

The emergence of the Swedish National Agency for School Improvement

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Swedish education has promoted decentralization and deregulation during 1990s. By this process, municipality got all responsibility about primary and secondary schools. Schools now has right to decide budget depend on how they are going to implement. And teaching is in much flexible framework than before. So is it possible to say that local got real autonomy throughout these reforms? This study mainly focuses on the social and political context of emergence of the Swedish National Agency for School Improvement. The question is: why did Sweden need the central improvement office while they wanted to decentralize the education system? There are two major matters found on this paper, competitive condition and central role of qualitative control. Those two matters are deeply related to the market mechanism. But Sweden is well-know as Social Democratic society. So how this country integrates with those two clashes? If simply say, the agency is the one which connect these two regimes. This paper presents the process of agency's establishment by referring the official reports and political documents.

This paper presents the process and its background of the emergence of the Swedish National Agency for School Improvement. Sweden has encouraged the decentralization throughout 1990s educational reform. Main purpose to introduce the decentralized system was to administrate by local autonomy. But in 2003, they got the central organization for school development. This paper focuses the reason why they needed the central agency while they're preceding decentralization and what kinds of problems they faced during decentralizing process. Actually Sweden is one of the most successful decentralized countries. So that to analyze the Swedish process can be expected to contribute to the discussion on central-local relationship.

There are three parts on this paper divided by periods. During 1990 to 1994, the liberal government tried to improve the quality of school education by promoting the "free choice" to parents. For guaranteeing the "free choice", they needed to give parents

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sufficiently information and diversity of school types. And to diversify schools and to give teachers and principals an incentive, deregulation on educational field has put in practice.¹ First part argues about the main effects and affects of these system changes following by the reform process.

Effects by the deregulation, schools and local authorities received more flexibility on daily works. Many distinctive practices have been able to hold on both public and private schools. Municipalities got the possibility to decide the budget in certain area. But the gap between schools was brought up as a problematic issue.

Second part follows the reaction of the reform on the period of 1994 to 2000. "Free choice" strategy brought competitive fundamentals on Swedish school education. And this competitive atmosphere caused conflicts and distrust between schools, municipalities and universities. Some of the teachers faced confusion by unreasonable demands.² So the strategy, which was expected to improve the quality of school education, could not encourage the local motivation. As if it were the survey of teachers' motivation, number of students who failed on final grade was grown.³

In 1994, the social democratic party came back to power again. They needed to get out of vicious circle of competitive atmosphere and to shift swiftly to controllable and cooperative regime. But as their pressing issue then was to join the EU, they couldn't change the situation boldly.

In 1997, "Development plan for preschools, schools and adult education – quality and equality" has presented on the parliament. It claims about the problematic increase of gaps on quality and equality in school education. And this plan found the problem on the malfunction of central supervision.⁴ Followed by the development plan, the government reinforced the function of supervision by ordering new project to the National Agency for Education (Skolverket).

But still, quality and equality of school education was not improved sufficiently, although the reinforced supervision succeeded to re-establish of order. Third part of this paper focuses on the moment of emergence of the central agency for school development. About coming near to the end of the six years supervision project, the government liked to strengthen the Skolverket's role of supervision. Thomas Östros, who was minister of education at that time, taken over the responsibility of school education from Ingegerd Wärnersson, and he suggested dividing the Skolverket into two agencies. Östros idea was to enhance the former Skolverket's part with putting more effort on quality and equality control.⁵

The separation and establishment of the agencies was held on recently in 2003. So this paper is very unique at dealing with this topic. But for analyzing the effects of decentralization on educational field, this object is seems to be quite suitable. It is difficult to certify the causal relationship on educational reform, therefore this paper dare to refer official documents such as policy reports, research papers and numerous surveys.

School development by "freedom of choice" strategy –toward autonomous management-

Decentralization and deregulation

Establishment of school autonomy was continues issue of Swedish nation from 1980s. There were tight curriculum, course plan, time plan and many other detailed regulations by central school committee (Skolöverstyrelsen) beside of Educational Act and Basic School Act. The regional school authority (Länsskolnämnd) had much power to control schools then. Inspector from regional authority came into classrooms every several years to check how the schools and municipalities keep to the regulations. Schools had to report the arrangement of classes and placement of teachers to the regional authority. On the financial field, about 85 percent of subsidy from center to municipality was specified into particular heading. Locals were dealt as branches of bureaucratic system down from center.

This administrative system was made for spreading schools to all over the country, and for offering high quality and equality education to all children. But in 1980s, as the perfect school attendance has been accomplished already, they needed to reform the construction from quantitative expanding to qualitative development. Educational researchers and the government promoted new methods for teaching, such as cooperative works with team teaching, interdisciplinary learning and project activities. But those tight regulation and strong influence from center limited to introduce these creative practices.

In the beginning of 1990s, the center took action on reforming decentralization and deregulation one after another. The main focus on these series of reform was to increase autonomy of schools and municipalities, and to encourage the teachers and principals motivation for developing their schools at same time.

Fundamental change was brought by making amendment of the Municipality Act (Kommunallag) on June 13th, 1991. This new act is important on the point that it grants much flexible discretion to the local authorities, and shifts all the responsibilities about

comprehensive school education to municipalities.⁶ And one more definitive point is that it allows delegating part of the authority. By this reform, municipalities got able to decide the budget more flexible.

According to the amendment of Municipality Act, regional authorities and central committee were abolished. At same time, Skolverket, which is a new central agency for education, was established. Skolverket took the roles to define the national goals, such as curriculum and course plan and time plan, and to assess each students' and schools' achievement to the goals by national test. But the inspection works were not appointed by government. These organizational reforms brought more possibility for creative activities of schools and teachers.

Liberalization of municipalities' and schools' inner organization was fundamental reform for increasing local autonomy. But betterment of financial administration was also vital task for it. At that time, independency of locals was very limited. In Sweden, municipalities have had the right to charge taxes from 1862, and local assembly have been able to decide the rate. About 50 percent of municipalities' income was filled up by income tax, and it was the pillar of them. And about 25 percent was from a fee of public services such as power, waste disposal and waterworks. The issue was the rest of 25 percent, which was subsidy from center.

Cost for education, nursery and welfare works were covered by the states subsidies. 85 percent of these subsidies was specified particular purpose of use, and municipalities received this money by deputizing the public services. But the perspective has changed to build up the local autonomy even in financial area.⁷ Therefore they needed to unchain the specifications.

System change for supporting local financial autonomy was taken effect after the national election in 1991. On the election, liberal alliance with four political parties usurped the government from former social democratic party. And this liberal alliance presented "The proposal to abolish the states subsidy for budget year 1992/93" in May 11th, 1992. This proposal proposed the abolition of 12 states specified subsidies and the establishment of new subsidy system. The 12 subsidies included the expenses for childcare, school operation, Swedish language courses for immigrants and special schools' management. These school related budgets unified to a new general budgets together with the one for elderly care, welfare, road administration and so on; those were also abolished by that proposal. The amount of the new general subsidy is decided by the three criteria of equalization between municipalities, redress of structural difference and

correction of depopulation. So it is not regarding to the purpose of expenditure.⁸

By these changes, municipalities got able to prioritize certain part of public services, and decide the amount of the budget and the way of its distribution. The budget for school education is determined under negotiation with other public services. So that the differences of expenditure on school education got be appeared between municipalities. But flexibility of budget making has been resulted indeed.

Proposal's offer was not only the generalization of subsidy. It reformed the collection system of income tax from source principle to residence principle. Former taxation system with source principle collected the taxes where the income has been accrued. Under this system, the municipalities which have more residents often lose their revenue to the one which have large industries. This reform certainly brought the increase of the annual income to bed town municipalities.⁹

This residence principle was indispensable to introduce the education voucher. And this educational voucher system untied the schools' detailed budget. Financial condition of schools got more unrestricted than former system.

Free choice and Goal steering

After winning the national election, and done states subsidy reform, the liberal alliance went to work on quality improvement of school education. The way of it was with "free choice" and "goal steering". "Free choice" was also the slogan of the alliance when they fight on the election. The meaning of it on educational field was the introduction of school choice and private schools. The alliance has seemed that competition makes situation better as it pushes schools to change.

Interestingly, "school choice" had two different meaning in Swedish. One is used by the social democratic party from 1980s, and this has meant "choice inside schools" at the beginning. But it changes with times; the meaning got interpreted more widely to the system which parents can choose the schools in their resident municipality after 1990s. This idea could fit to the social democratic party's political opinion. And as on the national curriculum from 1980 regarded schools as the center of community, the idea that students go out of municipality to take a lesson was hardly acceptable.

On the other hand, the school choice by the alliance meant to "choose the schools itself".¹⁰ It regarded education as a service, and was based on to "privatize" school education. Geoff Whitty analyses this concept by the term of "quasi market". Characteristic on this "quasi market" is to apart the buyer from the seller, and let the

buyer to choose the seller.¹¹¹²¹³ The alliances this idea was to divide schools and communities clearly, and supply the source for students' and parents' extra needs from outside of municipality.

The alliance took a step forward to latter regime. Parents got able to choose their children's schools without mentioning the border of resident municipality. By the introduction of educational voucher system, stable acquisition of number of students became a direct influence to the school management. Many schools got to target specific area such as IT, special needs education and gymnastics.

Furthermore, establishment of private governed schools¹⁴ became accepted. Expenditure for private high schools was already covered by states subsidy from 1984¹⁵, and it has been reformed to be paid by municipality where student lives in 1992. At the same time of this high school's reform, the Education Act was overwritten to put municipalities an obligation to support the private schools. Municipalities got have to pay more than 85 percent of municipal schools' educational voucher to private schools.¹⁶

The introduction of private schools caused the competition of student acquisition between public and private schools. Even though there were only 106 in 1992 and 217 private schools in 1994 with about 4700 public schools, the influence of private schools increased day by day. Many private schools took charge for certain needs such as religious schools, ethnic schools, and Montessori and Steiner schools as they have advantage to care special needs more flexible.¹⁷ But for municipal schools, snatch of their students by private schools leads decrease in income.

Competition between municipalities has also occurred. Residence principle enabled municipalities' horizontal transaction of the educational vouchers. So that the municipality which put more effort on school education could win students from surround. As it shows, "free choice" strategy was based on the competitive condition.

Beside of "free choice", the government tried to steer the quality of education by setting goals. The 1980s national curriculum for compulsory schools pointed out three main goals; equal opportunity, knowledge and skills and bring up and development. It described that schools should be a center of community at cooperating with preschool, home, society, cultural life and working life.¹⁸ This curriculum was revised in 1994, and be set the new for compulsory schools, pre-school class and leisure-time center. The new curriculum is based on the responsibility on goals and results system by each municipality and school.¹⁹²⁰ The then Minister of Education, Beatrice Ask describes on the curriculum's foreword as "this curriculum premise the distribution of responsibility,

states set general goals and guidelines for school activities, and municipalities responsible for its accomplishment”.²¹ New curriculum set a basic value with a title as “development of the individual school” instead of description of center of community.²²

“The activity of the school must be developed so that it corresponds to the goals that have been set. The principal organizer has a clear responsibility in this respect. Both the daily pedagogical leadership as well as the professional responsibility of the teachers is necessary conditions for the qualitative development of the school. This necessitates a constant examination of learning goals, following up and evaluating results, as well as testing and developing new methods. Work of this kind has to be carried out in active co-operation between staff and pupils in close contact with the home and with the local community.”²³

According to the idea of the new curriculum, Skolverket has started to develop the standardized national test. Before they introduce the obligatory standardized test, they also had an assessment on national scale. But it was only for all, and not to be used for the students’ record at school, and also not to be announced to public. Introduced new national test is for all students at 5th and 9th graders in compulsory school and high school students with Swedish, English and Mathematic. These results are used as the supportive information for students’ evaluation. The fulfillment of this new test is obligation to each school. Skolverket collects the data and publish the achievement rates sorted by sex, foreign backgrounds, municipalities and schools. Grading system was also changed from relative to absolute evaluation following by the new curriculum and the national test.²⁴

These reforms make the municipalities and schools very sensitive at the quality of education. It turns into problem especially for schools with big differences between sex and family background, and schools which is with low achievement as they face the difficulty to acquire the number of students. And publication of the result on national test and the introduction of absolute evaluation got conspicuous the gap of schools.

The idea of the measurement for improving quality of education by free choice and goal steering together with decentralization and deregulation was based on the liberal market mechanism. The alliance thought if they let parents and society the freedom of choice, schools would be diversified, and competitive condition improve the quality of education as constructively. The alliance tells on the proposition to the parliament as following.

“The regal regulation minimized nowadays, and the possibility for diversify

schools and challenge on the best local way is opened. The parents and students will be attracted to change their schools. These changes increase their participation to the pedagogical development activities.”²⁵

This sentence shows their confidence and expectation on educational reform. Definitely, deregulation made possibility to creative activities, and schools were diversified. Schools involved parents and students into their management. But some of negative influences were also caused by the reform in reality. So next what kind of difficulties they faced and how they struggled with them are the next questions.

From competition to cooperation –re-fusion of center and local

Side effects of deregulation

The first issue is how the educational expenses changed after the deregulation. Figure 1. is based on the Skolverket’s report with data from Statistics Sweden (SCB), and shows the change of educational expenditure per student. 1991, just before the reform, is set as 100 for all headings. Beginning of 1990s, while the Municipality Act and states subsidy system has been reformed, the cost for school lunch and premises increased, and materials, equipments, libraries is leveled off, but the expenditure for teaching, which is most closely related to students’ learning, was reduced considerably. Total cost for municipal compulsory schools felled down about 19 percent from 1991 to 1996.²⁶

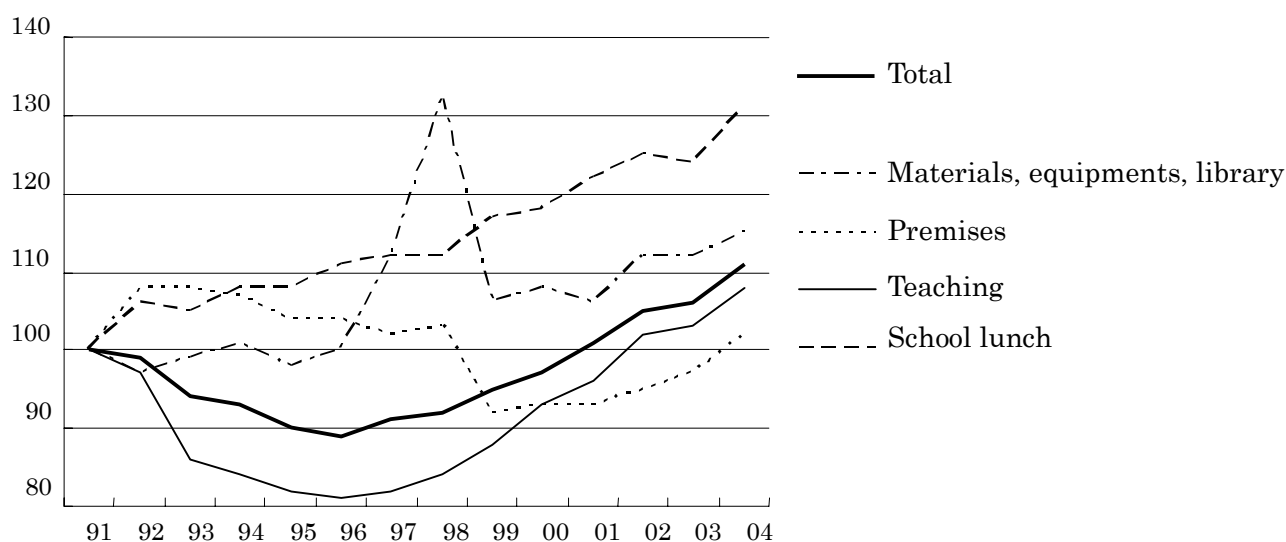


Figure 1. Cost per student in municipal compulsory schools during 1991 to 2004
(Source: Skolverket, 2005, s.32)

During these years, the number of students and schools were both growing. Table 1. shows the changes of the numbers of students, schools and teachers in addition to the number of teachers per 100 students and rate of educated teachers. From 1991 to 1996, student number increased from 887685 to 958972, and school number did so from 4665 to 4936. But about 8 percent of teachers are reduced from 93708 to 86898, and the number of teachers per 100 students decreased about 0.9 person from 1992 to 1996.²⁷²⁸ As this shows, the decrease of educational expenditure has put into practice by restructuring of teachers.

Table 1. Change of fundamental statistics

	Students	Schools	Teachers	Teachers per 100 students	Educated teachers (%)
1991/92	877685	4 665	* ₁	* ₁	* ₁
1992/93	887325	4745	93708	8.6	92.1
1993/94	893932	4826	88458	8.3	92.5
1994/95	915661	4900	87472	8.1	92.1
1995/96	938869	4934	88084	8.0	91.0
1996/97	958972	4936	86898	7.7	91.0

* no data

(Source: Skolverket, SCB)

Result of the restructuring of teachers, the relieved teachers faced the decline in the quality of teachers. The rate of educated teachers felled to 91.0.

The decline of educational expenditure was not balked in the alliance's plan. As the alliance assumed that "privatization" of school education would lead efficiency on local municipalities' management. Takeo Yamauchi, the former bureaucrat of Japanese Ministry of Home Affairs, pointed out with referring German literature²⁹ as following.

"Swedish local finance faced quite hard situation in the beginning of 1990s. If it was before then, they just could take a choice to raise the taxation rate, as they seemed naturally. Originally, the rate of local tax could be decided freely by local authorities' responsibility, and they actually did set by responding their own demands.

But from perspective of states economical strategy, it was disagreeable to increase the local tax only for filling up the income-outcome gap. So that state regulated to forbid raising the rate by building special law. It was withdrawn from 1994, and local

authorities regained the full right to fix the taxation rate by themselves. But then state had to take some action to save control it for balanced development of national economy.”³⁰

As the explanation by Yamauchi, the financial situation of local economy in the beginning of 1990s was getting worth, and they had no way to handle with it beside of inhibited of tax incretion. Therefore the money for education was flown out to the other expenditure fields.

Anyhow, total expenditure for educational cost was cut, teachers were restructured and downed theirs quality. These results influenced to corruption of educational quality whether directly or indirectly. Then it would be asked next how the liberalization and privatization on educational reform effected to local schools and municipalities.

Following part deals with the official report by former national audit office (Riksrevisionsverket), which was published in 1998 as a title of “Local school development – state’s role and responsibility”. This report aims to evaluate the results of 1990s reform with focusing on the school development activities in compulsory schools.

The report proofs the fact competitive environment involved schools, municipalities, the Skolverket, and even universities into the relationship of confrontation and suspicion, by taking empirical data of interviews to those interested parties. As a result of interview, professionals (ex. teachers and principals) report the feeling of blockade. Teachers felt that they got more works day by day, and too much to handle with meeting and new missions. Of course, this feeling partly came up by the restructuring of teachers. But it can be seemed also as the reverse of teachers’ desire to care more of educational works in their own schools. One aspect could be said as too much demand from state and municipality dampen eagerness of the teachers who tried to develop autonomous. And also, teachers needed to put much effort for understanding the meaning of those quick reforms. Most of principals also claimed the shortage of times and resources.

There were many schools challenging some projects. But many of these autonomous projects faced the common difficulty such as to share the idea with other schools and teachers, or to keep continuing the activities. And the report appealed that most of these cases were because of the lack of time and resources.

The interview to municipality level has brought the knotty problem of the reform’s affects into sharp relief. Municipalities had been able to take more powerful

initiative for introducing new teaching methods and investing for new technologies. All responsibility about compulsory education had been shifted, and locals were expected to show the leadership of school development and in-service training.³¹

But on the background of this situation, which is not written on this report though, integration of state subsidy brought strong influence of local politician. Expenditure of school education filled about 30 percent of municipalities' total budget.³²³³ And the cost cut of those expenditure got be a major issue on local politics. So that visible- and quick- resulted projects tended to be preferred. This could be also the explanation of Figure 1. Such cost for teacher education and school development were easily lost on the order of priority on this background.

Those municipalities often relied on the university-supplied in-service training courses. And these courses also faced difficulties. The report pointed out three major problems. One is the point that municipalities rarely invited to participate to the discussion about teacher education program. Each municipalities and surrounding universities well connected on the field of teacher training and teaching practice, but they did not have much opportunity to discuss about in-service training. As a structural defect, university took a suppliers role, and municipalities acted like customers. There was only transferring of courses and money, but no direct way to reflect the "customer's" needs, or to collaborate to develop local schools together.

The second problem was conflict inside universities. The fee for in-service training was large and important for universities. And a conflict dispute over the fee was occurred between the department which took the in-service training and other departments. Because of this condition, tendency to decrease of free lessons and increase of charged courses was clearly seen.

The third was the competition among universities. Universities, which collect the fees from local municipalities, got easy to manage if they could call more teachers to the program. As so, some universities caused competition over the further education courses. The report described that some part of municipalities had looked this conflict suspiciously.³⁴

While every local practitioners, teachers, principals, municipalities and universities faced serious problem, what could center help them? Skolverket actually did many supports for local school development, the report described. The strategy was by goal management by the national curriculum and criteria, indirect control by publishing of the results of support and evaluation, supporting by network meeting and researching

the teaching contents and methods, and supporting for some specific fields of in-service training which Skolverket has agreed the importance.

But Skolverket had financial difficulty then. All the budgets allotted for supporting schools during 1993 to 1995 had already spent. This means they could not supply sufficient amount of money for supporting schools. For easing this situation, Skolverket tried to prevent to correspond individually, and changed to support for project units. They allocated 270 schools into 7 developmental areas, and tried to guarantee the possibility for developmental activities by using organized networks. But as Skolverket described by self, it “couldn’t help to grasp the schools’ needs”.³⁵

The report showed the decentralization and deregulation made the rigid situation to the professionals (teachers and principals), administrative (municipalities), and its responsible (Skolverket). This situation clearly showed the failure of the alliance’s view on which “minimum regulations and clear goals” “increase the participation to educational development activities”.

Re-fusion of center and local

As a result of government change by national election, Ylva Johansson took over the chair of Minister of Education from Beatrice Ask in 1994. Johansson was 32 years old, young, female politician, and until just before becoming the Minister, she was teaching in Stockholm.³⁶ She was the leading person of the ICT project, “IT in the school (IT i skolan; ITiS)”, and known by large investment so called “Ylva money (Ylvapengarna)”.³⁷ Her philosophy was based on the idea that the key person is teachers, and the government’s role is to support those teachers autonomous and active school development.³⁸

By reflecting the negative affects of the reform, the new social democratic government needed to deal with the problems immediately. But it was urgently necessary for them to set the state finances in order for joining to European Union. Therefore they could not take radical change at that time.

It was “The development plan for quality and equality in preschool, school, adult education” in 1997 that showed the whole image of new Minister’s reform. The plan argues the functional disease of local autonomous steering.

“Quality and equality become hard to assess if the steering is not functional. As of this consequence, the risk to students’ right to have the high-quality education increases. (...) Practically speaking, all municipalities now have the school plan. Skolverket, however, regards this as not sufficiently concrete, practical and clear

connected to the real activity in the municipality to be able to steer as concerned. Connection between the school plan and budget is often missing.”³⁹

The Education Act revised in 1990 put all municipalities under an obligation to set the school plan. Municipalities have duty to evaluate and improve their school plan continuously.⁴⁰ But the development plan in 1997 pointed out the malfunction of the local school plans. Relevance between the budget and the school plan was often missing. Many municipalities hold up the quality of education as priority area, but they cut the cost in reality.

The government seemed the source of problem was on halfway supervision of the local autonomous steering. So they reconsidered and turned to take a part of responsibility on supervision on local activities. But still they described carefully as following.

“Distribution of responsibility means that state level responsible for formulating goals for schools and for following up and evaluating activities on national level. The Aim with this is that state level shall guarantee the equality and high quality. The municipalities have the responsibility of operation for schools and shall set the local goal and responsible for the local following-up and evaluation which comply with. The local political level responsible for self activities, their resource and organization, while school level responsible for activities which include relationship to the national goals. Teachers’ role has in and with the new curriculum and grade system which increases its weight. School leaders have a responsibility for the school level to realize the curriculums contents. The government assesses the distribution of responsibility between state and municipality which now seems well. It can be still established that the steering system demand on strong state actor, which is missing in certain degree. Such an establishment shall not be interpreted as some existing plans for changing balance in the decentralized system for schools, however. Returning to previous central steering is not realistically.”⁴¹

This sentence shows the government determination on new challenge for improving the decentralization with crossing out the word of returning to centralization. The Ministry of Education decided to give a new role to the Skolverket. Skolverket was ordered to supervise all local municipalities in next 6 years. This is a beginning of big change for the relationship between state and municipalities. By then, state emphasized to keep out from border of responsibility distribution and tried not to interfere in local works. They seemed “minimum regulation” encourage the school development. But from the 1997’s development plan, state aimed to activate schools by the phrase of “More

supervision! Active supervision!”⁴².

“The goal- and result oriented steering of schools is presupposed, apart from clear national goal, the effective follow-up to attain the goals. It demands on the developed system for both on the central and local level.”⁴³

These changes can be said as re-fusion of center and locals. Border crossing activities were also suggested by the Riksrevisionsverket’s report. The plan pushed the center into active supervision for quality and equality of school education.

More active role of the state

This part first argues about the functioning of the Skolverket’s supervision against the quality and equality of education. And next focuses on the difference of the opinion between the Ministry of Education and Skolverket about the strategy to improve the local schools.

Central supervision, which the Ministry of Education introduced for reconstructing the cooperative relationship, encouraged locals to increase the expenditure for school education, and effected to redress students’ achievement gaps. But it was not helpful for improving the quality of school education.

The conflict between the Ministry of Education and Skolverket then was, generally understood as on the differences about supervision. But this paper tries to regard it as ideal gap, that is, more essential conflict about supporting local schools.

Effects of “active supervision”

The growing gap and deteriorating of educational quality is clearly shown on statistics. Table 2. shows the number and percentage of students who failed to attain the national goals with sex and background differences. The total number of students who could not get the 9th grades compulsory school’s graduate certificate in any of Swedish, mathematics or English, was continuously increasing to 2.3 times from 1995/96 to 2001/02.⁴⁴⁴⁵ This survey proof that “active supervision” could not effect on the quality of school education.

But the percentage of the students who has foreign background was decreasing during that period. The reversal of male and female percentage can not be simply said as the effect of the supervision because it was also seen as international tendency. But still, the change of system contributed to certain part of equality.

Table 2. Change of student achievement

	Students who could not achieve the national goals				
	Total			Students with foreign background	
	Total (person)	Male(%)	Female(%)	Total (Person)	Per total (%)
1995/96	592	44.4	55.6	286	48.3
1996/97	618	42.4	57.6	290	46.9
1997/98	1102	40.9	59.1	357	32.4
1998/99	1142	39.1	60.9	410	35.9
1999/00	1243	60.3	39.7	412	33.1
2000/01	1338	58.1	41.9	407	30.4
2001/02	1414	54.7	45.3	430	30.4
2002/03	1309	55.1	44.9	389	29.7
2003/04	1404	57.1	42.9	448	31.9

(Source: Skolverket and SCB)

The evaluation of the “active supervision” can be seen on the report published by the national audit office (Riksrevisionen) in 2001, with title as “Skolverket’s supervision (Skolverkets tillsyn)”. It analyses the supervision report from three municipalities, Borlänge, Partille and Norrköping.

During 6 years supervision followed by the development plan, all of 289 municipalities was inspected. Skolverket dispatched 10 to 15 inspector group to each municipalities, and checked distribution of inner responsibility, functioning of the principals, professional development of teachers and staffs, analyse of the school plans and local activity plans and so on. Visiting of inspectors was informed before, and the municipalities and schools were asked to prepare required documents.

The report described the increase of the budget for Skolverket’s inspection. about 35 million Swedish kronor has spent in 1998, compared with 13.4 million in 1993. This doubling at least better the Skolverket’s financial difficulties.

But many critical comment certainly sent to Skolverket. The major criticism was that the inspection report had often resemblance with other municipalities, or that the report could not pont the essence, and was halfway.⁴⁶ Because only 10 to 15 inspectors were in charge of 20 municipalities, it was definetly overwork for them.⁴⁷

Between the principle of subsidiarity

The 6 years plan of “active supervision” followed by 1997’s development plan was rewarded with the redress of students’ performance gap, but not succeeded to improve the total quality of school education. The Skolverket’s supervision works criticized on its uniformity, and the criticism made an opportunity to the discussion of Skolverket’s organizational reform.

Generally, the division of Skolverket and the school improvement agency is regarded as the result of conflict between the Ministry of Education and former Skolverket. The conflict was the camp of Ministry, which argue the necessity of “more reinforced state role”⁴⁸, against the camp of former Skolverket, which criticize it on the reason that the state participate is quite capable to harm the autonomy of schools and municipalities, and that is too bureaucratic. But this paper catches the conflict as the ideal collision on the strategy of school development supported by the principle of subsidiarity.

The idea of subsidiarity back to the age of Aristotle, and developed by the social teaching mainly in the Catholic theology. Pope Pius XI did famous description at Quadregesimo anno as following.

“Just as it is gravely wrong to take from individuals what they can accomplish by their own initiative and industry and give it to the community, so also it is an injustice and at the same time a grave evil and disturbance of right order to assign to a greater and higher association what lesser and subordinate organizations can do. For every social activity ought of its very nature to furnish help to the members of the body social, and never destroy and absorb them.”⁴⁹

The Oxford English Dictionary defines subsidiarity as the idea that a central authority should have a subsidiary function, performing only those tasks which cannot be performed effectively at a more immediate or local level.⁵⁰ And the former Japanese ambassador in Sweden, Takeshi Fujii explain that there is “positive subsidiarity” and “passive subsidiarity”. “Positive subsidiarity”, according to Fujii, is the principle that “higher association must not intervene while lower association (ultimately, it is individual) can manage the problem”. And “passive subsidiarity” is the one that “higher association must intervene when lower association can not manage the problem”.⁵¹

If you look back the 1997’s development plan, the government argued that “strong state actor”⁵² was required because the malfunction of municipal supervision affected to educational quality and equality. This argument was on the premise that the municipal supervision was not functioning, and the center can take over the

responsibility in that case. That is, as “positive subsidy” on Fujii’s term, the government regarded that case as the situation that lower association could not manage. Actually, by the facts that total quality of school education went down, the half of the failure of graduation of compulsory education was filled by the students who have foreign background, the government opinion had sufficient basis.

But there were some who criticize the government strategy. Jan-Erik Liljergren, educational chief of Skolverket, is one of the inspector at Gävle. Although he thinks the works in Gävle went well, but questioned if the inspections for all municipalities was really necessary, and the quantity was reasonable. On the newspaper by teachers union, his interview is appeared as following.

”Many people likes control and evaluation, he said. Of course it is more simply to see what people have achieved. Considerably difficult thing is to see how people shall develop their activities.”⁵³

Liljergren felt misgivings about the Ministry’s supervision if its introduction made a starting point to bureaucratic control. He did see that not all municipalities were malfunctioning, so that he could not agree the necessity of uniform introduction of central inspection.

On this side, as Liljergren pointed out, it is difficult to justify the centralising of supervisory municipal works. He might be afraid that the reinforced state supervision damage local autonomy. It could be regarded as both effect and affect that the state supervision increased the municipal expenditure.

Skolverket has started new project so called “developmental dialog (utvecklings dialog)” from 2000 with government trust. This project is to support the schools and municipalities which have special difficulties with the gap between sex or foreign backgrounds, with having meeting about the environmental improvement. Skolverket gave useful information and budget for supporting local autonomous developmental activities.

Because the developmental dialog was only experimental project, the budget was quite limited. So that they had to select target communities or schools at first. Skolverket looked at the final grade of compulsory education and collected data of high schools’ results, and chose small number of municipalities which has serious problems.

Skolverket has no enforcement on the development dialog, so municipalities could decide by themselves whether they would participate or not. And the area and the way of development could be also decided by municipalities. Skolverket treaded very warily not

to disturb local activities.⁵⁴

But the Ministry took critical attitude to this project. They seemed that the developmental dialog was high cost for its influence, and opaqueness. Also, they questioned that the project makes the responsibility distribution all the more complicated.⁵⁵

The conflict between the Ministry and former Skolverket embodied as division of the Skolverket. Practical discussion about the role of Skolverket enlivened at the committee by the Ministry of Justice, which has take from 2000 to 2002. This committee was commissioned to analyze and adjust the issues about state supervision. The discussion about the state supervision and central-local relationship was argued not only in educational ministry, but also on judicial affairs, foreign affairs, finance, environment and many other ministries. The committee tried to show new idea of state administration by discussing on the issues which appeared after the decentralization and deregulation reform. It was supervision's supervision. On educational field, they pointed out the problem of Skolverket.⁵⁶

The committee published the report on February 2002. On the topic of Skolverket, the papers explain about the outline of the 6 years state supervision plan to all municipalities. The committee presented their opinion on the way of strengthen the supervising role of Skolverket.⁵⁷

Almost same days, in February 1st 2002, Ingegerd Wärnersson left from the chair of Ministry of Schools, and Tomas Östros taken over the responsibility. Östros has once succeeded the reform with splitting the administrative and developmental section in the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education (Högskoleverket). On this experience, he suggested to devide the Skolverket no sooner than he took the chair.⁵⁸

According to the discussion by the Ministry of Justice's committiee, the Ministry of Education began to draw up new development plan for reforming Skolverket's organisation. Reformation of Skolverket was to establish the school development agency and to prepare for the new supervsion role of Skolverket. Amazingly, all these discussion held by the Ministry completely in secret, and not only to general public, but also Skolverket were heard any of these plans. "The smoke never leak from the wall", Amanda Höglund describes with her original interview datas.⁵⁹ Confidentiality was succeeded, and when the staffs in Skolverket was first informed about this discussion was just a few weeks before the plan would be published.⁶⁰

But why did Ministry operate this planning hiddenly? There are two reasons

possibly considered. One is that since the devision of Skolverket means that government approve the failure of the supervision by then, they didn't want to create a stir at that time just faced the national election. But the liberal party of Sweden (Folkpartiet) watched for a chance to make this as the point at issue, the social democratic government should have decided before they speak out. Another reason was that Skolverket itself was also working with the plan to reorganise their own activities, it was easily forecast that they will have negative reaction.

Reflecting the discussion at Justice Ministry's committiee, Skolverket itself started preparing for reform of organisation. Skolverket continued the main works, which was goal setting and evaluation works, until February 15th 2002. After that, some staffs from development section shifted to work with the organisational reform issues. The plan of Skolverket was to be clear the framework of activities, reinforce the development section, and scale-down the supervising section. These plans were not sufficient for the Ministry who wanted to strengthen the supervison and to concentrate more to the evaluation works. Skolverket probed to expand the area of the "developmental dialog".

New development plan presented to parliament on May 23rd 2002. The Ministry side was given a decision in favor of the offensive and defensive battle. At the press conference for publishing the new development plan, delegation from the Ministry explained about the plan, which they said as considerable best result in limited their mission. The staffs who worked in Skolverket was very surprised with it. They were informed that new Skolverket will have new director, and the then director of Skolverket will become the head of new school development agency.⁶¹

The split of Skolverket and the school development agency can be assessed one way as to reinforce the state supervision works, which the Ministry preferred, and another way to develop the support works for encouraging the local autonomous activities. New Skolverket expanded the target of the inspection works from for all municipalities to for all schools. And the school development agency was trusted to create the system to support the locals with the way of dialogical development.⁶²

Conclusion

This paper analyzed the 1990's and 2000's educational reform with decentralization and deregulation as a change for guaranteeing the local autonomous school development, from competitive to cooperative condition, and for reinforcing the state role. By this analyze, three major points got become clear.

First one is the fact that competitive condition failed to encourage the autonomous school development and to improve the quality of education. It caused the strong feeling of faithlessness among municipalities and universities, and resulted to dampen local motivation.

Second is the point that decentralizing educational system not tended to exclude the central influence, but moved to wish for the reinforcement of state role. The reform after 1997, which strengthened the state supervision and increased the municipal expenditure for school education, was vital for keep secured the local autonomy.

The third is the origin of the school development agency. The difference between the Ministry of Education and former Skolverket on the idea of school development approach was symbolic for the identity the school development agency would take. How to activate local schools, on this issue, Skolverket and the school development agency are still straggling currently.

At the time of today, when the liberal alliance returned to the government again, the identity of central agencies is confusing. The Swedish challenge is to be continued.

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- ¹⁵ SFS1984:573, "Förordning om statsbidrag för fristående skolor på gymnasial nivå".
- ¹⁶ Fundamental regulations about private schools are written on SFS 1985:1100, "Skollagen", 9 kap.
- ¹⁷ Skolverket's website (<http://www.skolverket.se>).
- ¹⁸ SFS 1980:64, "Läroplan för grundskolan".
- ¹⁹ prop. 1990/91:18, "Ansvaret för skolan".
- ²⁰ SKOLFS 1994:1, "Förordning om läroplan för det obligatoriska skolväsendet".
- ²¹ SKOLFS 1994:1.
- ²² SKOLFS 1994:1.
- ²³ Skolverket, 2006, "Curriculum for the Compulsory School System, the Pre-School Class and the Leisure-time Center. Lpo 94".
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