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Same, but different – emergence of VET in three Nordic Countries

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Abstract: Historically apprenticeship has developed very differently in the Nordic Countries, either as a separate dual system (Denmark), as an integrated part of upper secondary education (Norway) or has almost disappeared (Sweden). This purpose of this paper is to examine the roots of these differences in the period of re-regulation following the deregulation caused by the dissolution of the guilds from the middle of the 19th century. The paper presents the first results of a comparative study of the roots of these differences in the historical transition of VET in three Nordic Countries. A number of earlier studies (Archer 1979; Thelen 2004) have pointed to the significance of the formative transition period after the dissolution of the guilds for the subsequent trajectories of VET, especially the relation between artisans and industrialists and the relation between the labour market partners and the state in establishing new forms of regulation of collective skills formation. Even though the coalitions and institutions formed in this period do not determine subsequent development, they do make some policy options more likely than others (Dobbins & Busemeyer 2014).

Keywords: Nordic Countries, apprenticeship, regulation, vocational schools

Methodology

The current research project (Nord-VET) has amended a comparative approach inspired by B. Lutz (1991). In this approach we try to identify the basic challenges that the different VET systems have been facing despite differences in their institutional architecture, and to study the ways these challenges have been handled by different actors and coalitions around VET. This is done by first developing a matrix which combines specific national research themes with themes of common interest in the three countries. Then we made a preliminary structuring with four main periods in the development of VET around key turning points in history since the dissolution of the guilds (mid 19th century) until today. For each period we formulated a number of key research questions based on existing research to guide the national studies of the emergence of VET in the four Nordic Countries (Finland is also included). The resulting four country reports pointed at a number of similar challenges for VET in the countries involved in each period, but also some particular challenges in each country. The four historical country reports are primarily based on analysis of existing historical studies supplemented with focussed studies of original documents, mainly policy texts, white papers and Government Reports. Where no



other references are made, this paper draws on the three reports from Norway (Michelsen 2014), Sweden (Olofsson & Thunqvist 2014) and Denmark (Bøndergaard 2014).

Results

This paper examines the period of re-regulation of VET following the deregulation caused by the dissolution of the guilds that to varying degree had controlled apprenticeship in the three Nordic Countries before the advent of capitalism. The transition to more liberal market regulation eroded the key institutions that had earlier secured the quality of apprenticeship training: requirements for the skills of the master and trainer, the journeyman's test and the apprentices' contract. Accordingly the further development of VET depended very much on the struggle over the how regulation should be organised and who should regulate vocational schools and the work based learning of young people entering the labour market. In the same period there was a strong expansion of general education, both as to the number of years young people spent in education and the share of youth attending primary and lower secondary school (Telhaug a.o. 2004). In addition to this apprentices access to school based training to supplement learning at work became crucial to preserve the quality of apprenticeship.

On this background we have identified two main common challenges for the future development of apprenticeship after the dissolution of the guilds. The first challenge was to how to reimpose binding regulations to secure the quality of work based training and to secure an adequate number of training placements both in relation to the requirements of young people and the requirements of the labour market. The second challenge was how to provide the theoretical, school based training needed to meet the requirements of modern production in the period of fast industrialisation – and how this school based education should connect with work based learning. In this paper mainly the first challenge will be addressed.

The comparison of the three countries shows that the fate and modernisation of apprenticeship relied on the alliances formed on this issue between the partners on the labour market; both between employers and unions, but also alliances made internally between skilled and unskilled workers organisations and between craft based employers and larger mass producing manufacturers. In addition, the fate of apprenticeship depended on the involvement and support of the state through legislation and through financial support for vocational schools.

Re-regulation in three Nordic Countries

Denmark was the first country to pass a law on apprenticeship in 1889 as a response to concerns formulated by the craft employers for the poor quality of skills (Hansen 1995). The first Apprenticeship Act only took a small step when it reinstated the compulsory apprentice contract. But this step was important for the employers' inclination to invest in the training of the apprentices in the first years of the contract period, with certainty that they could reap the benefit in the last years of the contract. In the period without compulsory contracts many apprentices dropped out before completion to take up work as semiskilled, and the employers tended to exploit apprentices as cheap labour rather than investing in training (Juul 2009). Subsequent



reforms of the apprenticeship act in 1921 and 1937 reimposed in new ways the key measures of quality control from the former guild system: The mandatory journeyman's test controlled by the trade committees, the requirement that the master and trainer should have passed a journeymen test and the introduction of compulsory supplementary school-based training in all occupations (Bøndergaard 2014). In addition the corporatist form of regulation was inscribed in the law of 1937, which gave the bipartite trades committees the legal authority to control the quality of the training companies. In this way apprenticeship was maintained in Denmark through a combination of occupational self-governance, which gave the employers and the craft unions a sense of ownership to VET, and state intervention that imposed binding quality requirements (proposed by the trade committees) on all training companies. The craft sector and industry agreed on this combined form of governance in contrast to Norway and Sweden where the two groups of employers often had diverging positions regarding the regulation of VET (Nilsson 1981; Sandberg & Høst 2009). This situation mirrors the dominance of craft production and the weak position of large manufacturing in Denmark especially in comparison with Sweden (Swenson 1991).

In Norway the employers' Associations for craft and industry formed in 1886 wanted to promote vocational training and education, but turned down the idea of state regulation. In 1920/21 the association rejected a proposition for an act on apprenticeship that would involve public registration and control of apprentice contracts and municipal control of technical evening schools (Michelsen 2014). The Craft Act of 1913 committed artisans to train young people under the age of 18 as apprentices and gave them an obligation to let apprentices attend in vocational schools (Sandberg & Høst 2009). But the law did not cover industry. Generally state regulation was weak until the first law on vocational schools that was implemented in 1945. This law did not cover the apprentices, who partly due to resistance from the crafts, continued to be regulated through the trades and occupations until the passing of the apprentice act in 1948, which only applied to the urban areas (ibid). This means that during the formative transition period after the dissolution of the guilds the regulation of apprenticeship was mainly left to the diverse trades and sectors without any legally sanctioned quality control supported by the state.

In Sweden the dissolution of the guilds in 1846 resulted, as in the other countries, in a decline for traditional crafts and apprenticeship training. Concern for vocational education was raised by the end of the 19th century by the associations for the crafts and the emerging industries. The committee that was appointed documented the low standard of training and required state regulation based on inspiration from central European countries. Subsequently proposals for a law to regulate apprenticeship was presented in 1909 and 1913, but were rejected (Nilsson 1981). After the first World War the craft associations continued to campaign for state regulation of apprenticeship (e.g. to make journeymen's test mandatory), but did not succeed due to resistance from large industry and most of the political parties. New laws on vocational schools were passed in 1918 and 1921 that subsidised vocational youth schools under municipal control. This also included the establishment of full-time workshop schools as an alternative to apprenticeship. The initiative expressed an indirect critique of the quality of apprenticeship training, which was considered to involve exploitation of apprentices' cheap labour and suffer from lack of qualified



supervision (Olofsson & Thunqvist 2014). These laws did not include requirements for vocational schooling of apprentices, and the regulation of apprenticeship was left to the labour market partners. In the interwar period these partners had difficulties reaching agreement on apprenticeship even though they recognised that there was a shortage of apprentices in relation to the needs of industry. Sweden had early developed industrial unions in contrast to the continued division in Denmark between Danish craft and unskilled workers unions. In Denmark the craft unions formed the core of a cross-class alliance that sustained apprenticeship. In Sweden the fear of a downward pressure on the wages of the semi- and unskilled workers from low apprentice wages was prominent in the confederation of trade unions (LO) that pursued levelling of wages across sectors – including wages for apprentices (Swenson 1991). In Denmark wages of apprentices were at a level 3 – 5 times lower than average wages of unskilled workers from WWI until the 1960es (Pedersen 1976). At the same time the uniform and centralised LO in Sweden pursued more egalitarian Socialdemocratic policies in comparison with the Danish LO that was strongly influenced by the large craft unions interests in preserving apprenticeship, which was considered a core value of these unions in relation to the semi- and unskilled unions (Christensen 1978).

Conclusion

The divergent trajectories of apprenticeship in the three Nordic Countries can to some degree be explained by differences in the ways they responded to the common challenges posed by the dissolution of the guild. State regulation was important in Denmark and Norway to reinstate the compulsory training contract and in Denmark also for the obligation of training companies to make apprentices attend vocational schools. While state involvement has been essential for the modernisation of apprenticeship, equally essential was the involvement of the employers and the unions. The training of apprenticeship has historically been a matter regulated by the guilds and the masters themselves separately for each occupation. Employers have generally been sceptical towards state interference in apprenticeship, and this was a key argument in Norway and Denmark for keeping vocational education separate from general education. In Norway this also resulted in the opposition of the employers to legal regulation of apprenticeship as they feared losing control of the system. This was not the case in Denmark where employers supported the Apprenticeship Acts that generalised the regulation agreed on by the labour market partners – and thus extended this regulation to cover all employers. This later came to include the adoption of a general training levy in order to spread the costs of training on all employers.

Vocational schools in Denmark mainly developed as a supplement initiative to improve apprenticeship, first as evening schools and after WWII as full-time schools for block release during apprenticeship in the form of alternating education. The vocational school in Denmark have weak connections to the municipalities and close links to the labour market. In contrast vocational schools in Norway and Sweden developed into an alternative full-time school based vocational pathway with closer links to the overall educational system and the municipalities. In this institutional architecture apprenticeship gradually was marginalised until policymakers much later (Norway 1994 and Sweden 2011) tried to revive apprenticeship in a modern form.



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