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EDUCATION INQUIRY

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Exploring the Intersection of Marketisation and Central State Control through Swedish National School Inspection

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Abstract
This article focuses on the role of the state in the context of an increasing market orientation in Swedish education policy. It asks if and how a market orientation and privatisation can be reconciled with attempts to re-establish central output control. The controlling function of the state is emphasised in the form of efforts to inspect both public and private schools. Drawing on the literature on governance, dealing with the “hollowing-out” and “filling-in” of the state, two scenarios are distinguished asserting that a market orientation in the case of education policy could either reduce or intensify the need for state-led control. It is concluded that the characteristics of Swedish education policy conform to the “filling-in” line of argument, namely that central state control is strengthened at a point in time when a market orientation and greater choice and privatisation are gaining ground. Keywords: marketisation, governance, inspection, Sweden, education policy

Introduction

The peculiarity of the Swedish school choice design is that, on the one hand, it is utterly deregulated with universal vouchers and encouragement to competition. On the other hand it has firmly remained under the central and local governments’ wings through (...) financial resources, (...) national curriculum, the central inspection authority (Bunar, 2010: 13).

The social, economic and political challenges of recent decades have put the nation-state under extreme pressure to respond to the resulting transformations and demands, not only at the international and national level but also at the local level. Neo-liberal influences entailing choice, accountability, efficiency, privatisation, marketisation and ideas of new public management have all set their mark on domestic politics and policy. Notably, the field of education is no exception. This is clearly evidenced in Sweden. In the early 1990s, a series of educational reforms were introduced. Among other things, striking changes were made to the educational policy in Sweden that ultimately broke the “state monopoly” on education. This resulted in greater school choice and allowed for the private ownership of schools, albeit tax funded through

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a voucher system, and since then there has been a rapid expansion of independent schools in Sweden.

Overall, the introduction of a range of market mechanisms and the subsequent emergence of an educational quasi-market can be viewed as one of the most important changes in Swedish education during the last few decades (Lundahl, 2007). Even from an international perspective, the Swedish education system is viewed as being extensively effected by marketisation. For example, it allows school owners to withdraw profit from the still publicly-financed independent schools. The choice reforms of the 1990s “transformed the Swedish school system from a virtually all-public, bureaucratically operated system with very little room for parental choice, to one of the world’s most liberal public education systems” (Blomqvist, 2004: 148). Indeed, this Swedish “model” seems to be travelling to other countries and systems. This was apparent during the British national elections in 2010 when the Swedish model of independent schools was strongly advocated by the Conservative Party (Wiborg, 2010; Allen, 2010).

A strict comprehension of the “market” is often not applicable when it comes to describing the provision of welfare services, especially since such services often remain publicly funded through taxes. Instead, the term “quasi-market” is probably better suited to describe what we are witnessing when the logic of the market enters the public sphere. Through mechanisms such as consumer choice and competition between different welfare providers, the public sector is increasingly orienting itself towards the functions of a “market” or, more correctly, a more market-like situation (Lubienski, 2009, c.f. Montin, 2006). Privatisation is often used to denote the process of transferring ownership from the state or state institutions to private actors (Lundqvist 2010). In the case of education, the distribution of the ownership of independent schools has changed during the last decades. In the 1990s, foundations and other non-profit organisations were the most common ownership forms of independent schools. However, today the share of independent schools run by profit-making corporations has rapidly increased (Lundahl, 2011). In addition, privatisation can also be conceptualised in light of the increasingly complex involvement of private providers in education policy, “through advice, consultation, evaluation, philanthropy, partnerships, representation, programme delivery and other outsourcing” (Ball, 2009: 96).

Taken as a whole, these developments have opened the way for new actors to take part in both educational policy-making and in the provision of educational services, and this has created complex networks and interactions blurring traditional private-public distinctions (Ball, 2008; 2007; Pierre & Peters, 2000). As the number of actors multiplies and the rules of the game change, the stakeholders’ roles are affected in different ways and this means that these roles must be renegotiated. The more long-term effects on education policy and practice, including classroom effects, largely remain to be seen.

Research on marketisation in Swedish education was relatively scarce during the previous decade (Nilsson, 2002), but now there appears to be increasing academic
interest in these issues (c.f. Daun, 2006; Lindbom 2010; 2007; Bunar, 2010; 2008; Lund, 2008; Fredriksson, 2010; 2009; Johnson & Lindgren, 2010; Nyhlén, 2011; Lundahl, 2011; Erixon Arreman & Holm, 2011; Lundström & Holm 2011; also see this issue of *Education Inquiry*). However, even with this growing interest, research has neither primarily nor explicitly targeted the role of the state in these transformations. Instead, it has tended to focus on important topics relating to the origins and effects of market-oriented reforms in education on teachers, parents, students etc. Thus, the state as an actor central in both affecting and being affected by these contemporary transformations remains largely under-researched in the Swedish case. As "privatisation and the state need to be thought together" (Ball, 2009), there is a need to elaborate further on these issues within the Swedish education policy setting.

**Aim and outline**

This article focuses on the role of the state in the context of an increasingly market-oriented education policy sector. In order to explore these issues, some thoughts from the governance literature on the role of the state are discussed by using the Swedish education policy as a point of departure. In particular, the state’s controlling function is emphasised and discussed with reference to the efforts to inspect both public and private schools. The empirical material includes official government publications and policy texts, as well as secondary sources and scholarly literature. The selection of texts has been guided by – and later read in relation to – the aim of the study by performing a qualitative content analysis (c.f. Bergström & Boréus, 2005).

In the following section, some arguments from the governance literature are outlined, placing the issue discussed in a theoretical context. Next, some of the main education policy developments are briefly illustrated, including the state’s utilisation of school inspection as a means of governing education. Finally, the concluding section focusing on the role of the state in an increasingly marketised education system in which choice and competition have been actively endorsed while, at the same time, some core education policy levers remain in the hands of the central state.

**Governance: “hollowing-out” and “filling-in”**

On a general note, it is often argued that the processes of globalisation, deregulation and privatisation weaken the nation-state’s ability to govern. The shift from government to governance, emphasising the role of networks and interactions between the multiple public and private actors involved in policy-making, has been used to grasp some of the changes the state is undergoing (Peters & Pierre, 2001; Pierre & Peters, 2005; 2000).

The forces and developments mentioned above have indeed affected the state, contributing, some scholars argue, to the state being hollowed-out since the state no longer exercises the same authority and control as it previously did. However, others have questioned the “governing without government thesis” (Davies, 2002) and the
hollowing-out of the state (Bell et al., 2010; Bell & Hindmoor, 2009). It appears that, by having taken part in the very processes of change that are challenging it, in some cases the state has even increased its capacity for central steering (Goodwin & Grix, 2011; c.f. Pierre & Peters, 2000). As such, the state is still “a critical player” (Davies, 2002). One way of conceptualising these tensions is to claim that simultaneous forces may be at play, resulting in both the hollowing-out and filling-in of the state.

According to Cope et al. (1997) this can be pictured in two, oversimplified, scenarios: The hollowed-out state has a severely reduced governing capacity. Processes of decentralisation push policy-making authority downwards in the system, privatisation outwards and increased Europeanisation upwards (see Figure 1 below). On the other hand, the filling-in state is strengthening its capacity inwards by processes of centralisation, i.e., transferring authority and responsibilities back to the centre (see Cope et al., 1997, 448; Bell et al., 2010, for a discussion of a society-centred perspective versus a state-centric relational approach). Further, the centre is increasingly employing other policy instruments to give effect to public policy (Jordan et al., 2005). As a result, the “iron fist may now be clothed in a velvet glove” (Hudson & Rönnberg, 2007: 17), as instruments connected to output control become more and more important (c.f. Ozga et al., 2011).

![Figure 1. Processes of Hollowing-out and Filling-in of the State](image)

**The controlling role of the state in an increasingly market-oriented policy sector**

Drawing on these lines of reasoning, we may on one hand anticipate that an increased market orientation would reduce the importance of and functions of the state as a controlling entity, given that authority and decision-making are transferred from the state to private actors. Combined with other transformations such as Europeanisation and decentralisation that push former state authority both “upwards” and “downwards” in the system, this reduces the policy-making and controlling role of
the state. This is in line with the hollowing-out argument. Accordingly, the choices made by educational consumers, such as parents and students, are expected to facilitate, more or less by themselves, educational quality and results since good performing schools are the ones being selected and thereby walk off as winners in the competitive game to attract students (c.f. Chubb, 2007). The logic of choice and user orientation is thus based on an assumption that they create incentives for educational providers to innovate and become more consumer-oriented. In such a system, the main controlling agency is thus placed in the hands (more correctly the feet) of educational consumers as their choices contribute to the system regulating itself by orienting itself towards innovation and by increasing its quality in order to attract consumers. In this way, this “market” controls itself and the controlling role of the state is neither evident nor necessary.

On the other hand, we may expect an increased market orientation to result in the state playing an even more important role as a controlling entity in the system. Following the filling-in argument, the state is far from a passive bystander; rather, it remains an important player, even if its presence is altered and the policy tools and instruments used to formulate and give effect to public policy are subjected to change. As authority is increasingly transferred to entities other than the state, one way for the state to retain command is to transfer some authority – mainly output and control-oriented means – back to the centre. Market-oriented reforms contribute to, for instance, a plethora of welfare providers and this in turn creates demands for additional control and actions on the part of the state. For example, there is a perceived need to collect and transparently display “objective” information as the consumers struggle to navigate their choices. Consumers find education’s quasi-market increasingly difficult to grasp as the supply of education providers multiplies and their marketing efforts turn more and more intense. The state is thus perceived as a legitimate and objective entity to produce information about the system and its schools, which the consumers can then act on (c.f. Clarke, 2008; Wilcox & Gray, 1996).

In addition, these controlling acts on the part of the state have an important role to play when it comes to accountability, and the possibility to set up such arrangements holding different parties to account. The ever more blurred system, in which both private and public actors interact and are increasingly interconnected, creates a need for new and additional accountability systems. Even though accountability arrangements are indeed highly dependent on their administrative and political contexts and structures, they share the common denominator of being linked to some form of retrospective control (Erkkilä, 2007). The state, once again, has an important role in both setting up and providing information to support and uphold these accountability systems by exercising different acts of inspection, evaluation and checking as well as employing other measures related to output control. Taken together, the utilisation of such levers contributes to processes of filling-in.
Reforming education and bringing in the market

A story of decentralisation, deregulation and marketisation

The Swedish education system has undergone profound changes over the last couple of decades. The early 1990s was a period of intense educational reform marked by efforts towards decentralisation, deregulation and marketisation. In retrospect, one might argue that the changes, especially those at the beginning of the 1990s, had a dramatic and fundamental, rather than incremental, character—Sweden turned from having one of the most centralised education systems to having one of the most decentralised systems (OECD, 2002). The process of restructuring Swedish education that took place during the 1990s has been described as “the most far-reaching alteration in a modern public organization in Sweden” (Helgøy, 2006: 100).

The reforms included transferring employer responsibilities for all teachers and head teachers from the state to the municipalities and abolishing targeted education programme funding and replacing this funding by a general grant that left allocation of the financial package to the municipalities. Further, new curricula were implemented, allowing for greater local and professional decisional roles in reaching the still nationally-defined educational objectives. In addition, during that period a new system of education governance was adopted, namely, management by objectives and results. The official motives for reform concerned, for instance, efficiency, democracy and professionalisation. It was argued that resources were more efficiently used if allocated locally and that local (municipal) responsibility increased both participation and teacher autonomy. During this intense reform period, two separate governments took decisions that resulted in the emergence of an educational quasi-market. By introducing vouchers, school choice and promoting the establishment of independent (but still tax-funded) schools, the state monopoly in the formerly strongly-regulated education sector was broken (Lundahl, 2002).

It is worth noting that the Social Democrats made no decisive efforts to terminate the choice reforms launched during the non-socialist government of 1991–1994. When returned to office in 1994, the Social Democrats largely accepted that development and in certain aspects even took it further. In fact, even before the shift in government in 1991 the Social Democratic party had already begun to initiate a discussion about increasing local autonomy, choice and other reforms (c.f. Jarl & Rönnberg, 2010). Even so, the fact that this development took place in Sweden has been seen as quite a “puzzle” by observers of Swedish society. As Baggesen Klitgaard (2008: 479) points out:

School vouchers might seem a natural feature of the liberal welfare model of the U.S. and American society generally. However, for social democratic welfare states in Scandinavia, school vouchers would seem to be a contradiction. Nevertheless, school vouchers have faced severe resistance in the USA (...) In Sweden, however, the social democratic welfare state adopted a national, universal public voucher scheme (...) Seen through the lenses of this very
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dominating perspective in comparative welfare state analysis, two decades of institutional
reforms in primary education in the USA and Sweden present an intriguing puzzle.

However, it was not only in Sweden that such educational reforms were taking place. There was what has been described as “an epidemic of education policy” (Levin 1998) that spread and was diffused among and between education systems in the Western industrialised world (Dolowitz & Marsh, 1996; Ozga & Jones, 2006). This “reform epidemic” was characterised by strides towards decentralisation, a market orientation, a focus on accountability and results, and ideas influenced by the New Public Management philosophy (c.f. Goldfinch & Wallis, 2010 for a recent discussion). Naturally, all such reforms had to be adapted, revised and implemented within a specific national context taking the society’s own social, political and cultural history as well as previous welfare-state trajectories into account. Given the specific national circumstances and history, the story of Swedish education policy and its extensive market orientation presents us with a particularly interesting case.

The long-term effects of the market-oriented reforms from the 1990s are only beginning to emerge. Statistics on the use of school choice and selection tell the story of a rapid increase in student numbers at independent schools. Over the last five years there has been a 26 percent increase in enrolment in independent schools and currently approximately 11 percent of the students at the compulsory educational level are enrolled in independent schools. At the upper secondary level, the expansion of independent schools is particularly strong with independent schools having a 22 percent share of student enrolment (Lundahl, 2011).

Increasing national control in education

Towards the end of the 1990s and in the early 2000s, there were some signs that the central state was re-announcing its presence in education to some extent, for instance, by reintroducing targeted state-funding programmes that were explicitly directed towards specific activities such as hiring additional teaching staff. The National Audit Office claimed that the National Agency for Education had become one of the government’s most important means to exercise governance over education by such use of target financial funding. Such a direction is contrary to the Agency’s initial direction leading towards management-by-objectives (Riksdagens revisor, 2002). In addition, other measures also pointed to intensified national control, such as the reintroduction of the national school inspection in 2003. Nevertheless, and at approximately the same time, there were continuing efforts to deregulate and decentralise decision-making authority in other respects, for example, decisions regarding the distribution of school time (Rönnberg, 2007).

After being swept off the agenda in the wake of the extensive decentralisation reforms in the 1990s, direct school inspections were reintroduced by the Swedish government in 2003. By this decision, the state reclaimed ownership of this instrument
of control that it had previously divested itself of and handed over to the municipalities. In addition, other control and evaluative activities have been set up during the last few terms of office under both socialist and non-socialist governments. National tests for young pupils, individual development plans and written individual subject achievements from first grade onwards are just a few examples of activities instituted or reinstituted in the last decade.

Taken as a whole, the higher number of control activities in Swedish education has been described as implying a new regime of scrutiny and control (Forsberg & Wallin, 2006). The National Agency for Education describes the independent schools’ relation and obligations towards the municipalities and the central state in the following way:

Independent schools are independent from requirements set by central municipal level. When it comes to insight, review and evaluation, however, the independent schools have an obligation to participate to the extent required by the municipality in which they are located. They are also obliged to participate in the National Agency for Education’s reviews, evaluations and inspections, as well as in national tests as laid down by the government or the agency appointed by the government (Skolverket, 2006: 16)

In the following section, the issue of school inspection as an act of national educational control is addressed.

**Tightening the reins by inspection**

In 1991, a drastic decision to discontinue the National Board of Education as well as the county school boards was taken and a new agency, the National Agency for Education (NAE), was established. The focus of this new agency was to disseminate knowledge and information, rather than exercising active control (Jacobsson & Sahlin-Andersson, 1995). Therefore, the NAE did not examine individual public schools, but “halted at the municipal level” (Statskontoret, 2005). This was very much in line with the reforms of the 1990s as the architects behind it strongly emphasised municipal accountability. Overall, this meant that the NAE exercised “an arms-length relationship with public schools, taking its main duty to be the monitoring of municipalities rather than of individual schools” (OECD, 1995:127).

However, to be more accurate, in fact the state never relinquished educational control by means of inspection when it came to the independent schools, as had been the case with public school inspection in the 1990s. Since the NAE was founded, it had a responsibility to approve licenses and inspect independent schools. A new school needed to have a licence in order to operate and certification was needed in order to receive the tax-funded subsidies that accompanied each pupil through the voucher system. After a new independent school had been in operation for a couple of years, or earlier if complaints were filed, the NAE undertook an official visit to the school, inspecting and verifying that the approval of the licence was still in order and that the school still met the requirements upon which it was initially judged when it obtained
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its licence to open. Reports were filed for both the approval and the introductory inspection. The NAE aspired to inspect each independent school over a three-year cycle but, due to an insufficient budget and the rapid growth of independent schools, this pace was impossible to sustain. In addition, the NAE had the right to conduct unannounced school visits of independent schools, for instance, if complaints had been filed or if the NAE otherwise had received indications that there may be violations of regulations or other problems (Skolverket, 2004). On the whole, this inspection scheme is still in operation for independent schools but is now carried out by the Swedish National Agency for School Inspection, called the Schools Inspectorate, established in October 2008 (Skolinspektionen, 2010).

It is interesting to note that state control measures, such as recurrent inspection over a three-year cycle and the possibility to make unannounced visits, which since the 1990s had been applied to independent schools, are currently being applied to all schools in the system. The strengthened school inspection performed by the Swedish Schools Inspectorate expands on measures that were already in operation, even during the time of the NAE that was characterised by disseminating knowledge rather than exercising control, and reflects a changed policy toward public schools. The toolbox for the national control of independent schools also contains other instruments not available for controlling public schools such as the possibility to withdraw the right to public grants or the license to operate as an independent school.

In sum, during the early 1990s the NAE continued to inspect independent schools, while inspection was largely non-existent for public schools with the exception of investigating filed complaints (RRV 2001:24). The state “halted at the municipal level” when it came to public schools and was reluctant to enter classrooms as an “arms-length relationship” was preferred. This was never the case for independent schools as the state, in fact, never went away. After 2003, inspection was reintroduced throughout the system and all schools and municipalities were subjected to inspections performed over a six-year cycle.

After the Inspectorate was moved from the NAE to an independent agency in 2008, the direction taken was towards a more intensified and strengthened inspection. Today, national control and inspection are converging for the two types of schools, i.e., public and independent. Under the present school act, for instance, regulations are to be applied to all schools and responsible authorities, both public and private (SFS 2010:800; Prop. 2009/10:165). The sanctions are to be similar as well, for instance, the possibility of collecting fines from schools that do not meet the standards. The authority to apply fines will be adopted in new legislation, but closing schools has already been an option when it comes to independent schools and would thus be extended to public schools.

The harmonisation of inspection processes is also underway (Skolverket, 2008). Even though this is the goal, there are certain differences in the inspection framework between public and independent schools. Independent schools are inspected
according to additional criteria, such as whether school admissions have adhered to the regulations, whether teaching is being conducted in an impartial way, whether there is financial stability, as well as issues dealing with the number of students, management and licence (Skolinspektionen, 2010b; SOU 2007:101; Skolverket, 2006b).

**Concluding discussion**

The central issue of this article is if and how a market orientation and privatisation, (hollowing-out of the state) meet and intertwine with re-centralising attempts at central output control and similar processes (filling-in by the state) during a period when “market politics” meet “accountability politics” (c.f. Moos, 2009: 398). It further addresses the question of how we can conceptualise the state’s role within this context. At the outset, by drawing on some parts of the literature on governance two different scenarios were distinguished, asserting that a market orientation in the education policy case can either reduce or intensify the need for state-led control.

**Embracing choice, privatisation and marketisation...**

The previous discussion has stressed the far-reaching market orientation currently at work in the Swedish education system. As such, a number of policy elements are often found in the process of creating quasi-markets in different areas of the public sector. Those elements display an overall logic that can often be found in these types of reforms, irrespective of policy sector and national characteristics. As Lubienski (2009) elucidates:

- [Q]uasi-markets are premised on *decentralising* authority away from large, input-based bureaucracies. (...)

- This decentralisation is accomplished largely through *deregulation*, where local organisations are given substantially more operational autonomy, often under the implicit understanding that they can then find more effective ways of improving services.

- Moreover, not only are the decentralised state organisations then expected to compete with each other for funds based on the number of clients they attract, but private sector organisations are also allowed to enter the quasi-market and compete for funding, thereby creating *cross-sectional competition*, and diminishing public-private distinctions.

- When service-users are then given the freedom to choose from a range of service providers – rather than being assigned to a local government provider – *competitive dynamics* can emerge as various providers have to strive to attract and satisfy users, or “consumers.”

- Hence, quasi-markets can create competitive imperatives that *incentivise* organizational behaviour of service providers to be more innovative both in
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responding to consumer demands and in finding efficiencies that allow for more favourable revenue balances. (…)

- Local organisations are accountable to consumers, having to demonstrate effectiveness and responsiveness to users, while users indicate preferences through market-style signals such as the threat of exit (Lubienski, 2009: 10f, emphasis in the original).

The processes and implications of a market orientation in the Swedish education sector can, on the whole, be described in accordance with the logic outlined above. Indeed, from a comparative perspective, the Swedish case has been regarded as very liberal in this respect (Blomqvist, 2004; Baggensen Klitgaard, 2008). The Swedish model of creating an educational quasi-market has embraced choice, privatisation and marketisation – all in all, adding up to a system far from the state monopolistic one that was once in force.

...And yet retaining and reinforcing state control...

Another distinctive feature of the Swedish education policy case concerns the reinforced efforts for central control in education. As already noted, governance theorists have argued that contemporary states are forced to use new techniques of government due to the fragmented and network-based society of today. In order to retain control output-oriented measures, such as evaluation, audit and checking, central tools are becoming reactive rather than proactive (c.f. Johansson, 2006). These tendencies, involving an intensified control function of the state, have been variously labelled as an “audit society” (Power, 1999), an “evaluative state” (Neave, 1998) or an emerging “new regime of scrutiny” (Taylor, 2005). However, these are not the only available means for state steering and input-oriented mechanisms, as a detailed and standardised national curriculum, organisation and the licensing of teacher and head teacher education etc. could also be mentioned (Jarl & Rönnberg, 2010). All in all, they keep the state in command. Drawing on the previous theoretical discussion, we may interpret these developments as ones in which processes of hollowing-out are accompanied by simultaneous processes of filling-in.

Indeed, the rise of central output control can be understood with reference to the previous decentralisation and transfer of responsibilities from the centre, as a case where “increased local autonomy in the public sector increases demands for external control” (Lægreid et al., 2008: 23). Thus, there is a widespread notion that the greater the local autonomy, freedom and empowerment, the greater the need for monitoring, supervising and auditing from the centre (Leeuw & Furubo, 2008; Taylor 2005; Farell & Morris, 2003). Accordingly, somewhat paradoxically though not illogically, reduced central activity (such as incorporating private actors into the policy-making process and welfare service provision) tends to be coupled with processes and mechanisms that increase central control (Helgøy et al., 2007). This is all very much in line with
an understanding of the filling-in attempts on the part of the state. These tendencies can also be observed in the UK education policy context, as “the core executive has extended, refined and intensified hierarchal control mechanisms in certain policy sectors” (Goodwin & Grix, 2011: 552), contrary to the hollowing-out governance narrative.

As Power simply but clearly puts it, “Trust releases us from the need for checking” (1999, 1). But what about the state’s “trust” in the increasingly market-oriented education system and the trust in independent schools as reliable welfare service providers? From the previous discussion in this article, it is evident that the state has different demands on and control over public education on one hand, and independent education on the other. The state has utilised more measures of national control, including inspection, licensing and unannounced visits, when it comes to independent schools. In that sense, the control efforts have been intense all along. But for public schools, those efforts began to increase in the early 2000s. By then, independent schools had for over a decade experienced several reintroduced or reinforced instruments of output control, such as inspection. Indeed, elements of control exercised by the state in the case of independent schools were later transferred to public schools and practices already in operation for independent schools were applied to public ones. In this context, it is also important to recognise that the market-oriented reforms have affected the whole system, not only independent schools but also public schools. Competition, privatisation and changing the rules of the game are part of the contemporary policy reality for all schools in the system, whether public or independent.

Education as a policy field is characterised by a large number of different actors interacting in several organisational and hierarchical levels of the system (public, private, national, municipal, local, professional, political etc.). This situation, involving complex networks and governance interactions, creates a need for information and surveillance of the situation, which often is directed from the centre of the system, i.e., the national level. In addition, this policy field can be of particular significance to the nation-state: “The importance of education not only in terms of creating and maintaining national identity but also for economic development suggests that this is an area from which the state will not willingly abdicate its role” (Hudson 2007: 224).

It may be argued that the need for central state control is intensified, rather than reduced, as a market orientation and reforms of choice and privatisation gain ground. This may be interpreted in terms of supporting the filling-in line of argument. However, and importantly enough, this is not to argue that there would be any clear-cut causal link between marketisation and reinforced control on the part of the state. The argument only asserts that there is intensified competition and a quasi-market situation in which instruments for and use of central state control is strengthened for all schools in the system. In Moos’ terminology, it appears as if “market politics” and “accountability politics” tend to accompany each other in the Swedish education policy case (2009: 398).
... **Resulting in an “odd combination”?**

This final section addresses the question of whether endorsing market reforms while at the same time reinforcing central control is an odd combination or, on the contrary, perhaps a logical state of events. Voices have been raised that it certainly is a peculiar situation when a market orientation and increased central control are simultaneously gaining ground. As Apple (2005: 11) puts it:

> The odd combination of marketisation on the one hand and centralization of control on the other is not only occurring in Education; nor is it only going on in the United States. This is a worldwide phenomenon.

This gives rise to the question of whether this creates a “hybrid” type of education system. In an OECD assessment of the current Swedish system the simultaneous efforts at market orientation and reinforced control are portrayed as such an amalgamation:

> The Swedish education system has developed an increasingly hybrid nature: on the one hand, deploying the philosophy and means that support local autonomy and the operation of a quasi-market situation while, on the other, adopting greater measures of supervision at the centre through quality assurance and control mechanisms (Nicaise et al., 2006: 33).

In contrast, others ask if this situation is rather a logical consequence and is what is to be expected from the creation of public quasi-markets. In order to buttress such an argument, however, some of the core assumptions of the logic of the market need to be revised. Notably, it challenges the presumption that choice in itself will enhance the quality of the delivered services and the performance of the welfare producers regardless of which other control measures are used. It asserts that the feet of the consumers cannot constitute the only mechanism of control and accountability in that case.

If the state still holds the upper hand, and is still in fact a “key orchestrator” (Bell et al., 2010: 852) or “core executive” (Ball, 2009: 96) and thusly finds alternative ways to navigate and remain in authority in an increasingly blurred and multiple-actor network governing context, should we then better speak of “a regulated market”, limiting choice and involving a “standard model” decided and controlled by the state, as outlined below?

> The State, regulating the market, insists upon a standardised curriculum and standardised assessment so that rational choices can be exercised. Thus, there is central control, a standard model, and limited choice within a regulated market (Turner 1996, 15 cited in Zajda, 2006: 6).

This article takes as its final argument that such questions need be posed and addressed by further research. The resultant answers could prove instrumental to facilitating our understanding of contemporary governing arrangements, their transformations and effects from both an empirical and theoretical perspective.
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Endnotes

1. The state is indeed a “much-debated concept” (Raab, 2000:26). In this article, I employ a relatively narrow definition of the state, i.e., the parliament and government, its ministries and central state agencies (Rothstein, 2002:113). By the state, I thus refer to formal political arrangements and institutions located at the national level, and the municipal and local arenas are therefore not included in this hierarchical definition of the state. Even so, I agree with claims that the state cannot be considered a unitary entity, and that the conceptualisation of the state needs to be undertaken with caution (Taylor et al., 1997: 29f; Ball, 1990: 19f).

2. As an empirical example, this presumption and overall logic is expressed as follows in a parliamentary motion from a member of the Moderates: “When school choice is implemented, the good and serious schools will be rewarded. Schools that are lagging behind or are mismanaged will see their number of students decreasing. Since the resources are accompanying the student [by vouchers, author’s remark] and no school shall receive special treatment from the municipality (which unfortunately is occurring today) schools become completely dependent on their ability to attract students. It profoundly alters the way we think about education. Each school’s quality, profile and how it is perceived by and connected to the local community will be central. No school management can afford not to look at how their results are developing. Schools that fail to meet quality standards will be forced to close down, either by withdrawing the voucher or by the students choosing to attend other schools” (Motion 1999/2000:Ub259).
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