

# Social Aspects in the Governance of a System of Education

## A Thematic Parallel Evaluation

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### ABSTRACT

This study is an offshoot of a 2002 evaluation study of the administration of Finland's system of education. Here, the social aspect is brought to the fore in a thematic parallel evaluation. As to evaluation theory, the approach applied combines constructionist and realist elements. According to the evaluation, the chronic heavy segmentation of Finland's government and public administration continues to aggravate difficulties in promoting social aspects in education. In national master policy making regarding education social aspects are present but not strongly so. A gap prevails between the national government and the self-governing municipalities. The former has provided the latter "freedoms from" but dispossessed them with cutbacks of "freedoms for" in education and other functions. According to a comprehensive international evaluation, Finland's basic education shines in European comparison, but according to Finnish domestic evaluation studies, 20 per cent of school leavers at their 16th year have learnt little. Together with the problem of vocational education drop-outs, the 20 per cent deserve keen attention from the social policy point of view. Keen coordination between established sectors of policy-making - at least education, social welfare, health care, and employment - is needed. Socio-economic under-representation of the dispossessed remains a problem in adult education to resolve, for instance, by new economic and other incentives. Finally, from the social point of view, the Finnish education system would benefit from the substitution of certain aspects of "process" and "care" models for the "product" and "cognitive" models now dominant.

Keywords: Social aspects, constructivist evaluation, realist evaluation, thematic evaluation

### 1. EDUCATION IN THE SOCIAL POINT OF VIEW

In 2002, an evaluation of the administration of Finland's entire system of education was carried out. This study is a thematic parallel evaluation based upon the original evaluation study. A clue to the social aspect offered itself, once one of the people interviewed, by the way a key figure in Finnish social policy, reminded of research results according to which education involves the best efficient preventive health care in that the best educated constitute the healthiest part of the population. The distance between education and social aspects is shorter than between education and health; therefore, analysing the social aspect of education is very recommendable.

Very often, health care only intervenes when problems appear. However, the concept of preventive health care is also strong. Social policy interventions also often occur only as reactions to problems. Even where they engage in such valuable functions as limiting damage, protecting victims and other innocent people and programming intervention measures to take place as early as possible, they often fall late. For example, anti-prostitution combat only may take place once prostitutes already roam the streets, rehabilitation of novice drug addicts only once addiction has already caught on and help to victims of crime only once they have fallen victims.

A wide concept of preventive social policy covers both direct and indirect measures to nurture and create circumstances where need for corrective social policy interventions fails to arise.

In their widest sense, preventive social policies are an affair of many types of professionals, decision-makers and citizens. Preventive social policy aspects can be embedded, for instance, in helping two- and single-parent families help themselves, urban and community planning and rehabilitation and creative social housing policies, provision of cultural, sports and youth amenities, asylum, alien and immigration policies, proactive interventions informed by criminological know-how and, last but not least, many parts of policies of health and education.

This study is a thematic parallel evaluation to an original evaluation instead of its emphases let alone its recommendations coinciding with those of the original evaluation. As opposed to the original evaluation, this research study stops at pointing out the "value" of selected aspects of the system of education at hand. No necessity is felt to give any practical recommendations, although it should not be too difficult for the interested to draw practical implications of the findings and conclusions.

## 2. PHILOSOPHY, THEORY AND METHOD OF THE EVALUATION

### 2.1 *The evaluation approach: between realism and constructionism*

A starting point of the evaluation study utilised in this parallel evaluation was a proposal by a ministry working group (OPM 2001). The group had outlined a certain set of evaluation themes and questions. This put the ultimate external evaluators, commissioned by the Ministry, in front of a dilemma.

Should the evaluators have taken the "customer's" views and concepts for granted? Or should they instead have insisted upon the application of some "scientific" framework regarding the very object, focus and topic of the evaluation (for a choice, see, e.g., Pawson & Tilley 1997). Should they have insisted on some given framework as to the design of the evaluation in view of the use of its findings? For instance, there are "objectivist evaluation" that by far and large ignores the questions of use, "stakeholder-based evaluation" that widely takes into account the spectrum of opinions on the matter of hand, and "empowerment evaluation"

that wants in one or another respect to enable some of those who used to be dispossessed (for a brief overview see Fetterman 2001, 109-113).

A way out was opened up by insights of hermeneutic philosophy and methodology of interpretation. The insights helped to avoid the risks of such constructivist evaluation which ignores the foreknowledge that any interpreter, including any experienced evaluator, possesses at the commencement of his or her task. An important evaluation theory classic (Guba & Lincoln 1989) did not turn out to be free from the said deficiency. Let us take the German philosopher Martin Heidegger's (1889-1976, 2001/1927) emphasis seriously that any interpretation involves a certain degree of violence by the interpreter towards the enunciators of the original words, sentences and texts, and towards the original actors who engaged in the comportment that is being analysed. We cannot avoid causing some "damage" with our interpretative interventions, but we can try to minimise the confounding effects. According to Heidegger's erstwhile pupil Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002, 1990/1960), what can be accomplished is even in the best case only a *Perspektivenverschmälzung*, a blending of the perspective of the interpreter and that of the original enunciator or actor. Finally, I disagree with extreme constructionist evaluators and agree more or less with Gadamer that both the interpreter and the interpreted always already reside in an environment many times interpreted and therefore rich in cultural and historical meanings, connotations, conventions and practices of understanding and interpretation. That is, nobody's constructions are really his or her own but only links in a chain of an endless intertextual chain of constructions, reconstructions and constructions of "self" and "others".

First, understanding and interpretation solely in terms of the original enunciator or actor is impossible. An interpreter, such as an ultra-constructivist evaluator, who claims absolute fidelity to "original intended meanings" of the enunciator or actor is ignorant, a hypocrite or in a state of hubris. Second, interpretation carried out by the interpreter, such as an ultra-objectivist evaluator, solely in his or her own terms is methodologically unethical. It involves the interpreter's effort to force the original

enunciator or actor into the straitjacket of the interpreter's privileged scheme of interpretation. In actual practice, interpretation involves a journey between a hypocritical or naive Scylla and an arrogant and violent Charybdis of an "interpretative fascism". Third, however deeply an interpreter reflects upon his or her presuppositions, this is not enough in situations where the enunciator's or actor's thoughts, ideas, intentions and actions involve something ethically reprehensible. To be a good evaluator it is necessary to be a methodologically ethical interpreter, but this alone is not sufficient for the evaluator to be ethical in encounters with the "real world" and its atrocities.

By now it has become clear that I perceive possibilities of combining aspects of constructivist and realist approaches to evaluation. Equally as I see interpretation as a necessary element in evaluation, I value highly the "realist" endeavour to detect "real", "underlying" albeit invisible mechanisms, which only reveal traces and symptoms of themselves, and from the traces and symptoms we can try to get to their structural sources. I have been acquainted with the realist approach since Bhaskar's studies of the late 1970's (1978, 1979). However, soon I came to see the approach as too limited and limiting, even when stripped of its post-Marxist deadweight, if not keenly connected with qualified aspects of constructionism.

## 2.2 *The evaluation questions*

In the original evaluation, the evaluators started with by acknowledging that the very first enunciators - first, the preparatory working group members - had a good deal of understanding of the administration of Finland's educational system and its other aspects. This is a version of Giddens' (first 1979) now almost classical view that, as opposed to contrary claims, enunciators and actors typically have a good deal of understanding of their own dealings and their own situation. Not only intellectually minded academics but also contemporary civil servants are postmodern individuals capable of a good deal of self-reflection in the face of contemporary contingencies, absurdities and ambiguities of language, interpretation, action and ethical and other evaluation (cf. Beck et al. 1994). Therefore,

the original evaluators only applied a re-ordering and a slight revision of an evaluation scheme originally suggested by the Ministry of Education working group. The resulting scheme came to include four thematic emphases, soon applied in an intensive face-to-face survey phase of the evaluation:

- (1) Does the particular part of the Finnish education system that is relevant for the respondent involve definite political and strategic goals? Is the path clear from those goals to the grassroots implementation of the actual education or is there ambiguity?
- (2) Are definite and assertive leadership, management, guidance and control perceptible in the relevant part of the education system? Or are there gaps and is there opacity? Do the leadership, management, guidance and control efforts actually influence education in the intended way, or are there ineffectiveness or harmful side effects? Have sufficient precautions been taken in view of the future that will evolve?
- (3) How is the relevant part of the education system institutionalised? Is this institutionalisation adequate? If not, which problems are there?
- (4) Are the research and development activities related to the relevant part of the education system adequate? From a metaevaluation point of view, does the same concern the evaluation measures that are carried out?

## 3. TECHNIQUES, INFORMATION SOURCES AND EMPIRICAL SCOPE OF THE EVALUATION

In terms of use-focused evaluation concepts, the original evaluation received clear features of stakeholder-based evaluation. The main information gathering technique were thematic interviews of stakeholder representatives of government, business, unions, the civil society and individual experts in 35 occasions, making a total of 92 interviewees. The evaluation also included a process consulting aspect in three seminars to validate the final evaluation scheme and the draft recommendations (cf. Schein 1999). As far as the original evaluation included features

of empowerment evaluation, those being empowered were the leading civil servants of the customer ministry. According to Fetterman (2001), even this is a legitimate extension of that concept.

Taping the interviews was impossible due to ethical considerations of confidentiality, and therefore written notes had to be taken. In the course of its interview work, the evaluation team continued to write a "process text" summarising and synthesising the evaluation findings. Many of the interviewees brought or sent written material. Many of them also gave hints to the evaluators on supplementing their ample collection of relevant documents. The number of relevant documents was well over 100, and this did not include relevant research literature. The themes risen in the interviews equally as the evaluation questions originally posed by the ministry working group drove the documentary analysis which, however, also brought in aspects of an objectivist evaluation, especially as a scientific reporting style with detailed references was chosen.

The evaluation proceeded as an open-ended pursuit within its original delimitation of themes. The evaluators could not have decided beforehand on the definite evaluation criteria without risking dogmatism, and clear criteria commensurable with those known in good evaluation practices had not been defined by the ministry working group, either. Open-endedness was another hermeneutic feature in the evaluators' strategy. Their information-gathering aimed at sufficiency instead of comprehensiveness, and the evaluators were content with such an economy of research that enabled the evaluation effort to reach an empirical saturation point before the relevant stages of report writing.

Institutionally, the evaluation covered the general policy making and implementation part of the Finnish education system and all of its five main divisions:

(1) Although the Finnish Parliament, the Finnish government and certain important advisory boards also belong to the key actors, the highest level of policy making keenly scrutinised in the evaluation consisted of the Department of Education and science policy of the Ministry of Education, the National Board of Education under the Ministry, some other national agencies, and the Education

Departments of the National Government's Provincial Boards.

- (2) There was the general education sector with 4 000 basic comprehensive schools, most of them run by municipalities, and with only a handful of private non-profit institutions. The sector also involves 800 upper secondary schools, also mostly municipal, preparing students for entry to a polytechnic or university.
- (3) There was the basic vocational education of about 400 institutions. Most of them are run by municipalities or federations of municipalities, but there are also many private institutions. The key revenue source is made up of national government grants paid on the basis of a student unit cost scheme.
- (4) There were 29 polytechnics founded in the 1990s, largely out of the most progressive vocational colleges through mergers. Technology, commercial studies and health care and social welfare are the largest sectors in polytechnic education. The polytechnics resemble the institutions of basic vocational education in that some of them are parts of a municipality's organisation, some are run by federations of municipalities, some are private foundations, and some are joint-stock companies. The polytechnics receive most of their funding as national government grants on the basis of a student unit cost scheme but, as opposed to vocational education, at the stage of the students' entry to the polytechnic.
- (5) There were 20 universities. Since the 1980s, all Finnish universities make part of Finland's national central government administration. Most employees are civil servants, and the universities apply government procedures in decision-making and accounting. Most of the funding comes from the national government budget. However, an increasing proportion of that funding has turned from "hard" funding by the Ministry of Education to "soft" funding allocated by the same ministry and many other ministries and agencies on a project basis. Only a small share of the funding comes from the private sector through contracts or otherwise, although its significance is considerable in the technological universities.

There is also some genuine international funding, mostly from EU Structural Funds.

- (6) There was adult education of over one of its providers. Main divisions consists of vocational adult education, either for the unemployed or those threatened by unemployment, or others. There is also general adult education motivated by the maintenance of values of culture and civilisation. Very many funding schemes exist for adult education, but in most cases there is government subsidisation up to 100 per cent of the costs.

There are definite links between sectors and levels of education that had to be acknowledged in the original evaluation no less than in the present thematic parallel evaluation. Completion of basic education is a precondition for entry either to a vocational school or an upper secondary school. Completion of the latter, in turn, is the standard requirement for entry to a university, although there are bypasses. Students are eligible for some accreditation of their studies in polytechnics should they be admitted to a university, although no direct entry paths exist so far apart of special arrangements with so-called bridge studies. Students can also use the credits they have earned in certain types of adult education towards degrees they may subsequently be admitted to take, including in universities.

#### 4. EVALUATION RESULTS BY MAIN EVALUATION THEMES, WITH SOCIAL EMPHASIS

##### 4.1 *Political and strategic goals*

The venerable concept of education as an activity nurturing civilised and cultured individuals by the efforts of pedagogical specialists turned out to be in a state of crisis. According to the original evaluation, contemporary Finnish views as to the proper shape of education varied greatly, from institution- and teacher-centred views to socialisation process views and views stressing immediate compliance with the urgent needs of the country's various industries and the demands of Finland's international economic competitiveness. All in all, the situation is one of

post-modern "pulverisation". Considerations of the past, the present and the future co-exist, and not always peacefully.

The Finnish national educational policies turned out to be largely driven by the National Council on Science and Technology, headed by the Prime Minister. Education as such does not receive focal attention in the Council, although it is not absent, either. Social aspects are only weakly present in the Council, although even they do have a presence there.

The Finnish national educational policies have demanding social goals, including regional, socio-economic and gender equality, social inclusion of everybody and life-long learning of all. However, it is another thing how the goals are put into operational practice. In point of fact, the multi-annual National Plan for the Development of Education and its about 100 specific objectives was not as widely known by far as one might have supposed. Some of the interviewees suggested sarcastically that many Finnish education policies are characterised by "management by Helsingin Sanomat", the country's leading newspaper being read daily by one third of the grown-up Finns. Its reporting on some problem may make it politically necessary to carry out emergency measures irrespective of their compatibility with the overall strategies and policies of the political decision-makers.

One particular "sin" besetting the Finnish national educational policies and their administration turned out to be segmentation, which pesters also any other part of the country's public administration. There are problems in making the government ministries work together in questions of education, most importantly the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Ministry of Trade and Industry. On occasion, even where the actual implementation in the regional and local level works reasonably and peacefully, the ministries in Helsinki are in disagreement. The organisation of pre-schooling either as "education" or "care" has caused disputes. However, the most serious inter-ministry co-ordination problem concerns the training of the unemployed and those under threat of unemployment. Should it be the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Labour which rules? Should there be two different national education and training policies or only one? In the former

case there would be one policy with an orientation towards culture and liberal education and general and specific technical skills, competencies and learning capabilities, and another special social educational policy towards the re-creation of potential for gainful employment or entrepreneurship.

There is a serious gap between the Finnish national government and the markedly autonomous municipalities. The latter do enjoy their freedom in organising basic education with fewer strings attached than in any other EU Member State. However, and unfortunately, the decentralisation allowing the municipalities their current freedoms took place at the same time as a severe national recession was accompanied by government grant formula changes in 1996-8, leading to serious cutbacks in the government grants to the municipalities.<sup>2</sup> As a consequence, many municipalities have freedoms to do what they can no more afford to implement. The municipalities do not lack ultraliberal "freedoms from", but they find themselves lacking in terms of social liberal "freedoms for". Educational equality is hard to nurture where there is too little funding to make it possible. There are also elements of misallocation in the general government grants to the municipalities, among which some of the well-doing ones accumulate more grants than their comparative needs are, because they happen to have a low per capita tax base.

The national-municipal problems are aggravated by the fact that it is not easy to detect a single "mouth" voicing the interests of the municipalities. It is true that all of them are members of the Association of Finnish Regions and Municipalities, regularly consulted by the Ministry of Education. However, the Association has no power over its member municipalities which, moreover, have many different interests. What Finnish regional studies colloquially calls the "sixpack" or the leading urban regions has very different prospects and goals than the stagnant or declining parts of the country.

#### *4.2 Leadership, management, control and guidance*

The evaluation results focused on some of the consequences of combined effects of Finland's rule by a wide right-left "rainbow" political coalition

since 1995 and the decentralisation of decisions from the plenum of the ministers down to each individual minister. The persistence of the coalition has presupposed each government party's and each minister's independence, but this has not been good for coordination and delayed the eradication of duplicate efforts. Efforts to improve the programming of government activities by condensing the political programme defined at the beginning of each government's term into a more concise and strategic set has not yet taken effect.

The evaluation results suggest that formal decision-making systems may remain rather powerless in the "real world" of vested interests and interest group politics. Although the rationalist language of the formal systems is widely accepted, it fails to capture much of the actual wheeling and dealing and the consequent obstacles to remedying the problems. The typical conclusion on why some reform measure could not be taken on board - or, why reforms that had turned out to be failures could not be cancelled - was reference to powerful interests that made the continuation of the status quo or the path once chosen the easiest option.

#### *4.3 Institutionalisation*

I have referred above to the national government - municipal governments gap prevailing in Finland. There are further problems, namely those on the regional level. Just before her entry to the European Union at the beginning of 1995 Finland abolished her previous system of national government provinces. She reduced the functions of the provinces and reduced the number of the provinces in Continental Finland from ten to five, creating three provinces with quite a large area and an awkward shape for the two southernmost of them.

The previous municipal federations of regions and the previous municipal federations for regional planning were merged into regional associations, which also belong to the category of federations of municipalities. The associations, fully independent of the national government, became the new Regional Authorities to carry out a part of the EU regional policies in Finland and bear the main responsibility for regional development and planning. However, in several

important respects the regional authorities are too small and too weak to succeed.

The reform left the Education Departments of the Provincial Administrations in a rather awkward position. Moreover, in the second half of the 1990's the national government created 16 Centres of Employment and Economic Development, merging regional units under the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Agriculture and Forestry. Finnish industry has insisted that the Education Departments be moved to the Employment and Economic Development Centres. Note that the Provincial Departments as they stand now are the first instance for citizens to appeal as far as they feel their children's rights to basic education having been violated. The Departments also provide consulting for schools, take care of certain EU Structural Funds tasks, work for coordination between national government, municipal and some non-profit private actors and carry out the statutory task of preparing an annual evaluation of the so-called basic services provided in the province, including aspects of basic and vocational education.

#### *4.4 Research and development activities and evaluation activities*

The Finnish education sector compares in an interesting way with the social welfare and health care sector. The latter sector has its dedicated R&D and evaluation think tank the National Research and Development Centre for Welfare and Health STAKES. On the other hand, the National Board of Education under the Ministry of Education has retained several regulatory tasks beside its R&D and evaluation functions.

In 2002 the evaluation activities regarding education in Finland have been the target of a major proposal, which the government budget of 2003 will implement. Adapting the model that for the evaluation of universities and polytechnics there is a Council for the Evaluation of Higher Education, the retired President of that Council was commissioned for a proposal on the Council for the Evaluation of Education, to cover basic education and basic vocational education. Resembling the former Council, the new Council would be organised as an autonomous board in the sector of the Ministry of Education. A unique

feature is that the secretariat of the new council would be organised in one of the universities.

It was also possible to observe a strong separation of sectors in their evaluation activities. There was little evidence of the educational evaluators being in much if any touch, with, say, evaluators of social welfare or health care.

## **5. EVALUATION RESULTS BY THE MAIN PARTS OF THE FINNISH SYSTEM OF EDUCATION AND THEIR MUTUAL RELATIONS, WITH SOCIAL EMPHASIS**

### *5.1 Basic education*

In pre-schooling, started in full in the early 2000s, tensions prevail between a "cognitive" and "product" model, introducing teaching disciplines early to prepare the children for their actual school years on the one hand, and on the other a "care" and "process" model with a concern for the children as members of group, community and society. In many respects the overall performance of Finnish basic education is world class. The OECD PISA survey (OECD 2002a) put Finland at the top in the performance of her basic education (in reading literacy) or close to the top (mathematical literacy, science literacy).

However, there national evaluation results qualifying the international excellence of Finland's basic education system. Although educational equality can stand comparison with that in other EU Member States and OECD member countries, inequalities do abound. About 20 per cent of those who have completed basic education in the year they turn 16 have learnt little. This problem is especially serious for boys, for whom the negative figure is 25 per cent, while it is only 15 for girls. That 20 per cent encounters the risk of becoming society's drop-outs with little hope of gaining entry into any further education or finding gainful employment. This group is also threatened by alcohol and drug addiction and criminal careers. Its members are obvious targets of preventive social policies as most widely conceived. It is alarming that there are now schools with a considerable proportion with immigrant children, mostly in the Helsinki area, with particularly high percentages of the slow-learners or non-learners, although Finland still has only 100 000 foreigners in a population of 5.2

million. All in all, socio-economic reasons are not difficult to identify for the segregation of schools by performance, but in the prevailing economics-dominated and technocratic atmosphere there is little market for social reformism to redress the ills. Unfortunately, it is the "healthiest" that can afford to buy treatment, such as municipal acquisition of consulting services from the National Board of Education to raise the standards in the most ailing schools.

Certain tensions appeared as regards the allocation of children with problems to special classes supervised by special teachers in the basic comprehensive school. Some interviewees suggested that as far as possible all children should stay in the same classes to avoid stigmatisation. Only in extreme cases should they be separated into special classes, from which they should be returned to normal classes as soon as possible. However, also such views were spelled out that the slow learners should not prevent the learning of the average and the quick learners. There were also tensions between different "schools" of education, such as law and order -centred, teaching discipline -centred, teaching profession -centred, socialisation process -centred and others.

The upper secondary schools constitute the apex of the Finnish general education. The performance of students taking the matriculation examination became once more a topic of heated national debate in the early summer of 2002. The media were quick to suggest that schools where the average performance in the examination is low are badly managed and that their headmasters and teachers are definitely incompetent. Experts tried to point out the venerable truth of educational research that many of the good schools are not good because their excellent teachers teach so well but because their student body is predisposed to high achievement and may perform well because of their socio-economic and cultural background. All in all, under the calm surface of good international performance of the Finnish basic education there is a great deal of seething. Again, there are socio-economic reasons for the stratification, but just as in the case of the first stage of basic education, the prevailing atmosphere is not strongly inclined to proceeding from analysis to remedial action. It is not impossible that the "social" aspects have been ignored in part because of a misconception that to touch on them would be

"socialist" and therefore politically incorrect in the contemporary ideological atmosphere, although Finland is far from being politically very right-wing.

Changing demographic structures cause particular problems for the upper secondary schools. There are now secondary schools in municipalities with only 2-3 babies born each year. In 10-15 years there will be hardly any option but to start transporting upper secondary students to some larger neighbouring municipality and its surviving upper secondary school, the maintenance of which could become a joint responsibility of two or more municipalities.

## 5.2 *Basic vocational education*

Basic vocational education has certain problems in allocating the students to fields where they have reasonable opportunities for finding employment once they will have qualified. Some of the most popular fields unfortunately are not those where the students taking their vocational qualification are likely to find a job easily or establish an enterprise of their own. On the contrary, there are certain fields such as "traditional" metal industries, which suffer from undersupply of young entrants with a vocational school diploma. The healthy feature that the government funding scheme pays the vocational institutions most per a student in socially necessary fields disliked by the students does not suffice for eradicating the problems. Note also that the average de facto retirement age in Finland is the low figure of 59, that many retire earlier for reasons of health and that the retirement of the post-war baby boomers is already going on.

Young people with a more or less useless vocational basic education qualification are a socially risky group, which is why there are strong reasons of preventive social policy to try to avoid deceiving them in such a way. Instances of deception were also cited in activities of private institutes in such high-demand fields of education as hairdressing and cosmetology. However, there are only the consumer protection authorities to appeal to, and they can intervene only in cases that the students have not been provided at all with what they contracted for.

From the viewpoint of preventive social policy, dropping out from vocational basic education may be no less risky than leaving comprehensive basic

school without having learnt much of anything. There is also the traditional gap between the "common people's" basic vocational education and the "bourgeois" upper secondary school. Although schemes exist to enable the completion of both in parallel by the same students, the numbers of entrants let alone students actually completing the dual cycle have remained low.

### 5.3 *Polytechnic education and university education*

There are relatively few aspects of preventive social policy to report on in Finnish higher education. Those aspects rather lurk at the boundaries of this apex of the country's educational system. Given the national policy goal of providing 80 per cent of each younger age cohort higher education and given the fact that 20 per cent of comprehensive school leavers have learnt little one cannot rule out that those receiving higher education are the socially included ones, whereas the remaining fifth consists of the excluded and the dispossessed. There are also some other albeit hardly visible "social" cracks in the otherwise polished surface of the Finnish higher education institutions.

The original evaluation provided some mixed evidence on the polytechnics. There were opinions that after a brief trial period, some of the polytechnics were approved too quickly and through political wheeling and dealing granted permanent polytechnic status on the basis of an evaluation of the Higher Education Evaluation Council. Small size is also a problem for some of them and likely to exacerbate due to changing demographic structures in population-losing areas. On occasion, instances when the quality of polytechnic teaching does not fulfill the quality requirements find their way into the national news media.

The universities proper are in many respects the most complex of all parts of the Finnish system of education. In certain respects the decentralisation of decision-making powers from the Ministry of Education to the universities has had results similar to comparable measures in relations between the national government and the municipalities. As funding has been cut, the newly decentralised universities have relatively few *de facto* degrees of freedom. Like the municipalities, they are also bound by legislation on administrative procedure

and the use of public funds. Perhaps most importantly, the turning of the "hard" money of the basic funding to "soft" project funding that must be applied for or contracted from various government agencies and other sources has contributed to ever more complicated procedures. It has also led to the tightening of very traditional financial control procedures and threatens with a constant need to recruit more administrators en lieu of scholars and teachers.

Certain preventive social policy themes can be raised when the internal system of governance, the organisation principles and the actual conditions of teaching, studying, research and learning at the universities are taken into account. Since the 1970s, the Finnish universities have applied a certain version of democracy with councils in two to three levels of administration made up of elected representatives of professors, students, and other research and teaching staff members, with administrators being without representation on the likely assumption that have other ways of promoting their interests. The supreme level consists of the General Council, which may take decisions even against the decisions of the lower councils. In most universities there are faculty councils or equivalent; in multi-faculty universities proper these are typically weak except at small universities without councils at the departmental level. Finally, in many universities even in very small departments there are department councils *de jure* taking the important decisions, although in point of fact many decisions nowadays have been delegated to department heads elected by the councils. Each council must follow the same formal procedures as multi-member law courts, which makes them inflexible and vulnerable to covert pre-meeting lobbying.

The universities find their hands tied by the prohibition of study fees, motivated on the grounds of safeguarding socioeconomic equity. This, the universities feel, prevents the recruitment of wealthy international students, who can now study in Finland free of charge, although there are no more than 4 000 of them so far of the 160 000 university students. Although the universities can now hire their professors and their other faculty and staff members without the intervention of the Ministry of Education, the provisions of the Civil Servants Act prevent the universities from dismissing even the most unpopular member of their faculty or staff at their discretion, let alone that

low productivity would lead to dismissal. These points reveal that the universities nowadays see the social aspects that they must observe as constraints instead of aspects of a societal and public service function that they should fulfill.

Managerialism has lent a multitude of buzzwords in the management of the Finnish universities, and the elected rectors may now on occasion wield real powers, like department heads or, at smaller universities, faculty deans. However, in many respects the empowerment of the managers to manage remains curtailed by the administrative and financial control and accounting procedures except through a slow war of attrition against the least preferred disciplines, departments and faculties. Increasing management powers was the basis of a suggestion of the Board of Rectors at Finnish Universities in May 2001 to turn all universities from organic parts of the national central government into independent bodies of public law with real powers to negotiate on the terms of their funding with the Ministry of Education, with full rights to establish and dissolve joint-stock companies, to enter as partners into existing companies but also to discontinue their partnership, and probably also with a real risk of going bankrupt as a result of misplaced business deals. But all this apotheosis of power may also have problematic social implications in delicate expert organisations which hardly have anything to do with real business making.

#### 5.4 Adult education

Adult education is the least homogeneous of the sectors of the Finnish educational system. Like the universities, but for different reasons, it is therefore particularly hard to evaluate. Note that adult education also includes the substantial training provided for the unemployed and those under threat of unemployment. I have referred above to the turf battles in that domain between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour.

My principal focus is here on one given aspect of Finnish adult education. Although the heterogeneity of this sector makes it very hard to generalise, the revelations of a recent study also bear relevance from the viewpoint of preventive social policy. According to this OECD study, the participation rates of Finns in adult education are among the highest in the world and in parallel with figures in the other Nordic countries. However, the study

criticised the aspect that those who participate most in adult education - heavily to very heavily subsidised from the public purse - tend to be those with the best background education and the steadiest employment (see Ministry of Education 2002). Therefore the distributional effects of adult education are truly regressive.

#### 5.5 Relations between levels and sectors of education

Choices made by the political decision-makers and the high administrative authorities on the principles of each sector and type of education and on conditions of transition of individuals from each level of education to the following levels are relevant from the viewpoint of preventive social policy. Above I have referred to the tensions between a "cognitive" and "product" model in pre-schooling. I have also referred to the question of segregating or not segregating "special" children in "special" classes.

There is a related undercurrent of the OECD PISA study and its marvellous results for Finland. Not only the very good learning results in the core disciplines but also other PISA results have been reported in the Finnish news media. For instance, Finnish pupils find school more boring than do pupils in most other OECD countries. Such results are warning signals that too exclusive a concentration on the "cognitive" aspects may produce a "social" backlash, including future demands for corrective social policy interventions.

Particularly worrisome is the difficult transition between the end of basic comprehensive school and, alternatively, the upper secondary school, a basic vocational school, or work. In the basic comprehensive school pupils are not usually made to repeat classes even where they have not learnt anything at all. "Minimum pass grade out of kindness", "armovitaset"; this is the common habit of letting everybody scrape through with the lowest passable degree even where they in effect have failed. There may be a social backlash of this habit as well, if not at school, then very soon after it.

## 6. SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE EVALUATION RESULTS FROM THE SOCIAL VIEWPOINT

This thematic parallel evaluation study was built upon an application-oriented evaluation project,

which did also have its research foundation. The conclusions of the two exercises have been intentionally disconnected. Whereas the original study was supposed to lead to practical suggestions, the present study stays in the level of intellectual research-based criticism. As far as there are practical implications, they must remain for the readers to do.

1. Without suggesting that the situation was worse in Finland than in any other highly developed country, it is still worrisome that segmentation between and within policy sectors plays the dividing role it does in the Finnish education policies and their implementation. This is apt to exacerbate not only difficulties in pursuing social ends, but also in pursuing rational, efficient and "technocratic" policies of whichever kind.
2. The rational language that dominates prevents the efficient thematisation of the influence of vested interests, whether these be ones of business, professions and pseudo-professions, the unions, the national bureaucracy or the municipal sector.
3. Problems caused by segmentation between sectors of policy-making and public administration remain chronic in Finland. One very tangible aspect of the segmentation problem involves the turf battles between the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Labour related to the training of the unemployed and those under threat of unemployment. As long as the battles continue, both education and employment policies will suffer.
4. The segmentation problems are further aggravated by the Finnish national government - municipal governments gap. Although since the 1980's deregulation has greatly increased the municipalities' "freedom from" control by the national government, little "freedom for" has ensued because of cutbacks imposed by the "state" in the 1990s and the very tight fiscal policies pursued hence. There are also unresolved issues regarding the organisation of education policy questions in Finland's regional administration.
5. Diametrically opposed to the egalitarian era of the heyday of the European welfare states, our era esteems differences in income and wealth, seeing them as key incentives for people to improve their lot by their own effort. However, the sheer differences fail to disclose the reasons for their prevalence. We have indeed come far from the times two-to-three decades ago, when the motto of Finnish public policies might have been taken from what has been ascribed to the anarchist Pierre-Joseph Proudhon: "Behind every property there is a criminal act." The not so uncommon ultra-liberalist assumption that behind every instance of dispossession there is moral inferiority of the person involved has almost come to replace it. However, such positive "moralisation of the market" is not devoid of serious philosophical including ethical problems (Haworth 1994). These problems also have implications for evaluating education policies.
6. The Finnish education sector appears underprivileged in regard to the evaluation it has at its disposal in comparison with the social welfare and health sector. This is also apt to inhibit the thematisation of social aspects of education.
7. According to the recent OECD PISA study, the overall achievement level is high in Finnish basic education. However, as in many other countries, the high averages conceal social inequalities, most importantly the 20 per cent of school leavers in their 16th year who have learnt little. The preventive social policy implications are evident, because the 20 per cent are potential drop-outs of society, with little hope of gaining access to vocational education or upper secondary school or obtaining a reasonable and steady workplace. A traditional and less grave social inequality remains in the venerable gap between basic vocational education on the one hand, and on the other the upper secondary schools.
8. In basic vocational education the government funding system towards the organisers of education is not yet satisfactory. Although the scheme works towards the right direction in paying the schools more for students in socially desirable fields avoided by students, the organisers receive funding on the basis of student numbers instead of actual employment of students who have completed their vocational qualifications without dropping out or the actual employment of the qualified ex-students. The vocational education drop-

outs are another socially vulnerable group worth special attention.

9. Few preventive social policy aspects can be found as such in the evaluation as regards polytechnic education and university education. However, the situation changes somewhat as far we penetrate the polished surface of the higher education institutions.
10. My foremost emphasis as regards adult education has been on a socio-economic stratification aspect, which also has preventive social policy relevance. In Finland a typical active participant in general, non-unemployment related adult education is a middle-aged, quite well-educated female with a steady workplace, while the elderly unemployed or underemployed male with little education is unlikely to find his way into adult education.
11. From the social point of view, the evaluation results reanalysed suggest that there may be some general overemphasis now upon a "cognitive" or "product" model of education and some underemphasis upon a "care" or "process" model. This concerns pre-schooling, and it also concerns the basic comprehensive school.
12. The thematic parallel evaluation also stresses the importance of focusing upon the transitions of real, living people from one stage, level or part of the education system to the next level or another level. The preventive social policy aspect is also relevant where for some reason, such as that of habitus of a person or the image of an institution of education, some of the most needy decline to seek their way to education.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> I presented a first version of the article as a paper in the conference *Evaluation for Practice: A Meeting Place for Diverse Approaches and Methods*, Tampere, Finland, 4-6 July 2002. None of the views presented in the paper are necessarily those presented in the original evaluation being utilised here, let alone that the views were those of the organisation that commissioned the original evaluation.

<sup>2</sup> More exactly, although the national government's share of the municipal education expenditures was not lowered, the student unit cost in the grant formula was geared down in spite of at least some low inflation over the years.

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