower secondary schools of the grammar schools. For that reason, already prior to the reform, rural municipalities had been given the right to provide lower secondary

education and establish grammar schools. Basic education was still to provide the workers, and the grammar schools' upper secondary education offered the route to leading positions (Kivinen, 1988; Aho, Pitkänen, & Sahlberg, 2006; Sarjala, 2008; Risku, 2011). The reformed education system still aimed at maintaining and serving the class society, only in a new for, however it did not abolish the social injustice between the countryside and towns. In 1960, only 20% of the pupils in the countryside attended grammar schools, while the percentage in towns was 47 (Kivinen, 1988; Isosomppi, 1996).

Figure 1. Education system of Finland established in the 1950s



Source: Risku, 2011, p. 194.

The reform of the education system in the 1950s did not significantly change the relationship between the State and the municipalities. Local authorities were mainly responsible for basic education as earlier. Local school administration was still weak in the 1950s and 1960s, and the State both outlined and controlled basic education explicitly. Individual schools had, however, a lot of freedom to construct the curriculum, which the schools' own head teachers and school boards led quite independently (Harju, 1988; Isosomppi, 1996). In 1960, most grammar schools were still state (121) and, increasingly, private (307) schools. A small but slowly growing number (46) were maintained by local authorities. The national

Board of Schooling continued to control grammar schools (Kiuasmaa, 1982; Isosomppi, 1996; Sarjala, 2008).

As stated above, in order to be able to pay the war indemnities, factories had to be built and skilled workers were needed. Finland transformed from an agrarian class society into an industrial Nordic welfare state (Aho, Pitkänen, & Sahlberg, 2006). The settlement of the countryside that had started in 1945 discontinued at the beginning of the 1960s. A large-scale migration from rural municipalities into towns and especially to the coastal South-Western Finland restarted, and is still continuing today (Aro, 2007a; Statistics Finland, 2007). During the 1960s and 1970s, altogether 600000 people moved away from the countryside, of them 220000 to Sweden (Aho, Pitkänen, & Sahlberg, 2006).

As a result of the migration, the number of rural primary schools started to decrease steadily. By 1975, the number of rural primary schools had already halved from its peak of 5700 to 2800, while at the same time the number of primary schools in towns had tripled from 400 to 1200 (Peltonen, 2002). The changes in the numbers of schools in various parts of Finland have to be seen as part of the general societal development, and not as a separate phenomenon. Demographic changes affect all public services, not just education (see for example Pihlajanniemi, 2006; Niemelä, 2008).

The parallel education system, despite the reform in 1950, could neither provide the required workforce nor, and especially, meet the increasing demands on social justice (Sarjala, 1982; Isosomppi, 1996; Kupiainen, Hautamäki & Karjalainen, 2009). Especially there was a lot of pressure concerning social justice to abolish the parallel school system and to replace it with the comprehensive school system. Particularly the Agrarian Party representing the countryside and the left wing representing the strengthening trade unions demanded the reform. The Agrarian Party was striving for equity between countryside and towns, and the left wing for equity between social classes. Parents, in their part, were taking their children to grammar schools in expanding numbers and pressing for free comprehensive education. Internationally, neighbouring Sweden showed example by implementing the comprehensive school system as part of the Nordic welfare state model (Aho, Pitkänen, & Sahlberg, 2006; Varjo, 2007). As a result of all the pressures, Parliament in 1963 mandated the Government to start building legislation to abolish the parallel school system and to replace it with the comprehensive school (Varjo, 2007; Sarjala, 2008).

The 1968 Basic Education Act introduced a nine-year comprehensive school, which comprised a six-year primary school and a three-year lower secondary school. For political reasons the implementation was started from Northern Finland, which was considered to require the reform most, and to resist it least. Regarding the whole country, a considerable amount of time was given to the implementation, which was carried out during 1972-1977 (Varjo, 2007; Sarjala, 2008; Kupiainen, Hautamäki, & Karjalainen, 2009).

With the implementation of the comprehensive school system, the parallel school system, which derived from the Middle Ages, was finally abolished (Sarjala, 2008). The State was determined to meet the economic challenges of the reform. It covered 81-90% of teachers' salaries, which comprised 70-80% of the total operating costs (Aho, Pitkänen, & Sahlberg, 2006; Sarjala, 2008). The share of education in the state budget increased from 9,1% in 1960 to 16,9% in 1975 (Sarjala, 1982; Isosomppi, 1996). The absolute increase was even more significant, because at the same time the State notably increased the funding for cultural, health care and social services, too (Varjo, 2007; Sarjala, 2008).

To secure the realization of the 1968 Basic Education Act, state administration was remarkably strengthened in the national and provincial level (Lapiolahti, 2007; Varjo, 2007; Sarjala, 2008). New departments were established in the Ministry of Education and in the National Board of Education, as the national Board of Schooling had been renamed (Sarjala, 1982; Kivinen 1988; Isosomppi, 1996). Provincial State Offices got their own educational departments, to which the Office of School Inspection was transferred from the national level (Sarjala, 1982; Nikki, 2001; Lääninhallitus, 2009; Lyytinen & Lukkarinen, 2010).

With the comprehensive school reform, municipalities received authority for the whole local provision of education. Most of the 385 private grammar schools that existed in 1974 (Kanervio, 2007) decided to join the local provision of education (Sarjala, 2008). Often grammar schools had been founded as private mainly, because it had been the only way to get a grammar school in the area. Almost a third of the private grammar schools were already owned by municipalities and several others were struggling with financial problems. In addition, legislation was revised so that many of those grammar schools that wanted to maintain their private status found it difficult to do so (Teperi, 1995).

In order to ensure the successful implementation of the comprehensive school system, the State mandated municipalities to strengthen their educational administration, which was to serve the centralized and system-oriented steering apparatus in the local level. The State was committed to cover all the actual expenses of comprehensive education, and granted municipalities the resources to manage their provisions (Sarjala, 2008).

With the new mandates and resources, local educational administration expanded. The 1968 Act on the Foundations of the Education System obligated municipalities to establish a separate office for the director or secretary of the local provision of education, i.e. the office of the superintendent. The superintendents were to aid the local school board in the preparation, supervision and execution of local educational issues (Laki kunnan opetustoimen hallinnosta, 1968).

Besides strengthening educational administration to secure the implementation of the comprehensive school, the curriculum and teacher training were also reformed. A broad committee including representatives from political parties and universities were invited to draw a detailed and academically demanding curriculum for the comprehensive school. The new curriculum was accepted by Parliament in 1970. To balance the differences between the basic and grammar schools a three-level streaming system was put to operation in the main academic subjects for the transition period of 1972-1985 (Sarjala, 2008; Kupiainen, Hautamäki, & Karjalainen, 2009). Teacher training was transferred from teacher colleges and seminars to universities, and qualified teachers were required to have the Master's Degree. Furthermore, large-scale teacher in-service training programmes were introduced to prepare teachers for teaching the whole age group (Aho, Pitkänen, & Sahlberg, 2006; Varjo 2007; Kupiainen, Hautamäki, & Karjalainen, 2009).

By the end of the 1970s the State had been able to restructure the education system in a way, which enabled it to attain the social justice it was striving for. There now was an education system that provided everybody the opportunity to education regardless of wealth or place of residence (Varjo, 2007). The next step was to see whether the social justice established in education could develop social justice also more widely in society.

In order to succeed in the effort of establishing social justice in education, the State had in many ways developed its central administration to its extreme. It is possible that the aspired social justice would not have

been achieved in the 1980s without the State's persistent will and the norm-based, system-oriented and centralized steering apparatus. Anyway, at the same time as the State began to reach its goal of social justice, the world around started changing in fundamental ways and the defects of the governance model began to show. As a consequence, people's, municipalities', the Finnish society's, and the State's values and opinions started to change, too. There was to be ample and harsh criticism towards the system-oriented and centralized steering apparatus.

Concerning education services, principals, head teachers and teachers felt that the system-oriented centralized administration had turned them into civil servants who merely followed norms and instructions, and reported in detail what they had done (Isosomppi, 1996; Hämäläinen, Taipale, Salonen, Nieminen & Ahonen, 2002). In addition, the new all-encompassing and elaborate curriculum constricted schools' work. (Isosomppi, 1996; Sarjala, 2008). As one result, teachers stopped teaching on the basis of the curriculum and merely repeated what was written in the text books (Nikki, 2001; Sarjala, 2008).

Towards the end of the 1970s there was a widely shared shift in thinking towards distributing power from the State and central administration to the municipalities, local authorities and schools (Pihlajanniemi, 2006). In addition, several parliamentary commission reports were prepared to reform planning and funding systems, and to increase local autonomy. Especially health care and social services were under scrutiny and it was there where the first changes also took place (Niemelä, 2008). The shift in thinking was mainly due to demographic, ideological and economic changes in the Finnish society. These changes will be dealt in more detail the following section.

### **Trying to preserve social justice and to develop local autonomy: 1980-2011**

During the 1980s the State in many ways achieved the social justice in society it had for so long been striving for. Finland became a Nordic welfare state (Aho, Pitkänen, & Sahlberg, 2006; Pihlajanniemi, 2006). Both state and municipal administration had been expanded to their limits in order to be able to implement and maintain the many reforms that had been created to reach the desired social justice. As the goal of social justice was

being achieved, people's respects started to alter and they began to emphasize individualistic values. The centralized system-oriented state governance had come to the end of its road. It had structurally been able to establish its fundamental goal of social justice, but to further develop society required novel forms of administration. Also, the local administration was now strong enough to carry more responsibility.

Many of the international trends starting to prevail after the 1970s seem to have mixed fairly well with the Finnish context and with the views of various actors on how to develop the Finnish society. Neo-liberalism, which emphasizes state-led market economy, started to gain a strong foothold in the formation of public opinion in the 1980s (Rinne, Kivirauma & Simola, 2002; Varjo, 2007). Neo-liberalism, which in Finland has often been seen as a threat to the welfare state (Varjo, 2007), also seems to have had a clear, but moderate influence on Finnish education policy (see for example Laitila, 1999; Varjo, 2007). Neo-liberalistic topics and scopes have certainly been both noteworthy and common in public discussion (Varjo, 2007), but the discussion has also included strong doubts towards market economy solutions, as well as towards decentralization (Laitila, 1999).

The European value shift from state-led centralization to democratic individualism in the 1990s is another illustrative example of the international trends. Administration is no longer regarded to have only one right form, but the form is considered to vary according to the context (Ryyänänen, 2004). There also seems to be a general consensus that, for example, the formal status of the principal has changed dramatically since 1980 in ways that resemble the ideology of the New Public Management (Alava, Halttunen & Risku, 2012).

Both the value change and the inadequacy of the centralized state governance are well illustrated in the 1986 parliamentary commission report (KM, 1986; Niemelä, 2008). It described the centralized, norm-based and system-oriented governance as inflexible, undemocratic and outworn. Centralized state governance was no longer able to meet the requirements of the changing operational environment. Nor did it correspond to the change in people's values. The report suggested decentralization as the new approach to meet local authorities' demands for more autonomy with fewer regulations and less control.

Some noteworthy legislative amendments towards decentralization were made already in the 1980s. The 1983 legislation abrogated the pre-

inspection of textbooks by the National Board of Education, and the 1985 and 1988 legislation repealed the school inspection system. Prior to the abolishment of the school inspection system, the nature of inspections was altered in the direction of evaluation and guidance. It seems, however, that the modernization of the inspection system came too late, and other forms of evaluation were introduced to replace inspections (Nikki, 2001; Kupiainen, Hautamäki, & Karjalainen, 2009; Lyytinen & Lukkarinen, 2010). Since 1985 there have been no regulations for the number of classes and class sizes, except for special education (Laukkanen, 1998; Sarjala, 2008; Souri, 2009).

During the 1990s the State began to lead the development of education with five-year development plans. The approach was to answer the critique the Parliament gave to the quality of parliamentary reports as tools for development. The 1990 Government report (VNS 1990/3 vp) on education policy examined the national education policy as a single whole for the first time. The report contemplated nationally and internationally both the past, especially the 1970s and 1980s, and the future presenting scopes and ideas on how to develop the national education system (Varjo, 2007). On the basis of the report, the first national Development Plan for Education and Science was compiled. After the first development plan, which focused on the period of 1991-1996, development plans have been published every five years. Today, there is a broad political consensus on the significance of the development plans for the developing of education policy (Lapiolahti, 2007; Varjo, 2007).

After the 1980s the Finnish society began to encounter severe economic and demographic challenges. Both have threatened the social justice and the welfare society that have been created (Rinne, Kivirauma & Simola, 2002; Sarjala, 2008).

At the beginning of the 1990s, Finland faced its most severe peacetime depression. The depression was mainly due to first having an economic boom period in the 1980s and then being unable to manage the global recession that took place in the 1990s. The 1990s global recession occurred at a time, when Finland was dismantling its state-led centralized and system-oriented steering apparatus. In the challenging situation the State did not succeed in the deregulation of financial markets (Honkapohja & Koskela, 2001). As a result, during the first half of the 1990s Finland's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) decreased 12%, the unemployment rate increased from 3 to 18% and the national debt seven folded. By 1995 the

national debt was already 67% of the GDP. Education met with system-wide cuts, as all welfare services did (Peltonen, 2002; Aho, Pitkänen, & Sahlberg, 2006). The economic situation has not been recovering that well since the 1990s (Honkapohja & Koskela, 2001).

The demographic challenges basically consist of two intertwining progressions. The first one concerns migration from the countryside to towns and, especially, to the coastal South-Western Finland (Aro, 2007b). The other one involves the aging of the Finnish people (Karvonen, Moisio & Simpura, 2009). What intertwines the two progressions is that it is usually the young who move to towns and the aging that remain in the emptying countryside (Aro, 2007b).

It is probable that the State through its central administration can no longer ensure social justice to everybody in the same way as in the 1980s. It is also unlikely that the municipalities, whose territorial borders are still based on medieval principles and that have not changed since the 1800s (Pihlajanniemi, 2006, pp. 14-15), will be able to ensure social justice with their present structures.

As the government bill (HE 31/2013) for restructuring municipalities describes, people do not live where they used to anymore, and public services should be rearranged to correspond to the new and all consistently altering situations. For that purpose, the state-led centralized and system-oriented steering apparatus seems to be a too inflexible way to govern, as has already been stated several times. Besides, the value change in the Finnish society demands democratic individualism. Decisions have to be made at the local level. (Ryynänen, 2004). Furthermore, the consistently tight economic situation of Finland does not offer that much freedom of action either.

The restructuring of municipalities has not been easy for the State, or for the municipalities, and did not really begin to take place until the late 2000s. In 2007 Parliament passed the Act on Restructuring Municipalities and Services (*Laki kunta- ja palvelurakenteen uudistamisesta*, 2007/169), which has been a strong central government attempt to guarantee social justice in all regions in Finland. The act has mandated municipalities to evaluate their services and together with neighbouring municipalities try to find the best possible ways to both maintain and develop their services. At least partly due to the 2007 act, at the beginning of 2009 of the then 415 municipalities 24,8% merged with each other and 32,9% collaborated with each other in education. (Kanervio & Risku, 2009). The present

government has laid a white paper to decrease the number of municipalities from 336 to 66-70 (Valtiovarainministeriö, 2012). The white paper has stirred an animated discussion. The discussion has already made the Government climb down with regard to its plan. The present estimate by the Government is 150 municipalities (Yle, 2012).

The 1990s depression made the State totally renew the previous cost-based and earmarked statutory government transfer system. As a result, the economical responsibilities of the municipalities have consistently increased. The 1993 act introduced an index-based and non-earmarked funding system (Souri, 2009). When the act was passed the government transfer for education dropped from 70 to 50% (Aho, Pitkänen, & Sahlberg, 2006). At present the State covers 34% of the estimated costs for basic education and 42% of the estimated costs for upper secondary education (National Board of Education, 2012).

The depression also accelerated the decentralization process and, in the 1990s, the relationship between the State and the municipalities was radically redefined. The State has consistently been cutting down its own administration. Above all, the cuts have met the State's provincial administration. At the beginning of the 1990s, regional development duties were transferred from the State Provincial Offices to the Regional Offices of the Municipalities. In 1997 the number of State Provinces was decreased from 12 to 6 (Lääninhallitus, 2009). In 2009, the state regional administration was completely reorganized and the State Provinces were abolished. Today there are 6 Regional State Administrative Agencies whose duty is to develop parity of esteem at regional level by implementation of legislation and directing and supervising regional functions (Aluehallintovirasto, 2012).

The 1995 Municipal Act gave municipalities the constitutional autonomy. According to the act, municipalities have to carry out the tasks assigned to them by law but they may organize their administration quite independently and decide autonomously how they carry out the tasks mandated to them (Kuntalaki, 1995/365; Pihlajaniemi, 2006).

According to Kanervio and Risku (2009), municipalities seem to make good use of their autonomy. In their survey, superintendents informed that they consider the strategic decisions by the local council more important than the strategic decisions by the State. Legislation seems to present the national will and direction but what is concretely done is decided at the local level. One can claim that the implementation of the comprehensive

education system established the basis for the successful results of the education system that are also revealed in international surveys such as the Programme for Institutional Student Assessment (PISA). Arguably, it was the autonomy that municipalities and schools obtained in the 1994 national core curriculum reform, coupled by the shift from external school inspection to self-evaluation of the profession in 1985 and 1988, that gave Finnish people the opportunity to succeed within the education sphere. Prior to the 1994 reform, Finland did not excel in international education surveys.

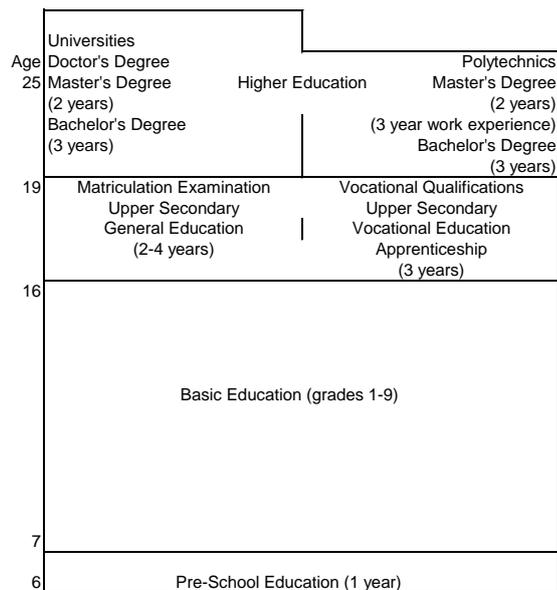
The constitutional autonomy obtained by the municipalities and the reforms in legislation offered municipalities good opportunities to organize their administration as they considered functional. Legislation from 1991 abrogated all the detailed task lists for leading educational office holders in the municipalities (Souri, 2009). The 1992 Act on the Administration in the Local Provision of Education no longer required the municipalities to have a separate office of the superintendent (Laki kunnan opetustoimen hallinnosta, 1992/706). Consequently, the number of full-time superintendents decreased during the whole of the 1990s (Rajanen, 2000). In 2008, about 5% of the municipalities did not have anybody in the office of the superintendent and about 22% had only one person at the town hall to manage educational issues. Of those who were conducting superintendents' tasks, 21,4% were also working as principals, 5,9% as administration managers and 1,9% as office secretaries (Kanervio & Risku, 2009). Concerning the number of people in educational administration outside schools in general, it is noteworthy to mention that there was a 40% drop during 1990-1995 (Hirvi, 1996). As a result of the drop, the size of administrative staff supporting the work of superintendents, principals and teachers mostly seemed to be very small in both Finnish municipalities and schools (Kanervio & Risku, 2009).

In 1998, the disjointed 26 separate education acts were aggregated into 9 acts, one for each different education form from primary to tertiary education. The aggregation had two main purposes. Firstly, it was conducted to reduce the number of separate acts, sections and articles. Secondly, it continued the deregulation by shifting decision making to the local level (Aho, Pitkänen, & Sahlberg, 2006). The amendments removed the school-based office and task structure of personnel. More flexibility was given to student groupings for example by unifying basic education into a single full comprehensive school. Professional qualifications were

clarified and the various specified provisions on administration were repealed (Kupiainen, Hautamäki, & Karjalainen, 2009; Souri, 2009). As a result of the 1998 aggregation of laws, the education system of Finland today forms a consistent and free-of-charge whole with no dead-ends, as presented in Figure 2 (Risku, 2011).

Decentralization touched also the curricula. The 1994 Basic Education Curriculum and General Upper Secondary Education Curriculum reforms offered municipalities and schools extensive autonomy replacing the earlier elaborate curricula. The new national core curricula defined the common guidelines but left a lot of freedom for municipalities and schools (Aho, Pitkänen, & Sahlberg, 2006; Kupiainen, Hautamäki, & Karjalainen, 2009). The 1999 Basic Education Curriculum reform concentrated on replacing the relative assessment system with the criteria-based one.

Figure 2. Education system of Finland in 2008



Source: Risku, 2011, p. 204.

The 2004 Basic Education Curriculum reform, on the other hand, was an attempt to supplement both the 1994 and 1999 curriculum reforms by

streamlining the distribution of lesson hours and the criteria-based assessment system.

No major reforms have taken place concerning general upper secondary education since 1994. In 2004, however, the matriculation examination was reformed to offer students more options in the test, and in 2016 there will be a partly electronic examination available. The revised distribution of lesson hours for comprehensive schools was passed in 2012 and will be put into operation in 2016 together with a reformed national core curriculum. Similar reforms are planned for general upper secondary education as well (Opetushallitus, 2012a,b).

Although Finland has systematically decentralized its education system since 1980, it has not resorted to similar accountability practices as many other countries that have decentralized their governance. Arguably the Finnish evaluation system is one of the key factors why Finland has become so successful in international surveys on learning outcomes. The general framework for national evaluation on education is determined by the Ministry of Education and Culture together with the Finnish Education Evaluation Council, Finnish Higher Education Evaluation Council and the National Board of Education. The framework is based on the government platforms and five-year education and research plans and includes the international, national, regional and local level. (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö, 2012a&b; Minister of Education and Culture, 2012).

The present evaluation system is based on the legislation from 1998. According to the 1998 Basic Education Act and the 1998 Upper Secondary General Education Act, education must be evaluated to secure the execution of educational legislation, to support the development of education and to improve conditions for learning. The salient findings of evaluations are public information, but no ranking lists are compiled. As Kuusela (2008) notes, lists based on school-specific average values are considered to be uncertain. Also, they only seldom seem to take into consideration the external context of the school, although it may have an essential effect on the learning outcomes.

One can argue the Finnish education system to be both extensive and systematic, and not to be constricted to assessing merely learning outcomes, but to rely on a wide sphere of evaluation information. During the present planning period (2012-2015), Finland will included, among others, in the PISA, PIRLS and TIMMS tests at international level. International evaluations are used to position Finland, and to identify

national strengths and weaknesses. National evaluations will focus on the effects on equality, productivity, economy, welfare, employability and competitiveness, and will be conducted by several actors.

The National Board of Education is responsible for national evaluations on learning outcomes. In basic education, evaluation will concentrate on the ninth grade and mainly consist of national sample-based assessments of a wide sphere of subjects according to a systematic framework. In vocational upper secondary education there will be national sample-based assessments on 12 vocational upper secondary qualifications (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö, 2012a). Evaluation practices in general upper secondary education resemble those of basic education with the exception that the independent Matriculation Examination Board, twice a year, organizes a rigorous national test which in practice every student takes at the end of their studies (Aho, Pitkänen, & Sahlberg, 2006). In the regional level, Regional State Administrative Agencies will arrange regional evaluations on the accessibility of basic and upper secondary education (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö, 2012a).

Local level actors, municipalities and other education providers, carry the ultimate responsibility for the quality of education (Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö, 2012a&b). They are obligated to conduct local self-evaluations to be able to develop their quality and to connect their evaluation results to national ones (Lapiolahti, 2007). According to the superintendents, the State supports the local development work more with information and guidance than through legislation and funding (Kanervio & Risku, 2009). The Ministry of Education has composed a quality tool which comprises eleven quality criteria for basic education based on Deming's Plan-Do-Check-Act Model (PDCA-model) (Opetusministeriö, 2010), and the National Board of Education (2013) launched an extensive programme to support municipalities and other education providers in compiling local development plans in education. There is a need for that, too, because research indicates that evaluation results do not always have concrete effects (see: Rajanen, 2000; Svedlin, 2003; Löfström, Metsämuuronen, Niemi, Salmio & Stenvall, 2005; Lapiolahti, 2007).

From the point of view of creating social justice, the present governance system seems to offer schools quite explicit and sustainable frameworks in which to generate national equity, while taking into consideration changing operational environments at the local level (Laitila, 1999; Vitikka & Hurmerinta, 2011). For example, the Basic Education Core Curriculum

(National Board of Education, 2004) includes very detailed national criteria for the mastering of various subjects at different stages of basic education. The criteria construct national equity, which is fundamental especially at the end of basic education, when students are admitted in upper secondary education using their basic education certificates as the admittance criteria. Besides that, the criteria also seem to enable teachers to plan their teaching according to their students' individual needs, which was one of the social justice goals for the comprehensive education system already in the late 1960s (Varjo, 2007). Furthermore, the national framework obligates teachers to evaluate their students' progress in a versatile manner. In fact, the national core curriculum forbids teachers to ground their student assessment solely on test results.

Two main goals label the education policy of 1980-2011: preserving social justice and developing local autonomy. With the implementation of the comprehensive school in the 1970s the State was able to structurally achieve the social justice it had strived for. During the 1980s Finland became a Nordic welfare state (Aho, Pitkänen, & Sahlberg, 2006). The accomplishment was followed with a value change that can be seen as parallel to many contemporary international trends like neo-liberalism (Rinne, Kivirauma & Simola, 2002; Varjo, 2007), decentralization (Ryynänen, 2004) and New Public Management (Alava, Halttunen & Risku, 2012). In addition, after the 1980s severe economic and demographic challenges endangered what was achieved and education policy was adjusted to preserve what had been accomplished. The centralized norm-based and system-oriented state administration did not meet the demands of the changing society any longer and was considered bureaucratic, undemocratic and out-of-date. Besides, the local administration of municipalities was now ready to take more responsibility.

Legislation was overhauled in a burgeoning manner to be able to transform the centralized governance into a decentralized one. The reform was made both to be able to preserve and further advance social justice and to develop local autonomy. Concerning local autonomy one can state that by 2011 local authorities had obtained the status of main providers of public services, especially concerning education. Local authorities also gained extensive autonomy regarding how to provide public services.

Evaluation of whether the State has succeeded in preserving and advancing social justice and the welfare state is difficult. The poverty index, which in 1966 was 18%, declined to 8% in 1991, and again rose to

15% in 2010 (Keski-suomalainen, 7.9.2011). In addition, the welfare state has not been able to take care of its citizens, when society has been going through economic hard times. A model example is the 1987 year class, which suffered most from the recession in the 1990s. Its statistics are appalling. Almost 25% have a criminal record, 20% suffer from mental problems and 17% do not have an upper secondary degree (Paananen, Ristikari, Merikukka, Rämö & Gissler, 2012; Yle-teksti-tv, 14.1.2011). Furthermore, as the government bill (31/2013) states the difference between municipalities' abilities to provide quality services is growing, and can already be seen in learning outcomes. The Act on Restructuring Municipalities and Services (Laki kunta- ja palvelurakenteen uudistamisesta, 2007/169), and the plans for municipal mergers in the white paper (Valtiovarainministeriö, 2012) and the government bill (31/2013) itself by the present government are strong indicators of the growing social injustice in society.

However, in line with Aho, Pitkänen and Sahlberg (2006, p. 10) Finland has still been able to preserve at least the "core features of the welfare state". One could also argue in the same way as Rynänen (2004) that the welfare state has been transformed into a welfare society which more constructively attempts to take into consideration the local autonomy and individual people's rights. Furthermore, it is important to note that the present Government in its government platform set the development of the Finnish society as a Nordic welfare state as its priority (Valtioneuvosto, 2011).

Concerning decentralization one could claim that although it has been a significant driver in Finnish education policy from the late 1980s, the State can still be argued to have a central role in societal guidance, development and decision making (Laitila, 1999; Kanervio & Risku, 2009). How the State succeeds in its role, is given some criticism. Among other issues, there are perceptions that education policies and their goal settings are not based on the real situations of schools but on theoretically ideal starting-points (Hannus et al., 2010). As one result, superintendents, principals and teachers, whose managerial roles have been expanding, often feel pressured by contradictions between goals, expectations, needs and resources (Suomen Rehtorit, 2005; Vuohijoki, 2006; Ahonen, 2008; Kanervio & Risku, 2009; Souri, 2009).

Concerning basic education one can note that the public comprehensive school still is overwhelmingly predominant. In 2009 there were about 3.100

public comprehensive schools and only 90 private ones. The status of secondary and higher education corresponds to that of basic education. All education in Finland is free of charge and students are admitted to schools and universities according to equal criteria. There are comprehensive public student grant systems to support students' welfare while they are studying (National Board of Education, 2012).

The societal changes of the past three decades have created several new challenges, but at least so far Finland has been committed to the path it has chosen. Finland has not returned to the parallel school system or to other similar inequitable solutions. The path is based on seeing education as an essential tool for creating social justice and to have social justice in education as a fundamental presupposition for that. It also seems that this policy can be enacted successfully in a public education system, giving power to the local level and avoiding suffocating control apparatus.

The performances of comprehensive school pupils have been at the top in all the four PISA surveys and the differences between schools continue to be the smallest among OECD countries (Malin, 2005, pp. 35-36; OECD, 2001, 2003, 2006, 2010; Sulkunen et al., 2010; Välijärvi & Linnakylä, 2002, pp. 114-120). Also, the number of students at the lowest proficiency level continues to be exceptionally small and the socio-economic status of students, their parents and schools seems to have one of the least impacts on students' learning outcomes among OECD countries. Besides, international comparisons show that the good results are not due to above the average investments on education but that the education system is also economically effective (Välijärvi & Linnakylä, 2002; Kupiainen, Hautamäki, & Karjalainen, 2009).

As one explanation for the good results in international surveys, one could of course name the education policy that has succeeded in creating the prerequisites for the good results. According to Hargreaves and Shirley (2009, pp. 47-55) Finland represents a so-called fourth way in which there is 'a democratic and professional path to improvement that builds from the bottom, steers from the top, and provides support and motivation from the sides'. Sahlberg (2011) identifies that Finland emphasizes equal opportunities, within a balanced education system, with high-quality teachers and a competitive welfare state. Similar perceptions can be found in the *Miracle of Education* (Niemi, Toom and Kallioniemi, 2012) where societal factors are identified as contributing to education success (Niemi, 2012), and the quality of Finnish teachers and the balance between broad

pedagogical freedom and responsibility (Toom & Husu, 2012) are highlighted as key explanations for the good learning outcomes.

## **Conclusion**

This paper has dealt with the progressions of social justice and the relationship between the State and the municipalities in Finland during the period of 1944-2011. Two political eras were identified and examined. The first one, 1944-1980, comprised the State's long-term will to create social justice in society by abolishing the parallel education system that was created in the Middle Ages and that worked to maintain the class society that, too, in essence derived from the Middle Ages. At the end of the 1970s the State succeeded in its aim by replacing the parallel education system with the comprehensive school that offered equal opportunities to all children to learn and advance in society according to their abilities and desires. The development in the education system in one part enabled Finland to become a Nordic welfare state in the 1980s (Aho, Pitkänen, & Sahlberg, 2006). The aim of social justice was achieved through an extensive centralized, norm-based and system-oriented administration.

As the desired social justice was achieved both people's views and the society changed radically laying the foundation for the second era, 1980-2011. The second era concentrated on preserving and advancing the social justice and on developing local autonomy. The centralized state governance no longer corresponded with peoples' views and was not able to meet the economic and demographic challenges of the 1990s and 2000s. The State began to radically reverse its policy towards decentralization to both develop local autonomy and to meet the economic and demographic challenges through local autonomy. Influences of neo-liberalism and New Public Management can also be traced, though in a moderate manner compared to many other countries.

Numerous amendments have been made in legislation. As a result, municipalities have obtained constitutional autonomy and are today the main providers of public services, especially concerning education. The State lays the fundamental aims and guidelines in society, but municipalities have a lot of freedom in the interpretation of the aims and guidelines and they seem to make good use of the freedom too.

It seems that the State has been able to preserve the core features of both the social justice and the welfare state that were established in the 1980s. There has been no return to an inequitable education system, but, fundamentally, everybody has equal opportunities to learn and advance in society. The results of the education system also seem to be of high quality. However, alongside this progress, economic and the demographic challenges have not been solved, and earlier social injustices are lurking round the corner and some have already had an impact on the social justice. Preserving and advancing social justice arguably needs to be at the heart of societal and education policies in the future.

The examination in the present paper indicates that comprehensive long-term goal-settings and consistent efforts towards the goals could be found in the Finnish education policies. The two political eras that were identified and examined for the present paper seemed to comprise goals and courses of action that were derived from the needs and desires of the society. The political eras also seemed to succeed and supplement each other in a coherent manner. What struck with many reforms was that the actors were given adequate time to implement the mandates and that during 1944-1980 the State was committed to support the actors financially.

As the municipalities gained constitutional autonomy, and as they in many ways became a more coordinate interlocutor to the State, something fundamental seemed to change. There now seems to be a more open and genuine dialogue between the various partners on how to try to reach the set goals or to solve the problems encountered. It also seems that the various partners at least occasionally, are able to listen to each other and change minds, trying to end up with doable syntheses, as in the case of decreasing the number of municipalities. The State no longer appears to subsidize the operations and reforms in the same way as before.

Both the framework of Taysum and Iqbal (2012) and the contingency theory seemed to suit the aims of this paper constructively. In line with Hodgson and Spours (2006) the examination was able to identify political eras to locate societal and historical meanings, contexts and movements, hegemony, and national debates in education. That scope of contingency theory, on the other hand, enabled me to connect the strategies and environments with implementation structures and to identify, describe and date education policies and political eras. Also, I was able to examine why the education policies and political eras were initiated and why they were abandoned.

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