

## Norway Moving away from Populist Education?

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*Which indications are found of Norway moving away from welfare state populist education into the mainstream of educational globalisation? Contrasting the legacies with the current ideological and political changes certain educational consequences are identified. Effects on governance and funding, structure, curriculum and the level of participation and equality are seen. Certain dilemmas of "double talk" are found. Simultaneously with the country's slow adaptation to current international mainstream there are loud expressions of the old urban socialist and the rural populist values. The speed of change is expected to be slow due to the fortunate offshore oil economy.*

### Legacies of a particular Scandinavian welfare state

During the 20<sup>th</sup> century Norway developed into a social-democratic welfare state. By the 1970s, a state organisation had developed characterised by a considerable degree of social justice. The ideal of a democratic society had been attempted and realised by means of an overall social policy, aiming at creating optimal equity of life conditions for all groups, identified by social background, gender, ethnicity and geographical location. The main mandator of this policy had been an alliance of the Social Democratic

Party (Labour) and the socialist-oriented trade union. Gradually, the welfare state policy was accepted and supported by the liberals and conservatives. At the year 2001 there is a strong consensus across the line of political parties, from left to right, of keeping up the welfare state ambitions. The consensus line in party politics has been furthered in public policy and administration. Changes have been based on experimentation with different solutions, dialogue with affected parties, and a stable bureaucracy, with the aim of creating and sustaining a stable society, and to ensure smooth implementation of decisions.

Different from other Scandinavian countries Norwegian welfare state development has been characterised by certain *populist* traditions. The country lost its political independence in the early 14<sup>th</sup> century and was administered at a distance, first from Copenhagen (1380–1814) and then from Stockholm (1814–1905). A scattered population of small farmers and fishermen was forced by harsh nature and tough living conditions to co-operate, and develop democratic procedures in their local communities. During the national awakening of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, localist values were manifested in strong linguistic and religious movements rooted in the local communities of the districts. The gross effect of the country's political history, geography and cultural movements in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries may be termed "Norwegian populism". According to Lauglo<sup>1</sup> populism implied "defence of small communities and their way of life, participatory democracy, rejection of the market forces of urban industrial capitalism, opposition to Norwegian membership in the European Common Market (later The European Union), and general opposition to technocratic expertise". In terms of parliamentary political influence populism has meant power for the districts more than for the capital area and other urban centres. This power has been strong enough to refuse membership in the European Union in two successive referendums (1972 and 1994).

Until the 1970s the population was very homogenous. Except for the small Sami minority in the North, all three million Norwegians used the same language. A shifting percentage (20–15) had

chosen New Norwegian<sup>2</sup> as their primary written version of the mother tongue. However, all students had to learn writing both versions of Norwegian. 96% were baptised at birth and became automatically members of the State Lutheran Church. The State Norwegian Broadcasting had a monopoly and applied a consistent "education policy" in its programmes, based in populist and equity values.

Implied in Norwegian populism is a strong ideology of equality. The historical absence of aristocratic values and symbols, the relatively equal material or living conditions and the synthesised influence of Lutheran religion and socialist values, have made equity an evident political aim, manifested in legally and constitutional equal rights to essential goods, like health services, education, work and participation in decision making at all levels and in all aspects of social life. Welfare policies have consequently aimed at making access to such goods independent of geography, gender, ethnicity, social status and any aspect of personal disability. As an example of equity in terms of geography and ethnicity the Sami minority in the North of the country can be taken. Although historically they had to struggle for their rights, today this small minority (ca 35000) has accept for public / majority support of their own language, own schools, textbooks in addition to their regular welfare state rights. An example from the field of education is that all special schools (for any sort of disability) are abolished. All children are integrated in their regular local school.

An absolute precondition for the impressive welfare state achievements after the WW II has

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<sup>1</sup> Lauglo J. (1998: 31–32): "Populism and Education in Norway", in Tjeldvoll A. (Ed.) (1998) *Education and the Scandinavian Welfare State in the Year 2000*. New York: Garland Publishing.

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<sup>2</sup> *New Norwegian* – was established in late 19<sup>th</sup> Century in order to have a more national language, rooted in spoken dialects in the countryside connecting to Old Norse (Icelandic). It confronted the majority language, strongly influenced by Danish.

been a steady economic growth. The War itself gave rise to dynamic economic development. The US Marshall-Plan aid programme to Western Europe after the war was a dramatic vitamin injection to Norwegian business and working communities. From 1965 the historically poorest Scandinavian country was economically blessed by the finding of oil and gas off its shores. While neighbouring countries had to face tough recessions in the 80s and 90s, Norway had a steady economic growth. At the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century it was one of the very few countries in the world without national debts. The establishment of the Oil Fund as an indication of national economic surplus was set aside to guarantee the welfare state in a future when the oil and gas have gone.

### **The current context: ideological and political changes**

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the Norwegian legacies are challenged. The golden age of the welfare state may soon be an event of the past. Several indications are seen of a “modernisation” along lines different from Norwegian populist traditions. The movements towards a global market economy are increasingly stronger, and are simultaneously activating forces in favour and against such developments. Although the pleasant national economic situation caused by the oil / off shore industry have calmed tensions. The country can afford to behave contrary to what is required by the international competition. For instance the districts still have sufficient power to keep up a highly subsidised agriculture. The Labour Party presently in government position (June 2001) is increasing its rhetoric in favour of the EU, and in its budget proposal to Parliament it is trying to reduce subsidies for the Norwegian farmers.

During the 1990s a deregulation policy supported by the Conservatives, the Labour and the Progressivists<sup>3</sup> successfully reduced state control in several areas, and opened for more entrepreneurial business patterns. These policies together with a booming economy in the late 1990s made it possible for a class of *Nouveau Riches* to develop. A greater divide between rich and poor in Norway has developed. This division is reinforced by another, by many seen as strange phenomenon, the fact that a rich state is actually reducing welfare benefits – “in order not to risk inflation and risky heating of the economy” – according to the Minister of Finance (May 2001). Deregulation, reduced state support, privatisation of previous public services and the new rich groups are making Norway more of a distinct class society than before.

The last decades’ moderation line of the trade unions, accepting slower wage increases, was fundamental to safeguard the economy and keeping up the welfare model. The recent economic development may lead to a break with this line. Also, deregulation and the changed character of production (e. g. ICT) may change the traditionally very influential role of the trade unions. Certain segments of employees may increasingly not see unionising as in their favour. Collectivity and solidarity values seem to be weakened. The population seems to be adapting a general accept of increasing inequity, for instance, the super-salaries “of international standard” to an increasing number of Norwegian CEOs.

There are indications of a change of the general political culture. Frequently people express distrust to politicians – in the newspapers’ Letter to the Editor the label of “politician disgust”

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<sup>3</sup> The Progressivist Party is the extreme right wing party in the Parliament. During the Fall of 2001 polls showed that it had the highest support of all parties.

is often applied. Recently voting ratio at general elections has been rather low. The political parties report record low numbers of members. The parties' political meetings at all levels as a regular part of local political life are diminishing. More than the traditional broad popular participation in the political processes, it is now the party leaders' debates and performances in the media, which are influencing the polls. Moreover, the political landscape is changing. The Conservative Party is growing most rapidly in popularity, and was on a recent poll the largest political party in the country. The social democratic Labour Party was left with its lowest poll since 1924 – 22%.

From the 1970s there has been a continuing small, but significant immigration from especially Asian countries, gradually weakening the Norwegian homogeneity. Immigrants accounted for 5,5 percent of the population in 1998, 3,6 percent of the population are non-western immigrants, predominantly from Pakistan, Iraq and Ex-Yugoslavia. Most non-western immigrants live in the capital region, accounting for 13 percent of the population in the Capital<sup>4</sup>. However, an even moderate immigration has affected a more multicultural Norway. A policy line of inclusion has been attempted, but a majority of the non-western immigrants are poor, scarcely-educated Asian Muslims, bringing with them a culture widely different from both populist and modern Norwegian values. Negative attitudes and reactions towards the immigrants among ordinary Norwegians, have been fertile ground for right wing political movements. At the same time the immigrant labour force is badly needed. Already many of them are manning positions

not attractive by the Norwegians. Recently a governmental body has suggested increased immigration of nurses from the Philippines in order to solve crises within institutions for elderly and ill people.

Summarised Norway's political, economic and social context at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century is characterised by movements towards an international policy agenda, whilst attempting to preserve Norwegian core values and traditions.

## **Educational consequences**

### *Governance and funding*

Until the mid-1980s Norwegian education was strongly centralised. The Ministry of Education was responsible for the detailed national curricula, examinations, earmarked funding, and for innovation and experimentation in curriculum and methods development. Local responsibilities were mainly for appointment of teachers and the administrative running of schools. As part of the general deregulation trends in the two last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century attempts at decentralisation also occurred in the education sector. A conscious policy of combined centralisation and decentralisation developed.

Centrally developed national curricula were actually strengthened, emphasising aims and objectives for Norwegian education. In 1997 a common national curriculum for both primary, lower and upper secondary school, as well as adult education, was introduced. On the other hand, the local levels were encouraged to be innovative in finding effective ways of implementing the curriculum. The previous detailed regulations of how to implement the curriculum were abolished. The municipalities were given considerably more responsibilities for compulsory education, primary and lower secondary school

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<sup>4</sup> Bjertnæs M. K. (2000): *Innvandring og innvandrere 2000* (Immigration and immigrants 2000) Oslo: Statistics Norway.

(9 years – ages 7–15 till 1998, 10 years from autumn 1998 – ages 6–15). A parallel transfer of responsibility took place for the upper secondary schools – from the Ministry to the counties.

An important change in the funding of education occurred when the Ministry started to give the municipalities lump sum funding. The municipality administration now got an opportunity of using the state support more flexibly, stressing different aspects of educational needs as assessed by local authorities. The change was generally much welcomed by the municipalities, who had for a long time seen the education sector as “an autonomous state sector” within the municipality, more or less outside local control. The teacher unions, on the other hand, strongly opposed the change. They saw it as a first step of breakdown of a comprehensive school of the same quality wherever located in the country. It was also seen as a step in taking more local political control over the teaching profession. The deregulation policies within the education sector in the 1990s generally reduced the influence of the unions, but teacher unions in Norway are still strong compared to other countries.

Private schooling has always been marginal in Norway, and strongly opposed by the social democrats, the left parties and the Centre Party. One reason was that the public school was seen as a cultural cornerstone in even the smallest communities in the scattered populated countryside. By the year 2000, 209 Norwegian primary and secondary schools are financed and run according to a special law for private schooling. For the compulsory years of schooling, this represents only 1,6 percent of schoolchildren. In financial terms there are no private schools at all. All schools accepted to be run by non-public bodies have to be approved by the Ministry in terms of their rationale, curriculum and organisation. When approved they are eligible for

85 percent state support for their running expenses. In principle schools can be run on one hundred percent private funding. However, if established for Norwegian citizen, the curriculum and organisation would have to be approved by the Ministry.

Private schools with public funding in Norway mainly fall into two groups. Firstly, and most frequently, there are the schools accepted on religious reasons. These are organised by specific religious groups found both within and, more frequently, outside the State Church. Recently there has been a moderate growth of such schools, threatening the existence of the local public school in some small communities. There are reasons to assume that this growth is caused not only by the special religious concerns, but also from an increasing distrust in the general quality of the public school. Religious schools also tend to have better academic achievements. The other main criteria for being accepted as a private school with public funding is pedagogical. Groups of parents wishing a school with a pedagogy principally different from the regular public school may succeed in having their application accepted by the Ministry. In general this is very difficult, since a main idea of the Norwegian model of schooling is that next to any sort of pedagogical principles are allowed to be applied, as long as one is working towards the stated aims of the school. In practice this policy has resulted in accepting as private, only these schools that for a long time have got a general accept of being “pedagogically different”; the Waldorf / Steiner schools and the Montessori schools. On the upper secondary level an increasing number of fee-paying private schools have been established. These are most frequently addressing the academic branches, and often established to meet a demand by students interested in improving their grades in order to be more competitive for

popular universities and study programmes. These schools as well as a growing number of private higher education institutions are profit-based. In general there is a tendency in the direction of more private schooling in Norway, both under the public funding model, and mainly tuition-based.

The present attempts to establish new steering models within the education system seem to indicate that the country may be “trapped” between two different philosophies. Local autonomy and increased accountability are expressed in measures like management by objectives and lump sum funding. These measures have been accompanied by in service training and “attitude campaigns” with a humanist-psychological orientation. It has been assumed that when local administrators, principals and teachers were informed properly and rationally about the new policies, they would use their autonomy to actively implement the policies and try to meet the objectives, without any external control measures. Suggestions about external evaluation of practices and goal achievement have been met by resistance, and have been taken as distrust of teachers’ professionalism. For Norwegian national education policies the present lack of an adequate monitoring and control mechanism is a dilemma. Frequent publicised examples of low quality in the comprehensive school as well as within teacher training make more and more stakeholders ask critical questions about accountability.

In terms of governance and funding of education, Norway in one sense seems to be following international mainstream. There is an attempt at increased central efficiency in making aims and goals more clear and related to the overall economical needs of the country. There is decentralisation in the form of localising responsibility for implementation and fine-tuning of

strategies and budgets to reach the national goals. On the other hand, traditional populist culture and traditional teacher autonomy may make actual implementation quite uncertain. So far the country does not seem to have found the proper measures of control and accountability of achievements. The dilemma may become increasingly more visible if more stakeholders show their dissatisfaction with the “products” of public schooling, and start voting by their feet – asking for private solutions, and being willing to pay for them.

### *Structural reforms*

The 1990s have been the most thorough reform period in the history of Norwegian education, affecting nearly all sides and levels of education. These reforms affected the compulsory school which in 1997 became 10 years, with obligatory admission of six year olds; introduced a national curriculum plan for primary, secondary and adult education (L97); restructured upper secondary education, and gave everyone graduating from lower secondary the statutory right to attend three years of schooling at the upper secondary level (R94).

Higher education institutions have been both centralised and differentiated in regional centres, with higher education programmes and courses co-ordinated through the *Network Norway*. More recently, a new debate as to the future development of higher education was initiated, through a national report on higher education labelled *Freedom with Responsibility*<sup>5</sup>. One of the most debated and publicised suggestions from the national committee concerns the restructuring of the university degree system to Anglo-

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<sup>5</sup> KUF (2000) *Freedom with Responsibility. On higher education and research in Norway*. Oslo: Summary of NOU 2000: 14.

Saxon degrees and hence shorten the time spent to obtain a certain degree. Focus is also put on making universities more accountable to economic and societal needs of relevant educated manpower and research, and on the quality of the services offered by higher education institutions<sup>6</sup>. The role of higher education is also seen in light on a life-long learning perspective, both for individual benefit and for the need of the “knowledge economy”.

Policy on life-long learning and adult education was initiated in 1997 with the so-called Competence Reform, emphasising opening up upper secondary and higher education for adult students with non-formal qualification<sup>7</sup>. Amongst other things, the reform aimed at giving all adults without primary and secondary education the opportunity to get these qualifications, and to ensure the right to study leave for all. The reform also emphasised development of “joint projects between the workplace and the providers of learning” through use of distance learning and in-service training programmes. The responsibility for implementing the reform was to be shared between the employee and employer organisations, and the government. This is still an unsolved issue, predominantly focusing on who should pay the bill.

The impetus for the reforms in education was, as in most other countries, a fear that the knowledge and competencies of Norwegians were not good enough in the global, knowledge economy with increasing competition and rapid technological changes. As such, the argumentation in many ways is in line with standard educational policy rhetoric from the 1980s and 90s, as seen for instance in UK or USA. However, raising

standards is not the only goal for education in Norway. With regards to the school’s function in society a twofold perspective is expressed. Education is supposed to promote equity in society, by ensuring equal rights to education for all. On the other hand, improvement of educational standards is claimed to be “the guiding principle for the 1990s (...) in order to respond to the needs and requirements of the international community and promote innovation”<sup>8</sup>. This ‘quality of equality’ rationale of education might be said to be an attempt to consolidate “the former social democratic policy of solidarity and the recent adaptation to an international market and competitiveness situation”<sup>9</sup>.

However, one of the most difficult issues in Norwegian education today, and potentially the most harming to the quality of education, is the recruitment to, and quality of, teacher training. Moreover, an increasing number of teachers do not have formal teaching qualifications, now accounting for 6 percent of all teachers in primary and secondary education. This is a particular problem in the northern part of Norway, and especially for the natural science subjects. Recruitment to teacher education has been slow in the 1990s. The number of applicants to teacher training colleges was reduced with more than one-third from 1996 to 1998<sup>10</sup>. In terms of the quality, a few shocking cases have been publicised over the last few years, reporting that more than 50 percent of teacher students fail in core

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<sup>8</sup> KUF (1996): *The Development of Education 1994–96, Norway*. Oslo: [http:// www.dep.no/kuf/publ/higed](http://www.dep.no/kuf/publ/higed)

<sup>9</sup> Tjeldvoll A. (1998: 18): “Quality of Equality? Scandinavian Education Towards the Year 2000”. Tjeldvoll A. (Ed.) (1998): *Education and the Scandinavian Welfare State in Year 2000. Equality, Policy, and Reform*. New York: Garland Publishing Inc.

<sup>10</sup> KUF (1999): *...og yrke skal båten bera... Handlingsplan for rekruttering til lærerfaget* (Action plan for recruitment to the teaching profession) St. meld. nr. 12, URL: <http://balder.dep.no/rcpub/99-00/stmeld/12/>

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<sup>6</sup> Welle-Strand A. (2000).

<sup>7</sup> KUF (1997a): *Kompetansereformen* (The Competence Reform) St meld nr. 42, URL: [http:// balder.dep.no/repub/97-98/stmeld/42/](http://balder.dep.no/repub/97-98/stmeld/42/)

subjects such as Norwegian. The background for the decline of the teaching professions is often linked to the general situation on the labour market. The 1990s have been a prosperous time in Norway, and the condition on the labour market so good that it has been fairly easy to get a job. Demand of workers has pushed salaries up in the private sector. The public sector, and especially education, has not had the same salary increase. This situation has contributed to the difficult situation Norway now experiences. The government has looked into the problem, and offered teachers a substantial salary increase in 2000. However, there is considerable doubt whether this will increase the quality of Norwegian primary and secondary education.

### *Curriculum traditions and the debate on values*

Concerning curriculum traditions, Norwegian compulsory education, particularly at the primary level, has been child-centred and progressivist, emphasising personal growth as the most important educational aim. However, recently “a main change from the previous national curricula the present emphasis is on *content*, seen as a rehabilitation of basic *knowledge*”<sup>11</sup>. The current national curriculum for compulsory education, the L97, consists of the subjects: religious instruction, Norwegian, mathematics, English, civics / social studies, natural sciences, music, arts & crafts, physical education, home economics and optional subjects. The two subjects with most overall time allocation is Norwegian and mathematics<sup>12</sup>. At the primary level local adaptation of the curriculum is a guiding

principle, where as on the secondary level, centrally defined subject-matter become more dominant<sup>13</sup>. Even though local adaptation of the curriculum is still claimed to be a fundamental principle, one may question this in light of the immensely detailed prescriptions on learning content, materials and pedagogy in the “subject part” of the curriculum plan. However, despite a stronger emphasis on core subjects, the progressivist tradition is still maintained, reflecting a certain duality of focus. Elements in the curriculum plan such as childrens’ responsibility for their own learning, learning to learn, the role of play and individually motivated activities, reflect the progressivist inheritance. A particular pedagogical means required after 1997 was “project work”. This was seen as a unique tool of creating motivation, participation, co-operation and learning of important parts of an exploding body of knowledge. The merging of ideas in the curriculum plan reflects the overall, and highly ambitious, aim for Norwegian education creating the multi-competent ‘integrated human being’.

A particularly hot debate in Norwegian education and specifically the curriculum, was the re-introduction of mandatory religious instruction in the compulsory school. The subject, ‘Christian Knowledge, Religious and Ethical Education’, has been heavily criticised from various groups, not least from the Muslim community. Even though the subject includes knowledge about other religions, the main focus is on Christian faith and the Evangelical-Lutheran church, because, the argument goes, this is a significant part of Norway’s cultural inheritance.

In upper secondary education, the general academic schools traditionally qualified for further studies, whereas the vocational schools prepared for work. However, with the Reform 94,

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<sup>11</sup> Tjeldvoll (1998: 12).

<sup>12</sup> KUF (1997b: 81): *Læreplanverket for den 10-årige Grunnskolen*. (The Curriculum plan for primary and lower secondary education) Oslo.

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<sup>13</sup> KUF (1997b: 68).

this differentiation was deferred, by granting students from vocational courses a certificate of 'general matriculation standard' for entry to higher education. Moreover, for the vocational part of secondary schooling, two new trends are visible. More importance is to be given to training at workplaces, through the apprenticeship system. Simultaneously, the time in vocational schooling is to be reduced, and the organisational differentiation between different vocational branches is being delayed to the second year. While earlier there was a choice of 109 different branches (in the first year of the secondary vocational school in Norway), the number has now been reduced to 13. In the first year the main concentration will be, instead, on general academic subjects, with the emphasis on an optimal broad knowledge base for later specialisation, retraining and lifelong education. The latter emphasis points in the direction of an academic drift in upper secondary education. For a learner who is not particularly interested in academic subjects, the new stress on academic knowledge might create a serious motivation problem.

### *Participation and equality*

Norway has always been committed to equality as a social and educational policy, pinpointed in the unity (comprehensive) school principle dating back to the 1920s. The unity or comprehensive school principle claims access to and inclusion of all children into the public school system, a common content and a common learning experience for all, regardless of economic, social, cultural and geographic origins, and regardless of gender and abilities. Alongside with the comprehensive principle, the principle of individually adapted teaching for all children, taking into account abilities and other preconditions, is a statutory right in the Education Law of 1998.

This principle means that all sides of the educational provision, curriculum, teaching, materials, shall be organised having in mind individual preconditions and needs. These two principles are different sides to the equality policy – taking into account both the equal opportunities side, as well as emphasising affirmative action for groups and individuals with the aim of creating equality of outcomes. This is expressed in the national curriculum plan as: "Education shall be adapted to the individual. Equality of outcomes is created through diversity of efforts directed at the individual students"<sup>14</sup>.

According to Hansen<sup>15</sup> "Many of Norway's strongest efforts towards equality now concern equality between genders". Gender equality in education has to be seen related to the active measures taken to ensure equality between genders in Norwegian society, and the way equal education has been conceptualised as an important measure to promote equality in society through education. This policy is in line with a general emphasis in the Norwegian political tradition of using public education as a primary means to ensure equitable distribution and social justice<sup>16</sup>.

The history of gender equality in education commenced in the early 1880s, when women were given right to take upper secondary exams and admittance to the university, establishing equal rights of admittance to education at all levels. In the 1950s, legislation established that the same subjects, curriculum and teaching should be offered to all pupils, regardless of gender. In the 1970s a more active approach to pro-

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<sup>14</sup> KUF (1997b: 15).

<sup>15</sup> Hansen G. M. (1996: 10): *A Discussion of Equality in Norwegian Schools*. Paper presented at the 40<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Comparative and International Education Society, March 6–10, 1996, Williamsburg, Virginia.

<sup>16</sup> Tjeldvoll 1998.

mote gender equality was sought, amongst other measures, in recruitment to upper secondary and higher education. The active approach was also furthered in the 1987 National Curriculum. At present time, promoting equality between genders is not particularly emphasised in the aims for education as presented in the Law of Primary and Secondary Education of 1998<sup>17</sup>. It is stated that education shall promote “human equity and equality”<sup>18</sup>. However, the tradition of emphasising gender equality in education is stated in the National Curriculum of 1997 as a guiding principle. Here it is stated that education shall contribute to assuring that both sexes have the same rights, duties and conditions in education, in the family and world of work, and in other spheres of society<sup>19</sup>. Moreover, that primary education shall prepare children for future work in accordance to their interests and abilities, not according to traditional sex-roles, and as such stimulate for equality in choices of professions and further education. How is this ambitious policy reflected in practice?

First of all, in terms of participation, education beyond compulsory levels has to a large extent become a female arena, and in 1995 for the first time in history were there enrolled more women than men in higher education. Today 93 percent of young women have an upper secondary education. 31 percent of 25–34 year old women have a college / university education, compared to 24 percent of men in the same cohort. Only USA has a larger proportion of women (aged 25–64) with higher education than Norway, and both countries are far exceeding

the levels of most OECD countries. The same is the case in upper secondary education<sup>20</sup>.

Secondly, are women’s chosen areas of study consistent with the aim of promoting non-traditional career choices? In 1996, in upper secondary schools, general academic study programmes were the most frequent area of study for both genders, accounting for almost 60 percent of female students, and 45 percent of male students. Amongst the vocational study programmes in upper secondary education, 19 percent of females were enrolled in health and social education, compared to 1,8 percent males, whereas 36 percent males were enrolled in crafts and industry programmes, compared to 2,5 percent females<sup>21</sup>.

In terms of areas of study in higher education, females counted for over 80 percent of all graduates studying ‘public health’ at lower (2 years) and medium levels (4 years) of higher education, and approximately 45 percent at masters level and above (5 years or more). Females accounted for more than 60 percent of graduates from educational studies and teacher training at all levels. Between 50–60 percent of graduates in the category ‘commercial, business, administration, social science and law’ were women. In the natural sciences and engineering, females counted for 35 percent of graduates at the lower level, 25 percent at medium levels and 30 percent of women at the highest level, with 5 years of higher education or more (numbers are from the years 1994/1995).

These numbers visualise that areas of study in upper secondary and higher education still

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<sup>17</sup> KUF (1998): *Lov om grunnskolen og den videregående opplæringa* (Act on Primary and Secondary Education). URL: <http://www.lovdatab.no/all/nl-19980717-061.html>

<sup>18</sup> KUF (1998).

<sup>19</sup> KUF (1997).

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<sup>20</sup> Statistics Norway (2000): *Utdanningsindikatorer, OECD, skoleåret 1997/98* (Education indicators, OECD, year 1997/98) URL <http://www.ssb.no/emner/04/utind/>

<sup>21</sup> Statistics Norway (1999), *Women and men in Norway 1998*, URL: [http://www.ssb.no/cmncr/00/02/10/wmnorway/content.shtml#P24\\_285](http://www.ssb.no/cmncr/00/02/10/wmnorway/content.shtml#P24_285)

confirm to a traditional sex-role pattern. Women's career choices are the health and social professions, education, and other traditional female occupations, whereas men dominate crafts and industry at secondary level, and natural science and technology at tertiary level.

As such, education beyond compulsory levels has become a largely female arena, although females still choose 'traditionally' to a far extent. But has equality in educational access and success lead to equality in family and working life, which was also a stated aim for the equality policies in education? Much evidence suggests that this is not the case, and hence 'equal pay' is the most important fight for Norwegian feminists. The fact remains that females in general receive lower salaries than men do, and that so-called female occupations as education and health care professions, has not had the same level of salary increase as more male dominant professions. In terms of family life, research suggests that women now suffer under 'double work'. This means that in addition to being active in working life, women also carries the largest burden of unpaid work at home, such as taking care of children and housework. Quite a few Norwegian women work part-time, especially low paid health care professionals. A controversial issue in Norway the last few years was the introduction of a new welfare benefit – the so-called "cash-support" to families with children under three years as a substitute for kindergarten funding. This policy was introduced by the Christian / centre / liberal coalition government in 1998, and meant that families could choose to stay home with children and receive cash support, or use the same money for kindergarten. One result has been that women with medium level education in typically low-paid professions such as healthcare choose to stay home, leading to a crisis in the public health system due to lack of workers. On

the other side, some women do find that Norway's equality culture with many highly educated women leads to restricted freedom for those who choose the 'traditional pathway', and that this choice in certain parts of society will be socially stigmatising.

In general, Norway's efforts to increase equality in education in terms of access and success of women have been very successful. However, the attempt at increasing gender equality in society through education still has not been affected for the larger part of women.

### **Dilemmas of double talk in Norwegian education**

As seen in the previous sections, a recurrent theme in Norwegian education is that two or more seemingly contrasting aims and methods, are emphasised in the policy documents. It seems that the education authorities does not have a clear idea about what type of education Norway should have, or perhaps closer to the truth, they attempt to accommodate many stakeholders' opinions in the same policy document. Whatever the reason, since policies generally are somewhat blurry, it is reasonable to assume that implementing these contrastive policies in educational institutions might be difficult, as implementation often requires clarity in policy formulation. Which potential controversies are visible in Norwegian education policy today? The comprehensive principle and individually adapted education can represent one such contrast. Interrelated is the potential contrast between equality and quality as aims for education. Child-centred pedagogy and focus on transmission of core subjects is another issue. In terms of governance, the tensions between centralisation and decentralisation is unsolved, as when the curriculum is to be determined locally but selected

centrally. In private education, schools are to be independent and being alternatives to public schools, at the same time as they must confirm to the national curriculum. There are many of these potential controversies. A few of them will be discussed somewhat closer.

The statutory principle of adapting education to local and individual needs within the comprehensive school, is one of these dualisms. The Norwegian emphasis on a comprehensive school for all children focuses on a common learning experiences and common learning content for all. The national curriculum plan draws up quite in detail the learning content all children should be exposed to through the compulsory years of schooling. At the same time, individually adapted education is a statutory right, and a fundamental principle in the curriculum. In essence, this is expressed in the plan as an “equal and adapted education in a common school based on a common curriculum plan”<sup>22</sup>. One measure to introduce this is the use of “individual curriculum plans” for children with special needs, which are supposed to include aims, content, teaching methods, and be evaluated continually. However, these curriculum plans are supposed to be within the framework of the national curriculum, and the individually adapted education is supposed to be organised and carried out within the normal class and school environment. Another debated issue concerns the relationship between adapted education and assessment of the students, when assessment in general is supposed to be in accordance with the aims put up in the national curriculum.

In terms of local adaptation of the national curriculum, a balance is struck according to levels of schooling – the curriculum is more locally oriented at lower levels, with increasing focus

on common learning content at higher levels. In terms of local control of schools, the fundamental steering principle, the mere existence of a detailed national curriculum plan, individual and school evaluation, challenges the local superiority of schools.

What can be the reasons for this double talk? In speculating over potential reasons, the national economic situation, the position and role of teachers, and the Norwegian policy tradition seem to be probable causes. In terms of the economy, Norway’s fortunate situation of economic growth has made it possible to maintain a larger public sector, use more resources on education, and focus on other aspects of schooling than mere production of human capital. At the same time, the government in its policies seems to be aware that the present economic situation dependent upon the oil reserves, in the future will change as the oil wells run dry. To develop a new technology-based economy is therefore a long-term aim. Preoccupation with education, and basing this interest on the future needs of the economy, has to a larger extent than before emerged in Norwegian education policy.

In terms of the teachers’ role and position, Norwegian teachers and teacher organisations have been strongly influential in both developing and maintaining Norwegian education. The tradition of progressivism has had a stronghold in the teacher organisations. Likewise the autonomy of the teachers has never been questioned. To disregard teachers concern and stakes in new reforms and policies can lead to immense difficulties in the implementation. The case of teachers’ powers also illustrates another Norwegian trait, concerning the policy formulation process.

In Norway, with its democratic tradition, the policy formulation process is based on an elaborate procedure of “hearings”. The ministry for-

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<sup>22</sup> KUF (1997b).

mulates a policy, which is usually based on a national report. The representatives in the committees who make these reports to inform policy making, always represent different political groups, is regionally representative, represent important stakeholders, which often makes the reports talking with numerous voices. After the policy is made, all affected parties in the whole country can make additional recommendations for changes. In general the Norwegian policy tradition emphasises consensus between parties for policies to be implemented smoothly. As a result quite a few policy documents and curricula, has a tendency of being “a bit of everything”.

Contemporary Norwegian educational policies are marked by the dilemmas of ‘double talk’, where education is supposed to affect seemingly contradictory purposes. Governance and responsibility for education are marked by an unresol-

ved tension between central and local control, public and private control and political and professional control, and the increasing difficulties of sustaining a dialogue based and consensus-oriented approach to educational policymaking. The Norwegian society at large, however, is marked by transitional tendencies, ideologically, economically, politically and socially. Ideologically, both urban socialist values and rural populist values have been intertwined in the Norwegian social-democratic welfare society. Now, globalisation (or a global awareness) and a new economic climate challenges these legacies. However, an affluent economy does at the moment smooth the tensions. Hence, change challenges for Norwegian education may not turn dramatic until the oil economy is drying up, and the country is forced to take education policies more forcefully in human capital direction, like Sweden (without oil) already is doing.

## AR NORVERGIJA TOLSTA NUO POPULISTINIO ŠVIETIMO

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### Santrauka

Straipsnyje nagrinėjama itin aktuali šių laikų švietimo problema – pasaulyje stiprėjanti internacionalizacija ir tradicinių nacionalinių vertybių išsaugojimas. Autoriai aptaria per pastarąjį dešimtmetį Norvegijoje įvykusius ideologinius prieštaračius. Kartu įžvelgia didėjančią prieštaračių tarp tarptautinių globalizacijos tendencijų ir norvegų tautos puoselėjamų vertybių bei tradicijų išlaikymo. Šalia analizuoja ir savo šalyje vykusios švie-

timo reformos pranašumus ir trūkumus. Remiantis išsamia reformos analize, daroma išvada, kad ekonomiškai stipri šalis gali laikinai atremti globalizacijos iššūkius. Tačiau ilgainiui šie prieštaračiai gali stiprėti ir tada šalis gali būti verčiama paklusti pasaulinėms švietimo raidos tendencijoms. Taigi straipsnyje keliamos problemos yra aktualios daugelio šalių švietimo reformų strategams.

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