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Shifting modes of governing: Reflecting upon state school inspection in Norway

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Overview

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I. Introduction and background

- Several scholars have addressed the movement towards a «post-bureaucratic» or «neo-Weberian state»
- Contemporary modes of governance [and governing] understood as “defining good ways to steer or govern the educational system” (Maroy, 2012, p. 67)
- Coexisting mixtures of governing modes (and policy tools), wherein the configurations adjust according to supranational influences, national traditions, and new expectations

(Hall, 2016a; Hood, 2007; Maroy, 2012; Olsen, 1995; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2011)

Governing

Governing understood within a heterogeneous public sector, where policy actors enact as well as interact with another within bureaucratic contexts, thus developing the “institutional bricolage” of which they are a part of (Draelants & Maroy, 2007).

“...[refers to] all activities of social, political and administrative actors that can be seen as purposeful efforts to guide, steer, control or manage (sectors or facets of) societies” (Kooiman, 1993, p. 2).

“Governing [...] defined as how an active state aims to (directly or indirectly) hierarchically steer processes at subordinate levels in institutions, such as through inspection” (Hall, 2016a, p. 31).

Frameworks and policy enactment

- Framework: an infrastructure of rules, which (highly) “regulate the inspectors’ practice through prescribing which information should be included, as well as how it is to be systematically and deliberately collected, as well as what type of relation and distance there should be between inspectors and those inspected” (Baxter et al. 2015, p. 74).
- Educational reform(-ing): inclines something more than mere policy initiatives from state policy actors, in hope to trigger changes in the institutional fabrics of school districts, municipalities and individual schools (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983; Hall, 2018).
- Policy processes not linear; involving constant sense-making, enactment, deliberation and renegotiation between policy actors (Braun et al., 2010)

State school inspection in Norway

- Regular, state inspections (FNT) since 2006 – Quality Assessment System (QAS)
- Inspections of public primary, lower-secondary and upper-secondary schools: County Governors' Offices (CGOs)
- 17 CGOs in Norway (2019: 11 GGOs)
- Inspections of private/free schools: Directorate for Education and Training (UDIR)
- Main purpose: to control legal compliance, and evaluate school districts' and schools' routines for ensuring students' individual rights
- Inspection reports published online
- Recent framework for FNT (2013-2017) – Focus on student learning outcomes
- Shift in configurations of policy tools:
 - Handbooks, templates, interviews, school self-evaluation (SSE), student surveys
 - New areas of concern
 - A more performative approach: however, no classroom observations
- New framework in 2018 (status quo?)

Main points (I)

- Shifts in state inspection policy occur in relation to international tendencies and influences, as well as a result of national traditions
- Processes of reforming focus on how policy actors, such as school inspectors and school principals, must relate to, interpret and enact state policy (e.g. frameworks)
- Key policy actors, such as officials from the County Governors' Offices (CGOs), enact state policy, inspection frameworks and legal statutes, thus functioning as active contributors to the (re)shaping of state school inspection policy

II. Reconfigurations of state school inspection policy; shifting governing modes

- How can the current school inspection policy in Norway be described in view of the parallel changes made in Sweden?
- How do the inspection policies of these countries combine different modes of governing?
- Comparative analysis of 23 legal statutes and policy documents in Norway and Sweden (2002-2012)

Methodological approach (i)

- Analysis drew on both historical methods and sociological, comparative methods (Kjeldstadli, 1999; Ragin & Amoroso, 2011)
- Two different methodological approaches; possible to develop a theoretical-analytical model, enabling a cross-national comparison of key documents
- Analytical model guided interpretation of the documents
- NVivo 10

Methodological approach (ii)

By studying the documents, four main sub-categories, or “governing modes” arose (Maroy, 2012):

- **purposive/legal**
- **purposive/professional**
- **evaluative/expert-defined**
- **evaluative/pragmatic**

In all, 830 references in the 23 documents were categorized according to the four sub-categories, which enabled an in-depth analysis of the texts, including a quantified dimension

Table 1: Modes of governing

Mode of governing/ function	Nickname	Description
Purposive/ legal	PURLEG	What should be; Regulations, Control, Examination, Compliancy, Surveillance, Supervision, Deficiencies, Pursuance, Fulfillment
Purposive/ professional	PURPRO	What can be done; Information, Help, Support, Remark, Withdrawal, State actions, Proactiveness, Professionalism
Evaluative/ expert-defined	EVEXP	What was done; Evaluation, Normative reactions, Achievement of targets, Accounting/revision, QAE, Standards, Guidelines, Follow-up, (Supervision)
Evaluative/ pragmatic	EVPRAG	What should be done; Development, Guidance, Counseling, Reflection, Cooperation, Learning, Dialogue, Trust, Reciprocity

Key findings (II)

- Even if the cases of public administration seem to be somewhat homogenous from the outside, there is substantial evidence of major differences in the inspection policies of these two countries. Thus, different governing modes indirectly define how school inspection is employed in Norway and Sweden.
- In Norway, governing has until recently focused on legal (regulation) and pragmatic approaches to inspection, while in the Swedish case, emphasis in the same period is on professional and expert-defined modes in addition to regulation.

III. Examining state school inspectors and educational directors: an institutional approach

Two key focus points:

- How inspectoral institutions and professional roles are evolving due to new expectations and accountability forms
- How the inspectors' and leaders' perceptions contribute to the process of developing their professional roles and new expectations

- Qualitative analysis of coded interview data with officials in three CGOs (n=9), out of a total of > 50 interviews

Theoretical approach (i)

Institutions and *institutionalization*

(Jennings & Greenwood, 2003; Scott, 2014)

Institutions: refer to “regulative, normative and cultural-cognitive elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life”

(Scott, 2014, p. 56)

Institutionalization: “Certain processes happening to an organization over time, reflecting the organization’s own distinctive history, the people who have been in it, the groups it embodies and the vested interests they have created, and the way it has adapted to its environment”

(Selznick, 1957, in Scott, 2014, p. 24)

Theoretical approach (ii)

Expectations and *institutional change*

(Weick, 2009; Scott, 2014)

Institutional change: “School inspectors, both individually and collectively, may be considered as *institutional agents*, however differing in the way they wish to employ the regulative, normative, and cognitive tools in their efforts to construct the very institution in which they maneuver”

(Hall, 2017a, p. 115; Scott, 2014)

Table I: Informants and cases (CGOs)

Informant /Case	CGO 'East'	CGO 'North'	CGO 'West'
Leader	<i>Paul (CGOEDE)</i> Director 7 years experience at CGO	<i>Ruth (CGONDDE)</i> Deputy director Economist and educator 6 years experience at CGO	<i>Harald (CGOWDE)</i> Director Educator 3 years experience at CGO
	<i>Eva (CGOEL)</i> Lawyer 8 years experience at CGO	<i>Jens (CGONL)</i> Lawyer 7 years experience at CGO	<i>Christian (CGOWL)</i> Lawyer 5 years experience at CGO
	<i>Patricia (CGOEE)</i> Educator 3 years experience at CGO	<i>Heidi (CGONE)</i> Educator 5 years experience at CGO	<i>Sophie (CGOWE)</i> Educator 8 years experience at CGO

The analysis revealed four key dimensions of (shifting) inspectoral institutions:

- (a) institutional change and new expectations
- (b) *inter*-institutional dependency and cooperation
- (c) *intra*-institutional dependency and cooperation
- (d) the role of past, present and future school inspection

Institutional change and new expectations

“But these instructions, it does mean there is quite a tight regime. [] Then you have to find and form that leeway without breaking instructions, and without surpassing what is understood as clear guidelines. [] Trying to find that leeway is not always easy, because you are supposed to be loyal towards the guidelines. But the possible leeway you have, might be as easy as just changing the wording”.

(Sophie, CGOWE)

Inter-institutional dependency and cooperation

“I can’t say much about the division of labor between the Ministry and the Directorate, because I don’t know much about it. But in any case, concerning the division of labor between the Directorate and the CGOs, cooperation is very good. I don’t think it was always like that. Because I hear it from those who have been here longer. That it’s a new way of working, and a whole new attitude towards our input.”

(Harald, CGOWDE)

Intra-institutional dependency and cooperation

“Well, I think that we complement each other very well when it works out as well as it does (laughing). So it could be that some times...if the educator wants to be the lawyer and the opposite, it may be quickly be like...a challenge, but if everyone uses their role a bit consciously, then I think it can turn out well. We do have economist which we need sometimes.

But I think we mostly complement each other, yes. But with an increase in inspections, then it's clear that educators have to almost be kind of 'hobby lawyers' (laughing). So they quickly become influenced by our way of thinking, which maybe is a bit opposed to their pedagogical hearts (again laughing)”.

(Jens, CGONL)

Role of former, present and future school inspection

“With the method we started out using in 2006, we were very concerned about which hat we were wearing. If it was the ‘inspectoral hat’ or the ‘advisory hat’. And it was actually wrong to bring an ‘advisory hat’ with us out on inspection, because it wasn’t supposed to be like that. We were very careful not to mix roles”.

(Eva, CGOEL)

Key findings (III)

- The role of school inspectors in Norway is currently evolving from a mode which is predominantly focused on control-based, compliance, to greater emphasis on a mixture of legal compliance, quality assessment and accountability, potentially intervening in the pedagogical practices of schools and classrooms.
- Judicial 'give-and-take' process (deliberation) between lawyers and educators: challenging
- Few differences between the three CGOs as to informants' perceptions, but more internal differences between professions (lawyer-educator) within same GCO.
- The inspectors experience a greater sense of dependency through inter-institutional and intra-institutional cooperation than previously. The link between the Directorate and the CGOs essential.
- Norwegian SI may be currently developing more in the direction of other current European inspectorial models, which presumes a role not only aiming at legal compliancy but also school self-evaluation (SSE) and assessment (Grek et al., 2013).

IV. Governing by templates: moving through the checkout line?

- Modes of “soft governing” (Maroy, 2015) [also] have clear implications in how school leaders and teachers experience the inspection process
- In the (re)new(ed) system, schools are increasingly prone to more performative approaches by inspectors, where school leaders and teachers are e.g. held accountable for assessment routines and practices
- Individual teachers, as well as school leaders, are exposed to intricate and detailed questioning
- Enquires into how school inspectors incorporate templates as a way of steering local formative assessment routines of individual schools: moving closer to classrooms
- Observation study of 13 meetings between inspectors, school leaders and teachers, in three municipalities (primary/lower-secondary schools)

Aim and RQ

Aim: To elaborate on how the use of templates represents a new way of steering, normatively guiding schools in the “right” direction towards the future

Research question: How does “governing by templates” represent a major shift in inspectorial policy and practice in Norway?

Conceptual framework

Governing tools: To serve basic needs in society to control delivery of common goods and services such as students' right to sufficient, high-quality education, state authorities draw on various mixtures of governing tools, as well as strategies e.g. monitoring, surveillance and inspection

(Hood, 2007)

Policy enactment: Policy enactment may be seen as involving “creative processes of interpretation and recontextualisation – that is translation through reading, writing and talking of text into action and abstractions of policy ideas into contextualized practices”

(Braun, Maguire & Ball, 2010, p. 549)

Table 1: Overview of observation sites, participants and data

Municipalities/ schools	Inspection process	Participants	Points of observation	Documents
Municipality A Greenfield Elementary School	Piloting phase	-Inspection Team A -School principal -Department heads -Teachers -Observer	1. Opening meeting 2. Interview with principal 3. Group interview with department heads 4. Group interview with teachers 5. Closing meeting	-Inspection handbook -Pre-inspection documents -SSE forms -Preliminary report (PR) -PowerPoint presentation of PR -Final inspection report
Municipality B Blue Meadow Lower Secondary School	Enactment phase	-Inspection Team B -School principal -Teachers -Observer	6. Opening meeting 7. Interview with principal 8. Group interview with English teachers 9. Closing meeting	-Inspection handbook -Pre-inspection documents -SSE forms -PR -PowerPoint presentation of PR -Final inspection report
Municipality C Red Hill Elementary School	Enactment phase	-Inspection Team C -School principal -Teachers -Super-intendent of education -Observer	10. Opening meeting 11. Interview with principal 12. Group interview with teachers 13. Closing meeting	-Inspection handbook -Pre-inspection documents -SSE forms -PR -PowerPoint presentation of PR -Final inspection report

Observation point (8):

The following excerpt is from a group interview with three English teachers at Blue Meadow Lower Secondary School (Observation Point 8). Inspector 1 (I1, educator) asks specific questions based on the SSE (student survey and other pre-inspection documentation) furnished by the school. Focus is on how formative (and to some extent summative) assessment was ensured in their classrooms:

I1: Over to the SSE. Any reflections concerning the students' responses [referring to the student survey]?

William: All feedback is on ITL [LMS], in addition to orally in the classroom.

I1: Encouraging feedback [feed forward] in, for example, science gets a lower score than, for example, in English.

William: The distinctiveness of each subject. English is maybe more concrete than science.

[Pause]

I1: Now, over to more on assessment. Is there a deadline for grading?

Mary: It's in the teacher's activity plan on ITL.

I1: Do you have a template for student–teacher conversations?

Mary: Yes, but I don't have it with me.

I1: Moving on to question 14 in the student survey. Assessment for learning. There are lots of good examples of good practice. We are wondering about Reading Development Forms and the 'Carlsten test' [reading speed test].

Mary: It's written down somewhere... [Insecurity among the three teachers, and they look at each other]

Observation point (13):

Main focus of the inspection process at Red Hill was formative assessment routines and practices of the school and of the teachers, and follow-up by school leadership. The excerpt is from the closing meeting, where Inspector 1 (I1, educator) and Inspector 3 (I3, lawyer) go through the preliminary inspection report (PR):

I3: The next point is AFL. We have observed that you have routines for mid-term assessment, so this is covered well. You also have routines for [unclear...], so that is a concern. On background of the student responses [referring to the student SSE survey], we conclude that this isn't good enough.

Principal Jones: So you probably understand that we don't really agree.

I3: Really?

Principal Jones: I mean that the student survey isn't really sufficient [referring to the table in PR Point 2.3.1 where the principal felt the student responses were somewhat unclear]. I would actually claim that there is something here which is incorrect. This doesn't make sense, and we therefore don't agree with the numbers.

I3: Really?

I1: The survey does include something which is not here. It concerns different questions, which are not included in the summary. When we have chosen to land on a 'No', it is due to the fact your responses in the SSE, compared to feedback from the students themselves in questions 5 and 6 concerning their participation in their own work process. Therefore, we think that you are on track, but still not good enough.

Principal Jones: What do you mean we should do?

I3: That the teachers become more aware of this, so there is not a whole lot you have to do.

Key findings (IV)

- State school inspectors are clearly engaged in evaluating the school leadership's routines for following up on the intentions of the central educational authorities
- The question of a “one-size-fits-all” approach to school inspection arises through the empirical data, where fixed templates actively shape the thinking of actors involved on both the meso- and micro-levels of policy enactment
- School leaders and teachers are subject to a system more focused on completing the inspection task at hand, rather than receiving necessary support and guidance in understanding the “maze” of legal standards and regulation surrounding their everyday leadership and teaching practices.

V. State school inspection: Ensuring equality in classroom instruction ?

- The Education Act (1998) projects three overarching legal principles: (a) adaptive education, (b) inclusive education, and (c) *equality in 'classroom instruction'*
- Equality in education: «Education (and classroom instruction) which takes in account that *all* students are different...and must [therefore] allow ample room for adaption...towards students' aptitudes, backgrounds, individual needs etc.»

(Knowledge Promotion, 2006)

Juridification of education

- Several recent studies of the Scandinavian context(s) highlight increased juridification of primary and secondary education

(Andenæs & Møller, 2016)
- On practical level, among e.g. school leaders and teachers, such increased focus on legal demands is perceived as challenging
- However, there is ample leeway to navigate within legal boundaries, implying widespread use of legal discretion

(Ottesen & Møller, 2016)

State school inspection

- Schools, school leaders and teachers experience legal issues as challenging (Andenæs & Møller, 2016)
- Focus on *compliance, evaluation, + performance*: lack of adequate «supportive» modes of governing
- Sufficient resources allocated?
- Increased use of student surveys one of several forms of School Self- Evaluation (SSE); student voice included in reporting (U.N. Convention, 1989)

Conclusion (V)

- The main challenge for today's schools is to ensure that equal opportunities, as well as that the individual legal rights of all students to acquire sufficient education, are fully observed
- In order to meet these needs, the forthcoming inspection framework (2018) should consider incorporating more supportive (and less performative) modes of governing
- However: compliance control is still necessary, to ensure certain legal standards in all schools

VI. Summing up/questions

- Norwegian inspection frameworks have undergone considerable change since 2006
- The current framework (2013-2017) is moving closer to the classroom level
- A system which is (still) evolving, and continuously adjusting to the need to combine control of legal practices, as well as the ambition to offer support to school authorities, school leaders and teachers.
- Focusing on compliance and evaluation ≠ schools requesting more support and guidance – a mismatch in governing modes?

“The greatest challenge is to get municipalities to understand that we are not trying to catch them with their pants down, we are aiming at helping them keep their pants up!”

(Heidi, CGONE)

Conclusion

School leaders and teachers, are today subject to a regime more focused on completing the inspection task at hand, rather than receiving necessary support and guidance in understanding the “maze” of legal standards and regulation surrounding their everyday leadership and teaching practices.

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(Photo: University of Oslo)

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