

## STRATEGIC SELF-MANAGEMENT

# Danish gymnasium management between playing solo and showing solidarity

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### Abstract

Compared to other parts of the Nordic education systems the Danish gymnasium or upper secondary school has been reformed very late. Today however, the tendencies in neoliberal educational politics represented by the European Bologna process, the PISA studies and OECD's recommendations are implemented in national governance in Denmark, and the gymnasiums have to adapt to the new management technologies embedded in New Public Management: Competence orientation, accountability and commercialisation as means or ends. How are gymnasium principals coping with this new situation? This article sheds light on strategies that gymnasium heads will use to create room for manoeuvre and the discourse they draw upon in order to give these strategies political legitimacy. The analysis shows how the Danish tradition of self-management, participant or 'bottom-up democracy' continues to have considerable significance. Despite internationalisation the traditional Danish concepts of self-ownership and cooperativeness still appear to be mental shapes or frames of understanding.

**Keywords:** Upper Secondary School Management, Neo-Institutional Discourse Analysis, Participants Democracy, Self-ownership, Cooperativeness, Neo- Liberalism

## 1. Introduction

In March 2010 six Danish gymnasium principals and the chairs of their governing bodies sent an open letter with an attached minute to the minister of education.<sup>1</sup> The letter was concerned with the distribution of pupils between gymnasiums. It made representation against existing stipulations requiring binding collaboration between gymnasiums and against the distribution committee for the setting of the individual gymnasium's capacity and admission of pupils. The six principals argued in favour of local self-management: The management at individual schools ought to have the freedom to choose how many classes they wish to establish and which pupils they will accept. Forced collaboration runs counter to the students' free choice of school. It works against the national target that 95% of a year cohort in 2015 is to have a youth training qualification.<sup>2</sup> And it puts a spoke in the wheel of the New Public Management technologies – taximeter management and self-ownership. Technologies introduced into the gymnasium area with a management reform in 2007 following the reform of educational content introduced in 2005.

In February 2011 11 principals write an article in the gymnasium teachers' trades union magazine, in which they argue for administrative cooperation, or in other words a voluntary cooperation between a number of gymnasiums around such factors as finances and accounts, IT and building maintenance. The 11 signatories see administrative collaboration as a way whereby the schools' independence and self-management can be retained in a time when mergers are increasingly mentioned as an appropriate solution to the liberalisation into many small units that self-ownership has brought with it. This group of 11 state that fusions will mean loss of the on hands relationship necessary for management to have a sense of the school's particular student intake base and its everyday activity, to counteract drop-out rates and to strengthen involvement and democratic dialogue at the workplace. Fusions will, write the 11-group, bring about more top-down management, hierarchy and bureaucracy and reduce the attention paid to the primary task of teaching and qualifying students (Jørgensen et. Al 2011).

The letters written by what we will call the 6-group and the 11-group have been chosen because they represent two different examples of strategies that heads of Danish gymnasiums can use in their attempts to create room to manoeuvre in the new management situation, in which – following transnational models – decentralisation and marketisation are linked to recentralisation and new forms of management, also known as advanced liberal management (Rose 1999, Dean 1999). In this article we will describe the two strategies – *solo play and solidarity* – that these two letters imply. We also wish to examine, what forms of national discourse these letters draw upon, when they attempt to justify these strategies and create support from the Danish public opinion. And finally we wish to discuss the potential implications of these strategic choices. What local future scenarios can we sketch in the light

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<sup>1</sup> Letter and minute of 12.3.2010 to the Danish Minister of Education from principals and governing bodies at six gymnasiums.

<sup>2</sup> The 95% target is part of an agreement from 2006 between the parties in the government then in office: Venstre (The Liberals) and Konservativt Folkeparti (The Conservative People's Party), the government's support party, Dansk Folkeparti (The Danish People's Party), Socialdemokrater (The Social Democrats) and Radikale Venstre (The Social Liberal Party). The only out-sider was the radical left-wing party, Enhedslisten (The Red-Green Party)

of the strategic situation these various gymnasiums find themselves? And, seen from a more general perspective, what national changes in educational policy can these strategies help to construct? We will be drawing upon neo-institutional discourse theory as an analytical tool as developed by, for example, Kjær and Pedersen. In this context we will be placing special emphasis on a description of the Danish competitive state as a particular negotiated construction, and on those bottom-up processes whereby decentral players – here gymnasiums' management teams – contribute to setting the agenda (2001).

Our point is that, faced with the new management situation, these two debating groups choose to take the offensive. As a strategic possibility each points in its own direction. But one thing they have in common. Their arguments draw upon the discourse of self-management that has been so dominant in Danish educational thinking – and in Danish history as a whole. We will either survive as 'self-owning farmers' or by being 'self-owning in a cooperative movement'.

Seen in relation to the individual Danish gymnasium, the former strategy can mean 'make or break', depending on the strategic situation the school finds itself in. The second strategy, meanwhile, can function as a defence against – or as a path to – creating the fusions they are trying to avoid. Directly or indirectly - intentionally or unintentionally - the choice of each strategy can end up confirming or reinforcing some of the neo-liberal tendencies that exist in transnational educational policy.

## 2. The 6-group

The contributions from 6-group and the 11-group came with a year's interval. Both took up critical positions to the management situation that has become a reality for gymnasiums since 2005 –reinforced by the self-ownership reform of 2007. This reality is one that has been formed by the model of New Public Management that the Danish ministry of finance has been developing since the 1990s, and its central management tools are competitive contracting. Basically both groups accept the competitive contracting model as a premise, but the 6-group and the 11-group relate to different *aspects* of the model, criticise it from different *positions* or perspectives, and suggest different *strategies* as solutions.

*The 6-group* criticises the *contractual aspect* of the management model, the limitations for decentralisation that are formulated centrally in the management documents, and they criticise it from a liberal position. The optimal preconditions for economic efficiency and quality are only present when there is total decentralisation and reliance on market forces, claim the 6-group, but these conditions are not present in the current situation. Neither the determination of capacity nor the distribution of students among gymnasiums is decided by individual gymnasiums but decided by a central body. Seen in the light of the competitive contracting the gymnasiums find themselves in a paradoxical situation:

*How, in a system in which the board does not make decisions in central strategic areas, can the board and the management team be made responsible for the school's performance? It quite simply does not add up* (Minute p. 3)

Decisions must be made by those to whom they concern. Only in such a situation can resources be used efficiently and schools become ‘client-oriented’, in other words produce the best possible quality (Minute p. 3). It follows that both determination of capacity and admissions should lie with the individual gymnasium (Minute p. 5).

The 6-group gives this standpoint legitimacy by confronting the classic welfare state argument that free choice leads to social inequality and to social and geographical selection. This division already exists because the distribution of students takes place using criteria based on distance, write the 6-group. This allows the individual gymnasium to reproduce existing social differences and differences between residential areas. Freedom of choice - a reinforcement of the liberal principle of the citizen’s defence against the state - will mean, argue the 6-group, that *‘those students who so wish [can] come out of their social ghetto’* (Minute p. 3).

The aspect that the 6-group latch onto in their critical comment is the paradox in a management model that is trying to loosen the ‘bind’ between quality and financial efficiency by decentralising while at the same time maintaining or reinforcing central regulation. As can be seen, the 6-group in their critique take up a standpoint that is both liberal and liberalistic, They emphasise both personal and economic freedom, and as part of their strategy they propose lifting contractual limitations so that it would, be possible to ‘go solo’ in the market-place.

### 3. The 11-group

Like the 6-group, the *11-group’s* comment is directed against tendencies towards central state management in a defence of decentralised decision-making processes. But they take a different stance from the 6-group. They focus on a different aspect of the ministry of finance management model, *its corporate aspect*, which they criticise for the paradox that in practice large units counteract the quality and efficiency that are the expressed intention behind New Public Management. However, the standpoint from which their criticism is mounted is a different one. The 11-group does not basically take issue with competitive contracting but in contrast to the 6-group they do not make an offensive case *in favour of* the market, Their argument is based on the ambition that aspects of participant democracy in the Danish welfare construction can be transmitted by means of a strategy built upon voluntary supportive cooperation between independent players.

Within New Public Management the principle of corporate management implies incentives for the creation of ever larger units – mergers of local authorities and of institutions in the form of actual fusions and/or campus creation – based on an assumption that larger units bring about increased economic efficiency and provide more quality for the equal or less expenditure. The 11-group attack this assumption and argue against fusions and in favour of a set-up in which individual gymnasiums are retained as smaller independent units, which nevertheless have to form parts of communities. According to the 11-group, four arguments speak *in favour of* this construction. Firstly, local sensitivity and the individual school’s ability to reflect the area’s particular socio-cultural conditions are retained. Secondly, management continues to be ‘at eye level’. The organisational size are kept at a level, where

decisions do not take unnecessary time and it is simple both in formal and informal contexts to ‘communicate one’s doubt’, as the 11-group express it. Proximity is retained – to the students, too – and this reduces drop-out rates. Finally, it is claimed that such a construction maintains involvement in the school as a communal project. Issues as curriculum development, teaching and organisation can at any time be up for debate. The 11-group are worried that the wave of fusions will counteract ‘the necessary quality in educational courses and [create] top-down mega-institutions that increase costs and are heavy on management’ (Jørgensen et. al. 2011 p.35).

So what is it that these two teams are really up to? On the one hand there is disagreement about what principles educational institutions should take as their basis for management. On the other hand they overwhelmingly agree in turning against centralisation and top-down management in their defence of decentralisation and self-management. To do so is understandable enough if we assume that they are interested in preserving and developing their own room for manoeuvre as local managers. But why do they tackle the matter in precisely the way they do? Why choose these particular arguments and strategies, and what can this bring with it?

#### **4. Neo-institutional discourse analysis**

To come up with a possible explanation of what the 6-group and the 11-group are doing in their contribution to the debate, why and how they are doing it – and what consequences this might have – we are drawing upon neo-institutional discourse theory (Kjær & Pedersen 2001).

We wish to understand the processes whereby overall political ideas turn into practical reality in institutions or organisations or businesses. Political ideas – social democratic or liberal ones, for example – are not transformed directly into institutional change but are ‘translated’ in order to give meaning in new institutional contexts. Neo-institutional discourse theory is formulated in opposition to rational implementation theory, in other words in opposition to preconceptions from political science whereby centrally determined policies come to be directly implemented in practice. Neo-institutional discourse theory does not regard institutional development as being mechanical but as a matter of attributing opinions and of power relations. Here the concept of discourse becomes a crucial one.

Discourse in this context is defined not only as language but as use of language. Discursive processes are processes in which language is used to establish or constitute particular social phenomena as being visible, meaningful and capable too communicate. This takes place by means of what neo-institutional discourse theory calls institutionalised articulation processes within a particular system of knowledge, in which particular rules apply for the production of acceptable statements. In line with other approaches to discourse analysis inspired by Foucault, neo-institutional discourse analysis is interested in discourses that represent a symbolic order – a particular horizon of meaning or context of rationality – that indicates what are to be regarded as problems and solutions, causes and effects. Included are indications as to which objects can be observed in the world, how these objects are to be interpreted, and which actions it makes sense to perform when we wish to intervene in

relation to objects (Foucault 1977).

As an analytical strategy this implies that, when we wish to characterise any particular discursive practice, we can – as we have done above – focus on which *aspects* of an observed item are made the subject of observation, which *position* or which perspective is used when it is observed, and which *strategies* for intervention are planned in relation to the item observed. In other words we can describe what is focused on, from where the focus comes and with what aim (Rose 1999, Dean 199, Hjort 2010).

Neo-institutional discourse analysis places particular emphasis, as its name suggests, on observing how discursive processes are woven together with *processes of institutionalisation*. This might be as formalisation of systems of knowledge production and reproduction in institutions of research and higher education. In other contexts we can follow how the formation of institutions is linked to particular regulation of what can be said, where and how - with the establishment of sanctioned and sanctioning forms of discourse. Certain ways of speaking and acting are acknowledged. Others are ignored.

Interesting is to describe which forms of discourse compete to establish the dominant position in and around an institution – and what alliances may be formed. This can tell us something about the balance of power and thereby give a broad indication of potential development scenarios. What we are dealing with in this article is the formation of a new type of educational institution, self-owning gymnasiums, in a context of a welfare state in the throes of transformation. The forms of discourse that the players involved – in this case the principals – choose to draw upon can say something about the way *they interpret* their power relations and their room to manoeuvre. As we have seen, neither of the two groups discusses competitive contracting itself. But their choice of discourse has practical significance. The discourse contributes to establish frameworks for what can be accepted as valid arguments in the new negotiation situation that is created. In this way it takes on significance for the future of the institutions, whatever the actual outcome of the negotiations, the tug-of-wars or power struggles between those involved in them might be.

The examples of the 6-group and the 11-group emphasise that it is important to see processes governing institutional change not only as top-down but also as *bottom-up*, as processes in which decentral players are actively involved in setting the agenda. The ‘translation processes’ that neo-institutional theory has primarily concerned itself with have been translations of political and economic ideas from the transnational to national level. Their approach is, however, also conducive to an understanding of how ideas such as freedom of choice are translated and given significance on their way ‘down the management pyramid’ from state to regions to local authorities to local management, colleagues and users, in this case teachers and students. Does freedom of choice, mean that school choose students or that students choose schools? It is worth being aware that translation processes can have their origins in many places – in this case from groups of principals ‘in the middle of the pyramid’ who wish to have a role in defining developments. They can not only be said to translate ‘larger discourses’ to the local level. They are also working actively to translate a local understanding of reality, so it can be acknowledged within the dominant management

discourses at the national level. Through these attempts they are trying to define the future but they are also drawing upon the past, upon discourses that historically have been of central significance and that they are interpreting afresh in order to create meaning in what is currently being seen as possible – or ideally to make possible what they see as being meaningful.

## 5. The competitive state

Peter Kjær and Ove K. Pedersen, who are the theoreticians behind the development of neo-institutional discourse theory in Denmark, take as their starting point an analysis of how the ‘larger’ transnational discourses such as Keynesianism and monetarism are translated at the national level. They have, for example, been interested in how change – is defined within various discourses. What decides whether a change has occurred? Is it, for example, a reduction in unemployment, even though this means a deficit in public finances, as Keynes would have it? Or reduced inflation, even though this requires a reduction in the public sector, as Milton Friedman would define it? Is the fact that the state has been able to control the economy a criterion of success, or is it best to do the opposite and have a hands-off approach and let the market regulate itself? These are standpoints that have fought in the international politico-economic arena since the end of the 1970s, but their internal power relations were radically altered after 1989.

In their analysis of Danish development over the past 30 years Kjær and Pedersen have placed particular emphasis on two features that together have led to what they call the Danish competitive state. Firstly, the marketisation that is so central to a neo-liberal strategy has been interpreted more as a *means* to reinforce political control both over the public and the private sector than as a dismantling of public control of production of services such as education or health care. Secondly, there is the particular Danish form of *negotiated economy*, in which many different interests both from the labour market and from various administrative and institutional levels have played a part in setting the agenda. Included here are the principals of our gymnasiums. Through these negotiations, write Kjær and Pedersen, a common interpretation and institutionalisation has been established over the years, in which Keynesian readings have gradually been replaced by new thought processes deriving from neo-liberalism.

The construction of the competitive state is to be understood as the current compromise between the classical welfare state, in which health, education and social security are financed and administered using public funding, and the minimalist state or welfare market-place, in which welfare is basically carried out privately funded by users themselves and by any insurances they might have, and welfare work takes place according normal commercial conditions. Within the construction of the competitive state the nation is defined as a national community of investment. Investments in education, health and social security are meant to strengthen the national ability to compete in a globalised market in order to secure welfare and social cohesion (Kjær & Pedersen 2001, Knudsen 2008, Pedersen 2006).

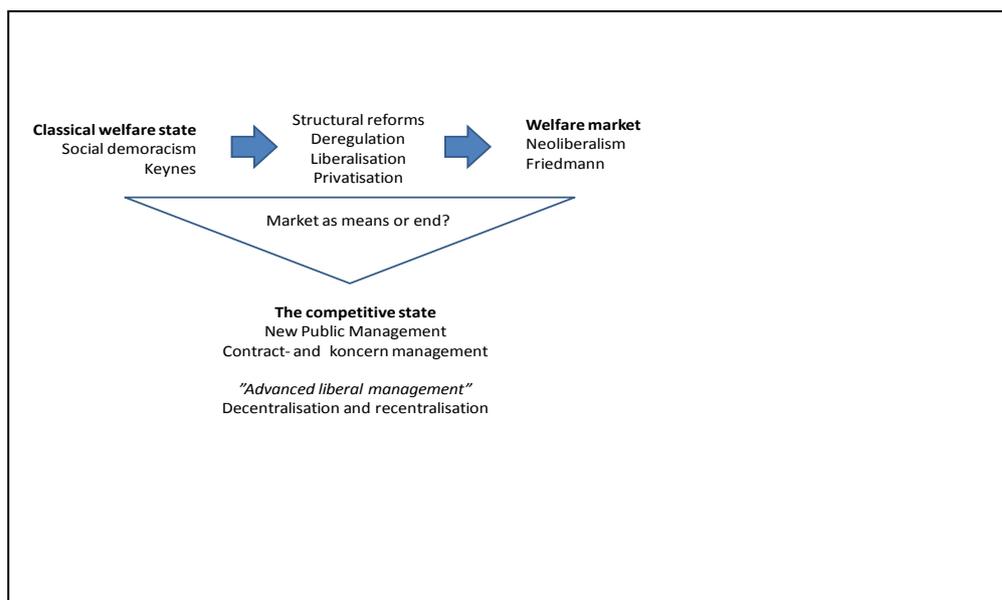


Fig 1.

The competitive state contains features from both the traditional welfare state and from the free market model, but it contains its own special characteristics. On the one hand, it demands the national orientation that has been at the heart of the collective insurance arrangement constituted by the Nordic welfare model. On the other hand the competitive state presents a radical redefinition of welfare work. Welfare has no longer to be regarded as an expense for society but as an investment intended to provide a return - either directly as a reduction in public budget or indirectly in the form of a strengthening of the competitive ability of national companies. Welfare work starts to change from a positive external factor, state-organised benefits made available to business, for example as, trained employees or social security giving flexibility to the labour market. Welfare work is increasing understood as a production that has to be rationalised and function as cost-effectively as possible, ideally with the aim of creating real value in an economic sense.

Compared with the free market, however, the decisive difference in the competitive state is that single welfare enterprises – as the 6-group clearly indicate – are not themselves master of their strategic prioritisation. State control of contracts means that they cannot choose only to get involved in business areas that are profitable to work with,. They cannot choose not to handle less attractive raw materials, production processes or groups of users as the recidivist child, teaching in ancient history or chronic patients (Klausen & Stålberg 1998, Klausen 2001, Pedersen 2004, Christensen & Klitgaard 2008, Christensen 2008, Dalsgaard & Jørgensen 2010).

Over the past ten years the competitive state model have been able to muster a broad majority across the centre of Danish politics but is today not without challengers. Formulated as a national model that requires social cohesive in society, it provokes the question: Who is to belong to the national community and who is not (Kristensen 2007). As the comments from

both the 11-group and the 6-group clearly show, NPM as a political management model has given rise to violent critique of its bureaucracy, and as an economic model it has brought demands for further deregulation and privatisation (Gjørup et al. 2007, Hansen 2008). In combination this vitalise both a liberal and a liberalist position, which makes it difficult to retain the social agenda that characterised the classical welfare state (Hjort 2011).

At the present moment the publicly funded welfare organisations are under pressure from all sides. The competitive state's various agendas compete for attention and consideration (Pedersen 2004). Organisations have to acknowledge competing forms of *rationality* whether they be *administrative*, *professional* or *commercial* in nature. When a school has to make a decision as to whether a student is to remain in the scheme or not, from an administrative point of view it will make sense to try to retain the student, so the college can provide documentation that it has done its bit to realise the national target for 95% of a year cohort to have taken a course in further education or training. From a professional educational point of view the decision might be trickier. Is it, in fact, realistic to expect the student to comply with the academic demands of the course? Will it be good for him or her from a purely human and social point of view to be held onto? And looked at from a commercial angle the choice is between trying to hold onto the student in the hope of harvesting the taximeter funding that goes with success or giving up as quickly as possible so as not to waste resources on a hopeless project (Hjort 2011).

Placed as they are in this complex dilemma, it can come as no surprise that heads of Danish gymnasiums are 'sounding off'. But why sound off in the particular way they do? They could simply have proposed new forms of national regulation of student admission, new forms of funding or something entirely different.

## **6. Self-management and Danish popular democracy**

When the 6-group and the 11-group choose – each from their own perspective – to argue for the self-management of small units, the self-administration of individual gymnasiums, one explanation can be found in particular features associated with the Danish version of the Nordic welfare state model, including the development of traditions of Danish educational policy and Danish pedagogical thinking. Common to the classical Nordic welfare state models is the fact that educational institutions, like the health service and social security systems, are in principle run and funded by the state, in other words are funded by progressive taxation and are 'universal' in the sense of being accessible to all citizens (Esping-Andersen 1990, Pedersen, N. M. 2007, Pedersen, S.T. 2007, Hjort 2008). If, however, we take a closer look at the construction of the welfare state in various Nordic countries as it has been cultivated by social democratic parties in the various nations or 'popular' alliances in the 1930s and especially in the period after the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, we can also see crucial differences (Hirdman 1990, Seip 1991, Högnäs 2001, Stuga 2002, Telhaug 2003, Telhaug et al. 2006).

The dominant sense of democracy in Denmark in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries we have defined as '*popular democracy*', in contrast to Swedish '*state democracy*' and Norwegian '*national democracy*'. (Raae 2011) This definition relates to Danish social democratic alliances with

substantial parts of Danish economic life, which has featured large numbers of small independent companies both in rural and urban and in areas, (the Danish “petit bourgeois” society). A central element here was the Danish cooperative movement – the ‘administrative community’ between larger farmers. The educational thinking in this movement was inspired by Grundtvig (1783-1972) and widespread within our so-called ‘high schools’, ‘after-schools’ and ‘free’ or state-independent Schools. The Danish Free School movement is built upon parents’ rights to establish and run school according to their religious, political or pedagogical convictions. It has played – and continues to play – a significant role in Danish educational thinking despite the fact that only a minority of Danish children (around 10%) actually go to private or free school, and even though 70% of the cost is not financed by parents but by the state (Hirdman 1990, Seip 1991, Högnäs 2001, Stuga 2002, Telhaug 2003, Telhaug et al. 2006).<sup>3</sup>

Popular democracy and the specific Danish way of thinking self-management in education can in part explain why the Danish gymnasium is so ‘weird’ when seen in a Nordic context. In both Sweden and Norway the gymnasium was subject to social democratic educational strategy from as early as the 1960s and 1970s. The intention was to create a comprehensive school, “School for all”. In Sweden school has been seen explicitly as a measure for promoting equality, and youth education and training courses has been integrated into a unified system inspired by Anglo-Saxon curriculum thinking.<sup>4</sup> Ordinary Danish gymnasiums have never really been embraced by a strategy of this kind, even though a social democratic initiative in 1972 made an attempt to do so by setting up a working committee (the Højby Committee). The gymnasium has retained its independent status in the educational system and its relationship to the traditions of *Bildung* and didactics of continental Europe. While Swedish and Norwegian forms of democracy have promoted the establishment of a comprehensive system, the Danish tradition of self-management appear to obstruct it. It has never been possible to establish a political majority in the name of equality in favour of intervening in respect to gymnasiums for being ‘elitist institutions’. The gymnasium, however, has grown from the inside over the past 50 years and has become a mass gymnasium. Where once it contained less than 10% of a year group it now contains about 50%.

While the Danish gymnasium was in relatively stable growth and, probably for that reason, was left alone as regards social democratic reform strategy, it became subject to radical reforms with the reforms of 2005 and 2007. In these reforms there were clear signs of efforts to ‘dynamize’ gymnasiums from within through project work and interdisciplinary

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<sup>3</sup> Popular democratic understanding implies that the people are not seen as identical with the state but as independent ‘decentral players’. The tradition for self-management both in education and in business remains so self-evident in Denmark that it almost becomes invisible but if we compare with Sweden and Norway, it becomes clearer that here we have a particular Danish variant of the Nordic way. We have characterised the dominant Swedish democracy as state democracy, because it bears stronger marks of identification between state and people, and the corresponding Norwegian democracy we have characterised as national democracy, because historically the formation of the state has taken place in the same movement as the formation of Norway as an independent nation (Raae 2011).

<sup>4</sup> The Swedish gymnasium has for a long period been a ‘comprehensive system’ that includes all youth education and training. In 1991, however, it was reformed with radical decentralisation and marketisation and in 2011 a new reform comes in involving a central tightening of curriculums along with some differentiation of students (Andersson 2010, Utbildningsdepartementet 2009).

cooperation or teamwork. However, there are also ambitions to dynamize from without through a stronger orientation towards competencies and towards market adjustment, through the development of particular study lines tailored to local demand from students and business. This drive was linked to attempts at re-stabilisation through a strengthening of the national canon and the new out-put control that is the dominant management tool in the competitive state. The consequence is that the gymnasiums find themselves in a highly complex situation (Bøje et al. 2008, Hjort 2010).

The discursive tradition in Danish management can play its part in explaining the late reform of the ordinary Danish gymnasium, but it can also help to explain why the 6-group and the 11-group choose to express themselves as they do when they need to create room to manoeuvre in the new complex situation. The discourse of self-management appears to come naturally as the discourse that can justify both critique of the competitive state's stranglehold and the delights of the free market.

Whether the 6-group or the 11-group – or neither of them – wins is not ours to know. But when they choose the form of discourse that they do when they have to argue their case, this can be read as *their* political interpretation of the power relations around the Danish gymnasium. If this reading is correct, then the present struggle in Danish educational policy is not between the classical welfare state and the competitive state, but between the competitive state and a more elaborated market as an extension of neo-liberal strategy – extending to the educational sector as we have seen happen internationally (Apple 2001, Ball 2003, Nichols & Berliner 2007, Hopman 2008, Karlsen 2009).

Counting *in favour of* the competitive state is a range of social arguments that the 6-group argue against. First of all the issue of social equality or cohesion, as national solidarity has been rechristened in the construction of the competitive state (Kristensen 2007). *Against it* are the discomfort of the re-centralism and tight corporativeness of the competitive state and its paradoxical forms of management. Both the 6-group and the 11-group formulate this by re-articulating traditional Danish self-management discourse on new premises – despite the fact that, that they do it each in their own way, the one more modestly expecting adjustments of the management technologies of the competitive state while the other is oriented more radically in a neo-liberal direction.

But if they win, what could the consequences be – in the short and the long term? Well, at the local level this will depend on the situation in which the individual gymnasium finds itself and on the way they choose to handle that strategically.

## 7. Future scenarios

Figure 2 models the phases of the 2005/07 reforms of the Danish Gymnasium (Hjort & Raae 2010). It is characteristic of the realisation phase that the decentral players set the agenda. At the moment we are in a subphase about establishing coalitions in order to *influence the conditions for strategy*.

Reform of content 2005		Management Reform 2007			
Construction phase		Implementation phase		Realisation phase	
Modernisation	Retraditionalisation	Interpretation	Logistic	Strategy Finances	Strategy Politics

fig. 2

We regard the contributions from the 6- and the 11-groups as exercises in this kind of coalition-making. Their contributions can say something about the complexity of the field in which coalitions are to be established (for example, two of the people who formed part of the 6-group coalition were also part of the 11-group!).

The complexity of the field and can the diversity of the gymnasium's strategic situations can be illustrated in this way (Fig. 3).

	Centre	Periphery
Low competitive pressure	Surplus gymnasium	Deficit gymnasium
High competitive pressure	Profile hunter gymnasium	Bankrupt gymnasium

Fig. 3

The 'surplus gymnasium' lies in an area that is financially well-functioning and central as regards its infrastructure. A gymnasium in this situation does not need to make any great efforts strategically but if it does so it will be a strong player in the regional marketplace. The 'deficit gymnasium' describes the situation in a remote rural area. Gymnasiums in this situation have a catchment area avoids significant competition. Schools like this do not need to make any strategic efforts either – the strategic opportunities for branding provided by the 2005 reform are more of a hindrance for them than anything else, since they have to offer a minimum of study lines anyway. The 'Profile hunter' designates an economically developed area, but the schools in this situation are less fortunately placed. They might be situated at the fringes of the town or region, at a distance from good bus routes. For gymnasiums in this situation making the right strategic decision is particularly important – this might involve offering attractive lines of study, so-called extra-curricular activities. The fourth, the 'bankrupt gymnasium', has the toughest conditions. Self-ownership has actualised the possibility of going bankrupt. Nevertheless the political struggle to change conditions can be decisive both for the profile hunter and for the bankrupt gymnasium. Is it possible, for example, to get an increase in the basic grant's share of the overall finances? Or is it possible

to minimise the financial pain that comes with a high drop-out rate by having a special social taximeter?

There is no simple cause-and-effect relationship between the strategic situation and the methods used by the individual gymnasium to tackle the situation and to act upon it. In our cases the 6-group and the 11-group can be regarded as good examples of coalition-making with an intention to influence the existing strategic situation – in the case of the 6-group directly by proposing deregulation, in the case of the 11 indirectly by emphasising the opportunities for creating communities. If we are to describe possible future scenarios for their strategies within the context of rationality we have established above, the picture might look like this:

The first strategy, the 6-group's, we described as 'going solo'. To go solo represents the most liberalistic version. *Seen from the perspective of the overall coalition's strategy*, the most significant critique of the present situation is that the contract management of the competitive state model is a state limitation of self-management. The core of the critique is the paradox that the individual school's management and governing board have been made responsible for the running and finances of the school without that responsibility bringing with it the freedom to determine capacity themselves and student admissions themselves. Going solo as a strategy allows the opportunity for make-or-break – the opportunity to survive and to profit from the situation or the risk of bankruptcy. *Seen from within the strategic perspective of the individual school, the situation is rather muddier*. For those schools that choose the solo strategy, the strategic situation – the pressure of competition and the position in relation to geographic centre or periphery – is especially significant. The further we move along the diagonal towards the bottom right corner of the figure the more risky the strategy will become. *Seen from above, from the political perspective of competitive state*, a critical point in the solo strategy will be selection between schools, because it challenges overall national goals – the 95% target, the regional distribution of education and training and the unified national standards. Seen from the perspective of the competitive state, it is a question whether these issues can be left to market forces.

The second strategy – to 'show solidarity' – bears the characteristics of the Danish negotiated version of the welfare state with an emphasis on the principles of participant democracy. *The critique that this coalition formulates* is aimed on the one hand at the liberalistic version of the education and training market and on the other at the fusions that for gymnasiums may be waiting in the wings as a (the competitive state's) means of regulation. 'Showing solidarity' involves the construction of community as a defence against both these opponents for the purpose of defending self-management. *Seen from below from a strategic perspective*, the critical point is the construction's vulnerability to changes in the political balance of power currently making up the competitive state. The question remains whether the competitive state is to be retained into the future in a version of contract management such as we have at present or whether it will be stretched further in the direction of liberalisation, deregulation and privatisation. *Seen from above, from the perspective of policy or of the competitive state*, the question has to be whether the construction of community is sufficiently robust to achieve the advantages of being a group concern. Is cooperation sufficiently tight and binding to

mean that large-scale and financial advantages can be reaped through volume?

The ‘showing solidarity’ strategy involves, however, an additional risk, namely the paradoxical risk of taking part in the process that the strategy is seeking to counteract. In the version described here, community is limited to finances, maintenance of buildings and IT. These are processes that are far removed from the school’s core activities – the teaching. As such, community appears to be a real alternative to fusion. An altered strategic situation could have consequences beyond the immediate horizon of the actors involved. Ironically the forming of administrative communities might simultaneously develop the technology needed for fusion. Common administrative systems standardise and make schools comparable across local differences. Unintentionally this can make fusion the ‘natural decision’. If the competitive state is stretched further in the neo-liberal direction, as we have seen in England and New Zealand, we can easily imagine that one day it will feel not only like a strategic and economic possibility but also like a strategic *necessity* to go further down the road of actual fusion in order to strengthen a competitive advantage.

A third scenario, which we have not mentioned but which has to be addressed for the sake of completeness, is ‘to go dino’. The ‘dinosaur’ strategy implies taking a sceptical, expectant or passive stance in the face both of the advanced liberal management mechanisms of the competitive state and of prospects of further marketisation. Arguments for ‘doing dino’ – trying to maintain the status quo – do not make up a strategy in the ordinary sense of the word. Whether ‘going dino’ has a future in itself is doubtful and will depend on whether the local competitive pressure is sufficiently low and/or on whether political goodwill can be achieved with regard to compensatory initiatives. At the moment we would claim that we are in the phase of political coalition. In this phase – and under the impression of the current political balance of power around the competitive state – the dinosaur strategy does not seem to be the most sustainable one.

All in all there is little at the decentral level in Danish gymnasium policy that indicates a retention of the classical principles of the welfare state. The struggle seems to be between more or less radically developed versions of neo-liberal educational policy as we know them from the transnational level. If this is a correct diagnosis, an interesting question is whether the decentral players are themselves contributing to promote the tendencies that they did not necessarily advocate at the outset – and from which they will not necessarily reap advantage either.

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