



## Education, Nation-State Formation and Religion: Comparing Ireland and Norway

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**Abstract** • This article compares the development of primary education in Ireland and Norway, from its establishment in the nineteenth century until present time. The aim of the article is to discuss how and to what degree nation-state formation after independence in Ireland (1922) and Norway (1905) created fundamental and persistent structures for the development of primary schooling, as well as the role that religion and nation-building played in this. Previous research on the development of Irish and Norwegian schooling and official documents and reports makes up the research material. The article demonstrates that, despite institutional secularisation around the world from the nineteenth century onwards, religious and national peculiarities in the establishment of primary education in Ireland and Norway continue to characterise, and to some extent explain, the differences in Irish and Norwegian education today.

**Keywords** • primary education, nation, religion, secularisation, comparative history

### Introduction

Ireland and Norway share a common past as union countries. Ireland was subordinate to Britain, and Norway was first in union with Denmark and Sweden within the Kalmar Union and thereafter with Sweden. This article will discuss how and to what degree nation-state formation following the independence of Ireland (1922) and Norway (1905) has created fundamental and persistent structures for the development of primary schooling, as well as the role that religion and nation-building have played in this. Ireland offers an interesting case study of the importance of religion in education, given the extent to which religion has been structurally embedded in the governance and development of education at all levels.<sup>1</sup> Over ninety per cent of Ireland's primary schools are still classified as Catholic. Although the symbolic domination of the Catholic Church is declining in most spheres of Irish society, the power of the Catholic Church is still unquestionable and Catholic religiosity and sentiment remain pervasive.<sup>2</sup> In contrast, the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church lost its hegemonic status in the governance of primary education during the nineteenth century when greater democracy and the involvement of teachers gained favour.<sup>3</sup> However, Lutheran Protestantism still remains a hegemonic position in the Norwegian

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1 Richard Byrne and Dymphna Devine, “Catholic Schooling with a Twist?: A Study of Faith Schooling in the Republic of Ireland During a Period of Detraditionalisation,” *Cambridge Journal of Education* 48, no. 4 (2018); Denis O’Sullivan, *Cultural Politics and Irish Education Since the 1950s: Policy Paradigms and Power* (Dublin, Ireland: Institute of Public Administration (IPA), 2005); Karin Fischer, *Schools and the Politics of Religion and Diversity in the Republic of Ireland: Separate but Equal?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2016).

2 Byrne and Devine (2018).

3 Alfred Oftedal Telhaug and Odd Asbjørn Mediås, *Grunnskolen som nasjonsbygger: fra statspietisme til nyliberalisme* (Oslo: Abstrakt forl., 2003).

society, and state and church did not separate until 2017.<sup>4</sup> A comparison of Ireland and Norway can illuminate the complex relationship between education, nation-state formation, religion and nation-building – and the effects these have had on education over the course of time.

Religion was a decisive factor in the early establishment of primary education in both Ireland and Norway. Since then, both countries have undergone a secularisation process (varying in pace and extent) that has tended to affect, first and foremost, the formal and organisational aspects of education, but not cultural elements such as faith, religious feeling and attitudes to the same extent. At the same time, in today's competitive knowledge society, both countries have undertaken to maintain an OECD-informed education policy with roots in American-Presbyterian sciento-social epistemology<sup>5</sup> and promising to qualify students for the labour market. Denis O'Sullivan refers to this development in Ireland as a transition from a theocentric to a mercantile paradigm.<sup>6</sup> The same may be true of Norway, as primary education in its earliest stage was referred to as “the daughter of the Church,” whereas the main goal of education in recent decades has been economic growth and qualification for work.<sup>7</sup>

The guiding thesis of this article is that, despite the institutional secularisation of Ireland and Norway that has endured since their establishment as constitutional nation-states and the establishment of their national education systems until the prevailing globalised educational thinking of today, deeply ingrained cultural traditions and ideas continue to affect educational reasoning, planning and organisation in ways that are specific to each country. The overall aim of this article is to show how this has developed differently in the two countries, and how persistent religious and national peculiarities still are in Irish and Norwegian education.

### *Method and guiding concepts*

This makes it a historical comparative project. Comparative education dates to the establishment of national education systems and the desire to learn from the experiences of others.<sup>8</sup> Since multiple approaches and sophisticatedly scientific methods have developed, however still the historical dimension and the potential of understanding the present through the past maintain. This article covers a long period of time, from the establishment of national education systems in the respective countries to the present, in which contextualised descriptions of historical antecedents are included. To do this I lean on David Phillips and Michele Schweisfurth, that claim that “A comparative study which neglects an analysis of the historical antecedents to any present-day phenomena in education is not covering the whole story and will lack

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4 Norway has had a state church based on the Evangelical Lutheran faith for more than a thousand years. According to the Constitution, the Norwegian church is still a national church and is subsidised as such.

5 Daniel Tröhler and Veronika Marici, “Data, Trust and Faith: The Unheeded Religious Roots of Modern Education Policy,” *Globalisation, Societies and Education* 19, no. 2 (2021).

6 O'Sullivan (2005).

7 Nina Volckmar, ed., *Utdanningshistorie: Grunnskolen som samfunnsintegrerende institusjon*, first edition (Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk, 2016).

8 David Phillips and Michele Schweisfurth, *Comparative and International Education: An Introduction to Theory, Method, and Practice* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014).

an important dimension to any explanatory power it might otherwise have.”<sup>9</sup>

The narratives of the development of primary education in the two countries are concentrated around central aspects such as nation-state formation, nation building, religion and secularisation, and their interconnection with education. Thus, the article can draw on previous research on comparative education, as these concepts have been central in comparative education from its emergence in the early years of the nineteenth century. I have not found any relevant specific comparative analyses on Ireland and Norway, but there are several comparative analyses that address and investigate the central concepts in this article. For this article I have found articles by Mette Buchardt and Daniel Tröhler especially useful.

In a Nordic perspective, Mette Buchardt is central in comparative research on religious education, state formation and secularisation. She has been most concerned with the distinction between *institutional secularisation*, the division of the church-state relation, and *cultural secularisation*, the sacralisation of the state.<sup>10</sup> To explain this distinction, Buchardt contrasts France and the Nordic countries. While France in its process of secularisation in the early twentieth century chose a radical division model in dividing religion and state, the Nordic countries chose an integration model, “where the state church of the monarch was changed into state-controlled so-called people’s churches – *Folkekirker*.”<sup>11</sup> Thus, the Nordic countries integrated and transformed religion into a national and cultural matter that supported social cohesion, a social glue for the state.<sup>12</sup> According to Buchardt, this manifested itself especially in the social democratic era in the aftermath of WWII.

Daniel Tröhler has been a great inspiration in the design of this article as he claims that the roles played by nation-state formation and religion are, in general, fundamental to understanding the development of educational thought, institutions and practices in different territories.<sup>13</sup> On the whole, Tröhler’s elaboration of concepts such as nation, nation-state, nation-building, nationalism and religion and their historical interconnections with education<sup>14</sup> has been useful in the analysis.

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9 Ibid.

10 Mette Buchardt, “Cultural Protestantism and Nordic Religious Education: An Incision in the Historic Layers Behind the Nordic Welfare State Model,” *Nordidactica – Journal of Humanities and Social Science Education* 5, no. 2 (2015), 131–65; Mette Buchardt, “The Political Project of Secularization and Modern Education Reform in ‘Provincialized Europe’: Historical Research in Religion and Education Beyond Secularization, R.I.P.,” *International Journal for the History of Education* 11, no. 2 (2021). Discussion, 164–70; Mette Buchardt, “Educating Migrant Children and Women in the Political Projects of the Welfare Nation-state and Secularisation. The Danish ‘Extreme Case’ in Light of the French,” in *World Yearbook of Education 2022*, ed. Daniel Tröhler, Nelli Piattoeva, and William F. Pinar (London and New York: Routledge, 2022); Mette Buchardt, “The Nordic Model and the Educational Welfare State in a European Light: Social Problem Solving and Secular-Religious Ambitions When Modernizing Sweden and France,” in *The Nordic Education Model in Context: Historic Developments and the Current Renegotiations*, ed. Daniel Tröhler, Bernadette Hörmann, Sverre Tveit, and Inga Bostad (New York: Routledge, 2023), 107–24.

11 Buchardt (2021), 167.

12 Buchardt (2023), 118.

13 Daniel Tröhler, “National Literacies, or Modern Education and the Art of Fabricating National Minds,” *Journal of Curriculum Studies* 52, no. 5 (2020); Daniel Tröhler, “Giving Language to Taboos: Nation and Religion in Modern Educational Reasoning,” *Nordic Journal of Educational History* 10, no. 2 (2023).

14 Tröhler (2020); Daniel Tröhler, “Education, Nationalism and the Ordering Construction of the

According to Tröhler, prerequisite to the establishment of modern constitutional nation-states in the nineteenth century was the idea of a nation claiming a cultural communality “politicised” to the extent that it could enter alliance with the modern state for mutual advantage.<sup>15</sup> The establishment of a national education system was crucial to the development of the idea of the nation as a cultural communality. Developing the idea of the nation in the minds of children (e.g., knowledge about the history of the nation, the national culture and, not least, the national language) became an important task for the school. Tröhler refers to this as “banal nationalism,” a concept outlined by Billig,<sup>16</sup> who distinguishes aggressive nationalism from “banal nationalism” as “everyday representations of the nation-(state) that build a common sense of national belonging among people.”<sup>17</sup> In the Norwegian research on educational history, the most prevalent concept in this process is nation-building.<sup>18</sup> However, while “a historic development of nationalism that started from an almost defiant national self-determination in the eighteenth century,” Tröhler claims, this led “to learning from strangers in the long nineteenth century, and result[ed] in the imperial minded instruction from others in the course of the twentieth century.”<sup>19</sup>

Thus, the article does not solely have a narrative character. According to the historian Paul Knudsen<sup>20</sup>, an analysis’s strength can be graded. If you have a research question that guides you, you are already analytical, although to a lesser degree. If you supplement this with concepts that further give direction to your research, you are more analytical.

The interconnected concepts accounted for above serve as a comparative lens to understand and explain the differences in Ireland and Norway’s nation-state formation and the further development of their education systems.

As mentioned, there is no specific *comparative* research on Irish and Norwegian school development, and consequently no comparative research on the relationship between education, religion, nation-state formation, and nation building. However, these topics are central elements in both general national-historical accounts and more specific national research literature on Irish and Norwegian education. Thus, this article relies heavily on earlier research on Irish<sup>21</sup> and Norwegian<sup>22</sup> school development and

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World,” in *World Yearbook 2022: Education, Schooling and the Global Universalism of Nationalism*, ed. Daniel Tröhler, Nelli Piattoeva, and William F. Pinar (London and New York: Routledge, 2022).

15 Tröhler (2023), 2.

16 Michael Billig, *Banal Nationalism* (London: Sage, 1995).

17 Tröhler (2020), 624.

18 Telhaug and Mediås (2003).

19 Daniel Tröhler, “From National Exceptionalism to National Imperialism: Changing Motives of Comparative Education,” *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* 43, no. 3 (2022).

20 Paul Knudsen, *Analytisk narrasjon. En innføring i historiefagets vitenskapsfilosofi* (Oslo: Fagbokforlaget, 2002).

21 See Donald Harman Akenson, *A Mirror to Kathleen’s Face: Education in Independent Ireland 1922–1960* (New York: Routledge, 2012, original 1975); John Coolahan, *Irish Education: Its History and Structure* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1981); Fischer (2016); Brian Fleming and Judith Harford, “Irish Education and the Legacy of O’Connell,” *History of Education* 45, no. 2 (2016); O’Sullivan (2005); Martina Relihan, “The Church of Ireland, the State and Education in Irish Language and Irish History, 1920–1950s,” in *Educating Ireland: Schooling and Social Change, 1700–2000*, ed. Deirdre Raftery and Karin Fischer (Kildare, Ireland: Irish Academic Press, 2014).

22 See Telhaug and Mediås (2003); Volckmar (2016); Nina Volckmar, “The Transformation of an Invented Tradition: The School Banner as a Symbol of Education,” *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* 61, no. 4 (2017); Harald Thuen, *Den norske skolen: Utdanningsystemets*

the recurring, complex and entangled relationship between nation-state formation, nation-building and religion. This extensive research literature, together with official documents and reports, constitutes valuable source material for this article. However, while this research is mostly national or nationally motivated, a comparison of Irish and Norwegian development needs to go further and offer comparative perspectives and analysis as accounted for above.

### *The structure of the article*

The article limits itself to the development of primary education. The main part of the article is the historical account of Irish and Norwegian school development through three phases, education before independence (education in union), education after independence (post-union education) and OECD informed education policy. Throughout, the development is concentrated around key historical antecedents that have had an impact on the relationship between nation-state formation, nation-building and religion, and the meaning of concepts themselves. While the first two phases were mostly national driven, the third was increasingly led by imperial instructions from others, like the OECD.<sup>23</sup> All three phases will end with a comparative summary related to research questions raised in this article. Finally, I will address some cases where the majority religion in both countries was challenged in a multi-cultural and multi-religious society. I end with some concluding remarks.

Before further exploring the development of Irish and Norwegian education, a brief historical backdrop of the two countries as union countries and their struggle for independence is necessary.

## **Historical backdrop**

### *Ireland*

Ireland during the eighteenth century was marked by the dominance of the Protestant Ascendancy and most of the land was owned by Anglican English landlords. However, the great majority of the Irish population was Roman Catholic and was excluded from power and land ownership under the Penal Laws.<sup>24</sup> Nominally, Ireland was an autonomous kingdom with its own parliament. In reality, it was a client state controlled by the king of Great Britain.<sup>25</sup> In 1801, the Acts of Union of 1800 were put into force and united the Kingdom of Ireland and Great Britain into the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland, and the Irish constituencies were transferred to Westminster.<sup>26</sup> During the second half of nineteenth century, Irish political life was dominated by nationalists who demanded a limited form of self-government within the UK union, known as Home Rule, and unionists on the other side who insisted on maintaining the union with the UK. Unionists feared the prospect of Home Rule being implemented in

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*historie* (Oslo: Abstrakt forlag, 2017); Harald Thuen and Nina Volckmar, "Postwar School Reforms in Norway," *The Oxford Research Encyclopedia, Education* (2020).

23 See Tröhler (2022).

24 The Penal Laws were a series of laws to uphold the establishment of the Church of England against Protestant nonconformists and Catholicism. They were introduced in Ireland with the Education Act of 1695.

25 Wikipedia, "History of Ireland (1691-1800)" (2022).

26 Fleming and Harford (2016).

1912, and civil war nearly erupted the year before the outbreak of the First World War. Home Rule was postponed until the war ended. However, in April 1916, republican separatists staged a rebellion in Dublin, known as the Easter Rising, in which they demanded Irish independence and an autonomous republic.<sup>27</sup> The Easter Rising was crushed by English soldiers, and many Irish rebels were killed or imprisoned in Kilmainham Gaol in Dublin.

Exhausted after the First World War, the British government could no longer resist Irish opposition and entered into negotiations in July 1921. The Anglo-Irish Treaty was signed on 6 December 1921, and from 1922 onwards twenty-six of Ireland's thirty-two counties proclaimed themselves as belonging to the Irish Free State. The northern counties opted out, instead accepting terms according to Home Rule and upholding their close relationship with England.

The 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty and the proclamation of the Irish Free State (for the twenty-six counties concerned) were succeeded by a bitter, devastating civil war from June 1922 to April 1923. People were deeply divided over whether to accept the treaty. The defenders of the republic would not accept it because it made Ireland a dominion of the British Commonwealth, more independent than under Home Rule but still with limited sovereignty. Critics of the Republicans, however, claimed not to accept the treaty's adoption because it was profoundly anti-democratic.<sup>28</sup> Eventually, the defenders of the Anglo-Irish Treaty and the Irish Free State (Free State soldiers) curbed the Republicans (IRA). However, the violence and executions continued for years.

The Irish Free State was a constitutional monarchy over which the British monarch reigned until the Constitution of Ireland came into effect in 1937. Thereafter the Irish Free State was called Éire in Irish (and Ireland in English), with its own president, a more powerful prime minister (Taoiseach) and a government. However, the constitution did not declare Ireland a republic, and the British monarch continued to reign in theory and in international and diplomatic relations.<sup>29</sup>

### *Norway*

In 1397, the Kingdoms of Sweden, Denmark and Norway were unified in the Kalmar Union, in which Denmark was the dominant partner. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, Sweden permanently left the union, leaving Norway as a dependent subject of Denmark. The Danish-Norwegian king abolished the Catholic Church in Denmark and Norway and introduced the Reformation in both countries in 1537. In 1660, the Danish-Norwegian king, Fredrik III, imposed absolute monarchy and concentrated all authority over the territory in Copenhagen. In the aftermath of the Napoleonic Wars (1802–1815), in which Denmark-Norway had been on the losing side, Denmark, according to the 1814 Treaty of Kiel, had to surrender Norway to Sweden. In Norwegian history, this union with Denmark that endured until 1814 is referred to as “400 years of night.”<sup>30</sup>

However, Norway avoided direct rule by Sweden, because Prince Christian Frederik

27 National Archives, *The Treaty 1921: Records from the Archives* (Dublin National Archives, 2021).

28 Diarmaid Ferriter, *The Transformation of Ireland 1900–2000* (London: Profile Books Ltd, 2005), 237–53.

29 Ferriter (2005), 369–70.

30 Volckmar (2017).

of Denmark summoned a constitutional assembly that settled on the constitutional administration of the country. The Constitution of Norway was signed at Eidsvoll on 17 May 1814. The Constitution was founded on the principle of sovereignty of the people and gave Norway the political status of a *constitutional state* in relation to Sweden. Thus, Norway had a large degree of home rule (self-government), although it was in union with Sweden and thus subject to the Swedish king. According to Bjarne Hodne, in 1814 Norway was not yet a *nation-state*.<sup>31</sup> To be a nation-state, Norway needed shared consciousness of a specific national culture and identity. The development and growth in awareness of a specific Norwegian national culture was thus a prerequisite to its final liberation from Sweden and complete independence in 1905.<sup>32</sup> The years prior to 1905 were marked by conflict between the two countries, but war was avoided in favour of negotiations and the peaceful dissolution of the union in 1905. In retrospect, the dissolution of the Swedish-Norwegian union can be characterised as a political and diplomatic masterpiece.<sup>33</sup>

## Education in union *Ireland*

Primary schooling in Ireland was initially ad hoc and unsystematic.<sup>34</sup> As a consequence of the Penal Laws (especially the Acts of 1695, 1704 and 1709), which sought to ensure the hegemony of the Anglican Church of Ireland and to diminish the status of the Catholics, Catholic education was proscribed. Catholic teachers then began to teach surreptitiously or, as the folklore puts it, under the sunny side of a hedge.<sup>35</sup> Thus, these schools were called “hedge schools.” Eventually they moved indoors, into private houses or barns, but were still referred to as hedge schools. They were fee-paying schools, run mainly but not exclusively by male teachers. Although proscribed by law, they immediately won the strong support of parents.<sup>36</sup> The majority of Irish children went to these unofficial hedge schools and did so well into the post-penal era.<sup>37</sup> Besides the hedge schools, there were also schools for the poor founded by Irish congregations such as the Presentation Order and various Protestant education societies.<sup>38</sup> In 1824, there were 9,352 hedge schools, 1,727 Protestant schools of various types and 46 schools attached to Irish congregations.<sup>39</sup>

Thus, primary schooling in Ireland prior to Ireland’s entry into the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland in 1801 was highly fragmentary and unsystematic. Although

31 Bjarne Hodne, *Norsk nasjonalkultur: En kulturpolitisk oversikt* (Oslo: Universitetsforl., 2002).

32 Hodne (2002).

33 Francis Sejersted, “Unionsoppløsningen i 1905,” in *Store norske leksikon* (2019).

34 Fleming and Harford (2016).

35 Antonia McManus, “The Irish Hedge School and Social Change,” in *Education Ireland. Schooling and Social Change, 1700–2000*, ed. Deirdre Raftery and Karin Fisher (Kildare, Ireland: Irish Academic Press, 2014).

36 McManus (2014).

37 Fleming and Harford (2016).

38 Catherine Nowland-Roebuck, “The Presentation Order and National Education in Nineteenth Century Ireland,” in *Educating Ireland: Schooling and Social Change, 1700–2000*, ed. Deirdre Raftery and Karin Fisher (Kildare, Ireland: Irish Academic Press, 2014).

39 Nowland-Roebuck (2014).

many other European countries promoted a system of national primary education in the nineteenth century, England was reluctant to involve the state in education,<sup>40</sup> quite in contrast to Scotland, for instance. Over the years, several attempts were made to unify and frame an Irish national education in an effort to bring Protestant and Catholic children together. Finally, a national system of primary education was established in 1831.<sup>41</sup> The decisive event leading to this was a letter from the then chief secretary of Ireland, Edward Stanley (the Stanley Letter).<sup>42</sup> According to Loughheed, Ireland was one of the first places in the British Empire to experience substantial centralised educational reform. The hope was to introduce a non-denominational centralised system of primary education to unite children of all creeds in the same classroom so as to reduce sectarian tension.<sup>43</sup> Crucial to the establishment of a national school system were the increasing power of the Catholic Church in the 1820s and political freedom for Catholics within the terms of the Emancipation Act of 1829.<sup>44</sup>

However, the non-denominational national education system of 1831 was introduced without any legislation being passed. The Stanley provision of 1831 relied solely on a letter requesting the Duke of Leinster to act as Chairman of the National Board, and after 1831 the national education system was creaking with sectarian divisions.<sup>45</sup> The Presbyterian Church was the first to oppose the system. By the middle of the century, although the education system remained nominally non-denominational, religious segregation was more and more widespread and the schools were controlled by the churches.<sup>46</sup> Eventually, by the end of the nineteenth century, the Catholic Church had gained control over education, and the close alliance between education and religion (i.e. between education and the Catholic Church as the majority religion) was established.<sup>47</sup> This was the situation prior to the establishment of the Irish Free State in 1922. Thus, the stage was set for what turned out to be a long-running clash between the state and the churches.<sup>48</sup>

### Norway

Public schooling in Norway dates all the way back to the Danish-Norwegian union and the autocratic Danish-Norwegian king Christian VI. In the beginning of the eighteenth century, he implemented State Pietism (pietistic Lutheranism) in both countries and introduced mandatory confirmation in 1736. Confirmation was required by law to become a fully-fledged member of society, get married and take over property.

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40 Fleming and Harford (2016).

41 Coolahan (1981); Fleming and Harford (2016); Kevin Loughheed, "After the Manner of the Irish Schools': The Influence of the Irish National Education in the British Empire," *Journal of Historical Geography* 60 (2018).

42 Loughheed (2018); Fleming and Harford (2016); Conor O'Mahony, "Ireland," in *Balancing Freedom, Autonomy and Accountability in Education*, ed. Charles Glenn, Jan De Groof, and Cara Stillings (Nijmegen, Netherlands: Wolf Legal Publishers (WLP), 2012).

43 Loughheed (2018).

44 Tony Lyons, "Thomas Wyse and Non-denominational Education in Ireland, 1830–1845," in *Educating Ireland: Schooling and Social Change, 1700–2000*, ed. Deirdre Raftery and Karin Fischer (Kildare, Ireland: Irish Academic Press, 2014).

45 Lyons (2014).

46 Fischer (2016), 13.

47 Fischer (2016).

48 Coolahan (1981).



To be confirmed, one had to be able to read the Bible and demonstrate sufficient knowledge of Christianity. The Ten Commandments and Luther's Small Catechism were especially important. In support of this requirement, in 1739 Christian VI issued a decree on compulsory education for all children (*Forordning om skolerne på landet*). The main purpose of primary schooling was to raise the religious and moral level of the population. Reading and Christianity were the only compulsory school subjects.<sup>49</sup> The school was to be governed by the Church and administered by the clergy, but the peasantry had to pay for the schooling of their children. This triggered loud protests, and in 1741 Christian VI was compelled to issue an edict giving rural districts greater power.<sup>50</sup>

The decree of 1739 was intended to result in a common school for the children of both wealthy farmers and crofters, and for both girls and boys. There were no other school facilities in rural areas, not even for the children of wealthy parents. The rural schools were mostly ambulatory, meaning that teaching was concentrated and located on the largest farms, and led by ambulatory teachers with scant qualifications. The children often had a long and arduous journey to school.<sup>51</sup> In the cities, however, the situation was different. Here, the school was segmented according to sharp social divisions. The children of wealthy parents could attend either private fee-paying schools or so-called Latin schools, originally associated with cathedrals and exclusively for boys. Most children were unable to pay for schooling and were directed to the compulsory schools, referred to in the city as "poor schools."<sup>52</sup>

Given Norway's independent role in the union with Sweden, in the nineteenth century it was able to develop its own education system. The Constitution of 1814 confirmed the sovereignty of the people and created the basis for a different balance of power in society. Right from the beginning, a separate ministry was established for church, education and culture.<sup>53</sup> Democracy was further developed and realised through laws on municipal self-rule in 1837, the introduction of parliamentarism in 1884 and the decision on general suffrage for men in 1898 and for women in 1913.<sup>54</sup>

In the process, the church and its personnel gradually lost control over the schools, the tasks and purpose of which needed to go beyond providing children with a religious and moral education. A true democracy required an enlightened people who could participate in society's development and thus legitimatise the political willingness to improve schooling for the commonalty (*allmueskolen*). In this respect, the Rural School Act (*allmueskoleloven*) of 1860 was a turning point.<sup>55</sup> This act introduced the principle of state-owned, state-funded permanent schools and prescribed a minimum of twelve weeks of tuition per year. Section 1 of the Rural School Act, and every education act since, is an object clause governing all activities in school, including the role of religion. Even if Section 1 of the act of 1860 continued to confirm the prominent role of the

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49 Telhaug and Mediås (2003); Volckmar (2016); Thuen (2017).

50 Thuen and Volckmar (2020); Telhaug and Mediås (2003).

51 Volckmar (2016); Thuen (2017).

52 Thuen and Volckmar (2020).

53 Kim Helsvig, *Reform og rutine: Kunnskapsdepartementets historie 1945–2017* (Oslo: Pax Forlag A/S, 2017).

54 Thuen and Volckmar (2020).

55 Volckmar (2016), 31–32; Thuen (2017), 62–68; Thuen and Volckmar (2020).

Evangelical Lutheran Church in Norwegian primary schooling, developments in the nineteenth century implied secularisation.<sup>56</sup> The object clause has remained a subject of controversy and negotiation ever since.

The next milestone in the development of the public schools was the Primary School Act (*folkeskolelovene*) of 1889. For the first time, Norway had common legislation for primary schooling in rural areas and in the cities, and, in 1896, the first five years of primary schooling were made common to all. This expansive piece of legislation placed Norway in the lead internationally in the development of common schooling for all.<sup>57</sup> In addition to giving pupils a general education that would enable them to participate in society, the schools considered it their responsibility to teach Norwegian history, Norwegian culture and the Norwegian language. Despite the union with Sweden, Norway was a nation-state in constitutional terms, but it still had to create a national identity in order to become a nation-state in terms of culture.<sup>58</sup> The primary schools and the teachers played an important role in this regard. Among other things, the teachers took the initiative to organise the popular annual celebration of the Constitution on 17 May and to campaign for full liberation, with forbidden Norwegian flags and national-romantic Norwegian songs.<sup>59</sup>

### *Comparative summary*

Thus, the status of primary education following independence from the union was very different in Ireland and Norway. In the Irish case primary education was fully state-funded but not state-owned or state-managed. The national system of primary education was meant to be non-denominational; however, the different churches – Catholic, Anglican, Presbyterian – gradually gained control over the schools, which led to an increasingly religious segregation. At the time of independence, the Catholic Church as majority religion was a powerful force in Irish education. In Norway primary education became state-owned and state-funded in 1860, however the Evangelical Lutheran Church maintained its strong position when it came to the school's content even though the school's content was expanded to include Norwegian history, -language and -culture developed in the ongoing nation-building and liberation process from Sweden.

Against this background, it is reasonably to say that the Norwegian development of primary school from a church-owned *allmueskole* to a state-owned *folkeskole* during the nineteenth century underwent an institutional secularisation process. At the same time, it is reasonably to say that the Norwegian primary school also started a cultural secularisation process as the curriculum of primary schooling was expanded to include the newly developed rich material of national-romantic culture. However, this did not prevent the Evangelical Lutheran Church from maintaining its strong cultural position. In Ireland, on the other hand, the Catholic Church in this phase, emerged as the dominating power in Irish primary schooling as both the owner and manager

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56 Karl-Arne Korseberg, "Skolens verdigrunnlag," in *Utdanningshistorie: Grunnskolen som samfunnsintegrerende institusjon*, ed. Nina Volckmar (Oslo: Gyldendal Akademisk, 2016).

57 Andy Green, *Education and State Formation: Europe, East Asia and the USA*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2013).

58 Hodne (2002).

59 Volckmar (2017).

of the schools. Even if Irish primary schooling was state-funded, it was a highly non-secular education system.

## Post union education

### *Ireland*

According to Karin Fisher,<sup>60</sup> neither the 1921 Anglo-Irish Treaty nor the Constitution (1937) brought about any change in the structure of the Irish education system, despite the establishment of the Ministry of Education in June 1924.<sup>61</sup> On the contrary, the alliance between education and religion and between the Irish population and the Catholic Church was solidified by the new Irish state.<sup>62</sup> The new Irish state did not challenge the power of the Catholic Church in education. According to Fleming and Harford, the Catholic Church maintained its dominant role in Irish education for the first four decades after Irish independence irrespective of the political party in power. At the primary level, the Church's power was ensured through the vesting of local-level management control in parish priests.<sup>63</sup>

Accordingly, the Irish Free State presented itself as both Catholic *and* Gaelic. Catholic identity and Gaelic traditions were seen as the roots of the popular vision of Irish history and identity, as the hallmark of nationhood and as the basis for independent statehood.<sup>64</sup> The schools were expected to help renew an Irish culture defined as Gaelic-Catholic, and, immediately after the proclamation of the Free Irish State in 1922, the Irish language was incorporated into the school curriculum.<sup>65</sup> However, at the time of the Irish Free State proclamation, the majority language was English; in 1911, only 17.6 per cent of the population spoke Irish.<sup>66</sup> The schools were now all obliged to introduce tuition in Irish for at least one hour per day.<sup>67</sup> Protestant schools opposed the dominance of the Irish language, and antipathy towards teaching of Irish was concentrated chiefly in counties close to the border with Northern Ireland.

What mattered after the establishment of the Irish Free State was what the schools taught rather than the changes in school management. Fischer simply states that; indeed, the 1921 Treaty was essentially a secular document.<sup>68</sup> Article 2 of the treaty states that the source of all political power and all legislative authority is to be found in the people of Ireland. Article 8, the only article devoted to religion, forbids the state from privileging any religion. According to Fisher, the state guaranteed both religious pluralism and the right to refuse all religious instruction. And, in accordance with article 10, all citizens of the Irish state had the right to free elementary education.<sup>69</sup>

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60 Fisher (2016).

61 Coolahan (1981).

62 Fischer (2016), 14.

63 Brian Fleming and Judith Harford, "Irish Educational Policy in the 1960s: A Decade of Transformation," *History of Education* 43, no. 5 (2014).

64 Coolahan (1981); Fischer (2016).

65 Relihan (2014); Coolahan (1981); Fischer (2016).

66 Akenson (1975, 2012).

67 Relihan (2014).

68 Fischer (2016).

69 *Ibid.*

The Constitution, however, incorporates Catholic principles throughout.<sup>70</sup> The main articles addressing education are Article 42 (Education) and Article 44 (Religion). Article 44 explicitly recognises the “special position” of the Catholic Church as the guardian of the faith professed by the great majority of the citizens.<sup>71</sup> However, the Constitution is reluctant to recognise the state’s role as educator in recognition of the family’s primacy in providing education for their children. Article 42 addresses parental rights and freedom of choice. It protects the right to establish private schools and to educate children at home. It expressly prohibits state monopoly over the provision of education. Article 44 provides that state funding for denominational schools must be non-discriminatory and protect the right of children to attend a school that receives public funds without attending religious instruction at that school.<sup>72</sup>

### Norway

Since its liberation from Sweden in 1905, Norway has been a unitary parliamentary constitutional monarchy.<sup>73</sup> Norway’s next educational reform came in the years before World War Two. In the 1930s, the Labour Party surged ahead to become the leading political party, a position it maintained well into the 1960s. The Labour Party launched the idea of seven-year mandatory comprehensive schooling (*enhetsskolen*, or “unity school”) as the foundation for all upper-secondary education. This was accomplished through the Primary School Act of 1936 and a mandatory national curriculum, the Normal Plan of 1939.<sup>74</sup> On 9 April 1940, Norway was occupied by Germany, bringing the further development of Norwegian schools to a halt. The idea of comprehensive schooling and the reform pedagogy approach of the Normal Plan were both anathema to Nazi ideology. The German occupying forces, together with Vidkun Quisling, who is considered a traitor, attempted to Nazify schools. However, many teachers resisted and obstructed this attempt.<sup>75</sup> The school’s foundation on the values of freedom and democracy and on Lutheran and Christian-humanist heritage were at stake.<sup>76</sup> In the aftermath, the teachers were collectively highly praised for this.

The political climate in Norway immediately after WWII was marked by cooperation and cross-party political consensus, and a cross-party coalition government was formed. However, the Labour Party soon assumed power in government and launched a social democratic welfare state model, three cornerstones of which were free health care, a public security system and free education from primary school to university.<sup>77</sup>

Norway was, in the first decades after World War Two, characterised by strong state control and, not least, strong trust in state authorities. The same applies in the area of education policy.<sup>78</sup> Following World War II and the experience of Nazi ideology, it was agreed that aggressive nationalism had to be avoided in favour of the democratic

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70 Ibid.

71 Ibid.

72 O’Mahony (2012).

73 Regjeringen, *Change of Government in Norway* (Regjeringen, 2013).

74 Telhaug and Mediås (2003); Volckmar (2016); Thuen (2017); Thuen and Volckmar (2020).

75 Thuen and Volckmar (2020).

76 Vegard Kvam, *Skolefronten: Einar Høigård og norske læreres kamp mot nazismen* (Oslo: Scandinavian Academic Press, 2013).

77 Thuen and Volckmar (2020).

78 Telhaug and Mediås (2003).

development of the Norwegian nation-state. It was acceptable to celebrate national freedom after five years of occupation, and Norwegian culture and language were still self-evident content in the schools, but democratic upbringing and solidarity had gained importance in the curriculum.<sup>79</sup> Although Norway retained the state church order, the process of institutional secularisation that begun in the nineteenth century continued throughout the twentieth century. The dispute centred on Section 1 (the object clause) of the education act and Christianity's ranking as a school subject. The institutional dispute was particularly fierce on the lead-up to the negotiations on the object clause in the Primary School Act of 1959, with a strong, loud Pietist Christian lay movement opposing the notion that a democratic upbringing should be equated to, and even put before, a Christian upbringing. In the final object clause, democratic upbringing was ranked before Christian upbringing.<sup>80</sup> In the Primary and Lower Secondary School Act of 1969, a Christian education at school was no longer part of the Church's baptismal instruction.<sup>81</sup>

### *Comparative summary*

Post union education in Norway cemented the institutionalised secularisation through cross-party political consensus, a strong state and the establishment of the social democratic welfare state model, in which state-funded, state-owned and state-managed education was an important cornerstone. Furthermore, democratic upbringing, despite resistance from the Pietist Christian lay movement, was by the end of the 1950s ranked before Christian upbringing and from 1969 Christian education at school was no longer part of the Church's baptismal instruction. However, it was not a sharp division between the state and the church. If we lend an ear to Buchardt<sup>82</sup>, the Norwegian Evangelical Lutheran Church was rather changed into a state-controlled people's church – a *Folkekirke*, and religion was turned into a national and cultural matter that supported social cohesion, what Buchardt names sacralisation.

The Catholic Church's growing dominance during the nineteenth century was not challenged by the establishment of the Irish Free State. Primary education is still state funded, however, denominational and non-secular. However, the Irish Free State presented itself as both Catholic *and* Gaelic. That is, Catholicism and Gaelic culture and language were seen as the roots for Irish history and a national identity. Gaelic culture integrated into Catholicism to support social cohesion in the new Irish Free State can also be named as sacralization. According to O'Connor, the Irish education system in this period was essentially a static system for a static society,<sup>83</sup> with a constructed historical awareness that interwove Gaelicism and Catholicism, the cultural thesis about what it meant to be, nationally, an Irish person.

79 Nina Volckmar, "Knowledge and Solidarity: The Norwegian Socialdemocratic Project in a Period of Change, 1945–2000," *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* 52, no. 1 (2008); Volckmar (2017).

80 Volckmar, ed. (2016); Korseberg (2016).

81 Korseberg (2016).

82 Buchardt (2021); Buchardt (2023).

83 Muiris O'Connor, "Investment in Edification: Reflections on Irish Education Policy Since Independence," *Irish Educational Studies* 33, no. 2 (2014).

## OECD informed education policy and governance

Internationally, the American economist Theodor Schultz is considered to have originated human capital theory, which is the correlation between a population's level of education and economic growth. This way of thinking made an international breakthrough in Schultz's analysis of American conditions in 1959.<sup>84</sup> Acceptance of this correlation would prove to have major consequences, not least for the OECD's education policy in the decades to come and well into the millennium. Since the late 1980s, supranational organisations such as the EU, OECD and WTO have played an increasingly important role as premise providers and coordinating bodies in education, and, of special importance, in implementing the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2000.<sup>85</sup> PISA is an international comparative survey that ranks education systems around the world, including the Irish and Norwegian systems.

This "imperial minded instruction from others" also affected the further development of primary education in Ireland and Norway from the 1960s on, where especially OECD is an important premise provider.

### Ireland

Ireland experienced an economic crisis in the late 1950s and subsequent unemployment and emigration. At the time, OECD worked on an analysis of education systems in several countries, in which one of the few willing to participate, according to Fleming and Harford, was the Irish government.<sup>86</sup> It resulted in the 1965 OECD report *Investment in Education*, which implied a turning point in Irish education, the breakthrough of human capital theory and a consensus that education was a key factor in national economic development. It also implied that the dominance of the Catholic Church in Irish education was finally challenged by the Ministry of Education.<sup>87</sup>

The Irish report documented, among other things, the lack of opportunity for poorer children to proceed to secondary and higher education and called for comprehensive schooling until age fifteen designed to offer a broad curriculum combining both academic and vocational streams.<sup>88</sup> On this basis, the education minister at the time, O'Malley, announced his commitment to provide all children with full educational opportunities from primary school to university. O'Malley has been praised for his political skill in getting the Catholic Church to enter the free tuition scheme at most of their secondary schools.<sup>89</sup> Fleming and Harford state that O'Malley's achievements during this period are such that he has been described as "the folk hero of Irish

84 Kjell Eide, *Økonomi og utdanningspolitikk: Økonomisk forskningsompremiss for utdanningspolitikken* (Oslo: Utredningsinstituttet for forskning og høyere utdanning, 1995).

85 Gustav Karlsen, "Internasjonale aktører som premissgivere for norsk utdanningspolitikk med særlig vekt på OECD," in *Reformideer i norsk skole: Spredning, oversettelse og implementering*, ed. Kjell Arne Røvik, Vidar Eilertsen and Eli Moksnes (Oslo: Cappelen Damm Akademisk, 2014); Ulf Blossing, Gunn Imsen, and Leif Moos, *The Nordic Education Model: 'A School for All' Encounters Neo-Liberal Policy* (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2014).

86 Fleming and Harford (2014).

87 John Walsh, "Ministers, Bishops and the Changing Balance of Power in Irish Education 1950–70," *Irish Historical Studies* 38, no. 149 (2012).

88 O'Connor (2014).

89 Walsh (2012).

education.<sup>90</sup> Thus, the power of the state, strongly backed by the OECD-report, was enhanced in the 1960s. This did not, however, amount to any fundamental undermining of denominational education, which remained a fundamental characteristic of Irish primary and post-primary education for the rest of the twentieth century. Nor did it lead to state control over the schools.<sup>91</sup>

There was no legal framework specifically for education in Ireland until the Education Act of 1998.<sup>92</sup> The Education Act of 1998<sup>93</sup> was enacted to provide a detailed framework for regulating the funding of the primary and secondary education systems. Furthermore, it requires schools to establish and maintain an admission policy that provides maximum accessibility to the school and respects the principle of equality.<sup>94</sup> The Education Act of 1998 was followed by the Education Welfare Act 2000, which addresses issues relating to school attendance up to the age of sixteen, and the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act 2004.

After decades of under-development and stagnation, Ireland at the end of the twentieth century had the fastest-growing economy in the world and had become known as the Celtic Tiger.<sup>95</sup> However, only the few benefited from the economic wealth and the gap between the rich and the poor widened. In a United Nations Development Program report published in 2002, Ireland had the highest level of poverty in the Western world outside of the United States, despite being ranked the fourth-richest country in the world.<sup>96</sup> In the first PISA results in 2000, fifteen-year-olds in Ireland came fifth in reading literacy (the second-highest ranking in EU) and close to average in mathematical and scientific literacy.<sup>97</sup> Ireland has continued to perform well above average on the PISA tests, and in this respect the Irish education system has been highly successful.<sup>98</sup> Thus, an OECD-informed education policy, based on neoliberal principle like parental choice and competition has strengthened state governance while also fitting well with the Catholic Church as the owner and manager of the schools.<sup>99</sup> Despite the strong position of the Catholic Church in Irish education, the state and teachers incidentally did gain control over the content of schooling after the *Investment in Education* report. In 1971, primary education was given a new curriculum (*Curaclam na Bunscoile*) that differed from the curriculum reforms following independence and their sole focus on Catholic religion, Gaelic culture and language. The 1971 curriculum<sup>100</sup> was child-centred and progressivist and it marked a new direction in

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90 Fleming and Harford (2014), 641.

91 Walsh (2012).

92 Relihan (2014).

93 Government of Ireland, Education Act (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1998).

94 O'Mahony (2012).

95 Ferriter (2005); EU funds contributed to the growing economy.

96 Ferriter (2005).

97 OECD, *Knowledge and Skills for Life: First Results from the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2000* (OECD, 2001).

98 OECD, *Education Policy Outlook: Ireland* (OECD, 2020).

99 See also Geraldine Mooney Simmie and Silva Edling, "Ideological Governing Forms in Education and Teacher Education: A Comparative Study Between Highly Secular Sweden and Highly Non-Secular Republic of Ireland," *Nordic Journal of Studies in Educational Policy* 2, no. 1 (2016), 32041.

100 Department of Education, *Primary School Curriculum: Teacher's Handbook, Part 1* (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1971).

educational thought and practice in Ireland.<sup>101</sup> In 1999, the primary school curriculum was revised,<sup>102</sup> and, as Fischer sees it, the new curriculum marked a further significant step towards wider acceptance of cultural pluralism in Irish society.<sup>103</sup> Thus, the progressive transformation of the curriculum stands in contradiction with the Catholic mono-denominational nature of most schools.

### Norway

As early as 1951, Parliamentary Secretary – and future minister of education – Helge Sivertsen argued in favour of seeing education as an economic investment.<sup>104</sup> Clearly, he saw this as an important argument in support of investing in and spending (more) money on education. This was an argument made for implementing the comprehensive school reforms in the 1950s and 1960s and expanding seven-year primary schooling to nine-year primary and lower-secondary schooling. It was first implemented as a pilot project in 1959 and as a country-wide structure through the Primary and Lower Secondary Education Act of 1969. This was the largest and most important educational project in the early post-war decades, and it mirrored the Nordic ideal of (the Lutheran Norwegian) *folk* as a form of national identity and unity. The reform was inspired by international trends, especially developments in the United States and Sweden. Sweden, a neutral country during WWII started transforming its primary schooling into nine-year primary and lower-secondary schooling several years before Norway.<sup>105</sup> At this point there is no evidence of direct influence of OECD or any other international organisations on Norwegian education.

In the late 1980s, the Norwegian government initiated an OECD expert evaluation of the Norwegian education system.<sup>106</sup> The report criticized previous developments of the Norwegian education system and thus legitimized a comprehensive reform of the entire education system during the 1990s. The correlation between level of education in the population and economic growth and competitiveness was kept at a particularly high level. First step was the introduction of management by objectives as the overarching governance principle in the education sector in 1991. The aim was to weaken the state's regulation of details and to transfer more authority and responsibility over to the local level.<sup>107</sup> School age was lowered to six and nine-year primary and secondary schooling was extended to ten years.<sup>108</sup> In addition, a statutory right to three years of upper-secondary education was implemented.

The educational reforms of the 1990s reintroduced the knowledge school but not in a

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101 Fischer (2016); Jim Gleeson, "Evolution of Irish Curriculum Culture: Understandings, Policy, Reform and Change," *Irish Educational Studies* 41, no. 4 (2022).

102 Department of Education and Science (DES), Primary School Curriculum (Dublin: Stationery Office, 1999).

103 Fischer (2016).

104 Volckmar (2008); Volckmar (2016), 80–81.

105 Thuen and Volckmar (2020).

106 OECD, *OECD-vurdering av norsk utdanningspolitikk. Norsk rapport til OECD. Ekspertvurdering fra OECD*. (Oslo: Aschehoug, 1989).

107 Gunn Imsen and Nina Volckmar. "The Norwegian School for All: Historical Emergence and Neoliberal Confrontation," in *The Nordic Education Model: "A School for All" Encounters Neo-liberal Policy*, ed. Ulf Blossing, Gunn Imsen, and Leif Moos (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2014).

108 Volckmar (2008); Thuen and Volckmar (2020).



way that was in line with prevailing international ideologies and the testing regime that was about to commence. Norway had not yet started using national tests, and when the first PISA test was published in 2001, Norway performed close to the OECD average, far worse than expected. The newly elected Conservative government made political use of the results to launch a far-reaching new reform of the Norwegian education system, symptomatically called the Knowledge Promotion (*Kunnskapsløftet*). The new minister of education, Kristin Clemet, announced a system change in the governance of education policy, in which governance would be based on clear national goals, a clear allocation of responsibility and increased local freedom of action.<sup>109</sup> Thus, the municipalities became the owners of primary and lower-secondary schools, and the county-municipalities the owners of secondary schools. In accordance with this shift in governance, the reform introduced a national quality assessment system and a new curriculum that emphasised competence, learning outcomes and skills, (while the previous curriculum was very detailed and content based, telling what was to be taught, when and how). Thus, Norway adapted to the new international ideology of evidence-based management through objectives and quality measurements.<sup>110</sup> The aim of schooling was no longer national integration but high performance in learning outcomes and skills.

The reform also emphasised a greater pressure on diversity and adapting education individually for each people.<sup>111</sup> However, all along, Norway upheld a strict privatisation policy in education. The Free School Act opened the way for the establishment of more private schools, but it was and still is prohibited to make money from private school operations in Norway. Only 3,3% of children attend private primary and lower-secondary schools.<sup>112</sup>

### *Comparative analysis*

Ireland experienced direct influence from the OECD on its education policy at an earlier time than Norway. The Investment in Education report from 1965 was a turning point in Irish school development. However, from the late 1980s, OECD has increasingly functioned as a premise provider for the national education policy in both Ireland and Norway. That is, education is brought in line with international neo-liberal education policy, implementing management by objectives, decentralisation, parental choice, competition and testing. For both countries this implies a move towards increased institutional secularisation. In the Norwegian case institutional secularisation started in the nineteenth century, however increased at the breakthrough of human capital theory and the involvement of international actors in education. Also, in Ireland the OECD involvement in education the last decades has brought about further steps towards increased institutional secularisation. However, it did not pose any threat to the denominational character of Irish education and the Catholic Church as the owner of most primary schools, despite a more child-centred, progressivist curriculum.

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109 Utdannings- og forskningsdepartementet, St.meld.nr. 30 (2003–2004) Kultur for læring (2004).

110 Thuen and Volckmar (2020).

111 Imsen and Volckmar (2014).

112 OECD. *Education Policy Outlook: Norway*. (OECD, 2020).

### Multi-cultural and multi-religious pluralism and the majority religion

Both Ireland and Norway have the last decades accepted many immigrants with a different cultural and religious background than the majority population in the two countries. The aim of the OECD involvement in education is to enhance the level of knowledge in the population, and thereby find ways to include the immigrants in society and education especially. This is a large field of research, which there is no space to go into here. However, no doubt, in this scenario the majority culture and religion will be challenged, and in the following I will go into certain events in the two countries that challenge the majority religion.

#### *Ireland*

Ireland, like many other countries in recent decades, has welcomed many immigrants and become a multi-cultural and multi-religious society. The demand for greater cultural and religious diversification suggests the decline of the Catholic Church in Irish society. Despite most people in Ireland identifying themselves as Roman Catholic (seventy-eight per cent), a significant number identify themselves as having other beliefs or not belonging to any religious denomination. In fact, the category “no religion” has expanded from six per cent of the population in 2011 to include ten per cent in 2016.<sup>113</sup> However, this has not caused any structural change in the Catholic hegemonic power over education and its ownership of the schools. More than ninety-six per cent of state-funded primary schools are still owned and controlled by religious institutions (ninety-one per cent Catholic, five per cent Church of Ireland). In 2015, there were also some Presbyterian schools, one Methodist school and two Muslim schools.<sup>114</sup> Since the early 1990s, more and more so-called Educate Together schools have been established. These are meant to be “integrated” or “multi-denominational” and are owned by the Educate Together association (in 2014/2015 it had 74 primary schools). More recently, a second type of integrated primary school has been created, the Community National Schools.<sup>115</sup> In 1999, the government decided to begin financing all new school grounds and buildings, which meant that new approved schools would be state-owned and not just state-funded. This, however, is true of only a few schools and has not threatened Catholic ownership of schools.

The Catholic Church was dealt a powerful blow, however, by the publication of the Ryan Report in May 2009 and the Murphy Report in November of the same year. The Ryan Report documented the abuse inflicted upon children in schools and homes run by some twenty religious’ congregations over the course of the twentieth century. The Murphy Report documented the sexual abuse of children perpetrated by priests, frequently priests in charge of primary schools in the Catholic archdiocese of Dublin, between 1975 and 2004.<sup>116</sup> This created shock nationwide, shock that did not diminish when it transpired that the Catholic hierarchy in Ireland had routinely concealed sexual abuse. However, neither of these events led to structural change, and the Catholic Church retained its power over Irish schools.<sup>117</sup>

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113 Merike Darmody and Emer Smyth, “Religion and Primary School Choice in Ireland: School Institutional Identities and Student Profile,” *Irish Educational Studies* 37, no. 1 (2018).

114 Fischer (2016).

115 Fischer (2016).

116 Fischer (2016), 114–15.

117 Fischer (2016).

## Norway

Prior to the school reforms of the 1990s, the minister of education at the time, Gudmund Hernes, drew a picture of a multicultural and multi-religious society in disintegration and sought national integration by way of common knowledge and cultural content in the schools. The instrument was a detailed national curriculum (*L97*) detailing what to teach, when and how. For Norwegian literature, for instance, there were lists of which national poets and writers to read.<sup>118</sup>

One of the main common subjects in this curriculum was Christian knowledge with a religious and philosophical orientation and values (*KRL*). The new subject was considered so broad and inclusive as not to require any exemptions or alternatives. Nevertheless, sixteen parent couples sued the state for the right to full exemption from *KRL*. They lost the case, in both the Court of Appeal and the Supreme Court. The Supreme Court found the curriculum to be in compliance with Norway's obligation under international law. Three of the parent couples, however, brought the matter to the UN Human Rights Committee and won. At the same time, another four parent couples brought their case before the European Court of Human Rights. In 2007, a marginal majority condemned the Norwegian government for not sufficiently safeguarding parents' right to raise their children in line with their own convictions. The obligatory *KRL* subject, together with the Christian object clause (Section 1 of the Education Act of 1998), was considered very unfortunate.<sup>119</sup> The Norwegian state's defeat at both the UN Human Rights Committee and the European Court of Human Rights in 2007 with regard to the Christian object clause together with Christian knowledge as an obligatory subject led to the establishment of a broadly composed politically appointed committee and a new, more value-based, object clause in 2009, as well as a new religious subject with the name Christianity, Religion, Philosophy and Ethics (*KRLE*). In the schools, knowledge of Christianity is permitted, preaching is not. However, half of the content must relate to Christianity.<sup>120</sup> In 2017, the Norwegian Church separated from the state, although the monarchy still professes the religion of the Evangelical Lutheran Church. Thus, in the Norwegian case, the Evangelical Lutheran Church has been challenged, both in the state-church separation and in schools but has nevertheless retained its hegemonic position.

## Conclusion

The long timeline in this article shows that primary education in Norway and Ireland continue to retain distinctive features that reflect the national cultural ideas behind each country's establishment as constitutional nation-state. All this time, Ireland has stuck to its state-funded denominational education system, where the Catholic Church owns most primary schools, while Norway has had a state-owned and state-funded primary education system since the mid-nineteenth century. This means that Norway started its process towards institutional secularisation at an earlier point in time than Ireland and has gone further in this process.

However, at their establishment as free nation-states both countries integrated their

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118 Volckmar (2016).

119 Korseberg (2016).

120 Ibid.

national history, national culture and national language into the dominating religious culture as a fundament for national integration and a common national identity. In this way both countries early started a process of cultural secularisation, or what Buchardt names sacralisation.

The breakthrough of the human capital theory in the late 1950s, the OECD-reports and especially the PISA-tests brought about great changes in the governance of education in both Ireland and Norway. Education reforms were driven by an OECD-informed education policy. A content-based curriculum has been replaced by a competence-based curriculum emphasising measurable learning outcomes adapted to the new test ideology. In this way, the goal of national integration has been replaced by the goal of qualification for work. This development mirrors the institutional secularisation process worldwide.

However, the OECD-informed education policy never posed a threat to the Catholic Church's power over education in Ireland. Still the Catholic Church owns more than ninety per cent of Ireland's primary schools. As school owner, the Catholic Church can promote its schools through a school ethos: its schools' cultural and moral values.<sup>121</sup> According to Fisher, the common understanding of "ethos" has a religious dimension. In contrast, the Evangelical Lutheran Church has lost its dominant power over Norwegian schools but is nevertheless integrated into the school's cultural content, and Christianity still dominates the subject of religion in school.

This article shows that, despite worldwide institutional secularisation from the nineteenth century onwards, deeply ingrained national cultural traditions and mindsets have affected educational reasoning and organisation in Ireland and Norway. The religious and national peculiarities in the establishment of primary education in Ireland and Norway still characterise, and to some extent explain, the differences in Irish and Norwegian education. Furthermore, the article documents the importance of viewing nation-state formation and religion as determining factors in the development of national education systems in general.

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121 Fischer (2016).

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