

# *Higher education policies and question of social (in)equality: cases of Argentina and Finland<sup>1</sup>.*

## *Políticas de educación superior y la cuestión de la (des)igualdad social: casos de Argentina y Finlandia.*

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**Resumen:** Este artículo analiza la manera en que las políticas públicas de Educación Superior (ES) de Argentina y Finlandia contribuyen o no a reducir las desigualdades sociales en sus respectivos sistemas universitarios. Realizamos un análisis genealógico de documentos y un análisis interpretativo de las políticas para encontrar similitudes y diferencias, desarrollamos interpretaciones plausibles ubicándolas en su contexto social e histórico. Comparamos las características de los sistemas sociales y las tendencias de las políticas implementadas en las instituciones de ES en Argentina y Finlandia, mostrando su cercanía o lejanía respecto de los principios originariamente estatuidos en torno a la ES en cada país. Estudiamos los casos de Argentina y Finlandia, mediante el análisis de las políticas de ES en la era democrática para conocer si las políticas contribuyen a reducir las desigualdades sociales en la ES. Concluimos que las políticas educativas cuanto más se basan en la lógica del mercado, las desigualdades en la ES tienden a incrementarse, incluso, en el país nórdico con estado de bienestar.

**Palabras clave:** Educación superior; (des)igualdades sociales; Argentina; Finlandia; políticas educativas.

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**Abstract:** This article studies the development of higher education (HE) policies in Argentina and Finland and examines what are the principles behind HE laws and policies, and whether the policies promote or prevent social equality. We apply genealogical document analysis and interpretive policy analysis to look for differences and similarities, and to place them in societal and historical context in order to make plausible interpretations. We contrast properties of social systems and patterns of policy practices that describe the character of HE institutions in Argentina and Finland. By creating country cases, we, analyze the HE policies of the democratic era in Argentina and Finland to find out whether and how the policies aim at reducing social inequalities in HE. We conclude that along with market logic in education policies, inequalities in HE tend to increase even in a Nordic welfare state like Finland.

**Key words:** Higher education; social (in)equalities; Argentina; Finland; educational policies

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#### **1. Introduction**

Education in all its levels and higher education (HE) in particular are regarded as a base of modern, democratic societies. Education aims at individual and societal gain in terms of symbolic and material resources, and at securing social peace and balance as well as economic prosperity of a society.

In this article, we focus on HE and the university institution as a provider of HE. We examine HE as a social phenomenon. In turn, university, as a provider of HE, is seen as a social institution. It transfers knowledge, understanding and ways of thinking as well as values and norms of the society to new generations. University is also a political institution because within universities lie an opportunity to both maintain and reform societies. Therefore, the relationship between university and ruling powers has always been full of tensions. (Välímää, 2018:11-12.)

This article studies the development of HE policies in Argentina and Finland and examines what are the principles behind HE laws and policies, and whether the policies promote or prevent social equality. We study properties of social systems and patterns of policy

practices that describe the character of HE institutions in Argentina and Finland. We do this by analyzing HE policies and legislation during the democratic periods in the respective countries in order to create two country cases. To make the cases understandable we provide a short historical background for the development of university and HE systems in the two countries from the 17<sup>th</sup> century until present day.

## **2. Aim**

Our objective is to study whether and how the ideal principle of social equality has been implemented in HE policies in Argentina and Finland. We ask, how HE policies have evolved in Argentina and Finland? How value of social equality shows in the policies and policy implementations? And, how the HE policies have dealt with social inequalities?

Our data is composed of HE policy documents, laws/acts on HE, and of relevant research reports and historical reports on development of Argentinian and Finnish universities and HE systems. The versatile data allows us, first, to identify the relevant and essential points of evolution of university institution and HE system, and, second, to identify connections of HE policies with national politics and prevailing social circumstances. Detailed analysis of our data, allows us to construct country cases and to depict the current state of the Argentinian and Finnish HE and university system and the way they deal with the issue of social (in)equality.

We apply genealogical document analysis and interpretive policy analysis to look for differences and similarities, and to place the differences and similarities in societal and historical context in order to make plausible interpretations (see e.g. Wagenaar 2011). We contrast HE institutions in two countries, or more specifically properties of social systems and patterns of policy practices that describe the character of HE institutions in Argentina and Finland. In our comparison, we follow Manfred Nießen's (1982) principle according to which the core of comparative research is not to catalogue differences and similarities between the cases but to analyze the phenomenon of interest in relation to its historical and spatial context.

## **3. Social (in)equality**

"Equality is one of the fundamental values on which so many countries around the world have chosen to build their societies", states OECD in Education at Glance 2018 report. But what is equality and what is it in relation to education? Our understanding of equality follows Amartya Sen's (1992) definition according to which equality is capability to function fully as a human being. Such capability entails freedom and knowledge (education) to choose one's life-path, and resources to pursue it.

Correspondingly, we adopt Göran Therborn's (2013) definition of inequality and understand it as a socio-cultural order, which reduces our capabilities to function as human beings, as well as our resources to act and participate in the society. Therborn (2013: 48-9) distinguishes three kinds of inequality: 1) Vital inequality, referring to socially constructed unequal life-chances of human beings; 2) Existential inequality, referring to unequal allocation of autonomy, dignity, degrees of freedom, and rights to respect and self-development; and 3) Resource inequality, providing human actors with unequal resources to act. Resources do not refer only to economic resources but also to social and cultural resources such as access to education. In this article, we touch upon resource inequality.

Education system, including HE is regarded as the key equalizing factor in modern, democratic societies. From individual's point of view, education is seen as the way to social mobility, to access of better income, standard of living, health, well-being and social position. From society's perspective, well educated citizens are seen as the most important assets in modernization and regeneration of the society, and in global (economic) competition. This commonly shared understanding is reflected in the agendas and recommendations that supranational organizations such as the OECD, the UNESCO, the CEPAL and the EU give to its member states. These agendas and recommendations with the strong belief in the equalizing properties of education influence in national (higher) education policies. It is interesting and important to see how the value of social equality is taken into the national (higher) education policies, and whether and how it is implemented in practice in different modern and democratic societies.

#### **4. The Argentinian case**

In 1613, the founding of the first university in the territory that was later to become Argentina, National University of Cordoba, under papal tutelage, represented a milestone in the history of this country's university system. The university was the result of a bureaucratic deal and a unilateral transfer on the part of Spain, derived from the development of European trade, the emerging disciplinarian bourgeois order, and the missionary spirit of the Jesuits. In fact, the university had hardly any roots in the local reality and became a redoubt of selection of the ruling elites in both city and country (Vázquez Cerrutti, 2003; Chiroleau, 2014; 2018a; 2018c; Buchbinder, 2005).

Meanwhile, the different immigration policies implemented by the successive Conservative governments between 1855 and 1891 brought about changes in the demographic composition of the country. In 1914, according to the INDEC Survey (in Chiroleau, 2018a; 2018c), those born outside Argentina represented 30% of the population. Soon afterwards, a social sector related to the immigration process began to claim access to HE. The reluctance of the university teachers, holding posts and doctoral degrees, to give up their privileges, led to a students' revolt that ended in the internationally renowned 1918 Reform. The reformers demanded a widening of the university's social bases, by assigning grants to the youth coming from the lower strata and proposing free attendance to classes and nightly schedules for those who worked. Although one of the movement's banners was free studies, this claim couldn't reach consensus and the compromise with the poorest population was settled in accordance with the "ideal" of a University involved with its society (Buchbinder, 2005; Chiroleau, 2018a; 2018c).

In reality, the relation between University and Society has never been direct but always mediated by a tense, unstable and irregular relation between university and state. The periods of repression, brought along a social closing of the university due to educational policies implementing the payment of fees, highly restrictive entrance examinations and an increase in the number of institutions not due to foster greater registration but to prevent the concentration of a critical mass in large cities. In democratic periods, on the other hand, there were greater possibilities for the less favored sectors to enter the university system, in accordance with policies tending to their inclusion (Vázquez Cerrutti, 2003; González, 2012; Buchbinder, 2005). Although, from the very beginning of the first democratic government, the fees charged to students at public universities were eliminated, the measure did not imply the disappearance of social inequalities the HE system. From Alfonsín's government, and its first measures to expand the social bases of the HE system, it became evident that not all social strata had the same chances of having access and remain in the system, as well as of developing a complete educational trajectory.

Nowadays, according to Chiroleau (2014; 2018a; 2018b; 2018c), the principle of widening the social basis of the university, understood as the expansion of opportunities at university level has been redefined as the aim of universalizing HE. Habitually, this aim has been expressed, in the educational policies, as the democratization of HE. Chiroleau (2014; 2018a; 2018b; 2018c) understands that democratization can be understood in two distinct senses. In a wide sense, it can be defined as an extension of the right or access to some good to a large population. In this sense, for example, the increase in the number of universities could be interpreted as the extension of the right to have access to HE. However, we agree with Chiroleau that not all social groups have the same probabilities to enter university and

obtain similar results. That is, the rise in the number of universities is not the only factor at play.

Instead, in a narrower sense, democratization in HE implies effectively reducing social inequalities. In this article, we intend to analyze the policies of social inclusion followed by the democratic governments of the period 1983-2015, under Presidents R. Alfonsín, C.S. Menem, N. Kirchner and C. Fernández de Kirchner, taking into consideration this narrower sense of democratization in HE. That is why we consider some aspects that have been part of the public educational policies such as the increase of the number of universities and of the grants offered to people from the lower social strata.

### **Educational system and the reproduction of social inequalities**

Unfortunately, for Argentina, educational policies did not follow a long-term state planning but, rather, economic policies imposed by the Economic Ministries of governments with different political, economic and ideological projects (Mollis, 2008). This explains the fact that, for example in 2014, Argentina has a university system characterized by its hyper fragmentation and heterogeneous academic offer, with a total number of 122 HE institutions in 2014, 46,7% were state-run (Fachelli and López Roldán, 2017:13). The set of institutions draws up a complex, diverse and heterogeneous map where universities play a multiplicity of functions other than teaching and doing research (Mollis, 2008).

On the other hand, with regards to educational level of the majority of the population, in 2010, out of a total 36.894.572 Argentine inhabitants, only 10.46% pursued university studies (INDEC, 2010). When asked if they had finished their careers by that year, only 45% of them answered affirmatively.

In general terms, Argentina maintains a concentration of registration on the public (free) university (Mollis, 2008). In 2015, public universities concentrated 51% of the enrolment and private universities, 48%. However, by 2014, state institutions provided academic offer and training to 78% of undergraduate and graduate students across the country (1,468,072) while private institutions to only 22% (403,373). The proportions are similar with regards to postgraduate careers: 77% of the graduates choose a public institution (110,417) and 22% a private one. Only 1% decide on an international / foreign university. The above means that 8 out of 10 students attend their careers at public universities (Atenea y Fedún, 2017). All along the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the evolution of registration shows a rising tendency, with an average growth rate of 6.7% per year (García de Fanelli, 2014:7). This sustained rate of expansion of the registration had been periodically altered by the country's political upheavals.



In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the structural factors contributed to slow down the growth of registration to an average 3.1% per year. This is mainly due to the decrease and stagnation in graduation at the level of secondary school. The net rate of higher schooling in the poorest quintile of the population is affected by the lower probability for these youths to finish secondary school. At this latter level 69% of the 15- 19- and 41% of the 20-24-year old people, who in the 2010 National Population Survey, declared having attended secondary school left it before obtaining a degree. This means that the problem of inequality of results at the secondary school level contributes, directly, to the small participation of the quintile of lower income of the population in higher education system (García de Fanelli, 2014:7).

Furthermore, between 2000 and 2011, the average annual growth rate of students entering national universities was only 0,5%, much below the average annual growth rate of the population under 18 in the same period (of 1,5%) (INDEC, 2010-2011 in García de Fanelli, 2014). As García de Fanelli (2014:11-12) has stated, the participation of the young in HE depends on the socioeconomic level of the home they come from. For instance, in 2010, meanwhile the rate of participation in university education of the quintile of homes with the highest income was 58%, the rate corresponding to quintile of the lowest income homes was 33%.

In addition, Fachelli, Derteano & Torrens (2013) have demonstrated that in the Argentinian university system, the parents' educational level, rather than their occupational level, has a greater bearing on the possibilities of those interested in a university degree. In addition, if their possibility of entrance is considered, the subjects whose parents have university degrees have greater access, but those whose parents are at the lowest occupational level are the most seriously harmed. Several researchers such as Torrado (2011), Mollis (2008), Chiroleau (2009), García de Fanelli (2015), Panaia (2015: 2017), have come to the same conclusion. The individual probability to have access or complete the different educational levels, depends on one's belonging to particular social strata. Self-recruiting phenomenon and the social inequalities reproduction manifests itself in the wider access of professionals' sons/daughters, who, at the same time, have greater possibilities of graduating.

## **A brief analysis of the educational policies in the democratic period Alfonsín administration**

Upon the return of democracy, in December 1983, the Alfonsín administration set about pulling down the barriers to university entrance to reach equality of opportunities, based on the student's "merit", avoiding discrimination by ascribed characteristics such as gender, socioeconomic status or ethnic group. After a normalizing intervention, a law was passed to establish the economic and financial system of universities, the abolition of fees and eliminatory entrance courses (though leveling courses remained). At the same time, the number of universities was increased (García de Fanelli, 2014).

Unfortunately, the objectives settled by the democratic government were not achieved as expected. The students who would be able to choose a university degree were heterogeneous. In the secondary level of schooling, the great variety of institutions, public and private, offer a varied quality of educational training. Normally, the young enter one school or another depending on their parents' educational, occupational and economic status. Paid (private) schools, which generally include a double daily schedule, tend to offer a higher quality education than public ones. This means that out of those who actually finish secondary school, not everyone has the same probability to enter university, since not everyone possesses the same amount of the necessary educational, cultural, symbolic, social and economic capital. Moreover, among those who do manage to register in university, not all pass the final examination of the leveling course, on account of a poor legitimate cultural capital (García de Fanelli, 2014).

## **Menemist administration**

From 1990 onwards, the international agenda of modernization of the higher education system, promoted by the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank, imposed the reduction of State support to education and science, the selective State control of the distribution of financial resources, and the encouragement to the expansion of private institutions and registration. Argentina, in accordance with this tendency was one of the Latin American countries with the lowest investment in HE. Comparatively, the average of investment in relation to the Gross National Product (GNP) is lower than that in other countries with lower income per capita, like Chile, Brazil, Venezuela and Mexico. While the general average of the sample is 1.3% of the GNP, in Argentina it is only 0.95% (Mollis, 2008: 510).



The World Bank held that the crisis in the education sector had an economic character. For this institution, the university budgets were wrongly spent, and the real funding of the system came from the popular sectors who paid Added Value Tax. In turn, the ones who attended university were from the middle class. For the Monetary Fund analysts, HE strongly depended on State and the universities should search for sources of funding other than the State, through the charging of fees and/or the sale of services (Vázquez Cerrutti, 2003; Mollis, 2008).

In accordance to these managerial guidelines, the Ministry of Education issued, in 1995, the Law of Higher Education N° 24521 (Mollis, 2008; Vázquez Cerrutti, 2003; González, 2012; Chiroleau, 2018a; 2018b; 2018c; Etchichury, 2010). As a result of an educational policy based on the neoliberal economic project of the Ministry of Economics, the Law enabled universities to generate additional resources such as entrance fees (thus violating the right of free nature of public universities granted by the National Constitution) and to offer services. The Law also established that the financial resources obtained from the fees had to be directed to grants, in particular to those who were not able to begin or continue university degrees because of economic reasons, as long as they showed enough aptitude and met all the institution's academic requirements. In this way, supposedly, no one would be left out of such studies (Etchichury, 2010; González, 2012; Ruiz de la Torre and Rueda López, 2016).

In accordance with these statements, the National University Scholarships Program (PNBU) was implemented in 1996. Another program developed was oriented to young people with ascribed characteristics (indigenous and disabled). However, at that time, the annual amount of the scholarship was 3,000 Argentine pesos, a derisory amount, equivalent to approximately US\$ 3000 per year at the official exchange rate in the period 1996-1998 (Banco Central de la República Argentina, 2018). In addition, for example, in a public university system, with an enrolment of 945.790 students in 1998, a total of 13202 people applied for the fellowships offered by the PNBU but only 2192 of them obtained the grants. From this total, only 1194 benefited for the first time (Anuario de Estadísticas Universitarias, 1998). In the end, the number of grants were insufficient, the annual stipend was small, and it was perceived irregularly (García de Fanelli, 2014; Chiroleau, 2018b:10).

On the other hand, between 1989 and 1999, during the Menem administration, 42 universities were created, but only 13 of them were public and 29 private.

### **Kirchnerist administration**

In the aftermath of the 2001 economic crisis, N. Kirchner became President in 2003, and upon his death in 2010, his wife C. Fernández assumed office for two consecutive periods

(2010-2011 and 2011-2015). Until 2008, the GNP kept a sustained rate of growth, in the frame of an international context of prices favorable to our commodities, and of a series of wide-ranging social policies, which changed the role of the State, considered now as a re-assigner of economic resources. Within this framework, the funding for the university system has grown in a sustained way, surpassing 1% of the GNP. A way of widening the social bases was stimulating the increase of the institutional offer and the consolidation of various forms of economic support to lower-income students (Chiroleau, 2018b).

In accordance to the increase of institutions, there were created 18 national universities, and 7 private ones. For example, between 2007 and 2009, 9 universities were created throughout the country. Thus, each province happened to have at least one university. This meant that a greater amount of population would have their own university, as, for example, in the suburbs of Buenos Aires (Atenea y Fedún, 2017). On the other hand, and according to some researchers, the new public universities were not the product of a plan based on a diagnosed related to the institutional offer-and-demand situation and on the existing degrees in each province or region (Chiroleau, 2018b:8).

Meanwhile, in 2011, the sum total of registration in the national universities represented 54% of the university sector in the country (García de Fanelli, 2014: 7; Chiroleau, 2018b).

With regards to the economic support for people with lower resources, two programs have been developed: in 2008, the National Program of Bicentennial Grants (PNBB, after the name in Spanish) and, in 2014, the PROGRESAR program. The first one was aimed at applicants to careers for a degree or to technical training in the disciplinary areas of applied, natural, exact and basic sciences, while the second was oriented to 18- to 24-year-old youths who did not work or, if they did, they were paid an amount lower than the legal “minimum, vital and mobile salary”, and so did their family group. In 2014, the annual amount of the scholarship was 7,200 Argentine pesos, a derisory amount, equivalent to approximately US \$ 848 per year at the official exchange rate in November 2014. And in 2015, the amount assigned was Argentine pesos 10,800 in ten instalments throughout the year, a small sum that is perceived irregularly (García de Fanelli, 2014; Chiroleau, 2018b:10). Although both programs intend to encourage the access, the permanence and the graduation of students coming from the lower-income homes, the amounts and the lack of regularity of the payments do not allow them to stay in the institution without working to afford the cost of their studies, something that does not ensure the fulfillment of the objectives of these grants (García de Fanelli, 2014; Chiroleau, 2018b).

According to García de Fanelli (2014 in Chiroleau, 2018b:10), the total number of grants assigned was not enough to cover the 18 to 24 year-old university students belonging to the

20% of lower-income homes, which represented around 170,000 persons in 2014; this implies that the grants reached only about 29% of this segment of the student population.

### **Closing remarks**

Chiroleau (2018b) holds that, up to now, there are no official studies evaluating the impact of the HE policies developed during the democratic period. Even though the public discourse has emphasized that the growth in registration and in the number of grants and respective budget implies the social inclusion, the reference to quantitative indicators of the expansion of opportunities does not consider the level of achievement of the original goals, nor the concrete effects at the individual and social levels (Chiroleau, 2018b:12).

The policy of horizontal access that tries to ensure, formally, free access to university for all, seems to be insufficient if the objective is to put an end to the social inequality of origin in the academic field. What seems to be necessary is the implementation of the principle of vertical equality of educational policies, allowing for differential treatment for those who come from unequal initial situations (Chiroleau, 2009 and García de Fanelli, 2014).

The formal equality of opportunities to have access to the institutions does not tell us much about the concrete possibility for all students of reaching similar results during the pathway. As Bourdieu and Passeron (2003) and Chiroleau (2018b: 4) have settled, the affinity between the cultural habits of a class and the requirements of an education system determines the possibilities of success. Even the leveling of the economic means (through grants or loans), though promoting formal equality, does not suppress the advantages/disadvantages of origin, which are hidden by a system that, rewards students' individual merits, in an apparently neutral way, legitimate the privileges in the name of education (García de Fanelli, 2014; Chiroleau, 2018a; 2018b; 2018c).

Finally, educational equality will be possible when the policies implemented are geared to the true inclusion of the least favored in the university system. For achieving this goal, the governments should invest constantly, with long-term education budget, enough grants for students who need them, allotments that keep with the real cost of university studies, and programs that foster, in an effective a continuous way, the necessary competencies for the development of successful educational trajectories, independently of the structural conditions of origin.

### **5. The Finnish case**

The Church played a central role in the development of (higher) education in Finland. The Cathedral School of Turku, presumably founded in 1276, was elevated to the Royal Academy of Turku by Queen Christina of Sweden in 1640, and became the third university

founded in the Swedish Empire following Uppsala University (in Sweden) and Academia Gustaviana in Dorpat, predecessor of the University of Tartu in Estonia. Like in European universities at the time, teaching language was Latin and there were four faculties: Philosophy, Theology, Law and Medicine. (Välímáa, 2018; Helsingin yliopisto, 2018.)

The reformation, that was accepted in 1527 and, eventually, rooted out the Catholicism from the Church and the Swedish Empire, had an important impact on education and the underlying values. In Lutheran Church, it was considered important that people themselves actually understood the word of God and consequently, Latin ceased to be the language both in liturgical services and at schools. (Välímáa, 2018.)

In 1809, Finland became part of the Russian Empire. Tsar Alexander I expanded the university. In 1828, the Academy of Turku was moved to Helsinki, the new capital of the Grand Duchy of Finland and renamed the Imperial Alexander University in Finland (University of Helsinki, 1919 – present). According to Humboldtian ideas, the new statutes of the University defined the university's task as promoting the development of "the Sciences and Humanities within Finland, and, furthermore, educating the youth for the service of the Tsar and the Fatherland." (Helsingin yliopisto, 2018.) In the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, The Alexander University was a hub of national movement that promoted the birth of independent Finnish State and development of Finnish identity (Plamper and Laalo, 2017).

Finland became independent in 1917. At the time, there were societal processes going on that had an impact also in the development of Finnish (higher) education. Economic structure started to change. Share of agriculture and forestry began to diminish while people increasingly earned their living from industry, construction, commerce, traffic and services. Change from class society towards democratic and industrial society challenged the education system. The new aim was to educate the whole population of independent Finland. Accordingly, statute of compulsory education came into force in 1921. Number of primary and secondary schools increased all over the country. Expansion of education system increased the pressure to develop HE as well. New HE institutions were established in Helsinki, Turku and Jyväskylä. In the spirit of educating the nation, the Civil College was established in Helsinki 1925. It offered academic teaching particularly in political and social sciences with the aim of promoting democratization of the society. Therefore, the College was open to all, not just to upper secondary school graduates. The College was renamed the School of Social Sciences in 1930 and it offered seven vocationally oriented

bachelor's degrees<sup>2</sup>. In 1960, the School of Social Sciences moved from Helsinki to Tampere and, in 1966, it expanded into the University of Tampere. (Välímáa, 2018:232-33; Kangas, 1992; Kaarninen, 2000).

Question of the status of Swedish and Finnish language in the society and in education was a topical social issue in the early decades of independence. Teaching language at the university had been Swedish although most of the students were Finnish speakers (Välímáa, 2018:228). In 1932 Finnish became an equal teaching language with Swedish and in 1937 the principle language in education and administration (Välímáa, 2018:170).

In the 1920s, Finnish and other Nordic governments followed liberalistic economic doctrine according to which public expenditure had to be cut at times of recession (Hentilä et al., 2002:253). In the 1930s, at the time of the Depression, there was a change in political climate. A kind of planned economy, where state purposely intervened in economy, was accepted. Simultaneously, the labour movement replaced the aim of revolution with a democratically controlled economy and society. After the Second World War, the lessons learned from the Depression and constant economic growth as well as political will towards equality and solidarity formed fertile conditions to build the Nordic welfare state (Antikainen, 2006:235).

From the Nordic perspective, the state is seen as a 'friend of citizens' who is responsible for citizens' welfare and, therefore, the policies should strive for narrowing social and economic inequalities (Antikainen, 2006:235). Education played a pivotal role in the pursuit of Nordic welfare state. On one hand, mass education was a part of the rationalistic ideology of modern society (Boli, 1989). On the other hand, education was considered as a social right, and as a service provided by the state to its citizens (Antikainen, 2006:236).

After the Second World War (WW2) and especially in the 1960s, number of reforms took place. One of the most important of them was the reform of comprehensive school. It created the basis for uniform, consistent and high-quality education to all regardless of their social origin, status and place of residence. The reform abolished the remains of the class society as everybody in the same cohort got uniform basic nine-year education after which they could continue either to upper secondary school and further to, HE or to vocational education. Since the 1960s, an expansion of HE in student numbers and in geographical spreading of new institutions has occurred in Finland and other Nordic countries (Antikainen, 2006; Välímáa, 2018:249).

<sup>2</sup> Bachelor's degrees in journalism, public administration, management of cooperative organizations, municipal administration, child protection, public law, and civic education, and in 1940s, bachelor's degrees

In the 1990s, a new sector of HE, Universities of Applied Sciences, was established in Finland. The aim was to increase the level of know-how of the workforce and to ease the entrance from secondary education to HE. In 2018, there were 14 universities of which 12 are public universities and 2 foundation universities, and 25 Universities of Applied Sciences in Finland (OKM 2018b; Universities Act 558/2009).

### Higher education policy in Finland

Finnish science and HE policies were still in their early stages of development in the 1950s and 1960s. “Academic-traditionalist” doctrine prevailed at the time (Sotarauta and Kautonen, 2007) with emphasis of university autonomy, elitist education and freedom of research and teaching. Economic utility of university education or research was not expected but the expectations and the policy were about to change. The law on development of HE institutions (1966-86) started a systematic steering of HE policy and shifted the budgetary power to the Ministry of Education. The new doctrine based on ideas of *human capital*. The common understanding was that investment in education increases both individual’s income and productivity of national economy. The aim of HE was no longer purely academic but also economical – research became the means to solve practical problems in society and to support economic growth to ensure that Finland would not lag behind the other industrialized countries. Consequently, new institutions of HE were established, teaching staff increased and position and status of students changed both in university and society. University students got representation in university’s decision-making bodies as tripartite system replaced the dominance of professors. Furthermore, production of student housing got started in the latter part of the 1960s and student loan guaranteed by the state became available in 1969 (Välímáa, 2018). Since the law on development of HE institutions came into effect, it became a matter of course that the state is the main financier of universities and that HE, including post-graduate studies, is tuition free for all citizens. In addition, it became accepted and clear that universities and HE institutions have to consider society’s needs in their activities (Välímáa, 2018: 277-78).

During the first years under the new law on development of HE institutions (1988-1991), and before the 1990s recession, resources allocated to HE grew 10% per year. The 1990s recession hit Finland extremely hard and consequently, the funding to universities was first frozen and then severely cut. Between 1990-2000, 20% of the funding coming from the Ministry disappeared. At the same time, a number of students increased constantly while a number of teaching staff remained the same (Välímáa, 2018:283-91).

In the 1990s, HE policy changed as the *new public management* became the dominant ideology. The goal was to make public organizations, universities and other HE institutions



2010 was built on such “European values” as transparency, participation, accountability, effectiveness and coherence, which are the basis of wider HE reforms in the European Union (Amaral et al., 2010). Along with the Universities Act (558/2009), universities ceased being treated as government accounting offices and became independent legal entities. Consequently, universities’ financial and administrative authority strengthened. As stated in the Act (558/2009, section 5), the public universities are independent legal entities and they may undertake commitments, obtain rights in their own name and possess movable and immovable property and engage in business activities.

Even though universities are separated from state bureaucratic structures, the state still holds strong financial control over universities’ affairs (Pinhero, Gerschwind and Aarrevaara, 2014:11).

According to Timo Aarrevaara (2010), academic freedom (emphasized in the Act) has shifted towards greater economic freedom rather than freedom of research, teaching and learning. Even though autonomy of universities increased, their authority eroded as the role of external members in Finnish universities increased. At least 40 % of the Board members at the public universities must be external, often representatives of industry and business. In addition, university Rectors are more like CEOs of “university corporations” than academic leaders. (Pinhero, Gerschwind and Aarrevaara, 2014.)

As a response to the discussion about the number and efficiency of HE institutions in Finland, the Act also prescribed unification of three universities. In 2010, University of Eastern Finland was established by uniting University of Kuopio and University of Joensuu. Turku School of Economics was merged into the University of Turku and Aalto University was established by uniting Helsinki University of Technology, School of Art and Design and Helsinki School of Economics. In the beginning of 2019, University of Tampere and Tampere University of Technology merge into one foundation university named Tampere University which is the main owner of the Tampere University of Applied Sciences. This HE community known as Tampere3 is a new kind of mode of operation in Finnish HE scene endorsed by the Ministry of Education and Culture. Development towards fewer and bigger institutions is considered the means to attract more outside funding for academic research, to increase collaboration with industry and business and, to shift academic research and teaching towards more applied research and work-life oriented teaching (See also Välimaa, 2018).

The current line of development is about to continue and grow deeper. According to the *Vision for higher education and research in 2030*, Finland continues to value education and learning as well as science and knowledge (OKM, 2018a). HE communities are regarded key assets for Finland in the global (economic) competition (see Oinonen and Tervonen-Gonçalves, 2018). The vision clearly indicates that in the name of efficiency, the trend towards fewer and bigger HE institutions will continue. Furthermore, investment in research and development (R&D) will be raised to 4 % of GDP and, at least, 50% of young adults aged 25-34 will have a HE degree either from the university or from the university of applied sciences by 2030 (OKM 2018a). For the sake of comparison, in 2017, ca. 41% of 25-34 year-olds had a HE degree (OECD 2018) and, in 2016, the investment in R&D was 2.8% of GDP, higher than in the other OECD and EU countries on average regardless of the recent retrenchments (Statistics Finland, 2017a).

### **Evolution of educational opportunities**

There is a centuries old Finnish proverb “Oppia ikä kaikki” (All life is learning) which reflects the principle and value that knowledge belongs to everybody and it is a person’s duty to cultivate oneself (see also Antikainen, 2006). The base for this principle lies in the Protestant work ethic and the Lutheran Protestant idea that everybody should have a chance and means to form their own opinion and understanding whether it is about God’s word or mundane matters. Lutheran Protestant values and principles have provided the ground for the development of Nordic welfare state and education system (See Sørensen and Stråth, 1997). The rapid development of Nordic welfare states and education system falls in the period of “Golden Age”, the 25 years after the WW2, when occupational structure changed dramatically, urbanization accelerated and occupations that required secondary and university education increased (Hobsbawm, 1994).

Although, university has maintained the social divisions of class society, and, until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, most students at university were sons of the clergy and upper-class families, university studies was one of the rare existing routes to social mobility (Välímää, 2018:129). The proportion of students from middle-class, working class and peasant backgrounds increased towards the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One typical Finnish feature has been a strong belief in education among all social classes and that is why the lower classes have been very eager to educate themselves. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Finland was the leading country in education in Europe when we look at the proportion of secondary school graduates to the number of inhabitants. Also, the proportion of university students among age group 20-24 (1,2%) was quite similar to, for example, the Netherlands (1,1%) and England (1,3%) (Välímää, 2018:189).

The other typical Finnish feature is the long tradition of women attending HE. Since 1885, women were able to enter the university and their numbers increased quickly. In 1907, 21% of all students were women. Compared to other European and Nordic countries, the proportion of female secondary school graduates and university students was high in Finland already in the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. By the beginning of 1930s, one third of all university students were women (Välilä, 2018:175-76, 243). After the WW2, number of women both in HE and in the labour market grew substantially (Oinonen, 2008). Today, 54 % of all students in HE are women. Women also graduate quicker than men (Vainio, 2014). In fact, nowadays, Finnish women are better educated than men. Yet, gender segregation exists both in disciplines studied and in the labour market. Women are overrepresented in humanities and arts, social sciences, education sciences and in health and welfare whereas majority of the students in technical sciences and information and communication technology (ICT) are men. In the labour market, the gender segregation shows in wage differences and career development (Statistics Finland, 2017b).

The expansion of HE has been fastest in Finland compared to other Nordic countries. If we compare the amounts of students in 1910 and 2010, the growth has been thousandfold. At the same time-period, the population growth has been only twofold (Välilä, 2018:310). This illustrates that entrance into HE has become open to practically all, and equal opportunities in education has increased particularly after the WW2 (Karhunen and Uusitalo, 2017).

Along with tuition free education, financial aid for students has been one important factor equalizing the educational opportunities and promoting social equality in the Finnish society. Government-guaranteed student loans have been available since 1969 but the current form of financial aid for students was introduced in 1972, initially composed of study grant and student loan. Today, HE student financial aid is provided in forms of study grant, housing supplement and government guarantee for a student loan and interest assistance, meaning that Kela (The Social Insurance Institution of Finland) pays the interest on a government-guaranteed student loan for those with low income. HE students who have graduated within the target time are also eligible for student loan compensation that may be even one third of the total amount of the loan. In addition, meal subsidy, which is paid to student restaurants, means that HE students can by meals at a discounted price. Student financial aid is granted for full-time students who are Finnish citizens or foreigners who reside permanently in Finland. The basic amount of study grants for an 18-year-old HE student living alone or with a partner is 250 €/month and if she/he is a provider of a minor child the amount is 325 €. The monthly amount of government-guaranteed student loan is 650 € for those studying in Finland and 800€ for those studying abroad. Incomes affect the

amount of financial aid. A student may earn 667€/month during the months he/she receives student aid and 1990€/month during those months he/she does not receive aid (usually summer months). How long students can receive student financial aid depends on the target time set for attaining the degree. In HE, one academic year which corresponds to 60 ECTS entitle to 9 months of student financial aid. As an example, a monthly student aid for a low-income student may be composed of 250 € study grant, 650 € student loan and 275-404 € of housing supplement depending on the district of residence. (OKM, 2018b; Kela, 2018.) Amendments to student financial aid in 2017 reduced the amount of study grant and increased the monthly amount of student loan which raised much criticism from student organizations.

Finland has done quite well in terms of equalizing social differences. Today, children of highly educated parents are only 1.5 times more likely to get access to HE than children of parents without HE degree. This is the best ratio among the western democracies but does not tell the whole truth. The fact is that more students at the universities have at least one parent who has HE degree (39%) than students at universities of applied sciences (22%) (Välilmaa, 2018:311-13). Even though, in the long-run, attendance of different social groups in HE has equalized, selection based on social background has not disappeared (Nori, 2011:225). According to Karhunen and Uusitalo (2017), equality of educational opportunities has not evolved since the 1970s in Finland. It seems that the effect of parents' social background on their children's participation in university education particularly has become stronger as we come to the 2010s compared to the 1970s.

## **6. Social (in)equality and higher education in Argentina and Finland**

In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup>, university institutions in Argentina and Finland were elite institution that reproduced social stratification and societal and cultural power positions of the few. In Argentina, along with the 1918 higher education reform at the University of Córdoba, the demand for equal educational opportunities for all emerged. However, reform and idea of free education remained as an ideal. In Finland, emergence of The School of Social Sciences (1930) which expanded into the University of Tampere in 1966, was the first sign of change in the outlook on purpose and role of higher education in the Finnish society. The mission was to promote democratization of the society by cultivating not only the elite but also the 'ordinary' people in societal matters by means of social scientific education. The new outlook was linked with the gained independence (1917) and nation building process, and with the emerging ideas of the modern Nordic welfare state.

Education is regarded as one of the cornerstones of the modern welfare state and the Nordic welfare state in particular (Esping-Andersen, 1996). In Finland, like in the other Nordic countries, strong Labour parties and their policies were broadly supported during the interwar period and after the WW2 with solidarity, community and equality as the fundamental values (Arensen and Lundahl, 2006). The development of the welfare state picked up steam in the 1960s and 70s. This reflected in the education policies. The reform of comprehensive school in the 1960s was the factor that swept away the remains of the class society and rooted the idea and value of social equality in the Finnish education system and society, at large. Idea that neither gender nor social, economic, ethnic or religious background or place of residence should affect individual's chances for education, personal development and social mobility, and that it is the state, not the family that supports individual in his/her aspirations and aims in life, was consolidated. This view is reflected e.g. in how financial aid for students is implemented. Since the 1960s, the university of elites has turned into the university of masses as the university sector grew in numbers of students, staff and institutions (Arensen and Lundahl, 2006).

In Argentina, instability characterizes the relationship between university and society. Periods of repression brought along social closing of the university while democratic period opened the doors of university to wider population. In general, during democratic period, educational policies developed in accordance with economic policies of different governments. Democratization of higher education has carried out by increasing the number of HE institutions and implementing national university scholarship programmes. However, these reformatations have not reduced social inequalities. Increasing the number of universities may be interpreted as the extension of the right to enter HE, but all social groups do not have an equal possibility to do so. Furthermore, the national scholarship system does not offer enough grants for the majority of young people from lower income families. Besides, the grants do not cover the real living costs of students.

In Finland, since the WW2, the social democratic education policy paradigm has been characterized by emphasis on individual development within the framework of social community, solidarity and social responsibility (Arensen and Lundahl, 2006:295). From 1980s onwards, however, values of individual rights and choice have competed with the collective values. Nowadays, individualization gains a stronger foothold in all sectors of society, education included. Education is increasingly regarded as a private rather than a public good. Accordingly, education provides individuals opportunities to develop their personal traits and use them for their own benefit (Arensen and Lundahl, 2006). In the last decades, due to the neo-liberal wave, both education and welfare policies have increasingly been influenced by market logic. Financial cuts and reforms in the Finnish arena of (higher)

education aim at increased freedom of choice, competitiveness and effectiveness. This is a common Nordic line of development and it is questioned whether the grounds to speak of a distinct Nordic welfare and education model still exists (Arensen and Lundahl, 2006:286).

Although, equality of educational opportunities has ceased to evolve in Finland, and the effect of parents' social background on their children's attendance in university education has become stronger in the last decades, the value of social equality and equal opportunities is still the bedrock of (higher) education. High quality education for all is regarded as key asset of Finland also in the future (OKM, 2018a). In Argentina, participation of the young in HE depends on the socio-economic level of their families. Parents' educational level rather than their occupational level has a great bearing on the possibilities of their children to attend to university.

Based on our analysis, it appears that when education policies are increasingly mixed with economic policies, social inequality in education tends to increase. Finland is a case in point. With the entrance of market logic in education policies, equality of educational opportunities has ceased to evolve. In Argentina, the education policies have, for long, been directed by economic policies. Parent's educational level influences in their children's attendance particularly in university level education in both countries. However, the influence is greater in Argentina than in Finland. First, Argentinian heterogeneous primary and secondary education system does not provide equal intellectual basis of all children. Besides, owing to great class differences in Argentina, not all young people have the same possibilities to end secondary school and to pursue successful academic career. In Finland, however, class distinction is not as pronounced as it is in Argentina, and the education system is comprehensive providing more equal basis for children's further education career regardless of their social and cultural background.

(Higher) education policies have not succeeded to promote social equality in Argentinian education system. Even though, in principle, they try to insure free access to university for all, in practice they do not provide equal opportunities for the young coming from lower income homes. To promote equality in educational opportunities in HE, the education system should provide intermediate training between upper secondary school and university and continuously invest in the scholarship system with sufficient grants. In Finland, education policies have succeeded better to promote social equality. The winners have been 'ordinary' people and women, especially.



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