

2019

EDULOG

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EQUITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

EVIDENCE, POLICY AND PRACTICE

**EQUIDADE NO
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EVIDÊNCIA, POLÍTICAS E PRÁTICAS

EDULOG

FUNDAÇÃO BELMIRO DE AZEVEDO

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An equity paradox?
The Northern European case

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5. December 2019

An equity paradox?

The Northern European case

Presentation Porto 5. – 6. December 2019

Introduction

- Main question: Is enrolment in higher education more equal in the Nordic countries?
- A review of research during 50 years
- Both comparative and from single countries
- Focus mainly on social class differences
- Covering the transitions at all levels of education

The Nordic countries: geography and populations



The Nordic countries in brief

- Five small countries, but 27 million people in total
- Culturally and geographically close
- But large differences in nature as well as economically
 - Denmark: Flat and fertile, well developed agriculture
 - Finland: forestry and high-tech
 - Norway: Coast and mountains: fishery, oil and mining
 - Sweden: forestry and iron
 - Iceland: fishery and geothermal energy
- Industrialised, but profiles according to natural resources
- Denmark, Norway and Sweden: almost identical languages
- Shared historical development, but also differences
- High living standard
- Relative small income differences (OECD)

Equity or equality?

- A change in terms or policies?
- Equality: reducing differences
- Equity: fairness and inclusion
- In most research: equality is used, so will I

What is the problem? Arguments for equalisation

- Education affects economy, health, political and cultural participation
- Educational inequality is associated with:
 - Lack of social effectiveness
 - Unfairness
 - Social discord
 - Weak representativeness

Political background

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Welfare state models (Esping- Andersen 1990)

- Liberal model (USA, Canada, Australia):
 - Targeted contributions to the weakest
 - Small welfare state, private actors
- Conservative model (Austria, France, Italy):
 - Less emphasis in market mechanisms than the liberal model
 - Marginal distribution mechanisms
 - Based on traditional family patterns
- Social democratic model (The Nordic countries):
 - Redistribution policies
 - Universalistic contribution mechanisms

Educational policies in the Nordic countries

- Since 1850: development towards comprehensive school systems
- Since WW II: educational policy related to the welfare state
 - Tuition free higher education
 - Generous student support systems

Trends and comparisons

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Peristent inequality in most countries?

- Shavit & Blossfeld (1993): a much cited comparative book
- 13 countries: USA, Germany (West), The Netherlands, Sweden, England/Wales, Italy, Switzerland, Taiwan, Japan, Poland, Hungary, Czechoslovakia and Israel
- Marked educational expansion in all countries
- Sweden and the Netherlands: decline in inequality between social groups
- In all other countries: no significant changes
- Strongest effect of social origin in the beginning of the educational career
- Marked reduction in gender differences
- Negligible effect of educational reforms

Later research opposes S & B (1993)

- Shavit, Arum & Gamoran (2007):
- Declined inequality in higher education in Japan, Korea, Taiwan & Sweden)
- In Israel and Italy: declined inequality in the transition from upper secondary to tertiary education
- Difficult to see effects of binary, unitary or diversified systems

- Breen et al (2009): In general inequality had declined between 1950 and 1975
- Reduced inequality in transition from primary to secondary education

What has happened in Nordic countries?

- All Nordic countries have developed register statistics

- Sweden:

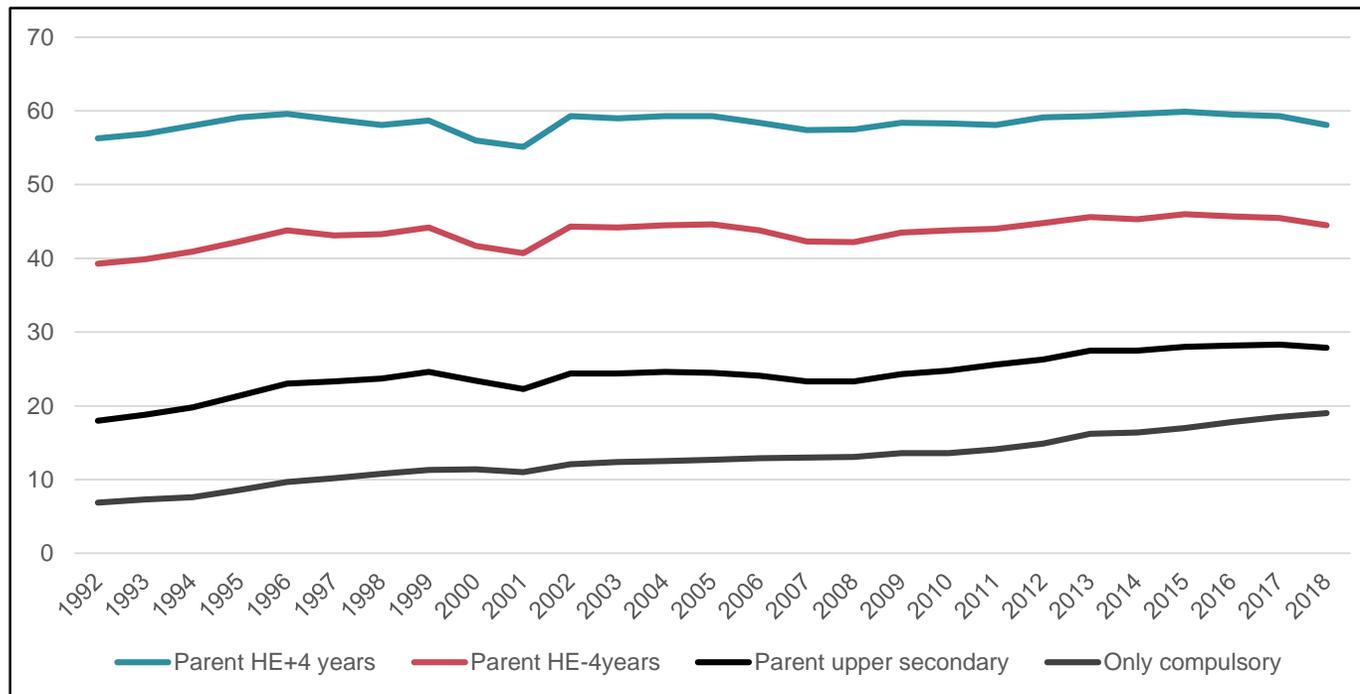
- Erikson & Jonsson (1996): Inequality decreased from 1930 to 1970, but stable pattern before and after
- A later study (Erikson & Jonsson 2009): little support for tertiary education expansion as an effective means for educational equalisation
- Increasing stratification within higher education

- Finland

- Kivinen et. al. (2007): Higher education participation is affected by social class and parents' education
- But: differences between academic and non-academic families are reduced
- Odds ratio : decreased from 19 to 8 from 1970 to 2000

What has happened in Nordic countries? (Norway)

- Knudsen, Sørensen & Aamodt 1993: Decreased inequality in HE total from 1980 to 1990, stable at universities
- This was later confirmed by Nordli Hansen (1999)
- **Figure show % of age group 19-24 enrolled in HE, by parents' education**



What has happened in Nordic countries? (cont.)

● Denmark

- Thomsen (2015): 1984 – 2010: participation ratio academic/ non-academic families: reduced from 4:1 to 3:1 in tertiary education
- In selective university programmes: ratio was over 8:1

No common Nordic equality pattern

● Thomsen et.al (2017)

- Enrolment to almost all fields of HE had been equalised from 1985 to 2010
- Not in the most prestigious programmes
- Considerably different patterns in the four Nordic countries:
- Finland and Norway: enrolment has been equalised in tandem with expansion
- Denmark: a more modest development
- Sweden: almost no change (but was more equal in 1985)

Summary of findings: the general pattern

- Main picture: In spite of massification of HE since 1950: still strong inequality in enrolment in HE (by parents' education or social class)
- The picture is less consistent when comes to changes over time
- Most recent research has concluded that there has been a significant move towards equalisation during the last decades
- Non-university institutions have contributed to more equality,
- Inequality has remained in universities, and especially the most prestigious programmes

Summary of findings: The Nordic countries

- HE in the Nordic countries are slightly more equal
- Surprisingly strong differences in equality trends between the Nordic countries
- Family economy is less important than class and parents' education
- Can this be explained by:
 - educational policy?
 - general policy?
 - welfare state models?
 - class structure?

The gender pattern has been turned upside-down

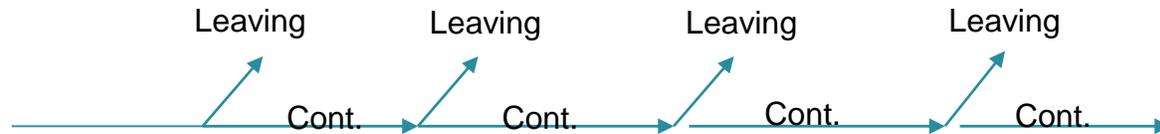
- Gender differences has disappeared in most countries
- In the Nordic countries women are in majority, also in e.g. law and medicine
- But still strong gender differences by field of study:
 - Technology is still male dominated, while nursing and teaching is strongly female-dominated

How to explain inequality in education

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Achievement, choice and selection

- Illustration of transitions between educational levels



- At each point, students from higher social classes have a higher probability to continue (and enter academic tracks)
- At each point, social inequality is increasing

Primary and secondary effects (Boudon 1974)

- Primary: differences between social classes in school achievement based on genetic and social/cultural factors
- Secondary: social differences in choices between students at the same ability level

Three theories on educational inequality

1. The value theory: Class-specific values about education, different interests
2. Culture theory: Well-educated families encourage and help children in school. Different “habitus” (Bourdieu)
3. Social position theory (Boudon). Educational ambitions depend on class. Developed further by Breen & Goldthorpe as rational choice theory, comparing gains and losses.

Erikson & Jonssons summary

- Academic performance is better among children from higher social classes (genetic or culture)
- Actual educational costs are higher for lower classes, primarily affecting transitions to higher education
- Actual probability of success (at a given achievement level) is higher the higher parents' education, help and support during school
- Perceived benefits of education are greater for children of higher classes, because the negative value they place on downward mobility outweighs the positive value of the corresponding social ascent for children from lower classes
- Perceived probability of success are lower for children from lower classes at the earliest educational choice

Policy for equalisation: some proposals

- Priority to early childhood education
- Limit early tracking and postpone selection.
- Avoid socially segregated schools.
- Entry regulations should be based on objective criteria.
- Access to higher education for all who have formal qualifications.
- A generous student support system

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