

# “WE HAVE DECIDED TO GUARANTEE THE CONTINUITY OF THE UNIVERSITIES LONG-TIME FUNDING”: THE POLITICAL RHETORIC OF THE MINISTERS OF EDUCATION AND THE REFORM OF UNIVERSITY FUNDING DURING 2005—2015 IN FINLAND

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## Abstract

*At the beginning of the year 2010, new higher education legislation was enacted in Finland. It is argued here that this reform was based on neo-liberalistic and New Public Management ideologies. This paper analyses the ideological shift that happened during the period between 2005 and 2010 by undertaking a qualitative analysis of the speeches given by different Finnish Ministers of Education devoted to higher education policy, especially on the role of the universities. Nine speeches by six different Ministers were analyzed. There was a clear change in the political rhetoric towards an almost unanimous neo-liberalistic rhetoric, irrespective of the political affiliations of the Minister.*

**KEY WORDS:** higher education policy, rhetoric, new public management, neo-liberalism, Finland, 2005 – 2015

## INTRODUCTION

The ideology of neoliberalism and its practical tool, New Public Management, have become the prominent ideologies guiding university policies globally during the past couple of decades. In practical terms, a neoliberal shift in university policy means that universal Humboldtian academia have been replaced with a higher educational system which strives to achieve market-oriented outcomes, performative measures and work-related skills. As Olsen and Peters (2005, 314) point out, neoliberalism has also introduced new types of regulations and management-style leadership inside the academic world. This new-style university, or rather reformed university policy, has appeared also on Finland during the past 15 years.

The renewal of the Finnish university system, which resembles the corresponding process in other western countries, as well as the rhetoric used to

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justify in this process has been investigated extensively within Finland during the past years. The topics have been approached from different standpoints e.g. the diffusion of the concept of the quality (Saarinen, 2007), university system renewal (Vanttaja, 2010), the rhetoric of internationalism (Nokkala, 2007; Kallio, 2009; Moisiö, 2014), the rise of the enterprise university (Kankaanpää, 2013) and the policy of management by results (Kauko, 2011; Kallio, 2014). The most widely used approach can be termed socio-historical where the aim is to study the practices and policies of the universities as a reflection of changes taking place within society itself. (Kallunki et al., 2015; Kankaanpää, 2013, 13.) The universities do not simply adopt the current policies and decisions, but they want to have an active interplay with the decision makers and surrounding societies. (Kohvakka, 2015; Rinne et al., 2015).

This paper analyses the neoliberal changes in the Finnish universities resulting from the introduction of the profit type on educational policy philosophy. We will focus on how the New Public Management-ideology was introduced into Finnish academia. Our empirical analysis is based on a decade of speeches made by Finnish Ministers of Education (2005 – 2015) and how these have molded current higher education policies. This ten-year period is important because it was the time when the present university legislation was planned, introduced and implemented i.e. the new University Act came into force in 2010.

## **1. THE FINNISH UNIVERSITY POLICY AND THE NEOLIBERAL TURN**

The principled struggle faced by universities is generally described as the dilemma between its educational (Bildung) mission and the (economic) benefit that higher education brings to societies. Corporate life demands an emphasis on professionalism, specific degrees and short times spent by students at universities. In addition, they hope for innovations and rapid commercialization of new scientific results. In contrast, supporters of the educational university emphasize the benefits of freedom of science and the universality of higher education. (E.g. Washburn, 2005; Marginson, 1997; Bienkowski et al., 2012.)

In addition, the aspirations aimed at academics have changed; currently it seems that a philosophy based on rapid profits seems to have the upper hand over the ideal that the purpose of a university is to provide its students with an academic all-round education that requires time. Habermas (1973, 163) claimed already in 1965, that “...work, language and power are shaping knowledge interests in media.” Habermas raises two interesting propositions. The first concerns the effect of the media and what the media thinks that state and official policy

makers consider as genuine and acceptable science i.e. worthy of financing; and secondly – in connection to the previous – an emphasis on technology.

One can propose that the background to today's competitive university emerges from the so-called philosophy termed New Public Management (NPM). This had initially also impacted on Finnish academic institutions from the beginning of this Millennium. This involved the introduction of full-scale quality auditing of the higher education; this was claimed as a part of the Europeanizing of the Finnish higher education system. Although its main economic resources originated mainly from the state budget, the political rhetoric shifted from the University as the guardian of society's civilizing features, as well as supporting local cultures: now they started to operate according to market values, i.e. attempting to attract financial resources from the market in the broad context. Furedi (2017, 79) goes even further in claiming that the *"...downgrading of the role of the judgement fosters a climate where members of the academic community are discouraged from criticizing and constantly questioning each other's views and ideas."*

The previous higher education policy discussion had tended to emphasize more equality, including gender equality. After the neoliberal shift, this was replaced by individual performance, accomplishment, and competition that aimed at financial benefit. The universities were expected to place an emphasis on specialization and entrepreneurship. Finland, a country with 5 million inhabitants has 15 universities, with four of them situated in the capital area. During the neoliberal shift, 20 years ago, every single university in Finland started to market itself as a globally rated high-class institution and this was confirmed by choosing the most appropriate university ranking list. There was a change from self-critical rhetoric towards a market-oriented discourse.

The measurement of "quality" became everyday praxis and it started to appear in publications and evaluations of research grant proposals. Unfortunately, what was actually being defined as quality was never made clear; the concept of quality was used randomly. Furthermore, while the measurement frame was adequate for the empirical sciences, it was not appropriate for the humanities and social sciences. The monitoring system tended to be top-heavy and it concentrated on producing numeric values for example, when comparing scientific publications. The policy makers' rhetoric about a productivity enhancement program in practice meant cutbacks to the universities' resources, i.e. this could be viewed as a tool to shape the work being done by academics i.e. in the direction desired by the policy-makers.

The concept of the NPM is multidimensional and difficult to formulate scientifically. It has been claimed to be part of the renewal policies carried out by President Reagan and Prime Minister Thatcher at the beginning of the 1980's and

also to the economic policies introduced in New Zealand during the same era. (Buschman, 2015: 100; Harvey, 2005; Hood, 1991; Springer et al., 2016.) This political trend reached Finland during the same period and the policy makers started to discuss about what reforms would be necessary and how market mechanisms influenced the national economies. One milestone in Finland was Harri Holkeri's right-wing coalition cabinet (1987 - 1991), during which the discussion about public utilities, market orientation, accountability and service culture entered the everyday vocabulary in political discussions. (Vanttaja, 2010, 24.) In Finland, historically education has been an important aspect of the welfare state, even a source of national pride. The ideology of universalism was central during those decades when the Finnish network of the universities was created: all young people, irrespective of their socio-economic background, should be able to be schooled and even graduate from a higher education institute. (Nevala, 1999; Kivinen et al., 1993; Rinne, 2010, Jalava, 2012; Kuusisto, 2017.) During 1980's the Holkeri government proposed a raft of new structures affecting the welfare state and public services. From today's vantage point, one can argue that this government initiated a paradigm shift where the employer's organizations lobbying for the market orientation penetrated into state policies: slogans such as "Can we renew ourselves without crises" and "the inevitability of change" – rhetoric were reiterated while the country went through a prolonged economic recession.

This led the belief that political objectives could be quantified, and the public sector started to use terms such as accountability and customership. The rhetoric of crisis penetrated also into the halls of academia. Even if the crisis had not yet been actually materialized, it was at least waiting around the corner. Resource cutbacks were also a part of this rhetoric i.e. there had to be cutbacks in public funding and resources. The restructuring of the universities was justified by claiming that these changes were up-to-date and trend setting. (Kankaanpää, 2013, 35-36.)

Direct state control was being implemented during the 1990's via assessments. Management and budgeting by results as well as numeric objectives lead to a situation where the system started to resemble the planned economy of the old socialist republics. The achievement of the numeric norms and indicators became ambition without actual content. This led inevitably to competition not only between departments, but also even between individual researchers in the same department. Management by results thus transformed the universities into mills or factories that could be managed easily by checking that they fulfilled their numeric quotas. This rhetoric has lead even to a discussion commonly heard in Finnish agriculture politics, i.e. the universities are now suffering

overproduction of graduates. If the departments and universities are producing more graduates – masters' degrees and doctorates – than expected of them in the contractual agreements signed with the state, then they would have to subsidize the extra costs by themselves. (Björn, Saarti & Pöllänen, 2017a.)

Quality assessment simply considered research and teaching as a commodity. By implementing different types of assessment systems and programs, the power to decide was shifted within the university to the central administration and consequently to the Ministry and market forces. It created a mistrust by the academics against the civil servants in the Ministry and the university administration. For example, responsibility of the quality was delegated to the academics, e.g. this meant that poor student results were the fault of the lecturer and the bad grade of a dissertation was due to bad guidance.

The academics started to notice increasingly levels of control and precarization: by peers, progress, or quality. He or she stopped to be a subject but had been transformed into a Foucaultian object of control and their working hours were monitored, performance appraisals were introduced, and publishing lists were scrutinized etc. In addition, the working contracts became precarious, unstable and time-limited, the concept of tenure virtually disappeared. This unstable system started to create guilt and the feelings of insufficiency and uncertainty i.e. academics were blamed either for writing too many domestic and/or too few international publications or expending too little efforts into fund raising or practising inadequate co-operation with other academics. The criteria for evaluation and assessment started to become fuzzy and varied from year to year. The constant change and learning process of new control systems became part of the stressful everyday life for those working in academia. (See e.g. Eskelinen et al., 2017.)

In the new system, academics were expected to attract outside funding, in fact this meant that he/she had to provide employment for other researchers, support his/her own department economically and even in some cases pay their own salary. For example, it became a pre-requisite for the academic to obtain authorization for some research project by gathering funds to support it. In other words, they had become research entrepreneurs. Psychologically, this could even mean that the academics started to demand more and more from themselves i.e. these goals defined by outside bodies became personal goals. In addition to the evaluator, the academic started to analyse the value of his/her academic work with goals and values originating from outside the academic world. (See Björn, Saarti & Pöllänen, 2017b.) In structural level, those higher education institutions and subjects were favored where the decision makers thought that the greatest economical profit could be gained. In regional thinking, this meant

that resources were channeled away from the so-called border regions, which became impoverished; this was especially detrimental in the funding of certain academic disciplines. Policy-makers thought that science was the discipline with the greatest economical potential (i.e. sciences, especially engineering, applied natural sciences, medicine) and this was where funding should be focused (Björn, Saarti & Pöllänen, 2017a; 2017b.)

## **2. THE MINISTERS' SPEECHES 2005-2015: WHAT, WHY AND HOW?**

We are concentrating on discourses and speeches utilizing the terms described by Fairclough (1991; 1992; 1997; 2002; 2003). This means that discourses are the ways of talking about important and everyday matters. For example, in our case, this means that university discourse during the 1980's was related to the universal nature of academia in every region in Finland. However today, this discourse and manner of talking have changed extensively. We examine these changed manners of discourses surrounding university policy. Discourses are ways of talking about things, which try to prove that relevant issues and phenomena are true. Discourses try both intentionally and unintentionally to change the world order and how things are represented and organized. The hierarchies of discourses are ways of representing the ways that societies are utilizing language. The hierarchies represent and reveal the dominant ways of talking not only about university policy but also about other issues such as emigration or unemployment. Discursive hierarchies also tell about us, represent and reveal aspects that are invisible.

The criticism of discourse analyses especially focusses on the selection and interpretation of data. With respect to our article, the reader can fairly ask about the limitations of data and how the analytical discourses have been chosen. For example, it may be felt that several discourses other than those that we have chosen could be found in even a short speech by a Minister. This is the point raised by Bacchi (2000, 55) how is it possible to draw the conclusion that some certain parts of text are representative and advocating an ideology or changes? We have chosen these discourses because they are relevant to previous literature. The discourse analyses (Fairclough, 1991; 1992; 2002; 2003; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997) underline the importance of context and contextualization.

When analyzing the speeches of Ministers of Education, one must be aware of the context where the speech was presented and to which audience. The Minister did not write the speech on his/her own; the speech would have been evaluated, modified and written and revised by many hands e.g. by civil servants in the Ministry of Education, by his political secretary and even by political advisers of

the Minister's own party. Thus, it must be appreciated that a Minister's speech is not her/his individual or own viewpoint or opinion – it is one part of the collective political will.

Our research questions are:

- (1) What are the main discourses in the Minister's speeches, which are concerned with the implementing changes in university policy?
- (2) How and where are the neo-liberal ideology and rhetoric used and produced in Finnish academia?

The data on which we base this research originates from the speeches outlining Finnish higher education policies delivered by different Ministers of Education and Culture during the years 2005 – 2015. The time-period was chosen so that it extended from the preparation and implementation of the current Finnish University Act, which came into force in 2010. Our analytical method involves a qualitative content analysis of the speeches i.e. a thematic analysis. The analysis progressed in phases. First, all three authors read all the selected speeches. Subsequently, we jointly discussed and decided on the main themes / discourses that guided the further in-depth analysis. During this final phase, we concentrated on these themes / discourses and each of the authors read closely and analyzed in more detail three of these speeches. All the authors made the final summarization. In the following sections, we will discuss the documents and the main themes / discourses, including quotations from the actual texts.

Analysed speeches:

Grahn-Laasonen, Sanni: Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeri Sanni Grahn-Laasonen avoin kirje yliopistojen ja ammattikorkeakoulujen johdolle (27.10.2015). Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö, 2015. <http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Verkkouutiset/2015/10/avoinkirje.html> (Accessed 3.4.2016)

Gustafsson, Jukka: Tampereen yliopiston lukuvuoden avajaiset (1.9.2011). Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö, 2011. [http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Puheet/2011/09/Tampereen\\_yliopiston\\_lukuvuoden\\_avajaiset.html?lang=fi](http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Puheet/2011/09/Tampereen_yliopiston_lukuvuoden_avajaiset.html?lang=fi) (Accessed 3.4.2016)

Gustafsson, Jukka: Tiedefoorumi (22.5.2012). Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö, 2012. <http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Puheet/2012/05/Tiedefoorumi.html?lang=fi> (Accessed 3.4.2016)

Kalliomäki, Antti: Tiedefoorumi, Helsinki (3.5.2006). Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö, 2007. [http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Puheet/2006/5/tiedefoorumi\\_helsinki?lang=fi](http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Puheet/2006/5/tiedefoorumi_helsinki?lang=fi) (Accessed 3.4.2016)

- Kalliomäki, Antti: Yliopistojen johdon seminaari, Turku (24.11.2005). Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö, 2005. [http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Puheet/2005/11/yliopistojen\\_johdon\\_seminaari\\_turku?lang=fi](http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Puheet/2005/11/yliopistojen_johdon_seminaari_turku?lang=fi) (Accessed 3.4.2016)
- Kiuru, Krista: Korkeakoulujen ja tiedelaitosten johdon seminaari (27.11.2013). Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö, 2013. [http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Puheet/2013/11/Korkeakoulujohdon\\_semma.html?lang=fi](http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Puheet/2013/11/Korkeakoulujohdon_semma.html?lang=fi) (Accessed 3.4.2016)
- Sarkomaa, Sari: Ajankohtaista korkeakoulu- ja tiedepolitiikassa –seminaari (3.9.2008). Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö, 2008. <http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Puheet/2008/09/Korkeakouluseminaari.html?lang=fi> (Accessed 3.4.2016)
- Sarkomaa, Sari: Innovaatioyliopiston taustatilaisuus (12.12.2007). Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö, 2007. <http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Puheet/2007/12/innovaatioyliopisto.html?lang=fi> (Accessed 3.4.2016)
- Virkkunen, Henna: Hallituksen esitys uudeksi yliopistolaiksi –lähetekeskustelu (26.2.2009). Opetus- ja kulttuuriministeriö, 2009. [http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Puheet/2009/02/yolaki\\_lahetekeskustelu\\_esittelypuheenvuoro.html?lang=fi](http://www.minedu.fi/OPM/Puheet/2009/02/yolaki_lahetekeskustelu_esittelypuheenvuoro.html?lang=fi) (Accessed 3.4.2016)

Based on the analysis we found the following main themes:

- benefit and productivity
- from educated citizens to top experts
- management by crisis
- from local universities to global top universities

We are analysing these themes with sample quotations in the following. They seem to reflect the ideological battle between the national vs. global and civic state oriented vs. market oriented points of view on the policies concerning the higher education and its mission (see table 1.).

**Table 1.** The conceptual fields found in the Finnish university discourse

	<b>National</b>	<b>Global</b>
<b>Civic state oriented</b>	widespread education – community	integration into the academic community
<b>Market oriented</b>	individuals with state-of-the-art knowledge know-how	competition and winning in the knowledge economy

## 2.1 Benefits and productivity

Olssen and Peters (2005, 326) argue: *'One of the major objectives of the reforms in higher education has been to install the concept of competition as a way of increasing productivity, accountability and control. From the neoliberalism viewpoint, increased competition represents improved quality'*. Before the new University Act in 2010, during the preparation of the legislation, the political speeches emphasized the concrete economic gains to be achieved, and this was the argument deployed when justifying the need for renewal of the current legislation. However, Minister Kalliomäki stated in the year 2005, that the concerns raised by the private sector about the competitiveness of the country's economy and the competitiveness of its commercial enterprises was at least partly not true, since the Finnish universities were doing well in international comparisons. It must also be noted that in the same speech Minister Kalliomäki still saw the role of the university as a public educator as fundamentally important. By conducting its basic role in a high-quality manner, the university institution serves in the best possible manner also the business life.

... The distinct specialization of the universities and polytechnics creates benefit to the private sector and to future students. The challenge is to identify structures that produce the best results, i.e. high-quality education and research and enable the transfer of this knowledge so that it benefits the entire society... (Kalliomäki, 24.11.2005)

Two years later, after a change of the Minister and the political party holding the post, Minister Sarkomaa stated clearly that the establishment of the putative Innovation University (later to be given the name Aalto University) was related to Finnish global competitiveness and she went on to claim that the new institution would add direct profit to the national economy. According to her way of thinking, knowledge was something that creates concrete profits for the national economy. Thus, the aim of the Innovation University would be to develop new services and products that could be exploited by society and especially commercial companies.

The Innovation University will attract a strong investment on the chosen leading fields. This is a national project that will benefit the whole national economy. The co-operation between other domestic actors – including companies, universities and research institutions – is the framework needed for international success as well as ensuring quality in teaching, research and innovation. (Sari Sarkomaa, 12.12.2007)

The profit and utility way of thinking is based on emphasizing the importance of those disciplines that can produce concrete and clear products while tending to ignore those in which profit is not clearly measurable. Thus, Kalliomäki, in his speech in 2006, emphasized the impact of research and the use of the research results both today and in the future. One can interpret this as emphasizing the hard sciences over the arts and humanities.

During the time when the ministers came from the liberal-conservative, National Coalition Party i.e. Sarkomaa (2008) and Virkkunen (2009) as well as that when the Social Democratic Party's Gustafsson (2011) was the Minister, the rhetoric of the benefit and productivity was linked with comments about global competitiveness and work-life based education and research. One can even argue that the economic statements during these Ministers were clearly misleading, or at least giving empty political promises to unsuspecting citizens and academics.

The typical manner of speaking about the benefits to the changes being introduced during this decade (2005-2015) can be tied to the need to rescue the Finnish national economy: from this standpoint, the aim of research is to ensure the global competitiveness of the country. One can also note that Minister Kalliomäki still during the years 2005 and 2006 did speak at least at some level of the wider educational purpose of the universities and he considered the concept of benefit in a broader social context. However, after the new law was enacted, all subsequent Ministers, irrespective of their political affiliations, increasingly concentrated on the concept of economic benefits. The productivity of the universities was to be measured in euros, and what was investigated in the universities had to be targeted towards practical and exploitable innovations. During the 2010's, competition, competitiveness and new markets became the most widely used slogans. Thus, the need to ensure the country's competitiveness in the global marketplace has been a fixture on the agenda, irrespective of which party the Minister represents. This culminated in the letter issued by Minister Grahn-Laasonen in 2015 to the management of the higher education institutions, where the main concern was the Finnish economy, ensuring its international competitiveness and how one could achieve more economical efficiency with fewer resources.

The tip of our science is sharp but far too narrow. It is far too expensive to try to conduct internationally top-level research in many fields. We do not have the fiscal or human resources to reach the top level in several subjects in very many areas. (Grahn-Laasonen, 2015.)

The only Minister that still used some other type of profit rhetoric than the neoliberal one was the social democrat Kalliomäki. He reflects in a well-informed

way the problems that relate to estimating impact of research and the time-scale for its exploitation:

First, a single research effort seldom leads to a noticeable impact. For the support of the social decision making or technological development work one usually needs support and evidence from a body of work. Thus, it is almost impossible to evaluate the impact of the research via some single work or the output of a single researcher. (Antti Kalliomäki, 2006)

He also sees another challenge in the evaluation of the exploitability of the research:

Another problem is tied to the same issue: it usually takes from five to ten years, perhaps even longer, after the publication of a research result until it actually has practical implications outside the scientific community. Nonetheless, it is obvious that the same means that we are using to increase the quality of the research also will increase the effectiveness of our research. (Antti Kalliomäki, 2006.)

Still in the year 2011, Minister Gustafsson reiterated the importance of universities' mission and social benefits by stating: *'High level research university can also emphasize the social relevance of its actions'*. In addition, he promised:

... the state of the national economy forces also the educational sector to contribute to balancing of the economy. Despite the need for savings, the universities resources will be developed in a positive way during this government.

One can ask the question - what happened when in the year 2015 the very same Minister issues the following statement to the academic community? When he is really meaning cutbacks, he talks about these as increasing the funding and resources. Even for the so-called strategically important branches of science the 'funding will be only allocated 'in proportion to achievements''.

We are preparing to support the concept of a division of labor, choosing one sector over some others as a form of structural development, we want to create centres of knowledge and innovation by providing strategic funding; its proportion out of the total budget we are prepared to increase. This strategic funding will be distributed in proportion to the actions taken and changes implemented. The specialization built on the strengths will also be supported by the funding instruments of the Finnish Academy and with a new round of capitalization.

## 2.2 From educated citizens to top experts

In their speeches, all six Ministers in office during this time kept referring to knowledge, top-level expertise and quality. It is somewhat curious that the benefits are only mentioned twice in these speeches although it appears to be the main underlying theme. On the other hand, productivity is mentioned a sixteen times. When the minister uses the word “knowledge” he or she is referring to the new technologies, producing research-based innovations and knowledge that can be exploited to create innovation and knowledge based production. The rhetoric about knowledge is thus restricted to the development of technology and innovations. If we are cynical, then they equate *knowledge with the innovation capacity* produced by the universities and the Finnish Academy.

The exploitation of this kind of knowledge is the central mode of thinking used to support the need for the university reforms and the creation of the Aalto (formerly Innovation) University.

Although there are no references to the educational mission of the universities in most of the speeches, one can find some traces about learning. In the speech by Sarkomaa, culture and art are mentioned, since it was an event celebrating the founding of the Aalto University. Therefore, she also mentions that the university’s mission includes also the advancement of culture and art and that the benefit is not measurable only in financial terms.

... we are not just visiting the money markets but we wish to develop strong, high-class and interesting art and culture. (Sari Sarkomaa, 2007.)

Sarkomaa also makes a mention of learning in a speech delivered in the year 2008, where she considers that the basic tasks of the universities will remain the same although the legislation is changing, and the universities will take care of the ‘*learning of the nation*’ which is a task set for them by the government. When analyzing the fact from the viewpoint of the situation today, about a half decade since the Act came into force, one can ask critical questions - how much of this basic task is still left? Are the universities still undertaking and managing to fulfil this basic mission? On the other hand, Sarkomaa states that the university must be able to renovate its structures and have courage to terminate certain research areas in order to strengthen its so-called core competences. In practice, most of this has now been implemented and one can note that the cutbacks have fallen mainly on those subjects – educational, humanities and social sciences – that try to fulfil the learning and educational mission of the university. Usually, these fields of learning facing cutbacks are those that do not produce innovation and products in a straightforward manner applicable to the world of business.

The quality rhetoric is clearly a distinct entirety. Although the concept is mentioned a total of 25 times in these speeches, it can be categorized under the knowledge rhetoric. The term “quality” now seems to be referring to ever-greater expertise, i.e. something that will lead to innovations that are more efficient. Sarkomaa rationalized the need for university renovation in the year 2008 by mentioning that while one goal was to improve the quality of the research and teaching conducted in the universities, at the same time, it was intended increase global competitiveness. Thus, quality in research and teaching was linked to the manner in which the basic tasks were being conducted; this was seen as one component in ensuring international competitiveness.

The concept of quality started to be increasingly emphasized in the political rhetoric towards the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The concept of the quality was never defined clearly; it remained a fuzzy concept that is hard to understand in a concrete manner. Ministers tended to speak about the quality at the same time as they are talking about Finland as the country that possesses the best and most competitive higher education system in the world. In her speech to Parliament in the year 2009, Virkkunen stated:

The now addressed proposal for the University Act and the accompanying legislation improves notably the operational prerequisites of all the Finnish universities and at the same time augments the quality and effectiveness of their teaching and research. The main principle guiding the reform was the strengthening of the autonomy of science. We want to increase the autonomy of the academic community and the resources allocated to the universities. We want to give the possibility to all our universities and branches of science that they can become among the best in the world. (Henna Virkkunen, 2009)

After the new legislation was enacted, in the year 2011, Minister Gustafsson proposed that a high quality research university also has to maintain social relevance in its operation, i.e. it needs to implement the so-called third mission entrusted to universities. One can argue that it is possible to discern Gustafsson’s political ideology in his speech. He proclaims that the educational equality of the Finnish society forms the basis for the country’s general welfare, but at the same time, he links equality with the competitiveness of the country’s welfare. In addition, according to Gustafsson’s rhetoric, he wants the Finnish higher education system to be viewed as ‘the best in the world’. This rhetoric of *Finland as the world’s best and most competent nation* recurred later in his speeches. In the Science forum in year 2012, he considers that a well-educated and learned nation can manage to cope even with crises.

Minister Kiuru continued the same rhetoric in 2013. In addition to mentioning competence, the key words in her speech are: high-level knowledge, knowledge-based growth, new knowledge based growth areas, well-educated people, educated and capable nation, the knowledge needs of the future, the knowledge potential of the nation, and the elevation of the adult populations' knowledge level. If one summarizes these concepts, then we can discern a knowledge rhetoric and its conclusion is: *'we need well-educated experts that are able to innovate'*.

Here, the concept of the quality is not used as the basis of knowledge, but instead as a synonym for this high-level and state-of-the-art expertise. In this speech, Kiuru mentioned knowledge types of terms 23 times. In comparison, renewal is referred to 16 times. In the speech delivered by Gustafsson (2012), renewal is mentioned 23 times and knowledge seven times.

The same quality based policy is continued in the open letter sent to the management of the higher education institutions in the year 2015 by Minister Grahn-Laasonen. She articulates how the Finnish higher education is fragmented, research is divided into too many and too small units, and furthermore, the top level of scientific research is too narrow. She states that it will be necessary to rectify this unprofitable situation in order that it does not hamper Finland's international competitiveness. Instead, it is essential to create a more qualitative and international-oriented, and efficient higher education system. Thus, the universities must dismantle, close down profile and specialize.

The small size of the Finnish nation is often mentioned in conjunction with these combined quality/productivity and internationality discourses. For example, in the speech given in 2006, Kalliomäki highlighted the fact that in comparison with other OECD-countries, one must bear in mind the small size of Finland. This argument means that as Finland possesses fewer resources than larger nations, Finland must focus especially on the quality of the research. In contrast to many other speakers, Kalliomäki also defines what the quality of the scientific research means:

The central points in the quality of the scientific research are the novelty and originality of the findings and the reliability of the knowledge that has been produced. (Antti Kalliomäki, 2006.)

Already one year previously, when addressing the university executives in a seminar, Kalliomäki had described a toolkit on how to improve the quality of the research. He stated that if more resources were allocated to higher education, it should be possible to improve the quality of the research being conducted. Kalliomäki appreciated that it would be necessary to ensure that the prerequisites

for research were available in the universities. He also noted that: *‘the indicators of the research activities are being broadened in the manner that the universities have requested.* From the point of the situation that exists today, one can pose the question - have these goals i.e. ensuring that universities have the prerequisites to conduct quality research, actually changed from that day?

We can speculate that the change to the neoliberal rhetoric might have happened after Kalliomäki’s tenure as the Minister of Education: he seems to be the last Minister that valued university learning *per se* and appreciated that university education was also an important social actor, not just a contributor to the national economy. When reading his speeches, one could speculate that the University Act might have been different if it had been completed under the auspices of a minister from the Social Democratic party. Another option is that there has been an actual paradigmatic change in the speech writing ideology in the Ministry.

Kalliomäki states: ‘There seems thus to be a place in the world for equality and social cohesion which is emphasized in higher education policy in the Nordic countries’ (Kalliomäki, 2005.) On the same occasion, he thanked the universities for their successful work in renovating their degree programmes: ‘During the past years, the functioning of the universities has become broader and more effective ... One has not thanked them for this in public. From my part, I want to give credit for such a well-done work.’

The speech delivered by Kalliomäki when viewed from the current situation, does seem to be at odds with the soon-to-appear productivity rhetoric since it reveals considerable respect, and understanding of the work being done in the universities. When reading Kalliomäki’s speeches, with hindsight it is possible to appreciate that he even uses scientific reasoning when defining the autonomous area of the university and its type of learning: ‘The PhD schools ensure that the candidates know thoroughly their area of expertise and have mastered its theoretical basis and methods.’ (Kalliomäki, 2005.)

### **2.3 Management by crisis – the threads of the Finnish model and the inevitability of the change**

The themes in these threads can be seen in the connection of the major challenges faced by Finnish society: a small population, an aged population and the need to manage the resources required to maintain the welfare state. The need for university reforms was mitigated in the speeches by claiming that it was inevitable to maintain the operational preconditions. Nonetheless, these reforms were based on neoliberal market-oriented policies.

If the renewal is not made now, the operational preconditions of the Finnish universities will deteriorate even further when comparing with other nations. (Sari Sarkomaa, 2007.)

One anticipated threat was the ‘loss’ of gifted Finnish researchers emigrating abroad or on the other hand the inability to entice ‘international top researchers’ into Finland. In fact, it does seem that the loss of talent from Finland has started to happen and it can be traced to these neoliberal-inspired budget cutbacks imposed on the Finnish universities: according to Statistics Finland, net emigration of researcher-trained individuals between the years 2005 and 2015 amounted to 1161 persons (Lindström & Kolu 2017, 31).

With the reform of university legislation along with the creation of the Innovation University as its leading project, we want to ensure that talented Finnish youngsters will want to apply to the Finnish universities and will receive high-quality education, and we will not lose them abroad. (Sari Sarkomaa, 2007.)

If one applies the rhetoric of the 2010’s, nowadays one hears references to the downturn in the global economy, its effects on the Finnish economy and employment. These arguments were used later as reasons for implementing productivity programs, closing down departments, and reducing the funding of the universities.

## **2.4 From local universities to global top universities**

Although the theme of internationalization is present in all the other topics raised in the speeches, it is worthy of special mention, because this was the most widely used theme in these speeches. International is one of the key words that has been most commonly used with 50 appearances. The term “global” is used 23 times.

The international competitiveness is also used as a reason for altering the course taken by Finnish universities towards a neoliberal model. Minister Sarkomaa validated the neoliberal agenda and the need to develop the universities towards the market-oriented direction by stating:

Nowhere else in Europe are universities considered as a part of the state government, which guides their teaching, research, innovation and social impact. If the renewal is not made now, the operational preconditions of the Finnish universities will decline even further in comparison with other countries. (12.12.2007, Sari Sarkomaa.)

There are two approaches taken when the Ministers speak about internationality. The first one recognizes that although Finland is a small nation, it must concentrate on a few, strategically chosen, research areas so that they can reach internationally recognized peaks. The second approach deals with the rhetoric about internationality and global market; this refers directly to the fact that by focusing its research on subjects that can soon be commercialized, Finland can increase its international competitiveness. In addition, one can notice some novelties in the 2010's rhetoric; one is the talk about the commercial possibilities of exporting the country's higher education to other states; another aspect is the introduction of tuition fees to non-EU students applying to study in Finnish universities.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, our analyses of the discourses and themes emerging from the speeches of Ministers, no matter whether the Minister represented right- or left-wing political parties, reveal that Finnish university policy has been penetrated by neo-liberal ideology during the past 20 years.

All the phases of the universities depicted as ideas have never existed *per se*. According to the current political rhetoric: the universities have to undergo continual renewal. Statements about science aiming towards pure truth or about the universities as autonomous actors are illusory. These statements do not tell anything about some lost paradise, but they do reveal the motivation behind the present policies. When individuals start to talk fondly about past traditions, this reveals that the change that has occurred has introduced a degree of insecurity; another way of viewing this situation is that they reflect dissatisfaction with the present status quo. (Kankaanpää, 2013, 12; Koski, 1993, 157.)

In general, one can say that at the start of the period analyzed i.e. the middle of the first decade of this millennium, there was still some reference to the principles of educational policies; this ended totally from the beginning of the 2010. Speeches from that time onward were totally based on neoliberal policies, so much that it is difficult to recognize the different political parties that the various Ministers represented. There were the following core recurring themes: utility, global competitiveness and internationalization, knowledge, structural re-arrangement, and certain undefined risks.

One can see a shift in the rhetoric from the regional or universities for the masses towards a need for a few top-level units. Regional universities were developed in Finland during a historical phase when the welfare state was created. Their foundation was based on the ideology of equality and universalism. In

effect, this meant a decentralization of the universities away from the south of the country and the realization that it was crucial to utilize the skills all of the nation's potential talented individuals in the building of the society. This was a period of optimism; the philosophy was education would lead to progress and this was matched by a desire to increase social equality. One role model of this planning was drawn from East Germany, but the practices were mainly implemented from the Anglo-American cultures.

The Act for the development of the Finnish universities, which dated from 1986, increased the basic funding of the universities; in addition, it also increased their self-regulatory decision-making authority. University rectors and heads of the faculties were able to decide freely about the funding and resources allocated for the research. In return, the state wanted profitability from the universities. The international impact of the research conducted was incorporated as a success indicator, but universities were still expected to fulfil their national and regional missions. Even at this time, it is possible to discern that there was an increased demand for better quality, increased social interaction and more internationalization. The need for internationalization was interpreted differently when comparing sciences and arts. In the social sciences, internationalization meant that one should be aware of international research and apply it nationally or locally. In the sciences, the internationalization meant either international joint publications or publishing one's own results in international journals.

During this phase, only a few social scientists spoke about the meaning of the competitiveness or competition. The ideology of competition did not penetrate even into certain fields such as engineering. In the science faculties, competition was mentioned when highlighting technological innovations or when speaking about result-oriented activities. In the everyday life of the university personnel, the main competition was for academic positions. One had still time to conduct research quite calmly, and the reporting responsibilities were only a task for a few members of the academic community (Kohvakka, 2015).

The role of the universities as the main component or actor in driving the economic growth started to become emphasized at the end of the 1990's. From the beginning of this millennium, the concept of commercializing research results became much more commonly expressed (Kalunki, Koriseva & Saarela 2015). A market-oriented ideology gradually gained ground not only in the state administration but also within the universities themselves. The main theme or mantra was the country's ability to compete in the global market; this meant that the entrepreneurial rhetoric gradually became an integral component of the university rhetoric. Management by results, continuous assessment and different systems of result evaluation became part of the administrative routine.

At this point, one starts to hear concepts such as the competition university or alternatively the corporation university or the market university. (See e.g. Kankaanpää, 2013.)

This change can clearly be traced in the rhetoric surrounding Finnish universities. The change is noted also in the everyday life of academics. Constant competition, control and assessment of the results have become everyday routines for those employed by the universities. The startling revelation emerging from these political speeches is their uniformity: this may be because the speech writing has started to influence the political decision-making or due to the fact, that after the neoliberal intervention, politics are no longer a part of the higher education policies!

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