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## 'THE SECLUDED AND THREATENED UTOPIA'

– transformation of  
Nordic equality politics  
facing global reality

### Introduction

In the Nordic countries, equality became the core aim of political agendas in the end of 1960s. Nordic equality politics started to dominate the welfare discourses also in Finland, where a shift towards Social democratic policies with commitment to ideas of Nordic welfare state boosted implementation of parallel reforms in health, social care and education. In the Finnish education policy, equality referred to social justice, regional or pedagogical equality, and to equal educational opportunities for all. Equality between sexes, however, was subsumed to other societal demands and democratization process in general. Since the 1990s, the market orientation and increased transnational influences in policymaking have challenged the culturally embedded (Nordic) notions of equality and changed its aims towards individual rights in education and work.

**On the other hand**, the agile moves of global industries have revealed paradoxes in the Nordic equality models. The global shifts in the divisions of education and work lead to wider questions about inclusion and exclusion inside equality politics. Have beneficiaries been limited to Nordic citizens only? At which costs and on whose expenses has the equality been created?

**Through case** studies in the fields of vocational and higher education, we analyse the transformations of Nordic equality politics and sex-distinctions since the 1950s until the contemporary days. While the focus is on changing economic and industrial orders, we assume that vocational and higher education policies are important for understanding transformations in adult education. They are contextualized to the political and educational changes in Finland. Even though the differences between Finland and other Nordic countries are remarkable, especially in the historical backgrounds and implementation of equality politics, we aim to point out some shifts and questions common to all Nordic countries. Furthermore, we also raise questions about the Nordic equality politics and sex-distinctions from a planetary perspective.

**The paper** divides into periods of *reconstruction and recovery* (1950s–1960s), *superior Nordic welfare state* (1970s–1990s) and *globalization without solidarity* (2000s–) according to the main economic and societal shifts. All periods cover the major political and educational changes, the nature of equality politics related to sex-distinctions and finally to the questions of planetary perspective. First, we present our theoretical and methodological frame and in the last chapter, we discuss our findings from the Finnish context in relation to the global reality.

## Theoretical and methodological starting points

We contextualise the transformation of equality politics and sex-distinctions into educational and political changes in Fin-

land as a Nordic country. Our analysis is thus embedded in a territory, which in the contemporary political order is recognised as a nation-state. The nation-state as the unit of analysis rests upon the historically structured deposits, which can be identified and mapped (Diamond 1993). The territory Finland represents a small nation, which throughout history has adjusted to the tensions between local and supranational, being dependent on the global economy and sensitive to its fluctuations. Thus, Finland has rather been an object of geopolitics, rather than its subject (Moisio et al 2013). The long history as part of superpower (first Sweden, then Russia) and especially relations with Soviet Union have shaped both the internal politics and external relations.

**Currently**, the membership of the European Union since 1995 and other supranational agencies strongly influence the political and educational agendas in Finland. Since the 1990s, the discourse of international competitiveness have arisen and the contemporary situation where the state operates through market control (Moisio et al 2013) is visible in education and in the rationalities of educational reforms. The shift towards ‘geo-economic’ era suggests the new definition of territory, where the relocalization refers to the network of attachments and connections rather than a bounded piece of land (Cf. Latour 2014; Moisio 2012; Jessop 2007).

**While the aspects** of vocational and higher education have remained rather marginal in analyses on transformation of Nordic adult education, we assume that reflections on equality politics and sex-distinctions in the context of geopolitical conditions and shifts also provide new horizons for adult

education research. Since equality politics and planetary perspective seem actually gain momentum in Finnish educational policy after the World War II, our discussion will continue from the period of reconstruction into industrial welfare state and into the globalized information society of the 2000s.

**In the Nordic** countries, gender equality has since the debates of the 1960s–1970s<sup>2</sup> dominated mainstream conceptions of equality in education and employment. However, we suggest that such approach may be challenged when observing its educational and political dimensions and moral implications in the global context. What are the values promoted in the search for equality and whose equality is at stake? While globalization of industrial and financial capitalism enables rapid changes in division of work and knowledge production (Kershew 2011), moving traditional jobs from Nordic to low-wage countries and pushing cheap immigrant labour-force to Nordic countries, we find it crucial to widen the perspective of equality politics and sex equality into planetary level. According to Graness (2012), the experiences of different contexts should be taken into account while opening the debate on ethical issues with global relevance to an intercultural approach. Following her, we assume that the opening up to traditions, conceptions and wisdom distinctive for the global South may be necessary for scientists and intellectuals in the global North for challenging and updating their self-granted ethical and political assumptions. By widening the context of equality politics, we may trace changing ethos behind and to reflect, how this relates to sex-distinctions in education. Instead of decontextualized and ahistorical observation of numerical or distributive equality, we wish to question the ‘ethical rules of the equality game’. (Radcliffe-Richards 2014.)

**Nordic adult** education – especially in its popular or liberal version – has traditionally focused on issues of equality, justice and democracy in relation to political and social change. It has emphasized participation of all people in social, political and economic life. However, these issues have primarily been defined in the context of nation building or nation-state. One of the crucial concepts in Nordic adult education is folkishness (folkelighet, kansaisuus). (Korsgaard 2011.) It refers to collective self-education, which is rooted in the knowledge, experience and wisdom of the folk inhabiting the Nordic territory. However, another although less recognized concept, which was included both in popular or liberal adult education for rural people and in vocational education for crafts and rural industries, is education for means of livelihood (näring, ehrverv, elinkeino). Again, this concept was tightly

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<sup>2</sup> In Finland, the emphasis commenced to shift towards gender equality somewhat later than in other Nordic countries.

related to promotion of work, occupations and industries rooted in the territory. (Heikkinen 2004.) Commitment to equality, justice, democracy and livelihood among local inhabitants may be justified and even globally constructive. Nevertheless, our hypothesis is that the fixation to Nordicness in the self-perception of adult education may have led to erosion of its potential for developing new, trans-national and planetary conceptions of adult education.

**While educational** policies typically promote reforms by introducing new vocabularies, which legitimize both economic and industrial priorities and educational hierarchies, they also convey certain underlying cultural values. Nowadays the European Union along with other transnational agencies have the hegemony in defining the concepts and policies of education: the vocabulary of commercialisation, competitiveness, marketization and competence-based education has penetrated also the fields of adult education. Furthermore, academization of education and general rise of educational level have created and legitimized global occupational hierarchies, which invites to re-examine equality also from the perspective of transforming distinctions between and inside sexes.

**The discussion** bases mainly on two ongoing researches. The first builds on an oral history project *Forestry Professions in a Changing Society* during 1999–2001, and committee reports from the secondary stage reform of 1970s–80s, which shaped the educational framework of the interviewees. The documents are compared with the policy documents on university reform of 1970s–80s. The second is a case study about implementation of transnational equality politics in Finnish

universities in the 21st century. It analyses documents of gender mainstreaming at transnational and local level and interviews of key actors, who translate them into practice. This is related to discourse analytical reading of policy documents used for legitimizing reforms in vocational education, polytechnics and higher education in beginning of the 2000s.

## Reconstruction and recovery (1950s–1960s)

### Political and educational changes

The projects of nation building, started already before Finnish independence from Russia in 1917, and experienced a heavy collision during the civil war in 1918, gained momentum after World War II. On one hand, the Finnish manufacturing industry had to concentrate on war payments to Soviet Union and on reconstruction of the country. On the other hand, the pressure to inhabit almost half a million refugees from Karelia prolonged the social, political and economic support to small farming and rural industries. The project of agrarian Finland collapsed after the triumph of modernization ideologies in all parties and the political victory of social democrats in 1966.

**Vocational education** maintained its distinctiveness as promoter of industrial sectors and occupational branches. (Heikkinen 2004.) However, initiatives for gathering all vocational education (also at higher institutes) into one 'educational' department (preferably in the ministry of trade and industry) were enforced already during the war. Legislation was prepared about obligation of larger municipalities to provide

vocational education for youth (and obligatory vocational school) and of state to provide central vocational schools in all parts of the country. The law came into force in 1958 and in a few years most municipalities – alone or jointly – had to provide some kind of vocational schooling to their youth, private vocational schools had either to be opened to public or transformed into staff training. However, vocational education policy remained separate and fragmented until 1970s, when all vocational education was assembled under National Board of Vocational Education in ministry of Education. (Heikkinen et al 1999.)

**The struggle** about the educational profile of folk school also continued until late 1960s. The followers of previous farmers' and workers' movements and parties promoted comprehensive school, but differently. To put it simply: while farmers preferred a school with vocational orientation, which would support industries both in urban and rural areas, social-democrats insisted on learned school, which would provide access to academic routes in education. Most representatives from all sectors of vocational education defended strongly separation of vocational and general – whether general or academic – education. Similarly the representatives of academic education fought against changing obligatory comprehensive school, although the five first classes of gymnasium, called middle school, was already becoming more popular than higher classes of folk school. Transition to nine-year comprehensive school was postponed until end of 1960s. (Heikkinen 2011.)

**Academic education** had traditionally been most valued part of education in national and local policy, not only among economic

and cultural elite, but also among farmers and workers. On the other hand, the proponents of vocational education preferred development of alternative routes through vocational schools to higher vocational education (this could have included a vocationally profiled lower classes in gymnasium). Although gymnasia were governed in National School Board in ministry of education, universities were autonomous until comprehensive centralization and unification of education system in 1970s. Demands about taking into account other than academic routes or needs of industry were common since mid of 19th century, but they were ignored: the pressure to regional equality just accelerated expansion of gymnasium and university network all over the country. (Heikkinen 2011.)

### **Nature of equality politics and sex-distinctions**

The social, political and economic heritage of rural landless and working poor – and majority of Finns were in rural industries – characterized equality policy until late 1960s. Scarcity of food, raw materials and finance justified prolongation of self-sufficiency and 'equality in poverty'. The few social subsidies were targeted to most vulnerable and poor groups. Small farmers, rural and urban workers, especially women, joined their efforts for some universal social benefits, such as folk pension, health, maternity and child subsidies. Concerning education, there were no public systems to support access in education beyond folk school. (Uljas 2012.)

**However**, the increased state intervention in industrial and economic policy during World War II, increased rights of labour unions and socialist organizations, together

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with pressure from small and poor farmers, made regional equality as the focus in national and local equality politics. Factories, educational institutes, hospitals, state offices and other public institutes were established in all parts of the country. Systems for regional subsidies to balance economic and social differences between municipalities were created.

**The pre-war** sex-distinctions in work and education were politically enforced after World War II. In the state of scarcity and poverty, attempts to strengthen sex-based division of work in industry and promotion of housewifery were doomed to fail. However, the previous ideals of vocational education, which we have described through education for engineers and nurses as masters and mistresses of the nation, were revitalized. (Lietzen et al 2015.) The domination of big industry, technical and manufacturing industry in the wartime politics and administration – also in vocational education –, was reflected in priorities of vocational education policy. Return of soldiers from the war as well as settlement of refugees, combined with payments of war and reconstruction industry, emphasized employment of men, especially into economically and social-politically crucial sectors. Without demonstrations, women were encouraged to withdraw from those areas. Segregation of women into female-dominated sectors in garment

industry, institutional catering, cleaning and social and health occupations was strengthened, alongside encouragement of staying at home as mother and wife, which for majority of women, however, was not economically possible. (Suoranta 2009; Heikkinen 2011.)

### Planetary perspective

After the World War II, Finland was beside Germany considered guilty for war and had to fight back its political, economic and cultural status in international relations. On the other hand, Finland had to make political treaties about companionship with Soviet Union, which conditioned its relations to other countries. Despite restrictions to political and economic interaction, bilateral trade with Soviet Union was also beneficial for Finnish economy and industries, enabling stable and long-term industrial activity and employment. While the focus was exclusively on promotion of big export industry, the failures of settlement and small farming policies materialized in massive labour migration from rural to urban Finnish areas and to Swedish manufacturing industry. Although promotion of export industry had dominated development of vocational and higher education policies since the end of the 19th century, the focus on strengthening of national industries and employment supported passive and reactive approach to globalization.

**During the 1960s**, progressive, anti-imperialist and democratic movements expanded everywhere on the globe. Despite the reluctance of official vocational and higher education policies, international solidarity towards independence movements in previous colonies, resistance to imperialist wars and arms races was growing also in Finland. (Koponen 2005.) A naïve belief in science and technology as tools for achieving equality between places and people was widely shared: there was little awareness of actual consequences from technologization, industrialization and urbanization in different places and among different groups of people. Ethnic romanticism also connected to charitable, but superior attitude of giving from ‘our good’ to the poor and disadvantaged on the globe. (Tuomi 1976.) In the mainstream vocational and higher education, anthropocentric approach continued unquestioned, despite first civic reactions towards pollution from wood-processing and metal industries.

## Superior Nordic welfare state (1970s–1990s)

### Political and educational changes

The history of the Finnish welfare state is quite short compared to other Nordic countries, where the reforms started already before the World War II. In Finland, the turn into the social democratic planning society took place in the middle of the 1960s, during the deepest technocratic phase. As in other Nordic countries, the role of the state has been central in implementing the ideas of the welfare state and the reforms in the field of education were also carried out via centralized authority, planned by state authorities and controlled

strictly through state legislation. Universalising reforms in health, social care and education were considered fundamental in the promotion of industry and trade.

**The Finnish** education system was reformed between 1972 and 1977, but it has its roots in political and economic decisions 1960s. First, the reform combined folk school and lower secondary school into nine-year compulsory education. The new nine-year comprehensive school that consisted of six-year primary school and three-year lower secondary school became a permanent system for all pupils by the beginning of 1980s. At the same time with the comprehensive school reform, as logical next step in reforming the education system, was to extend the reform to post-compulsory education. The major area of secondary school reform since the 1980s concerned vocational education. The purpose of the reform was to make vocational education more attractive to students who are transferring from basic school to upper secondary school. One attraction was to open also vocational school as an alternative route to higher education. This was how policymakers aimed to decrease the number of students in general upper-secondary education and to close the existing status gap between general and vocational school. However, secondary school reform was not able to narrow the gap between the popularity of general and vocational schools as was expected. Instead, this well-intentioned model of education increased separation between education and occupational sectors.

**Supported by** the transfer of governance of vocational institutes from branch ministries to ministry of education, the cen-

trally planned system distanced schools from the working life. (Committee report 1973; Heikkinen 2004.)

**The change of** education extended until university system. The university degree reform was carried out in the 1970s. It was based on arguments that had become familiar already in the 19th century – are still up-to-date. The university was considered to have exited from the rest of the society and producing too many graduates in humanities. Policymakers wanted university education to be closer to industry and be more responsive to different needs of society and working life. Reform was motivated by the expanding ‘human capital ideology’ from the 1960s, according to which education is important an important factor in economic growth. The extensive legislative reform at all levels of education brought the state in a significant role. The entire education was standardized and taken into centralized control. (Committee report 1972.)

**The 1980s** was a period of economic growth, construction of welfare state and expansion vocational and higher education. Therefore, the deep economic recession of the early 1990s was hitting Finland even harder than elsewhere in the world economy. Deprivation and poverty level began to rise quickly. Unemployment increased, and educational policies became a part of social policy. Decision-makers tried to reduce youth unemployment by adding training places and increasing attractiveness of education, for example by upgrading higher vocational institutes into polytechnics.

## Nature of equality politics and sex-distinctions

In the Finnish welfare state, equality could be seen as a state-led project of equal opportunities. Equality in education was a permanent theme and value in government policy and committees, but the content of equality depended on its target. Equality was seen as a regional question or issue of social and educational opportunities. It materialized in opening up of educational pathways, but marginally as equality between sexes. Expansion of education was believed to lead to the rise of a meritocracy where people’s status would be decided rather by their ability and effort than by their birth or inherited privilege or where they lived. The secondary education reform and other policy programs in the 1980s considered equality as principle of justice, i.e. equity and equal opportunity were the leading values of Finland’s education vision. However, despite the promise of equal opportunities for everyone, the result was rather unification than equality.

**In the official** equality and education policy of the 1970s, occupational ideals were sex neutral, but based on male or female conceptions. Equality between sexes was considered as an opportunity: women were encouraged to male-dominated fields and vice-versa. Within education in sexually divided fields, there were minor arrangements to help the students of opposite sex to feel welcome. They remained still male nurses or female engineers. (Committee report 1997; Lietzén et al 2015.) At the same time, traditional household work was occupationalised and moved outside the family. Women found job opportunities in positions that had previously been part of the domestic work. The increasing number



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of women in education as well as in the labour market was one of the most significant developments in the Finnish society. Throughout the 1980s, the proportion of women in wage labour was steadily around 47 percent, which was very high by international comparison.

### Planetary perspective

During the 1980s, Finnish economy and industry started to follow the global trend of liberation of trade and financial markets, while benefiting from outcomes of universalizing and democratizing societal and educational reforms since the 1970s. The post-war consensual commitment of export, rural and service industries to promotion of national economy and social coherence shifted into search for the competitiveness of industrial sectors and actors in global markets, where regional political aspects marginalized. Among policy-makers, vocational and higher education were increasingly considered as distinctive industrial clusters supporting the competitiveness of other industries inside Finnish national economy (or owners and investors of companies located in Finland) (Heikkinen et al 1999). However, as an outcome of movements for international solidarity and justice, discourses on democratization of society and industry remained powerful until 1990s. (Committee report 1973.)

**In the official** international development co-operation, the late 1970s was a time of growth. In Finland and other Nordic countries, development policy was subsumed to foreign politics, which beside combat against famines and reduction of poverty, focused on promotion of political and economic democracy. (Koponen 2005.) While planetary responsibility was by no means in the heart of vocational and higher education policies, the concrete initiatives built on assumptions that developing countries were lacking knowledge, skills, technology and capital. It seems that for educational policy-makers, investing in and providing assistance to restructuring would make a change. The Finnish development model was a kind of an attempt to move the Nordic welfare system in a foreign culture and develop the destination countries based on donors' terms of charity. The period might be characterized as that of benevolent ostentation, when rapidly industrialized Finland took its own model of development as assistance to Africa and South America. However, in the civil society, variety of movements and associations in vocational and higher education, mushroomed, requesting global solidarity for happenings in Vietnam or Chile, for example.

**In the 1980s** environmental awareness, climate issues and acid rain in Europe opened up a new kind of planetary debate, which extended to Finland. Nature conservation

was considered a broader matter of common concern than just own environment. The destruction of nature was a threat to the well-being of society. At the same time, the depletion of natural resources such as oil hit the headlines. The relationship between nature and economics became worldwide common policy issues. Pockets of environmental education were introduced into university degrees, however deemed to erode during the recession of the 1990s.

## Globalization without solidarity and responsibility (2000s–)

### Political and educational change

The collapse of the Soviet Union removed the last external barriers in the approach towards the Western Europe and in 1995 Finland became the member of the European Union. The deregulation and globalization shifted the focus from the technocratic and centralized welfare state into the (global) market economy. In the midst of mass-unemployment and trembling of traditional export-industry, the technology industry grew rapidly. Nokia gained its place as a world's largest mobile phone company and by the 2000s, policy-makers and leading industrialist envisioned Finland as the world's leading knowledge based society. The shift towards knowledge economy occurred hand in hand with the privatization, commercializing and technological developments in the production. The digitalisation in the fields of education and work led to the increasing disintegration of occupations and to deepening divisions between workers, management and academic professions.

**Educational institutions** were forced to adapt to the rapid changes of Finnish economy towards liberal market economy in the 1990s. The focus of educational policies shifted into higher education, since the building of knowledge economy required the strong contribution of universities. This also led into comprehensive reforms in the field of higher education. In the spirit of strong regionalisation, the nationwide system of polytechnics was created in the 1990s in order to react to rapid changes in vocational working life and to needs of business life and industry. The position of universities, on the other hand, changed in 2010s due to the Universities Act in 2009 and organisational reforms that followed.

**The educational policy** behind the higher education reforms emphasizes the harmonised competences and the industrial relevance. The pressure on international standardisation of degrees touched especially the higher education through the Bologna process and other transnational impacts on educational policy. Compared to earlier periods the transnational impacts have strengthened involving the ethos of global competitiveness in the educational market. (Universities Act 2009; Koski 2009; Ministry of Employment and the Economy 2008; Ministry of Education and Culture 2011.)

### Nature of equality politics and sex-distinctions

The market orientation and the emphasis of individual and global competition in higher educational policy have changed also the nature and aims of equality politics. While the obligations to promote equality have tightened, equality has become a factor for excellence for single organisations (Lätti 2012) and for building

the knowledge economy nationwide. The previous idea of 'equality for all' has shifted into everybody's equality, a subjective right between individuals. The promotion of equality is harnessed for the search of the world-beaters, while everyone should have the equal possibility to compete, to succeed and get to the top. (Heikkinen et al 2012; Ministry of Education and Culture 2011.)

**The impact of** transnational organisations has grown also in equality politics. Gender mainstreaming, promoted by transnational organizations during the last decades, aims to mainstream gender aspect in all levels and fields in education and work (Council of Europe 1998). Transformed into national and local policies the objectives mainly aim at equal rights to be recruited, proceed on a career and to receive the same salary. While equality is interpreted as similar representation of both sexes, it is seen accomplished, when similar rights have come true. Indicators measuring gender equality are mainly quantitative: i.e. representation of women and men in different positions and tasks, division of salaries, working hours etc. (EU Commission 1996; Lätti 2012; Equality and parity plans...) Thus, the focus in implementing the equality politics is on observable structures and practices. Although equality is regarded as an important objective in universities, equality plans are not highly prioritized in practice. Instead, they tend to serve other goals considered more valuable in organizations and are easily ignored in the conflicts of different aims. In universities, equality work is seen as part of human resource development and management. The enhancement of gender equality is defended by the creation of good working environment, better working capacity of personnel, improved quality, success, productivity and

competitiveness of universities. (Lätti 2012; Strategy of the University of Tampere 2010; Equality and parity plans...)

**In the level of** policymaking, gender mainstreaming has become an important part of the educational policy. Despite the increase of equality agendas and tightened obligations to promote gender equality, sex-based segregations remain tight due to academization of work and sharpened hierarchies between academic fields. Although women and men have been quite equally presented in higher education since the 1960s, academic branches still divide into male and female dominated areas. Women are strongly represented at care and educational sciences, where the academic status is lower, while men dominate the prestigious, more funded and export-oriented technical fields – especially ICT and natural sciences. Women are involved in the academia in large number, but are relatively few as professors and scientific gatekeepers. They are also facing expectations to take care of the teaching and the community more often than men. Due to these quite unchanging 'deep streams', promoting equality with the means of formal equality politics, which mainly target to observable surface as quantities, salaries and representation of women and men, is highly problematic. (Heikkinen et al 2012; Lätti 2012.)

**The building of** knowledge economy and the reforms of polytechnics and universities have also created new dichotomies inside and between groups of women and men. While education still allocates women and men into segregated areas in the labour market, both men and women are expected to adapt on a prevailing culture of individual and global competition, to

proceed on a career and get to the top – which also equality politics invites them to (Lietzén et al 2015). Today universities compete increasingly in the global markets where education has become an important export requiring new academic skills and occupational ideals. Academic skills are defined as capability to global action and competition, innovation and branding of educational products. (Ministry of Education and Culture 2012; Research and Innovation Council 2010.) The ideal of equality politics in the knowledge economy is sex neutrality. Gender mainstreaming targets to equal opportunities and to subjective rights to struggle in individual competition, also through ‘gender branding’, the promise of individual building of one’s own gender. Nevertheless, the realities of market economy (competition) are still strongly guiding this construction.

### **Planetary perspective**

Likewise in other Nordic and EU countries, official politics in Finland is committed to sustainable development. However, the market orientation in educational policy has changed the aims of internationalisation. (Koponen 2005.) While the earlier periods carried the ideals of charity and solidarity, in the 21st century the emphasis is rather on global competition. Notions of sustainability and environmental concern remain marginal in both vocational and higher education policies, where the process of Europeanization targets to harmonization as well as to common and competitive educational and industrial market. The focus has shifted to education export, innovation and productization for global markets, to international publication and ranking lists.

**Paradoxically**, while environmental, economic and social crises are more visible everywhere on the globe, the perspectives of global justice and responsibility have vanished from the aims of educational policy, while the search for profit binds individuals and organisations in the market. At the same time, the aims of equality politics have also moved towards individuality and subjective rights for success. From the perspective of lifelong learning, we can trace the moral gap between empathy and care for environment taught to children and the idea of individual competitor required from the adults.

**The restructuring** of global production and commodity chains and changes in global division of work have also affected the gender orders inside Nordic countries (Kershew 2011). The use of cheap female-dominated labour has moved increasingly to the global South. Although sex segregation is still visible in Finland and distinctions between groups of women are growing, we should ask who are excluded if promotion of equality is restricted to our own nation-state territory, where individual success has become a virtue. The accelerating rush after international excellence in both vocational and higher education indicates that their functions are being reduced into offering career options for few (elites), with the support of equality politics focusing on subjective right for individual men and women to make a career.

### **Beyond Nordic equality politics in education**

The transformations of equality politics in relation to global economy were reflected in territorial, cultural ethos. In Finland, the

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un-problematized and defensive regional equality in nation building (in the period of *reconstruction and recovery* 1950–1960) shifted into state led project referring to social justice and to equal educational opportunities for all in the welfare state (the period of *superior Nordic welfare state* 1970s–1990s). From the global perspective, the equality in the first case was linked to un-reflected and naïve agendas of international solidarity and anti-imperialism. In the latter, the equality included the nation-statist and conceited image of Finland in relation to less-developed or ‘developing’ regions on the planet, but also emerging environmental awareness.

**The geo-economics** led by global financial markets challenged both previous layers: the search for profit binds individuals and industrial actors in the market. In the (global) knowledge economy (the period of *globalization without solidarity and responsibility* 2000s), the equality moved towards individuality and subjective rights for success. From the global view, the ideals of solidarity and responsibility vanished, while the period is linked to global competition between individuals, companies and nation-states and to calculation of different kinds of benefits on planetary issues.

**In the end**, we wish to raise some questions about how adult education research

on Nordic equality politics – in general and from gender point of view – might proceed to take into account their relation to planetary perspective. Has the current policy of lifelong learning legitimized an ethical and educational rupture from rhetoric of solidarity and sharing in education of children and youth to calculative individualism in adult forms of education?

**Concerning** the ‘equality game’ (Radcliff-Richards 2014), it seems evident that in the Nordic equality politics, exemplified by developments in Finnish educational policy and practice, the focus has been on distributive justice among citizens in the Nordic region. Although it has included elements of responsibility for material survival of people in other regions (Granness 2012), concrete measures of solidarity have been selective based on the rules defined by the Nordic standards. Until recently, equality, responsibility and justice between humans and non-humans have remained absent from Nordic equality politics, as well as from education policy. The concept of global justice forces us to pay attention to ethical commitments of equality in (adult) education. For the Kenyan philosopher Oruka the question of justice, exceeding national boundaries, means a shift from the paradigm of equality to the paradigm of responsibility for the other. This includes the idea of human

minimum – first to guarantee a certain minimum standard of living to all human beings. (Grønness 2012). The fact that human agency has become the main force shaping the earth, raise also the question of responsibility of humans to living and non-living non-humans (Latour 2014).

**The findings** about the insular equality politics and educational policy also suggest taking political geography more seriously in political, practical and research discussions. Issues of equality should be considered and evaluated in relation to division of work and welfare in planetary perspective, through negotiation about their different conceptions, based on different territorial traditions. Another radical challenge for Nordic and any other territorial ethics and morals is to open up such ‘negotiation’ to include non-human beings, since the material conditions for exercising equality, democracy and justice among humankind is endangered because of the indifference of humans

for the impacts of their behaviour to non-humans and to human-non-human relations.

**Finally**, while inhabitants of the Nordic territory cannot and should not forget and escape their material, social and moral histories, there would be a need to critically revise some basic questions in Nordic adult education. Instead of rejecting phenomena and concepts such as means of livelihood (näring, elinkeino) and folkishness (folkelighet, kansaisuus), in revised interpretation they might be fundamental for wider concept of adult education. It could consider issues of equality, democracy and justice from the planetary perspective of reproduction of conditions for human life and learning from experiences, knowledge and wisdom of people. Finally, in order to gain empirical relevance and political influence, our exercise should be shared by similar exercises in other contexts, preferably both inside and outside the Nordic territory.

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