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Vol. 36, No. 3, September 2006, pp. 327–341

The Nordic model of Lifelong Learning

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This article explores how the so called Nordic welfare state, with its specific institutional make up, handles Lifelong Learning in a time characterised by the challenges of economic globalisation and the hegemonic impact of the neo-liberal agenda. The analysis reveals a high participation in the Nordic countries in Lifelong Learning and, in comparison to other countries, low inequalities. This can be directly linked to a state that sets a very demanding equity standard and has developed an institutional framework to support this ambition. This model explicitly recognises market failures in contributing to a system of Lifelong Learning for *all*. The findings support the growing awareness in the literature that those forecasting the end of the welfare state had misunderstood and/or undervalued the important impact of the specific institutions that constitute the welfare state itself.

Keywords: *Adult education; Implementation of Lifelong Learning; Lifelong Learning; Nordic countries; Participation of adults; Sweden*

Introduction

In many parts of the world, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon countries, neo-liberalism has come to comprise the raison d'être of politics over the last decades:

> It has narrowed the discourse of political, economic and social debate, transforming what it means to be liberal, social democratic or even progressive conservative by asserting itself against social entitlements, rights and citizenship. (Clement & Vosko, 2003, p. viii)

Accounts of globalisation often posit policy and institutional convergence towards reliance on individual and market incentives, rather than political or institutional mechanisms (Clayton & Pontusson, 1998). Yet, there are several accounts of how the forces of globalisation have a differential impact on countries. Hall and Soskice (2001) separate the economies of OECD countries into two distinct categories: the liberal *market*, which comprises Anglo-Saxon countries, and the *coordinated market system*, which includes the Nordic countries, Germany, Belgium and Switzerland. Anglo-Saxon countries, they argue, have been more affected by the rhetoric and reality of neo-liberalism than those nation-states within the coordinated market system. As Rothstein and Steinmo remind us (2002, p. 1), just as advanced welfare

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ISSN 0305-7925 (print)/ISSN 1469-3623 (online)/06/030327-15
© 2006 British Association for International and Comparative Education
DOI: 10.1080/03057920600872472

states face multiple challenges there are multiple responses. The authors point out that those forecasting the end of the welfare state had misunderstood and/or undervalued the important impact of the specific institutions that constitute the welfare state itself.

It is within this broader context of welfare regimes that this article sets out to explore how the so called Nordic welfare state, with its specific institutional make up, handles Lifelong Learning in a time characterised by the challenges of economic globalisation and the hegemonic impact of the neo-liberal agenda. The paper will be organised in three parts. First, as a general background the political project on Lifelong Learning, as it is being presented in the international discourse is briefly discussed. Second, comparative data on participation in Lifelong Learning is reviewed and third, the characteristics of the Nordic model of Lifelong Learning will be elaborated.

The political project of Lifelong Learning

In the 1970s, a time of concern for equality and democracy when many adult educators were informed by critical theory, adult educators lamented over the marginal status of the field. Today the situation is very different. Driven by a mainly neo-liberal agenda that has promoted economic or corporate globalisation, adult learning has become a central issue in national policies on education, the economy and welfare (European Union (EU), 2000; OECD, 1996, 2005).

Within adult learning circles there is currently a strong resentment of what is being seen as the colonisation of adult learning and its humanistic and liberatory traditions by an 'economistic' agenda, resulting in a drastic change in the conditions under which adult education operates (Gustavsson, 2002). The present promotion of Lifelong Learning, with an emphasis on adult learning, signals a deconstruction of welfare through a reconstruction of citizenship as the responsibility an individual has to an economic agenda (Bastow & Martin, 2003).

Critics of the present discourse on adult learning often invoke the ideals and goals that dominated during the first generation of Lifelong Learning (Rubenson, 1999). The idea of Lifelong Learning first appeared in the 1970s, at a time when post-World War II optimism about development, prosperity and the ability of schooling to promote social equality was being challenged. As a result, there were calls for new paradigms to inform educational policy. In this climate and within a humanistic tradition, Lifelong Learning was advocated—particularly by UNESCO—as a model that would promote a better society and quality of life, and would allow people to adapt to as well as control change (Lengrand, 1972; Dave, 1976). The concept was one of personal development; people were encouraged to 'make themselves' rather than 'be made'. An important issue in the analysis of the day was how a 'system of Lifelong Learning' could reduce educational gaps in society. The humanistic generation of Lifelong Learning saw a strong role for civil society and was primarily promoted by the volunteer sector, while in most countries the state and the market remained largely absent from the debate (Rubenson, 1999). The idea put forward in

humanistic tradition and with utopian vision was diametrically opposed to the neo-liberal tide that came to sweep the Western world. Indeed, issues like equality, democratisation and civil society, which underpinned the first wave of Lifelong Learning, ceased to inform the educational discourse in the coming years.

Driven by a different ideology with different goals and dreams the second generation of Lifelong Learning appeared in the late 1980s. This was a period of change and uncertainty for the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) economies. In a climate of rising unemployment, declining productivity and increasing public deficits, 'education and the economy' became a catchphrase for those dissatisfied with the status quo of education (OECD, 1989, p. 17). The OECD noted, 'The key appears to be the ability of people to cope with changes and to turn them to advantages in the future' (OECD, 1986, cited in Marginson, 1993, p. 48). These ideas were quickly picked up by the political sphere but not by representatives of the field of adult learning.

In short, discussions on Lifelong Learning became framed within a politico-economic imperative that emphasised the importance of science and technology, as well as highly-developed human capital. It is of interest to note that while the first generation of Lifelong Learning talked about education as enabling individuals to control and adapt to change, the second generation saw learning only as a mechanism for individuals to adjust to society which was shaped without their input.

Towards the end of the 1990s, policymakers had come to the insight that while the New Economy holds the promise of increased productivity and an improved standard of living, it also introduces a new set of transitions and adjustment challenges for society, industry and individuals. Sensing a public disgruntled with free-market capitalism and its seeming disregard for social and individual issues there was a growing awareness in political circles that these challenges needed to be addressed. Increased exclusion or marginalisation of large segments of the population and exacerbated socio-economic divisions were seen as a threat to global capitalism as such. The new understanding in policy circles came to affect the international discourse on Lifelong Learning and resulted in a softening of the economistic perspective (Field, 2003; Rubenson, 2004). This change is embedded in policy documents on Lifelong Learning, which are no longer exclusively concerned with human capital issues but also include references to social purposes (see, e.g. EU, 2000; OECD, 2003).

The present third generation of Lifelong Learning is a 'softened' economistic version that can be seen as a reflection of what has become known as the 'Third Way' (Giddens, 1999), which proclaims to reinsert issues of social cohesion, civic participation and democracy into politics. For Third Way governments, in particular, training and education have been identified as playing a key role in easing the transitions into a knowledge economy. Giddens writes that, 'education and training have become the new mantra for social democratic politicians' (1999, p. 109), while Tony Blair himself is quoted as saying 'education is the best economic policy we have' (quoted in Martin, 2003, p. 567).

According to critics, under Third Way governments' up-skilling, training or Lifelong Learning are conceived mainly in terms of generating wealth—for the individual, and for the country (Newman & De Zoysa, 2001). Indeed, although social cohesion and social justice have been a purported mission of Blair's Labour government, 'equity has been tagged on to Labour's priorities rather than taking a centre stage' (Ball, 1999, p. 204).

From the perspective of implementing Lifelong Learning, the three generations reflect different roles for—and interrelations between—the three major institutional arrangements: state, market and civil society. The first generation of Lifelong Learning, as expressed in the UNESCO tradition, saw a strong role for civil society, while the second generation privileged the market, downplayed the role of the state and almost totally neglected civil society. Thus, during the first generation NGOs came to play a relatively important role while the emphasis during the second became privatisation and deregulation of public education. It is important to stress that these institutional arrangements are not static but interrelated. Recognising market failures, and growing concerns over large groups not participating fully in social and economic life, the third generation can be read as a shift in balance between the three institutional arrangements. The market still has a central role in adult learning, but the responsibilities of the individual and the state are also visible. The language is one of shared responsibilities. However, a closer reading of the text and the understanding that seems to dominate the present policy debate might lead one to be more sceptical of what looks to be a major shift in the public discourse on Lifelong Learning. Despite repeated references to the involvement of all three institutional arrangements, what stands out in recent policy documents is the stress placed on the responsibility of individuals for their own learning—something that is underscored time after time. The stress on individual responsibility can be seen to reflect the Third Way programme and its ethos that 'the precept ''no rights without responsibilities'' applies to all individuals and groups' (Giddens, 2000, p. 165). Giddens continues:

> Governments must maintain a regulatory role in many contexts, but as far as possible it should become a facilitator, providing resources for citizens to assume responsibility for the consequences of what they do. (p. 165)

The stress on individual responsibility seems to legitimate a system of Lifelong Learning resulting in large inequalities in participation in adult education and training.

Participation in adult education and training

The Nordic countries are characterised by a very high participation in adult education and training (see Tables 1 and 2).

The average participation rate in the Nordic block was 53% compared to 32% for all IALS countries. However, a comparison with other highly industrialised countries in the IALS might be more appropriate. Thus, the average Nordic participation rate is about 14 percentage points higher (53 versus 39) than that of the following group of Anglo-Saxon countries: Australia, Canada, New Zealand, UK and USA.

Table 1. Per cent of population aged 16–65 participation in adult education and training during the year preceding the interview, by document literacy level, 1994–1995

	Total participation rate	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4/5
Denmark	55.7	25.0	44.1	60.2	70.1
Finland	56.8	19.3	44.0	66.2	78.1
Norway	47.9	18.0	35.8	50.7	62.7
Sweden	52.5	29.3	40.1	54.5	61.6
Australia	38.8	13.6	29.3	46.5	62.4
Canada	37.7	16.6	29.4	39.6	60.4
Ireland	24.3	10.1	19.6	34.2	47.3
New Zealand	47.5	28.7	40.8	55.2	68.3
United Kingdom	43.9	21.8	33.6	53.9	70.7
United States	39.7	17.3	32.3	49.0	59.1
Belgium	21.2	4.4	15.1	25.6	37.2
Netherlands	37.4	16.8	27.0	40.6	53.4
Average	**42.0**	**18.4**	**32.6**	**48.0**	**60.9**

Source: International Adult Literacy Survey, 1994–1998.

More recent figures from the EU Barometer 2003 see Table 2, reveal that the Nordic countries, with the exception of Norway, continue to have a substantially higher participation in adult education and training than other European countries.

Table 2. Participation in adult education and training and average number of hours of participation by type of training, population aged 16–65

	Total AET
Iceland	69.1
Denmark	58.5
Finland	55.9
Sweden	53.5
Norway	46.0
United Kingdom	41.4
Netherlands	41.0
Austria	39.3
Luxembourg	38.1
Germany	35.0
Ireland	33.6
Belgium	31.5
Spain	26.5
Italy	25.3
France	22.8
Greece	16.7
Portugal	12.7

Source: 2003 EU Barometer.

Another distinguishable characteristic of Nordic adult education is that the ever-present law of inequality is less severe in this region than in other countries, see Table 1. On the whole, as Table 1 shows, it is more common for those with a low literacy (levels 1 and 2 according to the IALS assessment) to participate in adult education and training in the Nordic countries than in other countries. Similarly, the Nordic countries report an unusually high participation rates among those with a short formal education, particularly those in the employed population (OECD, 1997, 2000). However, it should be noted that those with a short formal education are still far behind the well educated also in the Nordic countries.

The Nordic level of inequality is also linked to a more equal age distribution among participants. Although there was a wide gap in participation rates between age groups in all countries, those aged 56–65 in the Nordic countries participated more often than their counterparts in other countries (OECD, 1997, 2000). The training of professional categories in the Nordic countries does not stand out. There was as high or even higher rate of training in some other countries.

The Nordic participation patterns in adult education and training strongly support Martin Carnoy's point that there are crucial differences in what adult education attempts to do and can do in different social-political structures (Carnoy, 1995, p. 3). In this context it is of interest to note that the International Literacy Survey (OECD, 2000) found that there is a strong relationship between economic inequality in a country on the one hand, and literacy and adult education participation inequalities, on the other hand, see Figure 1.

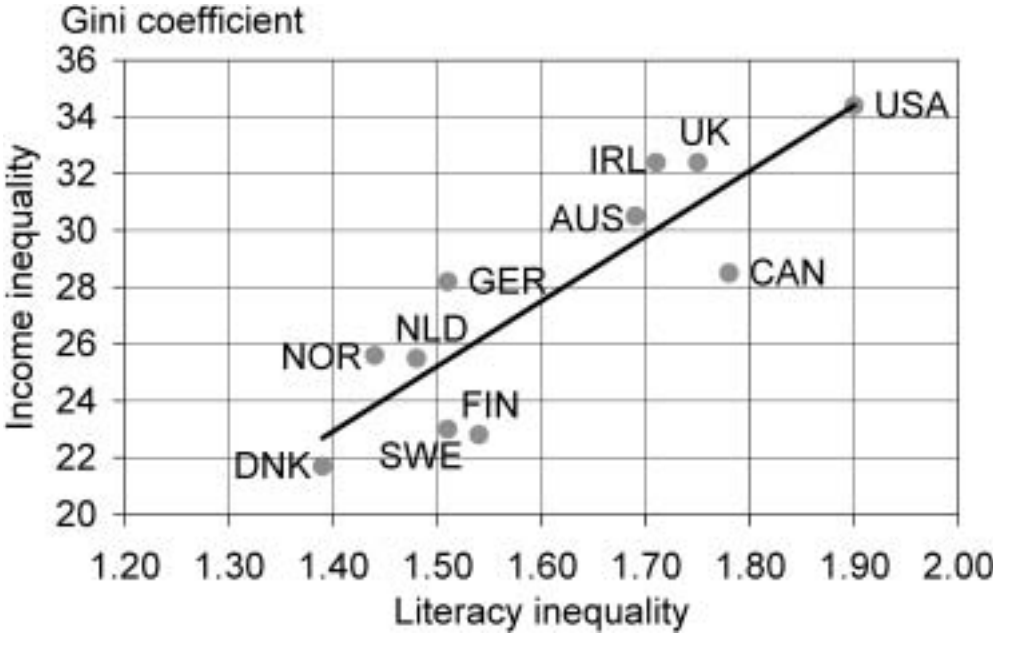


Figure 1. Relationship between economic inequality (Gini coefficient) and the inequality in the distribution of literacy within selected counties (Adapted from OECD, 2000)

Where one is high the other two are also rampant. Second, the countries tend to group themselves in three distinguishable clusters. There are the Nordic countries with relatively speaking low economic and literacy inequalities. In the middle we can detect a continental European cluster with Germany and the Netherlands with slightly higher inequalities than in the first group. And then there is the Anglo-Saxon group which show the highest level of inequality. The finding seems to suggest that inequalities in basic capabilities, as defined by literacy, are part of national structures and can be understood in terms of various forms of welfare-state regimes.

Esping-Andersen (1989) identifies three distinct welfare state regimes characterised by different institutional arrangements between state, market and the family. The Anglo-Saxon countries follow what he calls a liberal welfare-state regime where means-tested assistance, modest universal transfers or modest social-insurance plans predominate. The benefits are mostly moderate and often associated with stigma. There is distrust in what the state can and ought to do as well as a strong belief in market led solutions.

Another distinguishable regime-type can be found in nations such as Austria, France, Germany and Italy. Strongly influenced by the church and with old corporatist traditions there is less concern with market efficiency and granting of social rights have seldom been a contested issue in these countries. The tendency for the state is to hold off to interfere until the family capacity to help its members is exhausted.

The third category of countries follow, what Esping-Andersen labels the social-democratic or Nordic regime-type. In this group of countries we find less dualism between state and market and between working class and middle class. The state sets a very demanding equity standard and not equity of minimal needs as pursued elsewhere. The citizen's right to services and benefits have traditionally been defined according to the pattern of the middle class. This model restricts the market and constructs an essentially universal solidarity in favour of the welfare state. A defining character of the social democratic state is the integration of welfare and work. While truly committed to a full-employment guarantee the Nordic model is at the same time entirely dependent on having a very extensive proportion in gainful employment as the massive cost of maintaining the welfare state forces it to minimise the social problems and maximise revenue income.

In this perspective the Nordic model of Lifelong Learning thus has to be understood in the context of the Nordic welfare state regime. The findings suggest that the broader institutional arrangements are creating conditions for adult education whereby at least some movements in the direction of Lifelong Learning for all becomes a possibility.

Institutional characteristics of the Nordic model of Lifelong Learning

A first observation is that adult education is a highly visible phenomenon in the Nordic societies and far from the poor cousin that it is commonly referred to in many countries. A visit to a small community shows the central part it plays in the daily life

and the many forms of adult education. This refers not only to the bricks and mortar but also traditions of adult learning and teaching. Today's culture of adult education partly reflects an old tradition in all Nordic countries of a popular adult education sector with close links to social movements. In the 1960s adult education evolved as a distinct and central public policy area across the Nordic countries, with a strong presence of the state. Another common element across the Nordic countries is the close involvement of the social partners in matters concerning adult education and a strong link between adult education and labour market policies.

When we try to understand the formation of adult learning in a time of economic and social challenges it is important that the Nordic welfare state, although less generous, is still in place with its institutional arrangements and traditions (Kautto, 2000). A founding pillar in this strategy is the full employment concept with its institutional arrangements, which has profound effects on adult education policies.

Full employment and the Nordic model of Lifelong Learning

The Nordic welfare-state model has been associated with a distinct labour market regime. An active labour market policy is a principal factor of economic stability and full employment, and the foundation for the building of a welfare state. The goal has been to achieve full employment while minimising consumer price inflation and wage drift (Ryner, 2002). The provision of education and training arose out of the need to act swiftly against imbalances in the labour market. First, it helped underemployed and unemployed workers to improve their employability in occupations with better opportunities. Second, full employment prevented a fiscal overload on social policy programmes such as unemployment insurance and raised the general tax revenue. Third, it increased the supply of skills in industries where a shortage of suitably trained personnel tends to exacerbate inflationary pressures. Consequently not only the special labour market training programmes but reforms in adult education generally have been heavily influenced by human capital thinking (Rubenson, 2002).

A very hierarchical and selective educational system had not produced the human capital necessary for modernising the economy and ultimately wealth production. In the 1970s and 1980s, special post-compulsory options for adults at the secondary and tertiary levels were introduced, as well as a major increase in funds for popular adult education. There was also a desire to promote democracy and to compensate earlier injustices. The human capital concerns eased in the 1980s but returned a decade later with a vengeance to the fore of adult education policy. It was now driven by the challenges of the economic crises that took place in an environment shaped by concerns over how to adapt to the emergence of an information economy and the forces of globalisation.

With labour market conditions quickly eroding in the early 1990s the debate shifted to the role of adult education and training in the attack on unemployment. As an example, the Social Democratic government of Sweden introduced the *Adult Education Initiative* (AEI) (Government Bill, 1995/97, p. 222), not as an educational

bill but as a cornerstone in its policy platform Special strategies introduced in order to halve the unemployment by year 2000. The AEI signals a fundamental broadening of the Nordic tradition of active labour market policy. Instead of expanding labour market training programmes with their strong vocational focus, the AEI is attempting to raise the general level of education of unemployed adults. Similar emphasis can be found in the other Nordic countries (NOU, 1997, p. 25; OECD, 2001a, 2001b). In accordance with the Nordic welfare-state model the education and training offered the unemployed in recent Nordic reforms are quite extensive and not of the minimalist nature found in many other countries, particularly the Anglo-Saxon.

Recent Nordic policy documents reflect a growing understanding that while the New Economy holds the promise of increased productivity and an improved standard of living it also introduces a new set of transitions and adjustment challenges for society, industry and individuals. If not met these challenges could increase the permanent exclusion or marginalisation of segments of the population and exacerbate socio-economic divisions. It should be noted that there is a strong objection also in the Nordic countries to the economistic paradigm driving adult education. However, it is of interest to note that not only governments influenced by the hegemony of neo-liberal thinking but also progressive welfare researchers promote Lifelong Learning as a solution to economic and social pressures (Esping-Andersen, 1996, p. 259). While there is an understanding that adult education in itself does not create jobs, learning can promote competencies to adapt to the demands of the New Economy and allow full participation in social and economic life. Lifelong Learning can help provide citizens with the chance to acquire adequate skills to prevent low-paid jobs in the services from becoming life-cycle traps.

The recent shifts in adult education and human capital developments in the Nordic countries could be seen as a movement towards what Esping-Andersen's labels (Esping-Andersen, 1996, p. 260):

> A Pareto optimal welfare state of the future might very well be one that shifts the accent of social citizenship from its present preoccupation with income maintenance towards a menu of rights to Lifelong Learning and qualification.

It is interesting to note that while the state has been very keen to use labour market and educational policy to promote human capital development it has, despite strong pressures from the unions, been reluctant to regulate employer sponsored education and training and largely left this to be settled by the social partners at the bargaining table. This brings us to the Nordic model of industrial relations, which is an integrated part of the welfare-state regime and an important element in the Nordic model of Lifelong Learning.

Industrial relations and the Nordic model of Lifelong Learning

The Nordic countries have seen partly different developments of industrial relations over the last 15 years. A centrally co-ordinated decentralisation trend has been visible in Sweden and Denmark while Finland and Norway have seen a revival of

tripartite concentration at the central level (Dølvik & Stokke, 1998; Lilja, 1998; Scheuer, 1998). Despite these trends, continuing similarities between the Nordic countries and their differences to other countries still justify the notion of a Nordic model of industrial relations (Kjellberg, 1998).

There are some fundamental characteristics of this model that have been very conducive to the promotion of adult education and training. Firstly, a highly developed corporatist structure has fostered a tradition of collaboration between the state and the labour market organisations. Dølvik and Stokke (1998, p. 31) speaking from a Norwegian perspective, but relevant to the Nordic model of industrial relations, argue that contrary to commonly stated assumptions that globalisation will undermine national corporatism, the Norwegian example suggests that renationalised co-operative practices can be a viable strategy for coping with such pressures. Thus they see the radical decentralisation that has taken place in the Anglo-Saxon countries as the outcome of strong political agendas, rather than reflections of structural change in working life. This has helped develop a comparatively high degree of consensus on issues like productivity, the introduction of new technology and training (Qvale & Øverland, 2001).

Secondly, not only the trade unions, which boast the highest union density rates in industrial societies, but also the employers have a very large membership and are highly organised into large confederations of unions and employer associations with representation at national as well as local level. This provides the social partners with a strong research capacity and enables them to analyse and engage in public debates around vital policy issues. In the context of this article it is of interest to note that both trade unions and employers' confederations have, over the last 30 years, continuously paid close attention to education and training issues. The traditional three-tier system of collective bargaining corresponds to a four level system of union organisation: the workplace; local union branches; national unions; and union confederations. The local clubs, that are fully integrated with the national unions and the local branches are involved in local bargaining selection of health and safety representatives, participation in project groups influencing the work environment and the design of work organisation and new technology clubs also organise study circles. This reflects a unique combination of centralisation and decentralisation, a central feature in Nordic industrial relations. This has strengthened the position of workers at the political level through close links between social-democratic parties and unions while it at the same time also facilitates the union's presence at the workplace and allows direct contact with workers (Kjellberg, 1998, p. 75). Thus, while The Confederation of Blue-Collar Workers (LO) is engaged in the production of research based policy documents on adult education and training aimed at influencing public policy they are at the same time through their local representation busy at the workplaces organising study circles for its membership. This helps to explain the unusually high participation in adult education and training among blue-collar workers in the Nordic countries.

The institutional arrangements that allow for central involvement of the trade unions in adult education, at all levels of the organisation, helps adult education

become part of a worker's individual and collective identity. In their struggle for individual and or collective change the structure encourages them to reflect on the role adult education may or may not play. At the same time the corporatist institution provides a structure whereby adult education and training can become part of negotiations on changes in production processes and work organisation, introduction of new technology and economic democracy.

The strong trade union structure has an impact on adult education that goes far beyond the economic sector.

Civil society, popular adult education and the Nordic model of Lifelong Learning

The high and relatively more equal participation rates can partly be explained by the institutional structure of the Nordic adult education sector. In contrast to the situation in most other countries there exists a publicly supported sector of popular adult education. To many foreign observers knowledge of popular movements and popular adult education is an important source to the understanding of Nordic social development (Battail, 1988). The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw the emergence of strong popular movements that promoted their ideas through various forms of popular adult education, e.g. folk high schools and adult education associations. Over time this developed into a relatively unique and highly institutionalised popular adult education system whose distinguishing characteristics, despite considerable state and municipal subsidies, are that it is free and voluntary. Historically, popular adult education has been part of the labour movements counter hegemonic ambition and the movement's ambition to heighten individual members' consciousness and commitment to its dreams and goals for social change and justice.

Popular adult education can be seen as a part of the corporate state, lying at the crossroads between civil society and the state. State subsidies for popular adult education are motivated by the desire to support an enterprise that aims to make it possible for people to individually and collectively influence their position in life and promote commitment to participate in the development of society. Today popular adult education has three roles: as an agency of popular movements, an adult educator and as a supporter of culture. The study associations reach an overwhelming proportion of people in popular adult education. These associations are motivated by the desire to support an enterprise that aims to make it possible for people to influence their position in life and promote commitment to participate in the development of society. The studies are supposed to grow out of the interests and needs of the participants, should encourage position taking and decision making and act as a counterforce to the increased commercialisation and technocratisation of culture and social life.

Through the existence of publicly supported popular adult education, individuals in the Nordic countries have access to a form of adult education that can respond to different aspirations and needs to those catered for by the formal education system or the education and training supplied by employers. The existence of study

associations and folk high schools within the labour movement promotes an offering of study circles and courses that focus on the needs and aspirations of groups that traditionally do not participate in adult education and that are not interested to enhance their formal level of education. These needs are not age specific to the extent that career oriented motives are and this might explain the fact that participation in adult education and training among those 55 and older is comparatively high in the Nordic countries. Social class and ethnicity come into play also in participation in popular adult education. Yet, the system provides a content and form of adult education that has greater appeal to those traditionally not participating than other forms of general adult education (Rubenson, 1996). This system is made possible by the prevailing funding regime.

Funding regime and the Nordic model of Lifelong Learning

The IALS provides central information on public and private support for participation in adult education and training. The data show that employers are the primary source of financial support for that in all IALS countries. In the Nordic countries an average of 73% of those who had participated in some form of adult education and training reported that they had received financial support from the employer. This is slightly higher than the average for all the countries in the IALS, 69%. An in-depth analysis of the impact of level of public support for adult education found no relationship between the level of public support for adult education and training and participation rates (Tuijnman & Hellström, 2001). However, the study found that public support seems to have a crucial effect on the participation of those least likely to enrol in adult education and training. The authors conclude (Tuijnman & Hellström, p. 9), 'Thus it may be the case, more generally, that public support for disadvantaged groups is the main, defining characteristic of Nordic approaches to adult education'. The relatively high supply of adult education providers by public institutions in the Nordic countries makes the participants become less dependent on commercial providers.

A crucial issue related to the funding regime is the link between supply of and demand for adult education on the one hand, and the processes that govern who gets what kind of adult education on the other. In order to understand why the effects of adult education on equity are so small we have to look at the way demand determines what the adult education organisations supply. In a market driven system it is obvious that advantaged groups will strongly influence patterns of provision.

There is evidence to suggest that even organisations with pronounced ambitions to reach disadvantaged groups, unless there is earmarked funding for the target groups, actually provide a service that corresponds better to the demands of the advantaged. This is a result of existing funding regimes not compensating for the increased costs involved in recruiting the underprivileged. In a time when government policies seek to increase efficiency through the adoption of a more market-oriented approach and outcomes-based funding, there is a growing likelihood that the organisation goes after those easiest to recruit and more likely to succeed (see McIntyre *et al.*, 1996). In this perspective the comparatively

successful recruitment of the less well educated to adult education in the Nordic Countries is a result, not of public funding as such, but availability of targeted funding for recruiting disadvantaged groups. Nordic adult education policies over the last 25 years show that general policies have limited effects on the recruitment of disadvantaged groups as traditionally strong groups are consuming more than their fair share of the resources. Instead it has been earmarked funding for targeted strategies, like outreach and special study aid, which have been most successful (Rubenson, 1996). These measures are based on the assumption that certain groups shall 'consume' a supply and the challenge is to stimulate the demands among those groups for which the measure is taken.

Funding regimes bring up crucial issues around the relationship between the state and its citizens, and what understanding of democracy informs state interventions (see Rothstein, 1998). Dworkin (1977, p. 180) argues that the state should treat citizens not just with concern and respect but with equal concern and respect. In accordance with this principle both Rawls and Dworking argue for justice in resource allocation. However, as Amytag Sen (1982) stresses, the resource argument is not a sufficient condition for a just society. Instead he introduces the concept of basic capability equality referring, among other things, to the need to take into account differences in those abilities that are crucial for citizens to function in society. Sen's concept helps us to understand why a 'system' of adult education that implicitly takes for granted that the adult possesses vital instruments to make use of the available adult education possibilities by necessity widens, rather than narrows, the educational and cultural gaps in society. Instead the distribution of basic capabilities points to discrepancies in readiness to engage in organised forms of adult learning. The question is to what extend there are programmes in place to help develop the basic capabilities.

Conclusion

The final report from OECD's review of adult learning policies and practices in 17 OECD countries provides an in depth analysis of factors found to contribute to increased participation (OECD, 2005). The report highlights several crucial conditions for reaching the participation of low-skilled adults. An overall conclusion is that governments can play a useful role by: a) creating the structural preconditions for raising the benefits of adult learning; b) promoting well-designed co-financing arrangements; c) improving delivery and quality control; and d) ensuring policy co-ordination and coherence. OECD finds that because of non-conclusive evidence about the overall quantitative impact of market failures, adult learning policy ought to primarily focus on schemes with large leverage potential. OECD therefore concludes (OECD, 2005, p. 11): 'Regulatory and institutional arrangements that are conducive to enhancing investments by firms and individuals, while limiting public financing, are key within this type of strategy'.

OECD's conclusion is diametrically contrary to the policy lesson that can be drawn from the Nordic model of Lifelong Learning. A high participation and, in comparison to other countries, low inequalities in the Nordic countries can be

directly linked to a state that sets a very demanding equity standard and has developed an institutional framework to support this ambition. This model explicitly recognises market failures in contributing to a system of Lifelong Learning for *all*.

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