

Seminar C Speakers and Abstracts

Seminar C- 'The Nordic Exceptionalism'

at Room D169, 1330-1500 on 29 May 2012

Chair: Claus Holm

C1: Nordic Exceptionalism

Professor Andy Green, Institute of Education, University of London, UK

Lifelong learning systems in the liberal countries produce rather unequal skills outcomes which tend to reinforce income inequality and undermine social cohesion. However, high levels of participation in adult learning boost employment rates, which enhance economic competitiveness and thus contribute to social cohesion in the sense of inclusion in the labour market. Lifelong learning systems in the social market countries produce somewhat less polarised skills distributions with apprenticeship systems mitigating the effects of school segmentation in some of these countries; it may be equated with lower levels of inequality. Yet, less participation in adult learning reduces employment rates and increases exclusion from work. Lifelong learning systems in the Nordic countries produce more equal skills outcomes from school and benefit from high rates of adult learning participation. Relatively egalitarian school systems contribute to more equal and socially cohesive societies, whilst adult learning and active labour market policies raise employment rates and increase economic competitiveness. The most convincing explanation to the Nordic exceptionalism relates to the fundamental characteristics of social democracy. Nordic countries are substantially more egalitarian than most developed countries. Despite small rises in household income inequality in the past two decades, Nordic countries remain the most income-equal in the developed world. The Nordic countries are also the group of countries with generally low levels of educational inequality. There is a connection between the lifelong learning model and the models of the knowledge economy. Moreover, the Nordic countries, which produce more equal skills outcomes, tend to benefit socially from greater income equality, higher rates of mobility, better health and more social cohesion.

C2: Nordic Exceptionalism – traced back to the 1930s

Professor Ove Korsgaard, Department of Education, Aarhus University, Denmark

In his book, *Plague over Europe*, from 1933, the politician Hartvig Frisch was one of the first to draw a clear front against communism, fascism and nazism. According to Frisch, the working class throughout Europe was seduced by the communist theory about the proletariat's dictatorship as a necessary step towards a more just society and also by radical nationalism's criticism of parliamentary democracy. For the working class in Denmark, it was a matter of holding firmly onto Nordic democracy, whose essence, according to Hartvig Frisch, was that the nation is seen as the starting point for cooperation between workers, farmers and other population groups. This idea formed the basis for the development of a Nordic model of democratic welfare system in contrast to a communist and national socialist system. An important background for the Nordic exceptionalism was the global economic crisis that developed in the wake of the Wall Street Crash in 1929. The crisis brought numerous companies to their knees and agricultural exports dropped dramatically. The result was galloping unemployment and a sharp rise in the number of forced sales of farms. In Sweden, a coalition that united workers and peasants was developed in the late twenties and got the symbolic name *folkehemmet* or people's home; in Denmark the so-called *Kanslergade* agreement was reached

at the private home of Prime Minister Thorvald Stauning 30 January 1933 between the farmers and workers parties. The agreements' importance was thrown into further relief by the fact that it was signed the very same day as Hitler was appointed Reich Chancellor in Berlin and subsequently led Germany towards totalitarianism and later collapse.

C3: New Nordic Approach to Lifelong Learning

Assoc. Prof. Søren Ehlers, Department of Education, Aarhus University, Denmark

Lifelong Learning is a unique example of a transnational policy tool developed by international organizations and implemented by nation states. The five Nordic countries started their implementation of lifelong learning in the mid nineties before the EU took action due to the existence of Nordic Council of Ministers and they have developed valuable experiences.

The European Commission published a memorandum on lifelong learning in 2000 and established the following year a work programme called *Education and Training 2010*. Evaluations of this programme have shown that the Nordic countries as a region is having the highest performance in relation to participation and one of the reasons for this seems to be *Flexibility*: The strategies have constantly been revised making the Nordic region a laboratory for flexible implementation environments.

We may in theory differentiate between administrative principles as *Hierarchy, Market and Network* and the Nordic countries could in the late nineties be placed on a continuum where Norway was mostly oriented towards Hierarchy, Sweden towards Market and Denmark towards Network. But such a description would be too simplistic because the countries selected supplementary instruments which pointed in other directions. It may be noted when we consider the mix of instruments that Denmark tended to involve *Information*, Iceland stressed *Economic Means* and Norway preferred *Regulations*.

Nordic Council of Ministers has published a study of the trends within the last decade called *Effective Strategies for Lifelong Learning in the Nordic Countries* (2011). This comparative study has shown how all Nordic countries involve social partners in policy formulation as well as policy implementation and that the same pattern gradually is developed on the county level. The public authorities are no longer so visible, stake holders are being involved, and the strategies from county to county differ from each other.

The administrative principle Market is no longer dominant. There is a trend towards public regulation on the national level and voluntary coordination can be noted on county level. Enterprises and educational providers are interacting more and more. The Nordic *implementation environments* are flexible. This approach has been observed for almost two decades and seem to be a important factor behind the high performance in relation to participation.