Evolution of the Nordic VET systems – path dependencies and reorientations

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Evolution of the Nordic VET systems – path dependencies and reorientations

- Introduction:
- research situation typologies of VET, and skill formation systems
- Clear and persistent differences between these systems
- How have they been formed?
- Path dependency and critical junctures – issues and clarifications
- Initial conditions, social democracy and liberalization in Denmark Sweden, Finland and Norway
- Conclusions
Research situation

- Antikainen (2006): a Nordic model of education exists with equity, participation, and welfare as the major goals.
- The publicly funded comprehensive school system is the major institutional form.
- Still, the Nordic countries are at the top of the social investment agenda.
- The social democratic model.
Sweden and Denmark heavily researched as archetypal cases
1970: Sweden as THE social democratic comprehensive school model
2000– Denmark as THE apprenticeship model country
Finland and Norwegian VET system less researched
Nordic cross-national comparative study of VET
different education and training systems that appear to be stable in the long-run

“skill formation system”: self-reinforcing configuration of institutions at the intersection between labor markets and education and training systems

Focus on VET and its relation to the educational system

Role of the state vs. private actors (households, market) and intermediate organizations (employers/employees) in provision and financing of education
### Skill formation systems in advanced industrial societies

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<th>Public commitment</th>
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<th>Collective skill formation system</th>
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<td>Involvement of firms in initial vocational training</td>
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Trampusch and Busemeyer (2012;12)
VET comparisons in international context

Source: Busemeyer and Iversen (2012)
## Skill formation systems in advanced industrial societies

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Collective skill formation system

- Employers involved in the provision and administration of VET
- Intermediary associations (employers’ associations and – to varying degree – trade unions) involved in administration and reform of system
- National standards
- VET usually organized in the form of dual (apprenticeship) training, combining school– and workplace training
Statist skill formation system

- The State strongly committed to the provision and administration of VET as a viable alternative to general education and academic higher education.
- Intermediary association (employer) involvement is limited.
- National standards supplemented by systematic integration of VET with active youth labour market policies and training.
- Systematic integration of VET into comprehensive school-based forms.
- Strong linkages to higher education.
Liberal skill formation system

- Skill formation is primarily provided though the market and the general education system
- Focus on generic education and general skills
- VET tracks often regarded as inferior
- Combines low level of state comittment in VET with low levels of firm involvement
Path dependency – basic patterns

- Path initiation and path formation
- Feedback effects
- Increasing return
- Huge initiation costs, strong learning effects, adjustments and stabilization
- Main form of change: Critical junctures
- path formation – critical juncture – path – restabilization
- but also more continuous forms of change:
- drift and conversion of existing institutions

- The significance of coalitions of actors and mutually reinforcing constellations
Historical trajectory: Beginning and sequence

1860

Liberal phase

1945

Social democratic phase

1990–

Neoliberal phase
Point of departure:

Economic coordination

Craft survival

Craft decline

Political coalitions

Collective skill formation system

Social democracy

Denmark

Sweden, Norway, Finland

Statist skill formation system
Social democracy

Collective skill formation system

Denmark

Sweden, Norway, Finland

Statist skill formation system

Neo-liberal phase

Path Re-stabilization

Convergence

Path Re-stabilization
Denmark: the survival of apprenticeship

- 1857: Free trade act
- 1862: Guilds abandoned
- 1879: Reorganization of craft interests and coordination
- 1889: law on apprenticeship, reinstating the apprenticeship contract
- 1921: imposition of new quality control arrangements
- 1937/38: institutionalization of corporatist control of apprenticeship inscribed in law.

The strong position of the crafts, small businesses and the farmers cooperative movements created the institutional space for these continuities, weakening state centralization

Productive tensions between the workers and the employers and their organizations

The organizational separation of skilled and unskilled workers into different unions and the skills competition
Denmark: social democratic period

- 1957: New apprentice law expanded the school-based component of VET to complement firm-based training.
- 1958: 10 year folkeskole, old parallel school system transformed.
- 1975: the realskole segment of the lower secondary school abolished.

Social democratic attempts at integrating VET and theoretical tracks at upper secondary level failed.

Instead: Strong build up of VET as a separate policy field.
- State commitment increased.
- General skill component in VET strengthened.
- System diversification, more school-based and short programs developed alongside apprentice training.
- Policies of redistribution subsidizing employers and apprentices established.

The major political parties adapted their preferences and strategies to sustain the logic of firm-based VET.
Denmark III: The neo-liberal turn and the politics of flexibilization:

- Modularization or liberalization breaching older occupational profiles
- Individualization of training paths over the life course
- Dismantling of traditional boundaries
- Between the vocational and academic parts, between initial and continuing VET, between VET and higher education
- Between youth and adults,
- Between the employed and the unemployed
- Persistent tensions between the pragmatics of these policies and the strength of established occupational demarcations
- Increasing complexity and increasing dropout rates
Sweden: Initial phase

- late but swift industrialization process
- Industrialized before democratization
- A powerful bureaucratic state with constitutional veto points and an intact conservative bloc hampered educational reform
- Weak craft sector
- smaller Swedish firms overshadowed by larger enterprises.
- Development of industrial unions
- 1890: contours of a system for vocational education could be detected, characterised by a multitude of private, municipal and State organisers
- Difficult to reach agreement on the usefulness of apprenticeship or school-based practical or vocational educations.
Sweden: social democratic phase:

- Long-term project: establishing the principle of comprehensive education in all sectors of the education system
  - 1950s: experiments and indecisiveness
- Preferences of the business community shifting towards generalist VET schooling supplemented with firm-specific on-the-job training
- 1977: comprehensivization of higher education
- Access to higher education from VET increased
- 1980: a statist system formed. Attempts to activate employers failed
Sweden II: Neoliberal phase:

- Decentralization
- Three year programs
- Revitalization of school–enterprise ties
- The formation of new apprenticeship schemes
- But – new apprenticeships are not governed by the social partners
- No branch-specific agreements on skill formation
- School–based training remains the fundamental component
- Attempt to create a hybrid model in which school–based training is complemented with practical training in the firm (school–organized)?
- Some measure of apprenticeships.
Finland: Initial conditions:

- an agrarian dominated social formation
- small industrial core
- a marginal position for the crafts and small businesses.
- The emerging VET system formed without significant connections to craft traditions.
- a product of (large) export industries where the development of the agricultural sector and the modernization of industry merged, with the interest of socializing a labour force from rural areas.
Finland – social democratic phase

- 1958: Law for the provision of VET schools and VET study places
- Employers not obliged to take greater responsibility for the training of newcomers to their industrial field (state responsibility)
- Vocational school was perceived as workers’ own school.
- Weak linkages to higher education
- 1968 the School Systems Act (comprehensivization of lower upper secondary education)
- The reforms in secondary education followed the Swedish trajectory.
- 1968: apprentice law conforming the position of apprenticeship as a minor route
Finland: Neo–liberal phase school–based diversification

- 1992: New apprentice act was launched
- 1994: Vocational Qualifications Act
- 1996: Youth under 24 years obliged to participate in education or an apprenticeship training Programme.
- 1998: Act on Vocational Adult Education

- 2001: the structure and curricula of vocational education renewed
- the number of vocational qualifications and study programs significantly reduced
- on–the–job learning (work–related learning) introduced.
- All initial vocational qualifications extended to consist of three year programs
- The dominant VET model is school–based
- no dead ends between different levels of education
- The popularity of vocational education and training has increased
- Decentralization – decision–making power of local authorities increased.
Norway – initial conditions

- Democratization before industrialization
- Weak position of the crafts
- Small firm dominance
- Laissez faire and Guilds abolished, but apprentice training in the crafts resurrected
- Limited coordination capacity among employers in industry
- Both employers and unions disagreed in training issues
- State not interested

- VET a double periphery between the unitary school and the emerging industrial relation system
- Consistent reform failure
Norway: Social democratic phase

- Increased state intervention

- 1945: Vocational school law
- 1950: Apprentice law
- Forward in all directions
- (slow progress and conflicts)
- 1960: Merger of the «realskole» and the practical school in the lower secondary comprehensive school
- 1975: upper secondary comprehensive school formed,
- Loosely organized and specialized, limited coordination
- apprenticeship merely survived outside
- Conversion of apprenticeship into social policy option?
- No access from VET tracks to higher education
Norway – Neo–liberal phase?

- A peculiar amalgamation of a comprehensive school–based and an apprentice–based system
- High state involvement in financing, administration and monitoring of training in the firm and in the school
- The social partners in an advisory position to the state in apprentice training
- Financial incentives to employers for taking in apprentices combined with social pacts, voluntarism, and freedom of contract
- Considerable space for the firm in recruitment and skill formation practices
- System heavily front–loaded towards youth and youth rights
- Formally modularized but structured by established occupational profiles
- Minimal training provision below these standards (praksisbrev)
- Small vestiges of CVET training and active labour market policies towards adults.
- Weak linkages to mass higher education from VET tracks
Possible lessons from comparisons of Nordic Vet trajectories – organizing learning?

1. Between collective skill formation regimes and statist skill regimes
2. Within statist skill regimes
Conclusion 1

Nordic VET systems seem to develop towards a new convergence
Increased flexibilization and modularization

Statist school–based comprehensive systems are evolving towards the world of work
Apprenticeship and OJT introduced
Increased linkages to higher education
Still considerable differences across countries
Comprehensive systems are comprehensive, and they differ significantly
Conclusion II

- Collective skill formation system(s) diversification, modulariation, more school–based and short programs developed alongside apprentice training
  - still firm–led

- Will the twain (never) meet?
- Is there a discrete choice between systems?
- Can we pick elements we want?
- Can state–led apprenticeship develop providing autonomy for the social partners and the firm in VET?
Thank You!