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LIFELONG LEARNING GOVERNANCE IN THE NORDIC COUNTRIES: A COMPARISON

Towards a systemic approach

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a comparison**

Towards a systemic approach

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Foreword

Digitalisation and globalisation are changing our lives, working life and communities at an unprecedented rate. Our well-being and competitiveness are based on competence. Therefore, everyone should have the possibility to develop their competence in all stages of life.

In work facilitated by Sitra, 30 key Finnish societal operators created a common approach concerning the long-term lifelong learning policy in March 2019. The result of the work is described in the Sitra publication [Towards lifelong learning - The shared aim, funding principles and challenges](#) and its [summary](#).

This report focuses on comparing the solutions to managing lifelong learning in the Nordic countries. We reviewed how lifelong learning guidance solutions are administrative sector-driven and to what extent systemic thinking is used in governance. The systemic approach pays attention to the bigger picture, the interaction between its component parts and their continuous reshaping.

The Nordic countries have taken steps towards more systemic governance of lifelong learning. In Sweden, a strategic co-operation group has overall responsibility for this instead of individual ministries. Finland has carried out experiments applying a systemic approach to budgeting. In Iceland and Norway, legislation in part recognises the goal of lifelong learning, and the countries also have national lifelong learning co-ordinators. Most importantly, each Nordic country demonstrates its commitment to the long-term governance of lifelong learning beyond government terms.

It is our hope that the perspectives in this document are utilised to develop the governance of lifelong learning in the Nordic countries and elsewhere. This makes it possible to effectively support the opportunities people have for developing their abilities in different situations in life. Skills are the foundation of a fair and sustainable future. The continuous development of knowledge and skills promotes equality and the opportunities people have for engagement, and it also strengthens a more pluralistic democracy.

Helsinki, December 2020

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Summary

In a complex world, promoting lifelong learning is becoming an increasingly important investment in the well-being and competitiveness of individuals, companies and society. As global interdependence increases in society, the causal relationships related to lifelong learning become more complex. In such a world, there has to be an emphasis on the need for holistic thinking: in the future, lifelong learning must be managed as a cross-cutting entity, with an approach based on systemic thinking.

A comparison of the lifelong learning structures of the Nordic countries indicates that the current governance of lifelong learning is largely based on measures that are specific to administrative sectors, even though some closer co-operation between administrative sectors can also be seen.

In recent years, the Nordic countries have taken steps towards lifelong learning governance pursuant to systemic thinking. In Sweden, a strategic co-operation group has overall responsibility for this instead of individual ministries. Finland has experimented with applying a systemic approach to budgeting. In Iceland and Norway, legislation in part recognises the goal of lifelong learning, and the countries also have national lifelong learning co-ordinators.

The main substance of this memo as goals for the systemic governance of lifelong learning involve: 1) strengthening the long-term perspective in decision-making, 2) making better use of research-based information in understanding phenomena and 3) creating extensive high-quality interaction between different parties to generate a shared understanding and further the realisation of the goals and measures.

This report raises a question for further discussion: What kinds of new structures and solutions would provide scope for the parties, gather them extensively together, provide a view of the bigger picture and facilitate dialogue?

Introduction

Driven by technological development, the transformation of work emphasises the importance of lifelong learning for society, workplaces and individuals to succeed. With the transformation of work being more rapid and harder to forecast, even statistics show that the education received by the lifelong learner early on no longer carries them throughout their working career.

Different opportunities for learning must be available to a sufficient extent regardless of people's current life situation. They must be able to apply their competence in new ways or obtain completely new knowledge or skills to improve their prerequisites for keeping up with working life. For the employer, competence building is an absolutely necessary strategic means of building sustainable competitiveness to flourish in the market. In successful working communities, this can be seen as an operating culture that fosters learning: work tasks and working methods are shaped in unison so that people are able to draw on their skills and maintain continuous learning in the working community.

The increasing importance of lifelong learning to individuals and working communities also emphasises the role of society as a facilitator of competence building in different life situations. After building one's competence base during childhood and adolescence, lifelong learning is no longer a clear episode on the timeline of a linear working career that could be steered with the guidance processes of old governance paradigms. With the transformation of work, lifelong learning has become a multi-dimensional and dynamic element that is moulded as part of the wider system while also shaping the other elements of that system. There is a need for thinking about how lifelong learning can be managed in society systemically.

This report reviews and compares administrative models of lifelong learning governance in the Nordic countries. In particular, it is aimed at decision-makers who design lifelong learning policy, experts who prepare and execute it, developers of state guidance and others who are interested in the issue. It is based on the Sitra publication *Ilmiölähtöisen johtamisen näkökulma elinikäiseen oppimiseen* [Systemic governance perspective to lifelong learning], published in Finnish in October 2020.

Lifelong learning — a multidimensional phenomenon in a complex operating environment

In systemic thinking, the matter that is to be influenced is first understood and outlined. When looking at lifelong learning, its total complexity must be understood. Lifelong learning can be interpreted in different ways because different purposes can be identified and diverse causal relationships are

associated with it. For the individual, lifelong learning embraces several aspirations: *learning to know*, *learning to do*, *learning to live together* and *learning to be*. Learning can be seen as *life-long*, *life-wide* or *life-deep*. *Lifelong learning* refers to a person's life, from birth to death. *Life-wide learning* refers to the aggregate or parallel learning experiences at any stage of life. *Life-deep*, on the other hand, illustrates views and insights that increase understanding of the world outside one's life domain. Due to this multi-dimensional nature of lifelong learning, it has been difficult to gain a consistent view of lifelong learning. (Pantzar 2020) Defining the concept of lifelong learning is made harder because, in addition to the individual level, lifelong learning can be treated as a societal phenomenon. It is then necessary to distinguish between the ideological level and the political level — namely strategy — and practice (Kinnari 2020). This report focuses on the strategic — the political — level of lifelong learning.

Lifelong learning as such is a multi-dimensional and complicated matter. The operating environment in which it takes place is also complex. This complexity requires an understanding of the joint action and joint development of lifelong learning on the whole and its different areas, because it is not possible to deduce the functioning of the lifelong learning system from the actions of an individual or organisation. Political and administrative leaderships need to be aware of the situational picture of lifelong learning in order to manage it on the whole. Creating a situational picture requires quantitative indicators, but they are only one part of it. It is essential to notice indicators that impact the functioning of the entire system. To obtain a situational picture therefore requires several perspectives and the willingness and perception to look at the situations objectively and in a varied way. The processes should be developed to support dialogue between different experts and increase the transparency of operations (Vartiainen 2020).

In order for the continuous learning policy shaped on the basis of the situational picture to have an impact, key elements in terms of administrative policy include the accessibility of continuous learning, functional financing systems and strong social impact. It can be hard to verify the impact if the goals are scattered and can only be reached over different timespans. Administrative policy can be a tool for synergy, if the impact of continuous learning is conducted as part of more extensive social reforms (Aarrevaara 2020).

In a world where issues are entwined, striving for a goal requires an understanding of the bigger picture and its dynamics. In the current governance landscape, it is difficult to recognise causal relationships. As a result, the conventional linear design of strategic governance models in which goals are parsed into a line of individual actions where the desired goal is reached through their consistent realisation no longer tends to work. This impacts on the governance of lifelong learning in both society and individual organisations.

Applying systemic thinking to the governance of lifelong learning highlights the organisation's need for continuous reorganisation. But in publicly managed organisations, rigid decision-making structures and leadership

pursuant to the logic of top-down power structures are an obstacle to development towards the bottom up approach required by the systemic method. Governance fostering systemic change and creating resilience should focus on such things as interaction and joint learning. Systematic work is required for this (Stenvall 2020).

The different dimensions of lifelong learning described above and the summary of the current state of lifelong learning governance in the Nordic countries in the first chapter provide a starting point for considering the development of structures and operating models towards systemic approach. In the second chapter, Pinja Ryky, Iina Santamäki and Hanne Smidt examine the European Union's 2020 policy and the administrative structures of lifelong learning in the Nordic countries. EU policy reflects the diversity of lifelong learning and the interlaced nature of its different elements. The need for systemic governance can also be read from them: the European Commission's conclusions urge the fostering of interaction between all parties when seeking change opportunities for lifelong learning. The review looks at the key administrative structures from the point of view of systemic governance, such as the mechanisms for sharing responsibility for lifelong learning, budgeting, legislation, governance, operators and services and the areas of long-term development.

The third chapter describes how Finland has moved towards more holistic public governance pursuant to systemic thinking and how lifelong learning is viewed as a phenomenon on this development path.

The fourth chapter takes a look at the future and offers insights on how knowledge relating to lifelong learning and interaction that gives rise to shared understanding strengthen the long-term perspective in decision-making.

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Glossary

ADMINISTRATIVE SECTOR-DRIVEN GOVERNANCE. The conventional governance method of public administration, guided by linearly defined responsibility and power relationships. Each ministry implements the government policy in its respective sector and allocates its annual budget to activities and projects in its own sector.

LIFELONG LEARNING Learning that takes place throughout a person's life in different situations. In this context, lifelong learning is primarily a political concept that can be managed administratively. Lifelong learning is a systemic entity that promotes economic growth, people's skills development and a better match between education and the needs of the labour market.

PATH DEPENDENCY. Previous events and choices impact future events and choices. The old still exists and defines activities while steps are already being taken in a new direction.

SYSTEMIC GOVERNANCE. Identification of a phenomenon, meaning an observable challenge relating to the operating environment or complex problem that governance should impact. In systemic governance, goals are set for change and the way the impact of measures will be assessed is defined. It is essential to understand the dynamics of the phenomenon, associated interdependencies, continuously learn more about the nature of the phenomenon and apply this to governance. Systemic public governance can be seen as a way of implementing systemic thinking in government control.

SYSTEMIC THINKING. The systemic approach reviews the operation of complicated systems in a comprehensive way. The aim is to understand the factors that make up the system and how its different components influence each other and the system overall. Systemic thinking identifies regularities and factors explaining them, which can be observable or hidden.

1 European Union policies on lifelong learning and structures in the Nordic countries

Pinja Ryky, Iina Santamäki, Hanne Smidt

1.1 European Union policies on lifelong learning

For the last 20 years, lifelong learning and expertise development have been a cornerstone of European Union policy. The idea of knowledge-based economic growth was incorporated into European educational policy in the EU's development plan launched in 2000, known as the Lisbon Strategy. The set goal was for the EU to be the world's most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy by 2010.

Since the Lisbon Strategy, the importance of the lifelong learning policy has been discussed in many policy documents and declarations of the European Commission and Council. The mobility programmes of different educational levels were also compiled into one, and the entire portfolio was named the *Lifelong Learning Policy*, implemented in the years 2007–2013. The EU's policy can be widely seen in the Member States' educational policies as national programmes and measures fostering lifelong learning.

Several Member States, such as Finland and France, have highlighted the importance of lifelong learning during their EU presidencies to develop a “Europe of Knowledge”. The declarations of the ministerial meetings issued in the Bologna process have also consistently emphasised the value of knowledge and learning. In the 2020 Paris Declaration, ministers of 48 countries declared their intent to form a European Higher Education Area by 2025. The focus of the lifelong learning programme has been on the social dimension and expanding access and engagement.

Current EU policy aiming at a digital and green transition includes lifelong learning initiatives that primarily aim to reach those who have already completed a degree.

The lifelong learning included in the current EU policy also involves the European Pillar of Social Rights, which is concretely supported by the creation of a European Education Area. It covers all levels of education, not only higher education as in the European Higher Education Area. This is an important policy change that emphasises interaction between different levels of education:

“Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and lifelong learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and successfully manage transitions in the labour market.” (European Commission, 2020.)

A recent European Commission document (EU Council Conclusions, 2020) demands that the EU increase the policy focus on education, lifelong learning and the development of skills and competences so that the Member States can together respond to complex societal challenges. This document proposes the following with regard to lifelong learning, among other things:

- Ensure that the recovery plans concerning the COVID-19 crisis include a strategic approach to retraining and improvement of professional skills.
- Promote, where appropriate, retraining and the diversification of formal and informal training offered to adults. This will be realised by developing guidance and validation services, establishing infrastructures and increasing online services as an alternative to providing lifelong learning courses or on-site activities. In connection with this, the role of on-the-job learning and workplace mentoring systems could be developed further.
- Support individuals in the development of continuous skills and competence and obtaining a higher educational level. This will take place by offering individually customised and meaningful services, such as high-quality career counselling.
- Offer better opportunities for validating competence and direct economic incentives and special support for SMEs and self-employed persons.
- Research the possible models of public and private funding of lifelong learning and development of professional skill at the individual level. With funding, pay particular attention to vulnerable groups and workers with a lower skill level.
- Promote the active engagement of all stakeholders, such as businesses, government, regions, social partners, chambers of commerce, industrial sectors, education providers and other relevant partners in identifying the required skills and exploring opportunities for change.

The Commission's recent communications have supported the conclusions of the Council. They have emphasised the New Skills Agenda for Europe 2020, the Commission's Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027 Resetting education and training for the digital age, and the European Research Area and the European Education Area.

All of these proposals relating to the focal points of lifelong learning in EU policy require close co-operation between governments and the private sector. Investments in lifelong learning, retraining of the workforce and improvement of professional skills are also required. The proposal for a considerably closer relationship between the European Research Area and European Education Area is key to the new initiatives.

1.2 Nordic lifelong learning governance structures

Below is an overview of how the different Nordic countries have organised lifelong learning governance, structures and guidance. We also compare these with each other. Our summary reviews key governance structures in terms of phenomenon-based governance, such as mechanisms of sharing responsibility for lifelong learning, budgeting, legislation, governance, operators and services and the areas of long-term development.

The Nordic countries are an interesting benchmark for Finland, as our notions of the welfare state are similar in many respects. This review can also provide ideas for Finland concerning development opportunities. It has made use of an extensive information search, after which a Nordic network of experts validated the collected data. Table 1 presents a summary of the findings. The questions presented in it and the Nordic countries' ranking in the table are explained in the sections below. A more detailed country-specific description is attached to this memo.

Table 1 shows that the structures of lifelong learning management in the Nordic countries primarily represent a control system divided between different sectors of administration. This can be seen in the national budgets, for example: No Nordic country applies budgeting pursuant to a systemic approach. Rather, investments in lifelong learning are distributed among several different ministries.

As we see from the table, lifelong learning is primarily managed in an administrative sector-driven way in the Nordic countries. However, there are also signs of a systemic approach to lifelong learning management. The Nordic countries have, at least partly, committed themselves to a long-term policy of lifelong learning. In addition, some Nordic countries have a strategic collaboration group and permanent lifelong learning co-ordinator.

TABLE 1. Comparison of the lifelong learning structures of the Nordic countries.

| | Administrative Sector-driven | Features of Systemic Approach | Systemic Approach |
|--|---|---|--|
| 1. Who is responsible for the management of lifelong learning as a whole in administration? | One or two ministries  | Several ministries  | Strategic collaboration group  |
| 2. Does the country review the funding of lifelong learning in an administrative sector-driven or systemic way? | Administrative sector-driven budgeting  | Being planned/experiments  | Phenomenon-based budgeting |
| 3. Does the country's legislation recognise lifelong learning as an independent objective that has intrinsic value? | No  | Partially  | Yes |
| 4. Does the country have a national lifelong learning co-ordinator? | No  | Being planned  | Yes  |
| 5. Is the country committed to a lifelong learning policy that goes beyond the government terms? | No | Partially  | Yes  |

The next two figures portray the differences in two management methods in public administration. The models mirror the operating model of phenomenon-based public administration presented in a Sitra working paper (Sitra 2018b). The models are conventional administrative sector-based management and management that applies systemic thinking.

Figure 1 illustrates the model of administrative sector-driven public administration, reflecting the classic public administration portrayed by Vartiainen et al. (2020). In this, responsibility and power relations are defined. Each ministry implements the government policy in its respective sector and allocates its annual budget to activities and projects in its own sector.

FIGURE 1. Administrative sector-driven management.

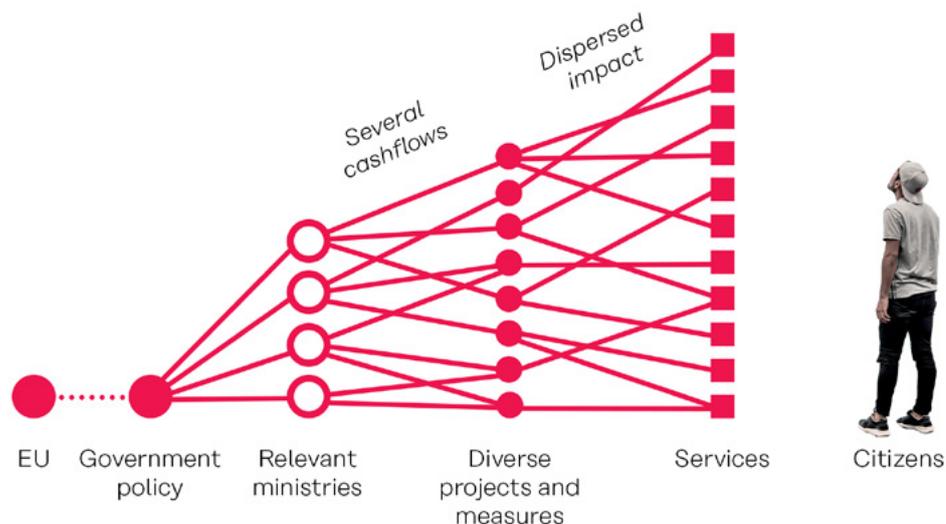
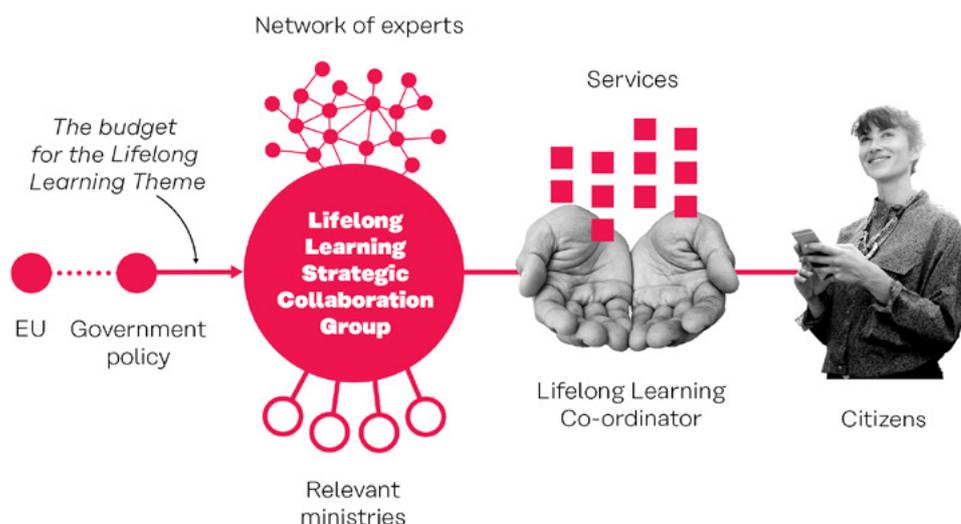


Figure 2 presents a model of phenomenon-based public governance. The starting point here of budgeting is a phenomenon, which is guided through larger cross-sectoral entities. Phenomenon-based governance is characterised by the co-operative culture described by Vartiainen et al. (2020). It includes continuous observation of how the guidance works and promotes the desired direction in different situations and as the interactive relationships between operators change. This also makes it possible to allocate funding more flexibly to measures considered to provide the biggest impact.

FIGURE 2. Phenomenon-based governance.



1.2.1 Who is responsible for the management of lifelong learning as a whole in administration?

The Nordic countries allocate the responsibility for the governance of lifelong learning to one or two ministries, several ministries and/or a strategic collaboration group. The strategic collaboration group involves both private and public sector experts.

The Swedish government has outlined four strategic co-operation programmes for 2019–2022 based on the strengths of the Swedish economy, Agenda 2030 objectives and areas of importance to future economic growth. “Offering skills and lifelong learning” is one of these collaboration programmes. Through joint competence, decision-making power, resources and networks, the collaboration programmes help to find innovative solutions, that respond to the biggest societal challenges and foster Sweden’s competitiveness (Regeringskansliet, 2020 c).

In Denmark and Iceland, responsibility is centralised in one or two ministries. In Denmark, the Ministry for Education and the Ministry of Higher Education and Science share responsibility for the administration of lifelong learning. The Danish government particularly focuses on the development of skills, and a trilateral agreement signed in 2017 plays an important role in strengthening public adult, post-graduate and supplementary education (Uddannelses- og Forskningsministeriet, 2020).

In Iceland, the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is primarily responsible for lifelong learning. A main goal of the government is to ensure equal access to education regardless of where in the country people live. The aim is also to develop the Icelandic education system based on the needs of students and society as a whole (Government of Iceland, 2017).

In Finland, continuous learning is managed in the public administration based on the Government Programme, and the work is carried out by ministries and cross-sectoral ministerial working groups. In addition, reforms are planned by Parliament and its committees and parliamentary groups in their parliamentary capacity (Parliament of Finland, 2020). From the point of view of lifelong learning, the most important group concerns the Parliamentary reform of continuous learning (Government of Finland, 2019). In Finland, the areas of lifelong learning, such as education in its diverse forms, are seen as a way of increasing the well-being of people in Finland and fostering Finland’s competitiveness and appeal. The Programme of Prime Minister Sanna Marin’s Government stipulates that the level of education and competence should rise at all levels of education, differences in learning outcomes should decrease, educational equality should increase and comprehensive services for lifelong guidance should be developed (Government of Finland, 2019).

In Norway, all five ministries that were involved in planning the national skills policy are also responsible for lifelong learning: the Ministry of Education and Research, the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Local Gov-

ernment and Modernisation. The Ministry of Education and Research has the primary responsibility for the management of lifelong learning. Skills reform has a strong status in Norway, and is based on the government's skills policy, which includes the national skills strategy for 2017–2021.

Norway's skills reform has two aims. The first is that no one's professional competence should become obsolete due to a lack of new knowledge or skills. The second is to eliminate the skills gap, or the difference between the skills required for working life and skills actually used by workers. (Regjeringen, 2019.)

The Nordic countries have incorporated key objectives and policies from the point of view of lifelong learning into their strategic documents. The reform needs relating to lifelong learning are mentioned in the Finnish Government Programme and Swedish government documents, while Norway, Denmark and Iceland deal with them indirectly in their documents.

1.2.2 Does the country review the funding of lifelong learning in an administrative sector-driven or systemic way?

Phenomenon-based budgeting refers to a budget section in which financial resources are allocated to the government's key strategic objectives instead of in terms of organisation, sub-item or sector. The aim is to resolve problems associated with a phenomenon, such as lifelong learning. (Sitra, 2018 b.)

Compared to other European countries, the Nordic countries invest the highest share of their GDP in lifelong learning provided through the educational system: Norway 5.4%, Finland 5.5%, Sweden 6.9%, Denmark 6.4% and Iceland 7.3%. The European average is 4.9% of GDP. (Eurostat, 2020.)

Each Nordic country funds lifelong learning in a sectorally through the ministries in charge. As in Finland, in other Nordic countries investments in adult skills development during working life are also made via state, ministry and private funding channels. (Sitra, 2018a.) Finland and the other Nordic countries can be seen as being willing to experiment with phenomenon-based budgeting for lifelong learning.

For example, the EUR 20 million project grants of the Ministry of Education and Culture during the COVID-19-hit spring of 2020 aimed to create a new instrument facilitating flexible utilisation opportunities at all levels of education and supporting the emergence of forms of activity transcending forms of education and sectoral boundaries.

Similar investments were also seen in Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Iceland during the coronavirus crisis of spring 2020: among other things, the number of student places was increased in particular to strengthen the opportunities for unemployed people to study.

Such individual extensive investments are closest to a needs-based approach, a way in which phenomenon-based entities could be partially built into the budget. However, the key challenge is that when funds are allocated

to individual projects, the overall view of services remains unclear to the lifelong learner (Sitra, 2018b).

1.2.3 Does the country's legislation recognise lifelong learning as an independent objective that has intrinsic value?

The Finnish legal system recognises lifelong learning as having instrumental value, but not as an objective with intrinsic value. Lifelong learning comes within the scope of regulation on both education and livelihood. At the level of the Constitution, lifelong learning is not an unambiguous and clearly structured theme, although we can specify a separate constitutional fixed point for it: article 16.2 of the Constitution (Sitra, 2019).

The same characteristics can also be seen in Sweden and Denmark's legislation. We can say that the countries' legislation recognises terms and issues pointing at lifelong learning, but not lifelong learning as a phenomenon. From the point of view of lifelong learning, however, key amendments have been made to the legislation of these countries.

Iceland and Norway's legislation can be seen as supporting lifelong learning. A good example in the case of Iceland is the Adult Education Act (Act 27/2010) concerning adult education and lifelong learning, drafted in 2010. The law was introduced to match the needs of people with short formal education and who are not covered by high school or university legislation (Government of Iceland, 2017 b).

In Norway, adult education is regulated by the Adult Education Act (1976) and Education Act (1998) (Regjeringen, 2006). Also, a new act relating to informal adult education entered into force in 2010, designed to regulate lifelong learning courses organised outside the formal education system (Adult and Continuing Education in Norway, 2016).

1.2.4 Does the country have a national lifelong learning co-ordinator?

A lifelong learning co-ordinator refers to a permanent unit that functions as the national co-ordinator and assembles dispersed operators and services under a full service principle.

Iceland and Norway have life-long learning coordinators. In Iceland, the Education and Training Service Centre (Fræðslumiðstöð atvinnulífsins, FA) operates based on a service agreement with the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. In Norway, lifelong learning is co-ordinated by Skills Norway (Kompetanse Norge), a directorate under the Ministry of Education and Research. The purpose of Skills Norway is to ensure that all adults, employed and unemployed, have access to the education they need.

In Finland, national co-ordination is promoted through the parliamentary reform of continuous learning and the planned continuous learning service centre that would promote smoother service from the perspective of

the client. Creating a service system for continuous learning involves reforming the services associated with the skills of people of working age, improving the matching of work and skills and reinforcing the regional ecosystem of competence (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2020; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020).

At present, Sweden and Denmark do not have national lifelong learning co-ordinators to gather dispersed lifelong learning services. Instead, the responsibility for co-ordination has been shared between educational institutions, government departments, regional initiatives, such as learning centres, and research institutions.

1.2.5 Is the country committed to a lifelong learning policy that goes beyond government terms?

In this review, commitment refers, for instance, to a permanent agreement between a ministry responsible for lifelong learning and a national lifelong learning co-ordinator or long-term ministry-driven lifelong learning projects. Such permanent agreements and long-term projects indicate that the state is committed to a strategy of promoting lifelong learning that traverses government terms, as these agreements and projects also continue during subsequent terms of government, and regardless of the new government line-ups.

In Norway and Iceland, the local ministries of education have permanent agreements with national co-ordinators, Skills Norway (Kompetanse Norge) and the Education and Training Service Centre (Fræðslumiðstöð atvinnulífsins, FA), respectively. Also, the Icelandic Education and Training Service Centre (FA) is responsible for the Education Fund that operates in line with the Adult Education Act 27/2010. The purpose of the fund is to promote appropriate learning opportunities for people who have a short formal educational background (Fræðslumiðstöð atvinnulífsins, 2020 b).

Concerning Sweden, Denmark and Finland, efforts are made to manage lifelong learning from a long-term perspective across government terms. However, for these countries, lifelong learning projects and co-operation programmes often last for only a single government term and there is no permanent agreement with the national co-ordinator for the time being. In general, the framework of the long-term development of the lifelong learning phenomenon is based on legislation and funding.

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2 Nordic governance structures of lifelong learning by country

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This chapter examines the lifelong learning governance structures that are central to phenomenon-based management in each of the Nordic countries. We do this on two dimensions: how linearly and how systemically lifelong learning is governed. The themes include the mechanisms of sharing responsibility for the management of lifelong learning, phenomenon-based budgeting, legislation, governance, co-ordination of operators and services and the areas of long-term development. We present the practices of each Nordic country under separate subheadings.

2.1 Denmark

2.1.1 Who is responsible for the management of lifelong learning as a whole in the government?

The Ministry for Education and the Ministry of Higher Education and Science share responsibility for the administration of lifelong learning in public administration. There are several departments, state-owned institutions and a number of councils, boards and committees operating under the supervision of the ministries. The adult education and supplementary training council (VEU) advises the Ministry for Education in themes important to the field of adult and post-graduate education (Børne- og undervisningsministeriet, 2020).

Lifelong learning-related themes feature prominently in Danish government documents. However, one can state that lifelong learning is not considered as a phenomenon; teaching and skills development are seen as tools for strengthening Danish society. In June 2017, an expert group on adult and supplementary education published a report, “Nye kompetencer hele livet” (New skills throughout life) and submitted its recommendation to the government of the time. The recommendations were divided into three themes, on the basis of which the government has carried out measures supporting the goals of the themes: 1) a uniform adult, post-graduate and supplementary education system, 2) strong and targeted vocational adult and post-graduate education, and 3) modernisation of party governance in the adult and post-graduate education system. (Nye kompetencer hele livet, 2017.)

Furthermore, the Danish government and labour market parties signed a trilateral agreement for 2017–2020, focusing on competence building and supplementation. The agreement strengthens the functioning of public adult,

post-graduate and supplementary education (Uddannelses- og Forskningsministeriet, 2020).

2.1.2 Does the country review the funding of lifelong learning in an administrative sector-driven or systemic way?

Denmark invested 6.4 per cent of its GDP in education in 2018, which is one of the highest shares in Europe (Eurostat, 2020). The aim is to maintain a highly educated and skilled workforce that succeeds in the global economy and to emphasise investments in education in addition to professional development.

In Denmark, the budgeting of lifelong learning is primarily guided through the Ministry of Education, the Ministry of Higher Education and Science, the Ministry of Culture, the Ministry of Immigration and Integration and the Ministry of Health. In addition, municipalities fund many services, such as local general education. Official university degrees are fully funded by the government.

Moreover, universities provide a varied range of courses for lifelong learning. Courses leading to study credits and qualifications are funded by the participants; however, employers frequently pay for them.

Denmark has focused on skills development and supplementation, and has made significant investments in recent decades. An example of this is the “flexicurity” model that makes it possible to update one’s training in conjunction with work. A total of about EUR 134 million has been invested in lifelong learning and skills development and supplementation in all sectors combined in 2014–2020 (Rambøll, 2020). Based on the trilateral agreement signed in 2017, a call for projects supporting lifelong learning and skills development has been annually opened to fund the projects. The trilateral agreement also includes special funding for the adult education and vocational training and education sectors (Uddannelses- og Forskningsministeriet, 2020).

2.1.3 Does the country’s legislation recognise lifelong learning as an independent objective that has intrinsic value?

Denmark’s legislation recognises terms referring to lifelong learning, such as “part-time education” or “open courses”, especially in conjunction with the higher education system, but does not recognise lifelong learning in itself as an independent objective with intrinsic value. Nevertheless, key amendments have been made to legislation. An example of this is Act 556 on the “Development of recognition of previous competence in adult education and post-graduate education”, which has been in force since August 2007. The Act gives everyone the right to have previously obtained competence validated within adult education and post-graduate education. It focuses on the

needs of the individual and aims to make the process as easy and flexible as possible. However, the legislation does not cover Master's degree programmes. (How informal and non-formal learning is recognised in Europe Denmark – country report, 2016.)

The purpose of the act on the assessment of foreign degrees aims to ensure the validation of international degrees and thereby facilitate access to the Danish labour market and the Danish educational system. Furthermore, the act aims to improve the recognition of study credits from Danish and international degrees in the Danish education system.

2.1.4 Does the country have a national lifelong learning co-ordinator?

Denmark does not have a single national lifelong learning co-ordinator to gather dispersed lifelong learning services under a full service principle. Instead, there are several regional lifelong learning co-ordinators and at different stages of the educational system in Denmark.

2.1.5 Is the country committed to a lifelong learning policy that goes beyond the government terms?

In Denmark, efforts are made to manage lifelong learning from a long-term perspective across government terms. Based on the review, however, we can state that there are several lifelong learning projects underway in Denmark that are not centrally co-ordinated. In addition, the Danish Ministry of Education and Ministry of Higher Education and Science do not have a permanent agreement with the lifelong learning co-ordinator that would traverse government terms and support long-term lifelong learning policy.

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2.2 Finland

2.2.1 Who is responsible for the management of lifelong learning as a whole in the government?

In Finland, the management of lifelong learning as a whole is the responsibility of the government, Parliament, ministries, committees and parliamentary groups. The government is headed by the Prime Minister, assisted by the Prime Minister's Office. The ministries are responsible for preparing legislation and matters to be decided on by the government in their respective fields. In addition, reforms are planned by the Parliament and its committees and parliamentary groups in their parliamentary role. Parliament enacts legislation. The government must have the confidence of Parliament. Lifelong learning is managed in the public administration based on the Government Programme, and the work is carried out by ministries, cross-sectoral ministerial working groups and parliamentary groups. (Parliament of Finland, 2020; Parliament of Finland, 2020 b; Finlex, 2020.)

The key ministries responsible for continuous learning in Finland are the Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, Ministry of Social Affairs and Health and the Ministry of Finance. The Ministry of Education and Culture is responsible for planning early childhood education, general education, vocational training and higher education and science policy. Education policy is enforced and developed by the Finnish National Agency for Education. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment prepares up-to-date information about working life and develops working life through diverse services, is responsible for the integration of immigrants and for the acquisition of non-degree-based labour market training. From the point of view of lifelong learning, the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health is responsible for promoting well-being and engagement, well-being at work and supporting the working capacity of senior citizens. The Ministry of Finance guides its investments through the state transfer system and steers the work of committees relating to continuous learning. (Sitra, 2018; Ministry of Social Affairs and Health of Finland, 2020.)

In the programme of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's government, lifelong learning is seen as a way of increasing the well-being of the Finns and fostering Finland's competitiveness and appeal. The Government Programme outlines that the level of education and competence should rise at all levels of education, differences in learning outcomes should decrease, educational equality should increase and continuous guidance service should be developed. The fact that the transformation of work and digitisation will change jobs requiring a lower level of education the most is seen as a specific challenge. This requires retraining in groups that currently participate little in adult education. The themes of lifelong learning are seen as key to Finland's prosperity, a concrete example of which is the Government Programme entry on a parliamentary reform of continuous learning. (Government of

Finland, 2019.) In early 2021, the government will submit an educational policy report to Parliament, to which the parliamentary group will also provide content. The policies aim to ensure an increase in the comprehensive level of competence in Finland, increasing education equality and growth in Finland's international appeal. The review concerns the entire Finnish educational system and development of research, and it is strategic by nature. The work on preparing the report is assessed and supported by extensive parliamentary monitoring. It is also tasked with ensuring co-operation with the parliamentary groups. (Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland, 2020.)

2.2.2 Does the country review the funding of lifelong learning in an administrative sector-driven or systemic way?

Investments in skills development during the working life of adults are channelled via state, ministry and private funding channels (Sitra, 2018). In general, the funding is channelled by four ministries. The biggest flows of funding come from the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Finance. The Ministry of Finance's investments in continuous learning through state transfers to local government are substantial. The Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment and the Ministry of Social Affairs and Health also have funding essentially associated with lifelong learning (Sitra, 2018; Ministry of Finance 2020; Ministry of Finance 2020 b).

The programme of Prime Minister Sanna Marin's government aims to develop the operations, guidance and funding of different levels of education so that an extensive portfolio of working life-driven and diverse lifelong learning portfolios will emerge in Finland. (Government of Finland, 2019, p. 166.) From the point of view of the management of lifelong learning, it is interesting that the Ministry of Finance's working group considered phenomenon-based budgeting in 2018–2019, and the issue has also been discussed by Parliament. The Committee for the Future in particular has spoken for experimenting with and developing phenomenon-based budgeting. (Committee for the Future, 2018; Committee for the Future., 2018 b.) The National Audit Office of Finland is surveying the benefits and challenges of phenomenon-based budgeting based on international and Finnish data. Based on the observations, it is possible to consider how phenomenon-based budgeting could be strengthened, if desired (National Audit Office of Finland, 2020).

There is strategic intent and willingness to experiment with phenomenon-based budgeting of lifelong learning in Finland. For example, the aim of the EUR 20 million project funding of the Ministry of Education and Culture during the COVID-19 spring of 2020 was to create a new instrument facilitating flexible utilisation opportunities at all levels of education and supporting the emergence of forms of activity transcending forms of education and sectoral boundaries (Ministry of Education and Culture of Finland,

2020 c). Such individual large-scale investments are the closest to a phenomenon-based approach, a way in which needs-based entities could partly be built into the budget. However, the key challenge is that when funds are allocated to individual projects, the overview of services remains unclear to the lifelong learner (Sitra, 2018 b).

2.2.3 Does the country's legislation recognise lifelong learning as an independent objective that has intrinsic value?

In Finland, lifelong learning is influenced by both acts on education and diverse acts on livelihood. Legislation only recognises formal education, i.e. learning that aims at a degree. If informal learning is to be reviewed in order to assess forms of the learner's livelihood assistance, it must also be included in the scope of formal learning through various recognition practices. The legal system recognises lifelong learning as having instrumental value, but not as an objective with intrinsic value. At the level of the constitution, lifelong learning is not an unambiguous and clearly structured theme, although we can specify a constitutional fixed point for it: article 16.2 of the Constitution. (Sitra, 2019.)

2.2.4 Does the country have a national lifelong learning co-ordinator?

For the time being, Finland lacks a comprehensive strategy for the development of continuous learning that would gather together the work of different operators engaged in lifelong learning (OECD, 2020). National co-ordination is promoted through the parliamentary reform of continuous learning and the planned continuous learning service centre that would promote smoother service from the perspective of the client. Creating a service system of continuous learning involves reforming the services associated with the skills of people of working age, improving the matching of work and skills and reinforcing the regional ecosystem of competence. The organisation of the service centre would make use of existing resources and new kinds of operating models, taking into consideration the current structures and impending amendments to regional administration. The tasks of the new service organisation would include improving the match between the supply and demand of labour and co-ordination of co-operation between educational institutions, universities and other service providers. The services would be supported by a digital ecosystem of continuous learning, which would gather information about study opportunities in an easy-to-use form serving all residents and working life, for example. Competence survey and recognition and career planning and counselling services would be attached to the system. (Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment, 2020; Ministry of Education and Culture, 2020 b; Ministry of Education and

Culture, 2020 d.) A budgetary appropriation has been reserved for the continuous learning service centre.

2.2.5 Is the country committed to a lifelong learning policy that goes beyond government terms?

In Finland, legislation and funding set the key framework for the long-term development of lifelong learning on the whole. In practice, implementing long-term reforms is challenging, as each government's programme has impacts on the allocation of budgetary appropriations. Therefore, most lifelong learning projects and programmes are implemented within government terms.

The Ministry of Social Affairs and Health reform of social protection is the longest lasting project portfolio, which has continued over two government terms. Long-term reform work is supported by permanent committees established for the entire duration of the electoral term, including the Committee for the Future. However, committees can be re-established by proposal of the Speaker's Council once the government has been appointed following a parliamentary election (rules of procedure, article 17). In fact, all committees have been re-established by the 2007, 2011 and 2015 parliamentary sessions following the establishment of the government. (Parliament of Finland, 2020 b.)

The UN 2030 Agenda is a key long-term action programme for sustainable development that also concerns lifelong learning (Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, 2020). The government programme (Government of Finland, 2019) includes reform proposals associated with the 2030 Agenda action programme. The co-ordination secretariat established in the Prime Minister's Office plans, prepares, co-ordinates and ensures the national implementation of the 2030 Agenda. (Prime Minister's Office, 2020.)

In Finland, efforts are made to manage lifelong learning from a long-term perspective across terms of government, despite the challenges. The programmes associated with lifelong learning are prepared so as to guide the change in the long term.

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2.3 Iceland

2.3.1 Who is responsible for the management of lifelong learning in government?

The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture is responsible for carrying out legislation covering all levels of education, from general education to vocational training and post-graduate and adult education. This includes drafting curricula for general education, enacting regulations and planning educational reforms. The Ministry of Education, Science and Culture grants accreditation to higher education institutions that fulfil the criteria laid down in national legislation as well as internationally accepted criteria (Government of Iceland, 2020.) The national lifelong learning co-ordinator, the Education and Training Service (FA), was established in 2002 when the Icelandic Ministry of Education and Culture of that time concluded an agreement with the central unions of the country's employees and employers. FA operates based on a service agreement with the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture (Fræðslumiðstöð atvinnulífsins, 2020).

In 2017, the government laid down several lifelong learning objectives for the years to come. One of the key objectives of the government is to ensure equal access to education regardless of where people live. The aim is

also to develop the education system based on the needs of students and society on the whole. There is a desire to support innovation and development at all levels of education, as this is seen as a prerequisite for future innovation. (Policy Statement, 2017.) A list of measures was compiled based on the 2017 Policy Statement for the ministries responsible for the themes. Several measures relating to lifelong learning have already been marked off as complete from the list.

2.3.2 Does the country review the funding of lifelong learning in an administrative sector-driven or systemic way?

The biggest flow of funding to lifelong learning takes place via the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. The Ministry of Industries and Innovation also funds some lifelong learning projects in the tourism sector. Of the 2021 budget, 10 per cent is allocated for the remit of the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture, while the costs of the education and culture sectors are estimated to increase by up to EUR 36 million (Government of Iceland, 2020). Icelandic experts describe the funding system as a complicated aggregate of several different flows of funding.

The Icelandic Education and Training Service Centre (FA) is responsible for the Education Fund that operates under the Adult Education Act 27/2010. The purpose of the fund is to foster appropriate learning opportunities for people with a short formal education. The funding shares of the Education Fund are specified in the budget for each year. The Board of Directors of the Education Fund is responsible for distributing funds from the Education Fund and imposing specific terms and conditions for the funding shares, which are confirmed by the minister (Fræðslumiðstöð atvinnulífsins, 2020 b).

2.3.3 Does the country's legislation recognise lifelong learning as an independent objective that has intrinsic value?

Icelandic legislation recognises the need for encouraging individuals with a low level of education to embrace lifelong learning. A good example of this is the Adult Education Act (Act 27/2010) concerning adult education and lifelong learning, drafted in 2010. The law was introduced to match the needs of people with a short informal education and who are not included in the scope of application of the legislation on upper secondary schools or universities. The purpose of the Act is to offer opportunities and encouragement to this group of people, increase their professional skill and create the required solutions for matching the needs of Iceland's key industries offering employment for increased competence (Government of Iceland, 2017).

Iceland uses a validation system for competence acquired outside the official education system. In Iceland, the assessment of actual skills is based

on the idea that learning does not only take place in the official school system, but also in all kinds of situations and various contexts. All learning is valuable, and therefore it is important to document it, regardless of where it was obtained. Actual skills are therefore combined skills that a person has obtained in various ways, such as through work experience, internships, leisure time studies, studying at school, voluntary and/or NGO work or family life. (Fræðslumiðstöð atvinnulífsins, 2020 c.)

2.3.4 Does the country have a national lifelong learning co-ordinator?

The Education and Training Service Centre (FA) has a service agreement with the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture. The task of the Education and Training Service Centre (FA) is to offer its target group an opportunity for education and improvement of position in the labour market. The FA's target group includes people who have not completed secondary education. The main areas of responsibility of the centre are to prepare the curriculum, develop the validation of informal studies and dissemination of procedures, supervise the development of counselling and advisory services, identify the training needs of the target group in co-operation with representatives of the labour market and education providers, develop the procedures of accredited adult education in co-operation with education providers, foster the quality of the activities and guidance of accredited education providers, collect, store and share information about the target group and its education needs, govern the education fund and develop and maintain the student register. (Fræðslumiðstöð atvinnulífsins, 2020.)

2.3.5 Is the country committed to a lifelong learning policy that goes beyond government terms?

The permanent service agreement of the Education and Training Service Centre (FA) with the Ministry of Education, Science and Culture and their responsibility for the Education Fund specified in the Adult Education Act (Act 27/2010) prove that Iceland is committed to a lifelong learning policy that goes beyond government terms.

The outlook for lifelong learning in Iceland is influenced by the same key changes that are also happening elsewhere in Europe. Loss of jobs, automation, new competence requirements, new technology and increasing diversity set the basis for Iceland's future reforms (Committee on the Fourth Industrial Revolution, 2019; Rannis, 2020). The Future Committee appointed by the Prime Minister in 2019 published a report on Iceland's society in 2035–2040.

The action plan based on the report was published in May 2020, and includes three measures on lifelong learning:

- The development of services for continuous learning for groups exposed to technological change, including immigrants and people with a short formal education.
- Assessment of the state of lifelong learning in the country as a whole. The system of continuous learning must be clear and simplified so that it can include a wider group of adults. Investigating the roles of schools and education service providers and a survey of who pays for each training
- Strengthening the connection between lifelong learning and the formal education system

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2.4 Norway

2.4.1 Who is responsible for the management of lifelong learning as a whole in the government?

In Norway, all five ministries that were involved in planning the national skills policy are responsible for lifelong learning: the Ministry of Education and Research, the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation. The Ministry of Education and Research, however, has the primary responsibility for the management of lifelong learning.

In Norway, skills reform is an example of the cross-sectoral development of lifelong learning. Norway's skills reform has two goals. The first is that no one's professional competence should become obsolete due to the lack of new knowledge and skills. Everyone should be provided with an opportunity to renew and supplement their skills so that an increasing number of people could work longer careers. The second goal is to eliminate the skills gap, or the difference between the skills required by working life and skills actually used by workers (Regjeringen, 2019).

The skills reform is based on the government's skills policy from 2013 to today, including the national skills policy strategy 2017–2021, which the government, social partners, Sámi representatives, the Parliament and the Association for Adult Education signed in 2017 (Regjeringen, 2017).

The government and other partners that signed the skills policy strategy comprise the skills policy council that meets regularly. The council operates in line with the skills policy strategy and discusses the objectives specified by the "future skills need council" (Kompetansebevovsutvalget KBU) and other topical matters. It is the task of Kompetanse Norge, a directorate under the Ministry of Education and Research, to make sure that all of the strategic partners reach the objectives set in the skills policy strategy.

The parties that signed the skills policy strategy have undertaken to make choices that support both individuals and society on the whole, foster better learning opportunities and effective utilisation of skills in working life and to particularly strengthen the skills of adults with weak connections to working life. The report on the skills policy strategy presents a snapshot of what the government has done so far and the measures that have been launched in the reform process. It indicates a clear direction for the development of skills policy in the years to come. (Regjeringen, 2017.)

2.4.2 Does the country review the funding of lifelong learning in an administrative sector-driven or systemic way?

The budgetary policy on lifelong learning go through five different ministries in an administrative sector-driven way (the Ministry of Education and Research, the Ministry of Labour, the Ministry of Justice and Public Security, the Ministry of Trade and Industry and the Ministry of Local Government and Modernisation), which allocate part of their budget to departments under the ministries. The biggest fund flows to lifelong learning are funnelled via the Ministry of Education and Research. In addition, the state supports general education and lifelong learning services organised in municipalities. In 2020, the government tackled the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic by investing EUR 145 million in skills development.

2.4.3 Does the country's legislation recognise lifelong learning as an independent objective that has intrinsic value?

In Norway, amending the legislation on lifelong learning is quite straightforward. Moreover, the government has approved temporary amendments to legislation to support lifelong learning services. Based on this, we can conclude that Norwegian legislation supports lifelong learning and in part recognises it as an independent objective with intrinsic value.

The government is actively pursuing measures that support the lifelong learning policy. For example, legislative amendments associated with student loans are being enacted now and in the near future. The right to free education from general education to adult education is guaranteed by law. Since 2001, all employees have had the right to study leave. Adult education is regulated by the Adult Education Act (1976) and Education Act (1998) (Regjeringen, 2006). Higher education is regulated by a separate act that covers this level of education in its entirety, regardless of a student's age. Also, a new legislative amendment relating to informal adult education entered into force in 2010, its aim being to regulate lifelong learning courses organised outside the formal education system (Adult and Continuing Education in Norway, 2016).

2.4.4 Does the country have a national lifelong learning co-ordinator?

Kompetanse Norge, a directorate under the Ministry of Education and Research, acts as the national co-ordinator of lifelong learning. It is tasked with increasing awareness of the importance of lifelong learning among decision-makers, partners and the entire population. The purpose of Kompetanse Norge is to ensure that all adults, both employed and unemployed, have access to the education they need.

Kompetanse Norge sees the central role of skills in safeguarding jobs. Therefore, its aim is to ensure that:

- adults have the possibility of flexible education
- Norwegian companies rigorously develop skills
- the authorities and most people are informed of the types of skills we will need in the future
- immigrants are given good Norwegian language training and good language tests
- both young people and adults have access to free high-quality career counselling and information about education and work (Kompetanse Norge, 2020).

2.4.5 Is the country committed to a lifelong learning policy that goes beyond government terms?

The Ministry of Education and Research's permanent service agreement with Kompetanse Norge proves that Norway is committed to a lifelong learning policy that goes beyond government terms. This agreement and the projects of Kompetanse Norge will also continue during subsequent governments, regardless of their composition. The national skills policy strategy provides for a strong political mutual understanding of the importance of skills policy in Norway, and that strong political commitment is also expected of future governments. A new national skills policy strategy is already being planned as a continuation of the 2017–2021 strategy.

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2.5 Sweden

2.5.1 Who is responsible for the management of lifelong learning as a whole in the government?

In Sweden, lifelong learning is managed by the government, with implementation carried out by the ministries in charge and strategic co-operation groups. The key ministry in charge of lifelong learning is the Ministry of Education and Research, which is responsible for general education, higher education and research.

Based on the political agreement of January 2019, the government prepared four strategic co-operation programmes for 2019–2022. These are based on the strengths of the Swedish business sector, objectives of the Agenda 2030 programme and areas of importance to future growth. The strategic co-operation programmes are digital structural change of the business sector, health and bioscience, business sector and climate change, and the supply of competence and lifelong learning. (Regeringskansliet, 2020 b.)

The co-operation programmes bring representatives of the private and public sectors together to discuss what can be done in response to the societal challenges of the themes. The supply of competence and lifelong learning co-operation programme involves the Ministry of Enterprise and Innovation, Ministry of Education and Research, state research institutions, such as Vinnova and RISE, trade unions, universities and a group of experts and stakeholders from different sectors, among others. A co-operation group establishes several smaller working groups that identify and plan solutions and proposals concerning select subjects. Vinnova and other relevant authorities provide support and take part in practical work based on the government's instructions and assignments of the working groups. (Regeringskansliet, 2020 b.) Through joint competence, decision-making power, resources and networks, the co-operation programmes help to find innovative solutions that respond to the biggest societal challenges and foster Sweden's competitiveness (Regeringskansliet, 2020 e). We can say that these strategic co-operation programmes review societal challenges in accordance with the systemic approach.

2.5.2 Does the country review the funding of lifelong learning in an administrative sector-driven or systemic way?

Sweden invested 6.9 per cent of its GDP in education in 2018, which is one of the largest allocations in Europe (Eurostat, 2020). During the last two government terms, in particular, Sweden focused on offering lifelong learning opportunities throughout the country to all residents. The education budget proposal for 2021 particularly focuses on the development of competence and deepening the co-operation between the education and business

sectors. One of the focal points guarantees student grants for adult students and skills validation.

In Sweden, lifelong learning is funded by administrative sectors. The biggest funding flows are channelled via the Ministry of Education and Research, the ministry responsible for the development of education and skills. The 2021 budget includes general education, special education, adult education, vocational training and education, higher education and research.

In 2016, six out of ten Swedish adults aged 25–64 took part in some kind of a continuing education course offered by their employers (SCB, 2018). Public education is free to all Swedish citizens at all levels of education.

2.5.3 Does the country's legislation recognise lifelong learning as an independent objective that has intrinsic value?

Sweden's legislation recognises terms referring to lifelong learning, such as "skills development", but does not recognise lifelong learning as an independent objective with intrinsic value. From the point of view of lifelong learning, however, key amendments to the legislation are in the making. An example of this are amendments to the Higher Education Act, clarifying the role of universities as part of lifelong learning in terms of both students and working life. The legislative amendments are intended to enter into force on 1 July 2021. In addition, according to the Validation Committee's report (Regeringskansliet, 2020 c), new legislation relating to skills validation is expected to enter into force in 2021, improving the availability of skills validation at all levels of education already covered by the current legislation.

2.5.4 Does the country have a national lifelong learning co-ordinator?

At present, Sweden does not have a national lifelong learning co-ordinator to gather dispersed lifelong learning services.

Instead, the responsibility for co-ordination has been shared between educational institutions, government departments, regional learning centres and research institutions.

2.5.5 Is the country committed to a lifelong learning policy that goes beyond government terms?

In Sweden, efforts are made to manage lifelong learning from a long-term perspective across government terms. Based on the review, however, we can state that the project portfolios and co-operation programmes of lifelong learning often only last for a single government term. For example, the strategic co-operation programme on skills provision and lifelong learning will only continue through the current government term, until 2022.

Guaranteeing the availability of higher education, especially to those with an immigrant background and in areas with limited availability of higher education is high on the political agenda for the years to come. In addition, expanding learning centres to rural areas in particular will continue.

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3 Towards systemic governance of lifelong learning in Finland

Sinimaaria Ranki

It is a global observation that conventional administrative sector-specific policy measures based on linear thinking do not tend to reach the desired outcome in a world in which matters appear as intertwined, extensive and multi-dimensional phenomena (Ramos and Hynes 2019).

In the 2010s in particular, international discussion has called for adopting systemic approaches in preparing and executing political decisions. The need for perceiving systems and their elements and understanding the dynamics of systems in all of their complexity has become increasingly topical from the point of view of the impact of policy measures. Because global phenomena profoundly impacts society, policy measures are correspondingly and increasingly needed to achieve comprehensive change in society. At the same time, the governance of extensive phenomena applying systemic thinking would require a systemic change in political decision-making and government control itself.

The need for developing government steering so that it would be better placed to perceive phenomena that transcend the administrative sector and shape society extensively over the long term and influence them has also been recognised in Finland. The development work that obtained its key input from the OECD Public Governance Review (OECD 2010) has been long-term and consistent. Through it, the development of government steering reflects a new mindset. The significance of understanding overall situations has been emphasised as developments and links between matters and events have become more difficult to foresee and more nonlinear (Vartiainen et al. 2020). Following the working papers published by Sitra (Hyssälä and Backman 2018, Sitra 2018), the debate in Finland Finnish has begun to talk about a systemic approach to carrying out the systemic approach in the steering of the Finnish Government. The next section outlines the steps taken by the Finnish Government in recent years towards more systemic government steering. Section 3.2 describes how the Finnish administration has proceeded towards systemic governance in administering lifelong learning.

3.1 Steps towards more systemic state governance

This section presents some aspects of the extensive government steering development work carried out in different parts of Finland towards systemic thinking in government steering.

In February 2016, the Finnish government established a working group to evaluate and submit proposals for harmonising government activities. The establishment of the working group was part of (Prime Minister Juha Sipilä's) the government's governance and execution spearhead project, one of the aims of which was to strengthen data-driven governance and execution transcending administrative sectoral boundaries. One of the tasks of the assignment was to find out how to proceed towards a uniform government structure and what the impacts of the changes would be on the governance of ministries and cross-sectoral entities.

The working group decided to propose (Ministry of Finance 2017) that rules on establishing temporary cross-sectoral organs be added to the statute of the government. The Prime Minister's Office prepared a draft amendment in accordance with the proposal of the working group (Prime Minister's Office 2018b). The rationale stated, in line with the working group's report, that social phenomena increasingly concern more than one administrative sector, or are such that they fall clearly within the scope of any administrative sector. Therefore, the government plenary session should be able to establish fixed-term and broad-based preparatory organs or projects. The Prime Minister's Office also proposed that coordinating the activities of their ministries with those of other ministries be added to the duties of the Permanent Secretaries. The government approved the proposed amendments to the statute on 5 April 2018.

In its 2018 futures review (Prime Minister's Office 2018 a), the Prime Minister's Office describes the next steps towards coherent governance. Due to multi-dimensional problems and the need for systemic change, the aim is a coherent government that operates in a systemic way across ministry boundaries. The futures review also mentions the significance of a shared situational picture as a facilitator of more flexible implementation and better leadership.

In its 2018 Annual Report, the National Audit Office of Finland (NAOF) draws attention to the fact that it is not enough to coordinate between the goals and measures of different administrative sectors of, with political preparation increasingly needed to connect different sectors and administrative sectors. Therefore, education should, according to the NAOF, develop as larger entities with shared objectives and measures.

The development of government steering has made use of Sitra's reports on the structures and operating methods of representative democracy. The working paper titled *Updating Democracy* (Hyssälä and Backman 2018) makes proposals for actions for reforming democracy. Some of them concern the structures and operating methods of government. The working paper describes a target state for the activities of the government, where it is guided by the strategic government policy and a phenomenon-based public finances plan and budget contribute to supporting the implementation of the government programme.

“Phenomenon-based” or “phenomenon-driven” means that a phenomenon, namely an observable challenge relating to the operating environment

or complex problem on which governance should have an impact, is identified. Systemic public governance can be seen as a way of implementing systemic thinking in government control. Objectives regarding the outcome and impact are set for the key phenomena jointly chosen by political parties. Objectives are set for both the government term and the long term beyond government terms. In the target state described in the working paper, these phenomena are an essential part of the preparation of the public finances plan, thereby adding socially important themes to the dialogue between Parliament and the government.

The *Phenomenon-based public administration* discussion paper (Sitra 2018) deepens the ideas presented in the report by Hyssälä and Backman (2018) for working on an increasingly strategic government programme. The working paper states that the Finnish public administration carries out its basic tasks well, also according to international comparisons, but that the challenges associated with the increasingly complex operating environment call for new ways of working. The work sees a phenomenon-driven approach as a way of perceiving matters that should be resolved by society. The proposed actions include strengthening the knowledge base of the strategic government programme, making budgeting more strategic and several ways of managing entities in public administration. Increasing the co-operation between administrative sectors is key to the proposed measures.

The Ministry of Finance established a working group in June 2018 to review the points of view associated with phenomenon-based budgeting. In its report (Ministry of Finance 2019), the working group states that the report on the possibilities of phenomenon-based budgeting has emerged from different operators' need for the better governance of entities, increasing co-operation across administrative sectors and promoting solutions to multi-dimensional societal problems. Background materials for the report included Sitra's discussion papers [Updating Democracy](#) and [Phenomenon-based public administration \(Fenomenbaserad offentlig förvaltning\)](#).

The working group ended up proposing five different implementation models. Collecting information about the phenomenon in the current budget is at one extreme and changing ministries' authorisations and budget structure as required by systemic comprehensive preparation is at the other extreme. Lifelong learning is one of the three cases on which the working group outlined each implementation model. The working group did not issue any recommendations, but reviewed the strengths and weaknesses of each operating model. The report provides a good foundation for assessing the funding of lifelong learning, taking into account the situations of a person's entire life cycle.

The Permanent Secretaries of Finnish ministries published their joint views of the key issues for the 2019–2023 government term in 2019. In the introduction, the Permanent Secretaries wrote: "Instead of administrative sector-specific political preparation, the future government will act holistically, of which this document itself is an example." According to the Permanent Secretaries, funding for continuous learning must be clarified so that it

can also be allocated more purposefully. Holistic activity is represented, for example, by the idea that new opportunities for supporting competence should be reviewed in conjunction with the reform of social security (Government of Finland 2019).

The National Audit Office of Finland reviewed the boundary conditions of phenomenon-based budgeting and good practices of combining appropriations into larger entities to solve select phenomena in its recent *Havaintoja ilmiöpohjaisesta budjetoinnista* report. The report describes the benefits and challenges of phenomenon-based budgeting based on international and Finnish data. The report presents observations of how phenomenon-based budgeting could be developed in Finland, if desired.

3.2 Steps towards more systemic governance of lifelong learning

A concrete step in Finland towards managing lifelong learning as an all-encompassing whole was the launch of the parliamentary reform of continuous learning in August 2019. According to the document on launching the project (Ministry of Education and Culture 2019), the reform responds to the need for developing and revising one's skills throughout life. It reviews the provision and funding of education throughout the educational pathway, social security, change security, unemployment and connecting proactive and labour market training and skills identification into the new system.

The broad-based line-up of the working group makes it possible to bring several points of view to the preparation process. A situational picture based on statistics and an international review (OECD 2020) of the phenomenon of continuous learning and bridges have been built in researcher meetings between different sources of information and experts.

A proposal for reforming continuous learning will be fully completed in early 2021. However, the working group already made a proposal concerning the establishment of a continuous learning service organisation (Lehikoinen et al. 2020). The new organisation aims at an operating model that transcends administrative sectoral boundaries, serving the development of the individual's skills as a whole that builds their working career. In its budget negotiations for 2021, the government decided that the proposal would be worked on further (Prime Minister's Office 2020).

In Finland, lifelong learning can probably be considered as an example of a phenomenon for which co-operation required by extensive and complicated reforms has already been developed, an overview based on diverse information about the phenomenon has been prepared and a common mindset has been strengthened. Supported by the common approach previously prepared, the phenomenon of lifelong learning could lead the way in developing operating models for systemic governance in government steering.

3.3 Systemic governance requires a paradigm shift

Based on the concise review above, one can see that Finland has persevered with developing government steering system in the direction of systemic thinking and phenomenon-based governance. The first situation analysis presented in their research project on developing the government steering system towards more systemic thinking, Lähteenmäki-Smith et al. (2020) state that the keys to more phenomenon-based governance already exist. In their view, co-operation between administrative sectors and a culture that supports it have clearly strengthened, and joint objectives are being identified and pursued through good interaction.

In analysing international trends in government steering, the OECD considers Finland to be well placed for systemic change towards an administration in which the institutional mindset changes into a phenomenon-based one. The OECD is currently analysing the current state of the core elements of systemic change in Finland (Ministry of Finance 2020). Also Vartianen et al. (2020) find that the public sector has increasingly begun to review its operations in a phenomenon-driven way. They characterise this as a very significant change.

The transition of state administration towards phenomenon-based governance is, however, always path-dependent, according to the literature, meaning that the old still exists and defines activities while steps are already being taken in a new direction (OECD 2017). As with other countries, the layers of governance and guidance still maintain a hierarchic steering system in Finland (Sitra 2018, Lähteenmäki-Smith et al. 2020). At the same time, complexity and the mounting diversity of the information environment are increasing the tension between short political cycles and the long-term nature of decision-making.

In Finland, the use of information as the basis of societal decision-making has been confirmed by the government's principle decision (Government of Finland 2013). The policy strengthens the long-term nature of decision-making and a multidisciplinary approach. However, persistent counterforces prevent the realisation of long-termism. In surveys on the long-termism of decision-making from somewhat different perspectives (Tuomisto et al. 2017, Hellström and Ikäheimo 2017, Aula and Konttinen 2020, Koskimaa and Rapeli 2020), urgency is repeatedly cited among the factors explaining short-termism. More extensive questions that involve more complexity and uncertainty remain in the background of decision-making. Finding out about large complex entities is hindered by the fact that the information is often fragmented and scattered, and there is a huge amount of it.

With the use of data remaining one-sided in hectic decision-making, there is no overview of the phenomenon at hand or understanding of its complexity. Furthermore, no overview emerges if information is not used for identifying the problem but purposefully justifying a decision that has already been made using select data (Hellström and Ikäheimo 2017).

Progress towards more long-term decision-making and systemic governance requires, according to the views of decision-makers (Koskimaa and Rapeli 2020), tools that make it possible to effectively address problems across political boundaries and government terms. Correspondingly, it is hoped that administration would have new and more strategic- and phenomenon-based programme work focusing on the big picture. According to Vartiainen et al. (2020), phenomenon-based steering following the systemic approach should be based on an overview of the subject of control, the objectives and needs of the control and applicable control mechanisms. Decision-making and its implementation should be considered in diverse groups, and should make use of dialogue in strengthening trust and developing social capital. The authors find that because phenomenon-based activities involve a sense of community and co-operation, steering should also be developed to strengthen them.

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4 Summary and conclusions

When we develop the governance of lifelong learning in a more systemic direction, it is necessary to understand both lifelong learning and government steering as phenomena. The governance of lifelong learning and government steering are both variously intertwined with the surrounding society and therefore continuously change (Lau et al. 2019). As is always the case with a paradigm shift, the transition towards systemic governance also results in the need for new skills. At the same time, path dependency causes friction in boldly reforming activities.

Looking ahead, the shared strategic intent formed by 30 key societal operators stipulates that lifelong learning should be governed as an all-encompassing whole with a long-term perspective. Underlying this is a future view of an operating environment that could, as Pirkko Vartiainen (2020) put it, be characterised as saturated with complexity. Vartiainen and the 30 societal operators have a shared view of the required change in governance: the governance of lifelong learning requires a new kind of systemic thinking. Lifelong learning as a whole should therefore be managed on the basis of a shared situational picture, over the long term and extensively assessing the impact of policy. Finally, it is discussed — as an input for follow-up discussion on the systemic governance of lifelong learning — how the long-term perspective of decision-making can be strengthened by the use of information that supports understanding phenomena and interaction that creates shared understanding.

4.1 Use of knowledge helps to understand the phenomenon

Achieving systemic change requires long-term activity and its promotion on a broad front. A jointly understood situational picture built with verified and up-to-date knowledge is needed as its foundation. In systemic thinking, qualitative connections between different factors included in the system are essential. The systemic approach helps to understand what can be influenced by steering and how. Knowledge that has been extensively compiled and analysed helps to identify which steps will strengthen and which ones weaken the impact of the planned policy measure. With data, the direction and appropriateness of development can be outlined. Change has — or at least should have — a purpose. Knowledge contributes to verifying the direction rather than precise measurement of progress. (Burns and Köster 2016, Mason 2016, OECD 2017, Sitra 2018, Koskimaa and Rapeli 2020, Lähtenmäki-Smith et al. 2020.)

Sitra's working paper titled *The Future of knowledge use in societal decision-making* (Hellström et al. 2019) contemplates how decision-makers and supporting civil servants could use knowledge in a more versatile manner.

The working paper is based on the view that decision-making succeeds better when the means of knowledge use are adapted more consciously to the nature of the phenomenon at hand. Puustinen and Jalonen (2020) remind us that phenomena most commonly involve simple, complicated and complex problems.

Simple, or tamed, problems are linear in terms of their causal relationships, so the planned measure provides a foreseeable result. Complicated problems can be difficult, but they are technical and can therefore be solved with coherent measures. Complex problems, instead, are ambiguous and intertwined so that different solutions can be offered to them according to different points of view. As they also emerge by themselves or due to other events, the impacts of planned measures are difficult, or even impossible, to predict. Complex problems cannot be solved through knowledge.

When facing a complex problem, an extensive understanding of the factors influencing the situation and suitability of different operating models for the situation is needed in choosing the approach and planning the processes. In order to obtain a diverse, interdisciplinary overview of the problem, networks and the ability to combine and proportion different information, challenges and objectives are needed. (Hellström et al. 2019.)

To strengthen the effectiveness of governance, it is essential to also include people's points of view and the insights of international experts in the knowledge base. Randomised experiments based on carefully contemplated study designs build an understanding of the impact of measures and factors influencing it in the long term. (Sitra 2018.)

Besides versatile use of knowledge, creating and continuously maintaining a shared situational picture need functional interaction processes that deepen the shared understanding and create an atmosphere of trust that facilitates joint learning (OECD 2017, Hellström and Ikäheimo 2017, Sitra 2018). It is the capability of using knowledge and learning in dialogue with stakeholders that is a key factor of the impact of administration in a world characterised by complexity (Burns and Köster 2016).

4.2 Dialogue gives rise to a shared understanding

A shared situational picture only emerges in interaction that interprets knowledge. The key factors of interaction are transparency and openness because the trust that facilitates joint learning is built through them.

Hellström et al. (2019) emphasise the significance of well-prepared dialogue in building a shared understanding and thereby strengthening the impact of decision-making. In their view, a shared interpretation of knowledge is needed especially when tackling major, long-term societal challenges. Including people who differ in their thinking, abilities and mindsets in joint dialogue helps to ensure that decision-making targets the right problems and that the related connections between different matters as well as values and interests are identified in as versatile a manner as possible. The authors state that the best results are achieved when not only those preparing decisions

but also those making the decisions personally take part in the joint process of establishing knowledge.

In successful dialogue, the framework of thinking of those participating in the process expands and, as a result of co-learning, commitment and quality of decision-making are improved. When discussion takes place in an open atmosphere of trust based on mutual appreciation, everyone feels that they can actively express their ideas and is interested in listening to the views of others. Shared understanding emerges and learning together takes place.

In order to nurture trust, it is important to be able to assess the functioning of interaction as the work progresses. This makes it possible to update the situational picture as the phenomenon changes and as a result of measures taken, while allowing learning about the impact of the measures taken. It is necessary to consider which other aspects influence the behaviour of the actors and monitor how the channels and forms of impact change.

Applying phenomenon-based or other systemic thinking to governance is about continuous learning: how the knowledge based on the situational picture is interpreted together to learn about the phenomenon and its dynamics, as well as about how the phenomenon can be influenced and development towards the desired purpose supported. Due to the long-term perspective and impact, it is necessary to have the patience to stop and think at times, even if there is pressure to make rapid decisions.

Introducing systemic thinking into the governance of lifelong learning means a completely new kind of approach to thought and action. Structures that give room for dialogic operating models are also needed. An understanding of the jointly interpreted knowledge-based situational picture and continuous joint reflection on the impact of measures facilitate steering the phenomenon in the desired direction.

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