On Finnish Higher Education



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Main issues

- How Finnish higher education has changed
- What is the contemporary Finnish system of higher education
- How does society influence on the changes of higher education

- **Starting point:** A system of higher education can’t be exported to another country. But we can learn from each other.



Contemporary Finland

- European Union member state, 1995=>
- Democratic Republic, 1917=>
- Population ~5,6 million inhabitants
- Nordic Welfare State = welfare benefits available to all citizens: free education & health care, social services
- No corruption
- High level of generalized trust
- Income differences among the smallest in the world



On Historical & cultural contexts of Finland

UNIVERSITY OF JYVÄSKYLÄ
FINNISH INSTITUTE FOR
EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH



Geo-political context

- Culturally & politically Finland between East and West in Europe
- Finland was one of the core areas of **Swedish Kingdom** as **Eastern provinces** (1155-1809); a part of **Russian Empire** as **Autonomous Grand Duchy** (1809-1917)
- **Western juridical tradition** (rule of the law) has been the basis for societal life
- Finland was connected to the **Western cultural sphere** through Catholic Church (12th century =>)

⇒ **Finnish students were sent abroad** (Paris 13th, Prag 15th,,Wittenberg 16th century)



The Kingdom of Sweden, 1696



Historical maps portal / Rantupa, The University of Jyväskylä, 17.3.2022

Inauguration of the first university in Finland: Royal Academy in Åbo in 1640



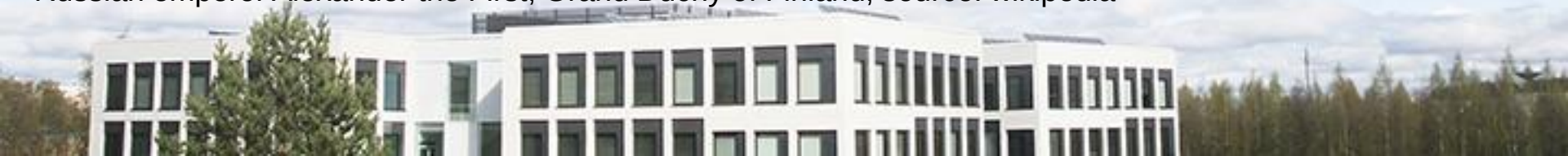
The aims were to: 1) Strengthen Swedish Kingdom (civil servants educated)**, 2) Defend** Lutheran Church & religion (priests & theology)**, 3) Develop** backward provinces culturally

Finland in the Russian Empire (1809-1917)



- **Autonomous Grand Duchy**: all Swedish institutions continued: 1) **University** (=> Imperial Alexander University, 1827), 2) **Lutheran Church** 3) **system of education;** 4) **Swedish laws** = juridical system & legislation;
- **Own government** & internal administration ⇔ civil servants, **training monopoly to university**
- **Own currency & central bank** (1860s=>) supported the development of national economy

Russian emperor Alexander the First, Grand Duchy of Finland; source: wikipedia



19th century trends in HE

- **Humboldtian ideas accepted**: 1) institutional autonomy; 2) freedom of study & teaching; 3) academic freedom
- **Nationalism** developed & implemented by professors & students (***fennomans***): “education of the nation & nationalisation of educated”
- **Finnish language & culture developed** ⇔ University became **a national cultural institution**
- With industrial development ⇔ **debates on the need to train practical professions** (forestry & agriculture; technical & commercial education) **1840/50s=>**



Educating professions for the nation & national economy

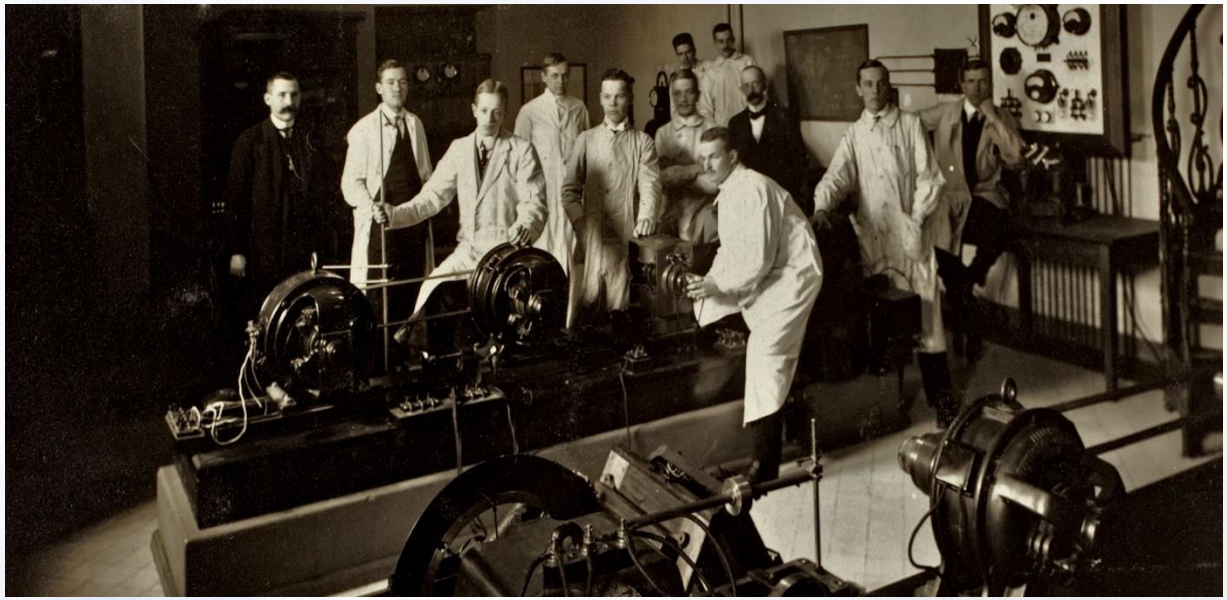


Photo: technical education in the 19th century

- **Agriculture & forestry** => faculty in university (1890s);
- **Professionalisation process of university degrees** (medicine, law) => humanities supported nationalistic project ⇔ **Finnish language & culture**
- **Technical & commercial education** => HEIs in early 20th century (Technical Uni + 3 business schools)



Teacher training colleges, 1863=>

Folk schools established from the 1870s => teacher training colleges (seminars) for male & female students
⇔ Nationalism & upward social mobility for students





Female students in sports suits, male students in their best suits in the 1890s, (photo: Wikipedia)



Higher education and social change?



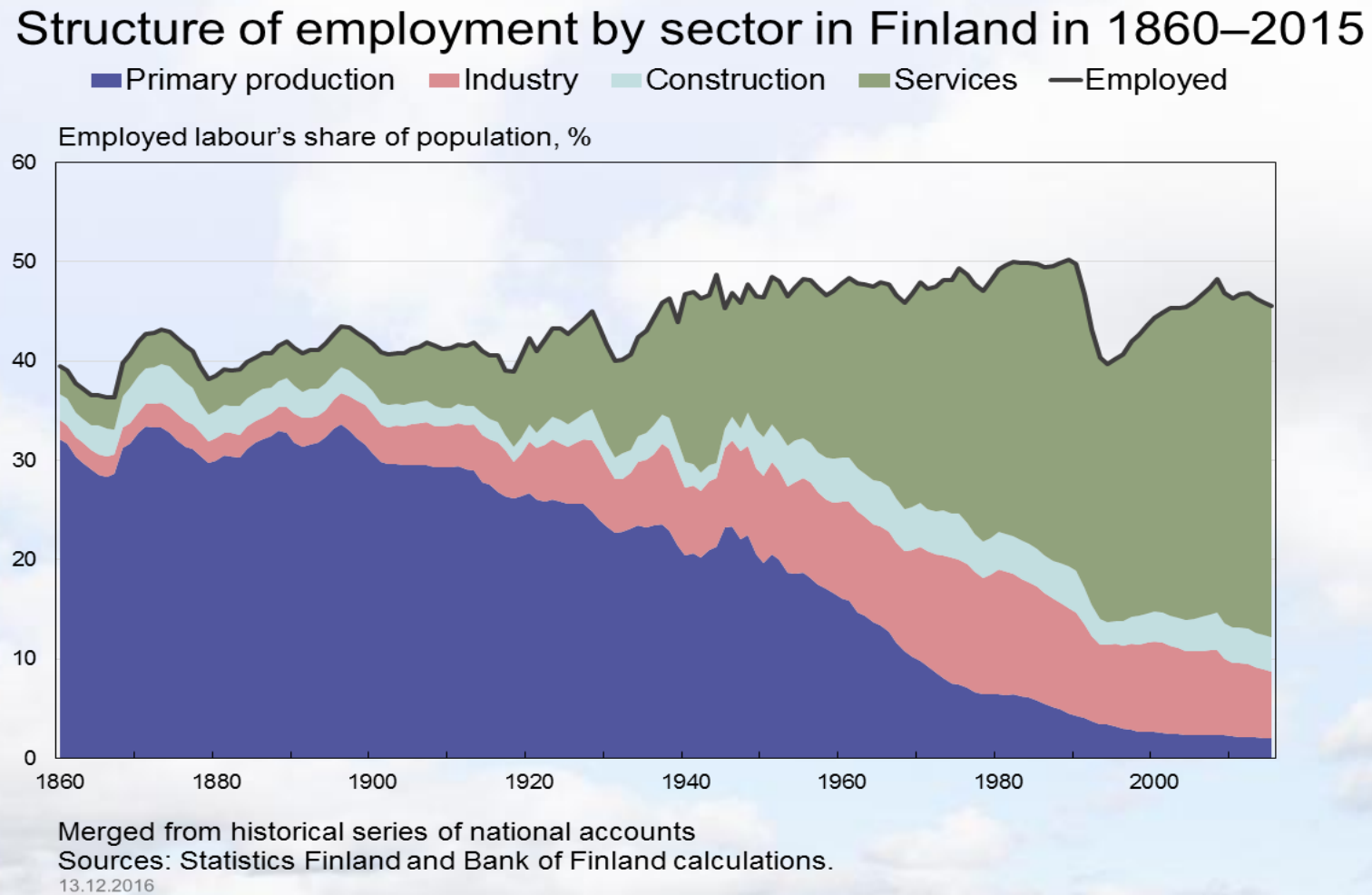
”White Finland” (1920s-1930s): elite higher education



- After a **bloody civil war** (1918) education was seen as a tool for national integration: compulsory education act (1921), gymnasiums expanded, => more HE students
- **Elite system of higher education:** University of Helsinki closely connected with political elite
- **Private HEIs:** University of Åbo & University of Turku in Turku; Technical university & two business schools in Helsinki, one in Turku
- **Elite education continues,** esp. in medicine & law

Photo: stamp to commemorate 300 years of the university

The Change of Finnish Economy 1860-2015



HE changing society, the 1940s =>

- Changes in national economy created new needs for HE
- Political balance changed after WWII: left & centre parties in power (1940s-1980s)
- **Nordic welfare state policies** (1960s-) aimed to create a fair & equal society ⇔ **reforms in education, social policies, health services…**
- **Education** was seen both as an **instrument in making** an equal society + **equal educational opportunities** were seen as an end in itself
- Rapid expansion of HE supported by **macro-economic perspective** *(manpower & mobilizing talent reserves), too*

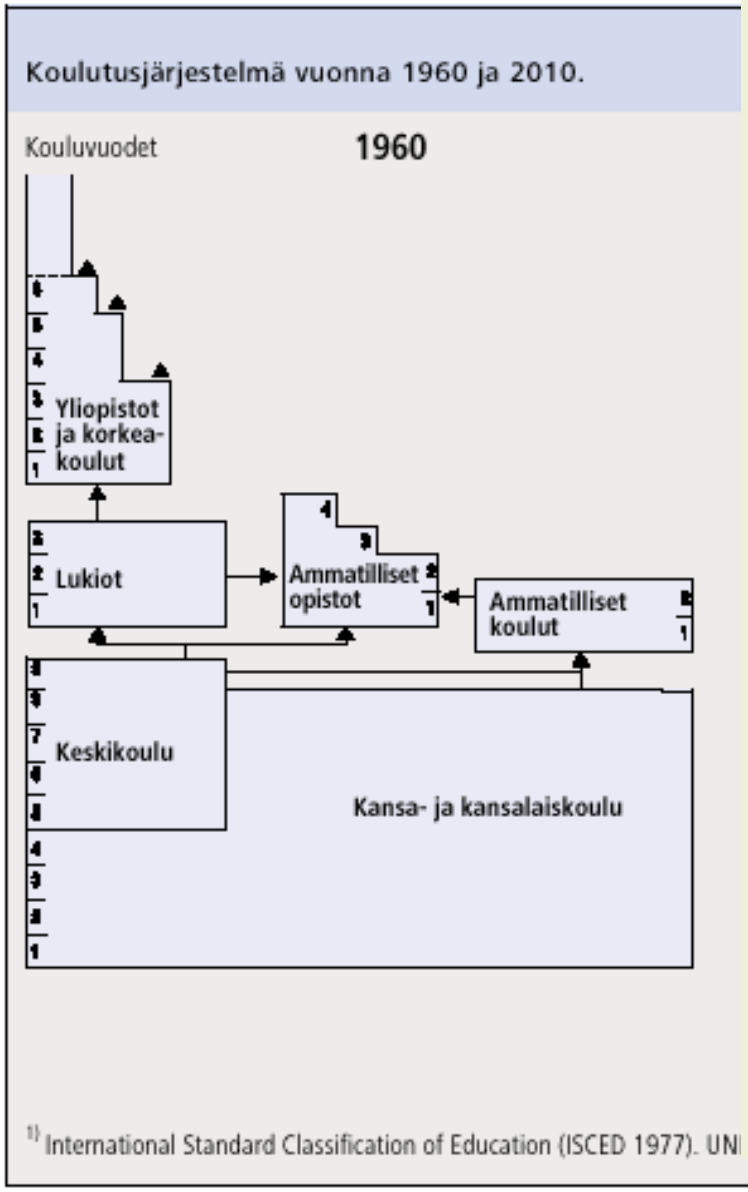


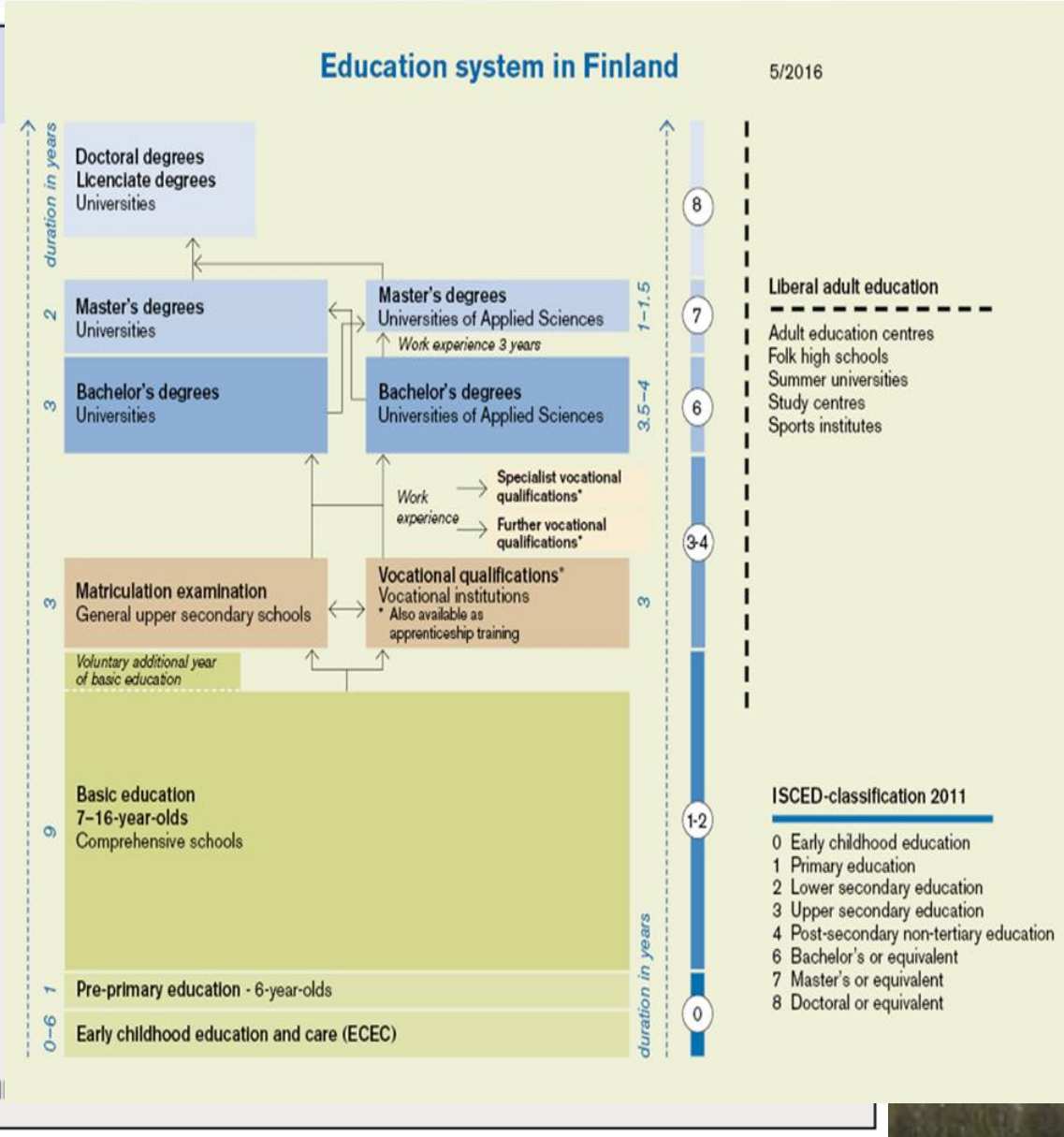
Education reforms, the 1960s – 1990s

- **Massification** of HE (1960s-1980s): universities established all over the country; the number of university students grew from **25 000** (1960) to **97 000** (1990)
- Establishment of **higher vocational education sector**, polytechnics (Universities of Applied Sciences, UAS) during the 1990s. The main aim was to help recovery from economic downturn & rise the level of education
- **Comprehensive school reform** (1968-77) + the **Reform of teacher education** in the 1970s: teacher education from colleges to universities



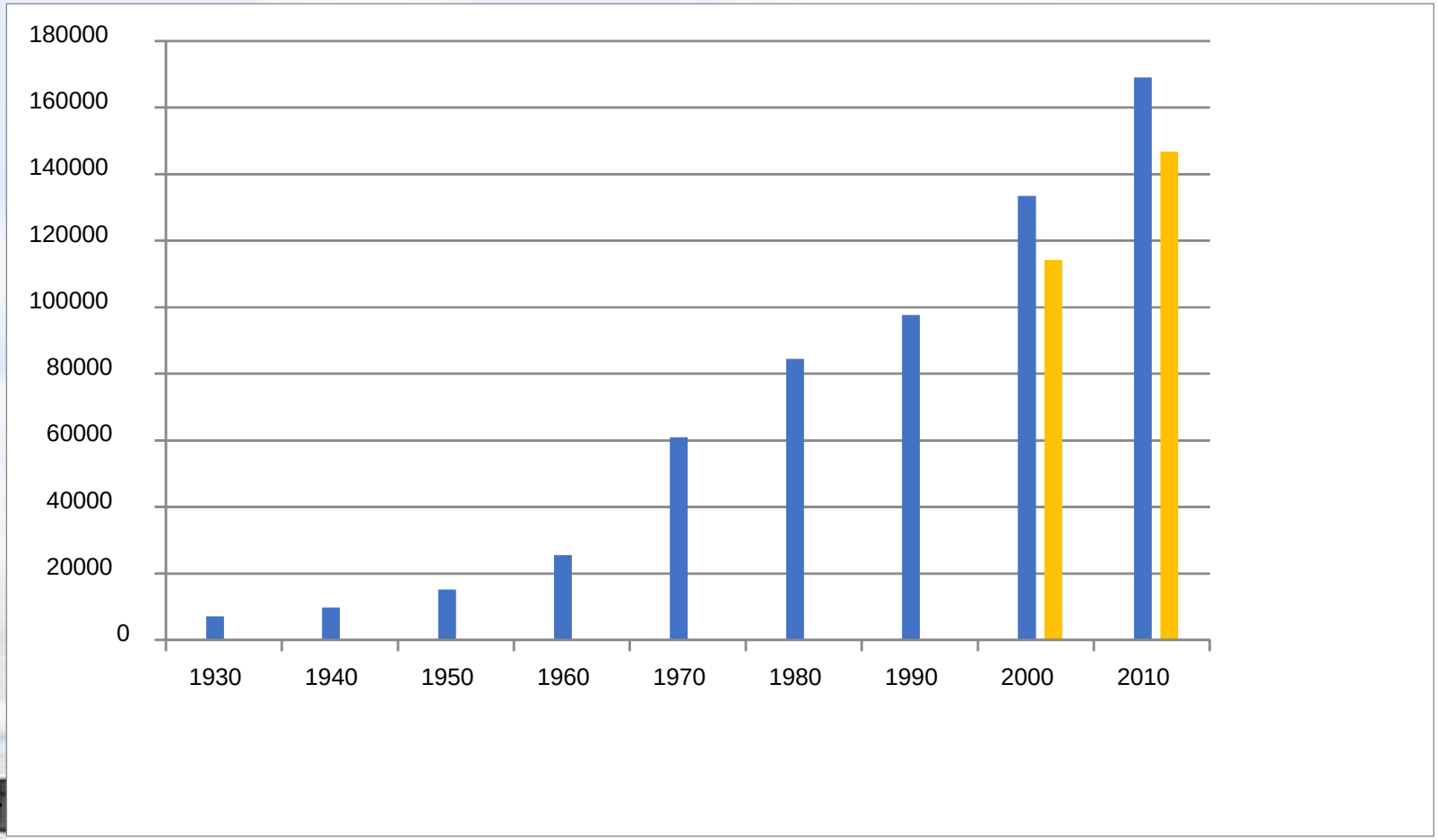
The Change of System of Education 1960s => 2010s





The Expansion of higher education; student numbers from the 1930s to the 2010s

- Blue = university students
- Yellow = University of Applied Sciences students



All students in UAS & Universities (2022)

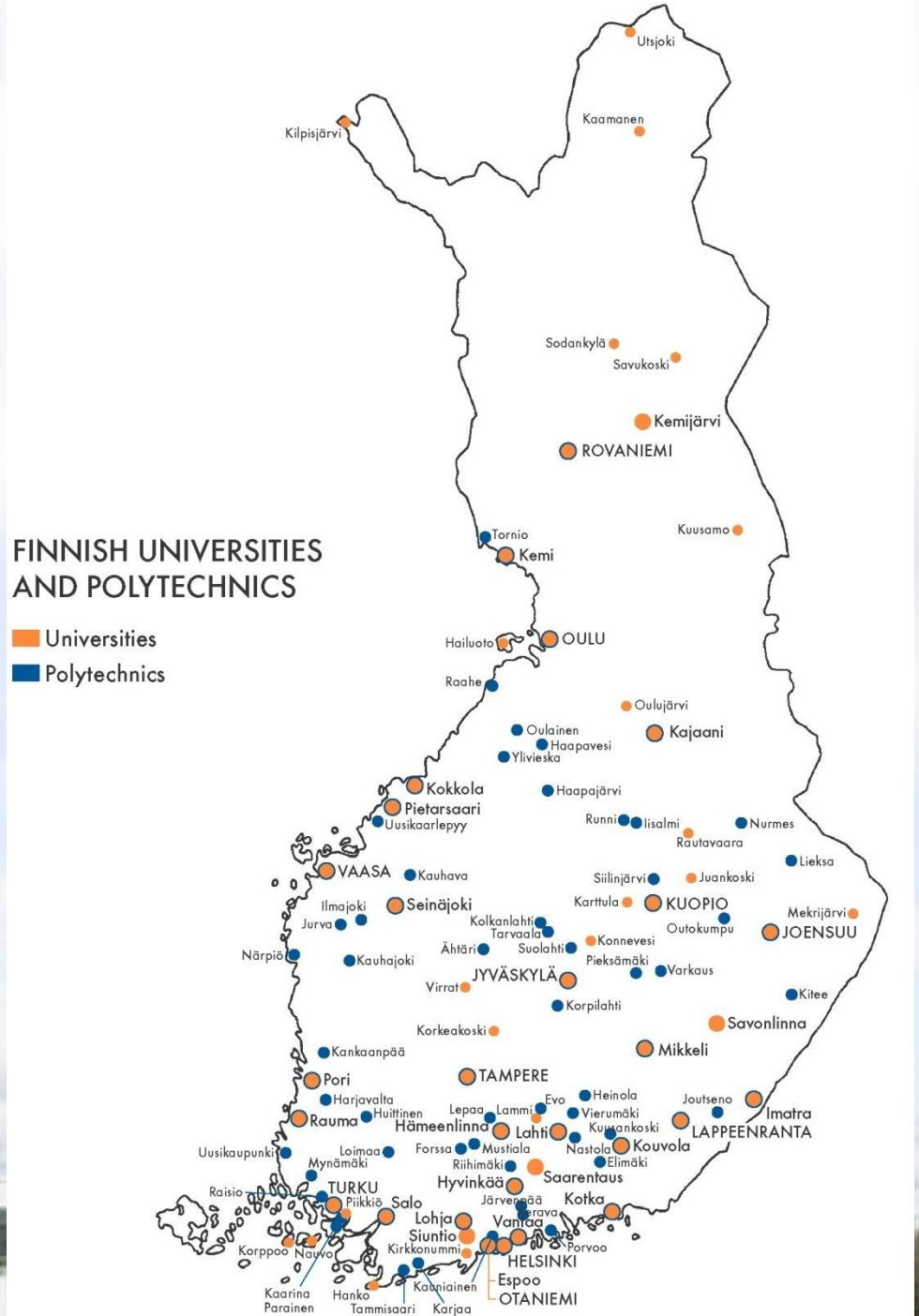
	New students	All students	
UAS (*female*)	**51 000** (58%)	**166 600** (55%)	
University (*female*)	**27 200** (58%)	**162 500** (56%)	
All (*female*)	**78 000** (58%)	**329 000** (55%)	



Number of HEIs:

1) a regional policy principle &
2) value statement for equality & equity

- *Big dot = main campus*
- *Small dot = teaching or research unit*



The tasks of the UASs are:

*"to provide teaching which is **based on scientific or artistic foundations** aiming to produce **high expertise** in the fields, to support **students' professional development**, to **conduct applied research and development** which supports both the development and advancement of **teaching and regional development, innovation and development and working life** with the aim of **advancing regional economic structures**... While taking care of these tasks UAS should promote **life-long learning**." (UAS Act 932/2014)*

Education provided in the following 8 fields:

- **Humanities and Education**
- **Culture**
- **Social sciences, business and administration**
- **Natural resources and the environment**
- **Technology, communication and transport**
- **Natural sciences**
- **Social services, health and sport**
- **Tourism, catering and domestic service**



Higher education today

13 Public Universities *(Yliopisto)*, 11 as *independent legal entities,* 2 run by foundations + National Defence College (hybrid)

24 Publicly funded Universities of Applied Sciences: 22 UAS under MEC, + Ålands Yrkehögskola + Police College (Ministry of interior)

\+ **6 university centres** *(hybrid organisations)*

Starting place offered to over 100% of relevant age cohort in universities (27 000) and UASs (50 000); M**ass higher education system (1970s=>)**

Funding from public sources**, main funder being MEC (2/3)**

No tuition fees: students defined as young adults, independent of their parents

Steering of the system by MEC; based on **management by results** & performance agreements & **funding model**

Development supported by **Finnish Education Evaluation Center**



Student profiles in universities & UAS

- **53% of pupils** study in upper secondary general education schools (gymnasiums)
- **41%** in vocational institutions or apprenticeship training
- **In higher education:**
- **University students** have an academic profile**: 90% of the university students** have a matriculation examination; **2,5%** vocational qualification; **4%** both of them
- **UAS students** have more vocational profile**: 51% of students** have a matriculation examination; **30%** vocational qualification; **9,5%** both of them
- Flexible system: university ⇔ UAS



Two sectors of higher education, ”equal but different”: Universities & UAS

Universities

- All degrees (BA, MA, PhD)
- Basic research
- **Orientation:** academic & internationally recognised research; training of qualified academics
- **Multidisciplinary universities**; all disciplines covered in the university sector

UAS

- BA + applied MA degrees
- Development oriented R&D projects & activities
- **Orientation:** training & education of professionals
- Main aim is to **develop regional economy & working life**
- 8 fields of education



Previous education of new university students

The previous education of new students at universities

Start year of education	New students	Previous degrees						New students	Previous degrees					
		UAS		University		Secondary education			UAS		University		Secondary education	
		degree	higher degree	Bachelor's Degree	Master's degree	secondary school graduate	vocational school degree		degree	higher degree	Bachelor's Degree	Master's degree	secondary school graduate	vocational school degree
2020	24 870	3759	201	1638	1095	21 255	2697	100 %	15 %	1 %	7 %	4 %	85 %	11 %
2019	22 074	3333	174	1473	873	19 068	2601	100 %	15 %	1 %	7 %	4 %	86 %	12 %
2018	21 759	3411	132	1599	963	18 735	2589	100 %	16 %	1 %	7 %	4 %	86 %	12 %
2017	20 265	3006	114	1116	714	17 706	2289	100 %	15 %	1 %	6 %	4 %	87 %	11 %
2016	20 943	3027	102	1050	735	17 550	2226	100 %	14 %	0 %	5 %	4 %	84 %	11 %
2015	20 745	2868	87	1104	852	17 799	2049	100 %	14 %	0 %	5 %	4 %	86 %	10 %
2014	20 853	2913	84	1107	816	17 856	1950	100 %	14 %	0 %	5 %	4 %	86 %	9 %
2013	20205	2661	78	1044	861	17400	1788	100 %	13 %	0 %	5 %	4 %	86 %	9 %
2012	19 824	2424	51	936	750	17 010	1758	100 %	12 %	0 %	5 %	4 %	86 %	9 %
2011	20118	2427	39	888	753	17373	1818	100 %	12 %	0 %	4 %	4 %	86 %	9 %
2010	19 989	2439	27	792	771	17 541	1800	100 %	12 %	0 %	4 %	4 %	88 %	9 %
Yhteensä	231 645	32 268	1 089	12 747	9 183	199 293	23 565	100 %	14 %	0 %	6 %	4 %	86 %	10 %

UAS=university of applied sciences

The previous education of new students at universities

(y 2020) Field of education	New students	Previous degrees						New students	Previous degrees					
		UAS		University		Secondary education			UAS		University		Secondary education	
		degree	higher degree	Bachelor's Degree	Master's degree	secondary school graduate	vocational school degree		degree	higher degree	Bachelor's Degree	Master's degree	secondary school graduate	vocational school degree
Education	2 832	282	21	240	126	2 523	507	100 %	10 %	1 %	8 %	4 %	89 %	18 %
Arts and Humanities	3 324	399	15	219	162	2 856	486	100 %	12 %	0 %	7 %	5 %	86 %	15 %
Social sciences, Journalism and Information	2 967	438	48	285	213	2 676	321	100 %	15 %	2 %	10 %	7 %	90 %	11 %
Business, Administration and Law	4 341	723	21	285	150	3 900	312	100 %	17 %	0 %	7 %	3 %	90 %	7 %
Natural sciences, Mathematics and Statistics	2 229	144	1	159	93	1 884	150	100 %	6 %	0 %	7 %	4 %	85 %	7 %
Information and Communication technologies (ICT)	2 688	429	21	195	159	1 920	288	100 %	16 %	1 %	7 %	6 %	71 %	11 %
Engineering, Manufacturing and Construction	4 236	864	33	150	117	3 441	396	100 %	20 %	1 %	4 %	3 %	81 %	9 %
Agriculture, Forestry, Fisheries	387	63		24	18	324	42	100 %	16 %	0 %	6 %	5 %	84 %	11 %
health and welfare	1 686	366	39	66	42	1 572	168	100 %	22 %	2 %	4 %	2 %	93 %	10 %
TOTAL	24 690	3 708	199	1 623	1 080	21 096	2 670	100 %	15 %	1 %	7 %	4 %	85 %	11 %

Cooperation between UASs & universities?

- **Different models**: 1) ownership; 2) cooperation between independent institutions
- **Common problems:**
- Teaching timetables & curriculum ⇔ flexibility?
- Different orientations: practical skills & capacities (UAS) vs. theoretical (broader) understanding
- Practicalities ⇔ locations distance
- Online teaching as a solution?



Socio-Cultural contexts of contemporary Finnish higher education

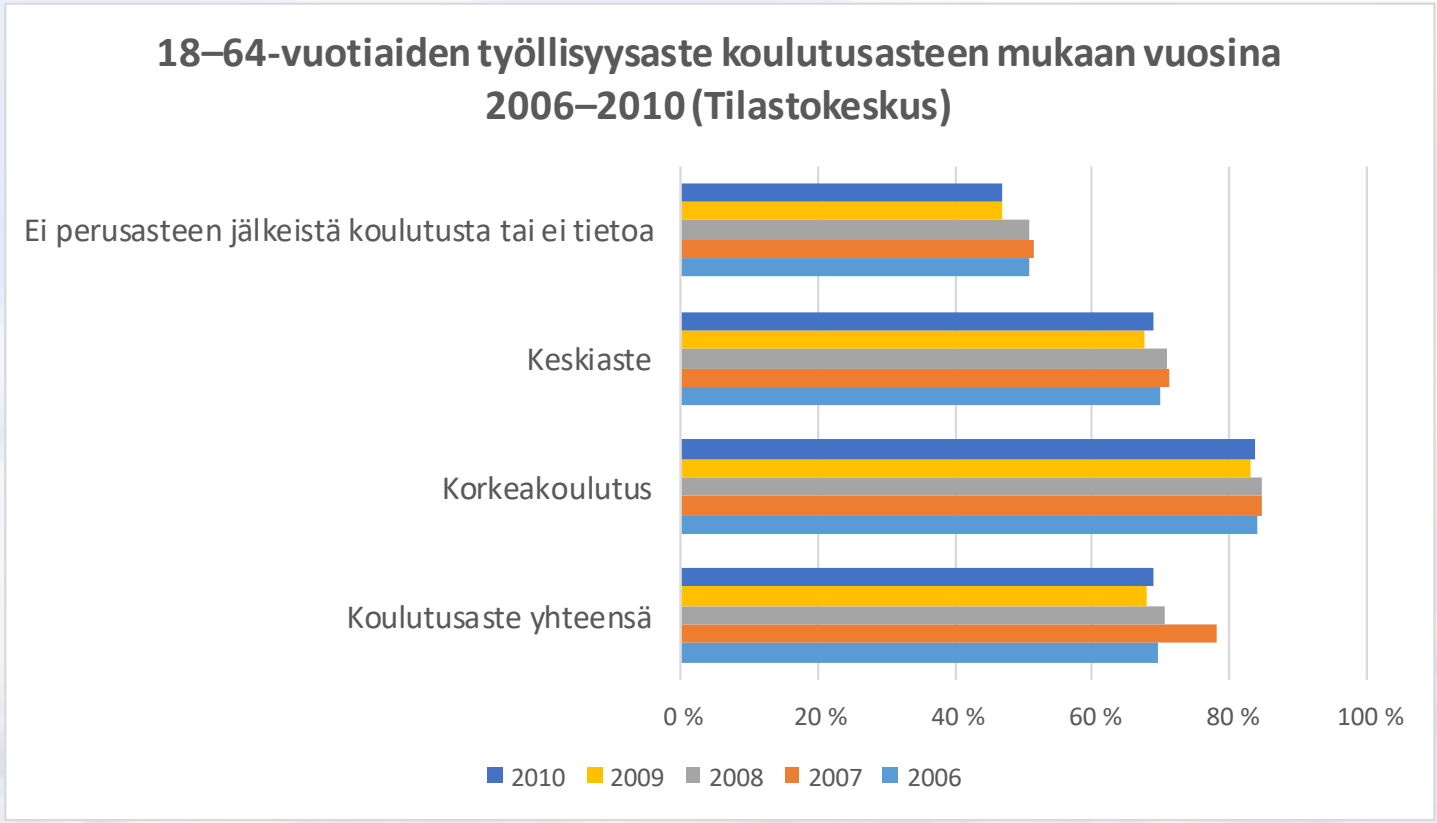


High Social Status of higher education

- **Universities have a high status in Finnish society**
- **HE degrees appreciated:** 1) status-wise & meritocratically (entrance to jobs) 2) economically
- Universities as **national cultural institutions** ⇔ important for the nation & state building processes
- Tradition matters: Universities have played particularly prominent role in the ***cultural, political and economic processes*** creating Finnish nation & nation state
- **=> HEIs important for Nordic welfare state + Knowledge society & knowledge economy**



Employment –HE degree is the best quarantee against unemployment



Equality, equity & trust

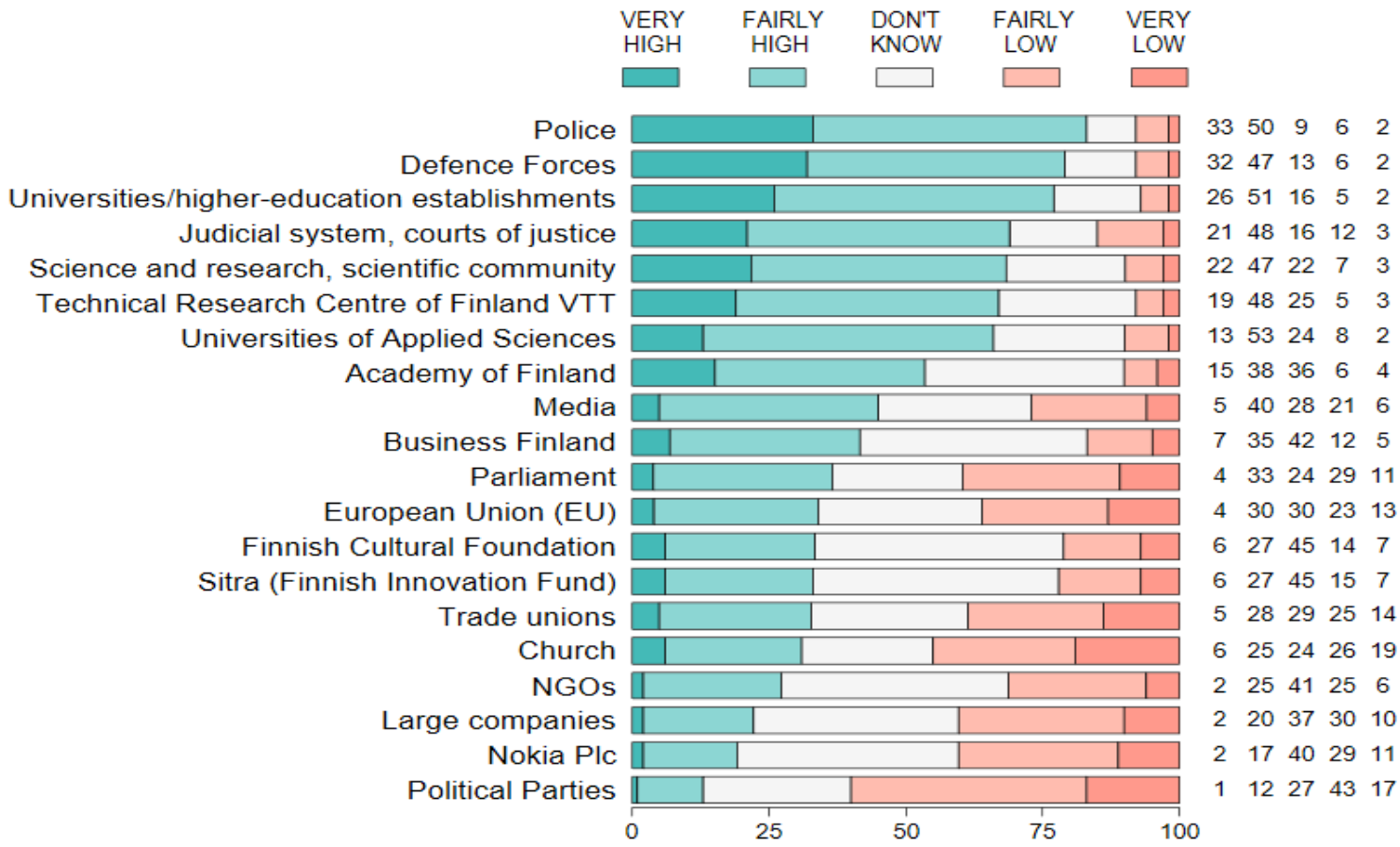
- **Equality & equity,** core values in Finnish society
- **In education: equal educational opportunities** indifferent of gender, socio-economic class, geographical location, ethnic origin
- Principle of equality has impacted & impacts strongly on and in Finnish education policy (1950s – 2020s)
- **Trust in fellow citizens & the institutions of society** *(generalized trust),* including the system of education
- => Trust in **institutional autonomy** of schools & HEIs + **professional autonomy** of teachers, academics, **academic freedom** (Finnish constitution)



Trust in the institutions of society in Finland

The Finnish Science Barometer 2019

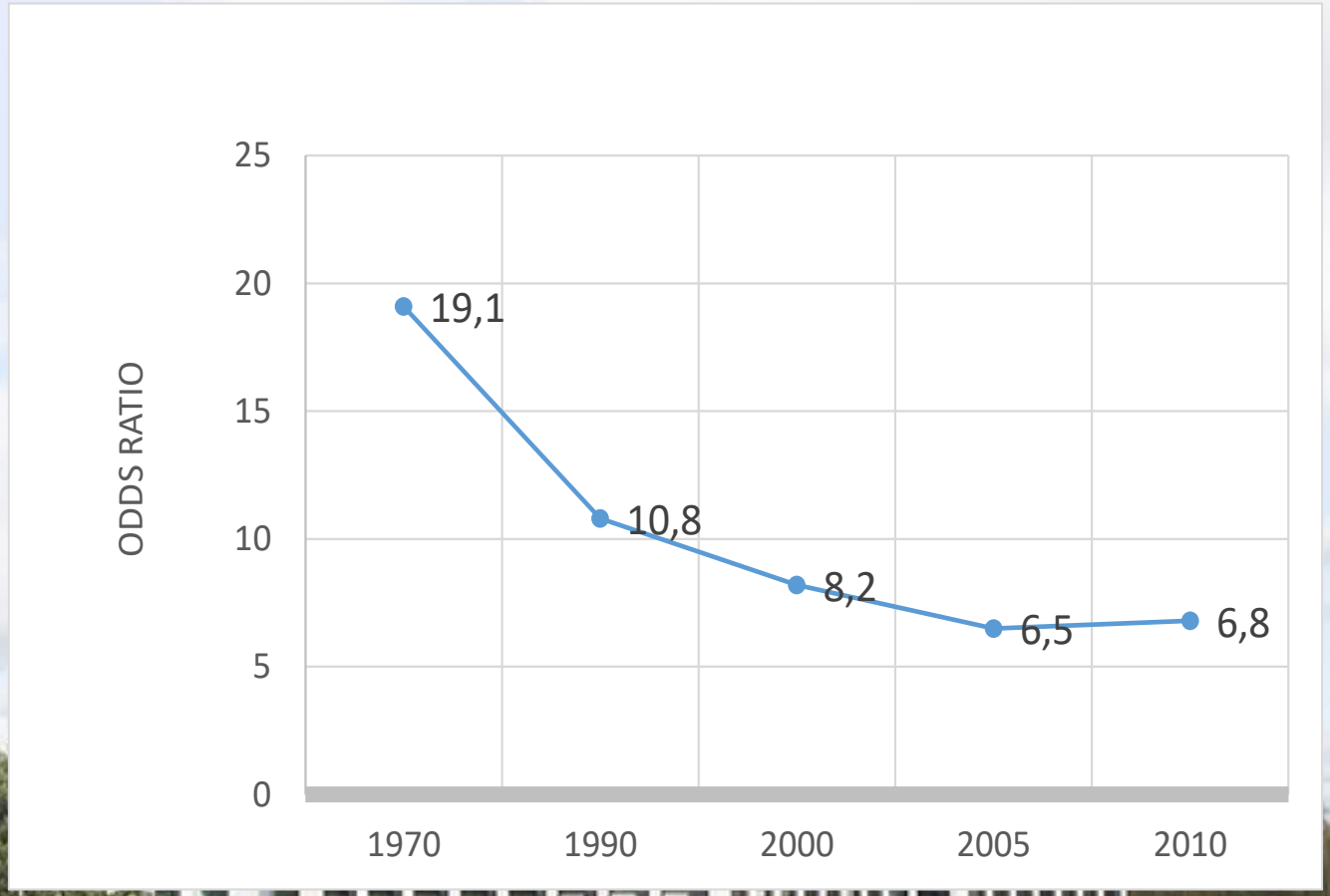
Figure 5. LEVEL OF TRUST FELT TOWARDS VARIOUS SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS (%).



Finnish Society for Scientific Information / Yhdyskuntatutkimus Oy 2019

Social mobility & equality in access to HE / by 24 years

Finns with one of the parents having a HE degree have **6,8 greated propability** to get access to HE as compared with those whose parents do not hold a HE degree. (Kivinen Osmo & Hedman, Juha 2016)



Discussion: the relationship between Finnish society and higher education?



The Role of state in Finland

- **State regulates the system of education**
- Legislation *(normative steering)*
- Main funder of the system (via performance agreements) *(economic steering)*
- Evaluations & accreditations & databanks (*information steering*)

Simultaneously:

- HEIs are autonomous (procedural autonomy)
- Academic freedom is quaranteed in the constitution
- ⇔**Trust in society**



Conclusions

- **Equality** & equity are both political objectives & core value in Finnish society
- **Generalized trust** describes social relationships in Finnish society and the dynamics of education system
- Higher education has been, and continues, to be important in the making of nation, national identities & national economy in Finland
- Historically, the core question has been and is: **What does (Finnish) society want and expect from education & higher education?**



Thank you for your attention!

