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Visa Immonen & Anna Sivula

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The politics of heritage education: an analysis of national curriculum guidelines in Estonia, Finland, and Sweden

Visa Immonen ^a and Anna Sivula ^b

^aDepartment of Archaeology, History, Cultural Studies and Religion, University of Bergen, Bergen, Norway;

^bDepartment of Cultural Heritage Studies, University of Turku, Turku, Finland

ABSTRACT

Heritage education is present in many educational institutions and their study programmes but not often directly addressed in national curriculum guidelines. The guideline documents of Estonia, Finland, and Sweden for compulsory basic education (children from 7 to 16 years old) are a case in point, and this article analyses how heritage is defined, in which contexts it appears, and what kind of effects it has in these educational policies. To accomplish this analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis is employed as a conceptual framework. It is argued that despite the claim made in the policies regarding heritage belonging to all, heritage is placed in opposition to history writing and associated with minority groups.

KEYWORDS

Heritage; heritagisation; history; national curriculum guidelines; North Europe

Introduction

Recent political protests and debates, fostered by such movements as Black Lives Matter or Me Too, have an explicit connection with heritage (Williams, 2021). Demands are being placed on contemporary societies to come to terms with their colonial, racist and sexist pasts. This has pushed to the fore the forms of teaching which give particular significance to heritage – i.e. heritage education (e.g. Sypnowich, 2021). In this article, we analyse the national curriculum guidelines for compulsory basic education (children from 7 to 16 years old, or levels 1 and 2 in the International Standard Classification of Education) in Estonia, Finland, and Sweden from the perspective of heritage education. We focus on how heritage is defined, in which contexts it appears, and what kind of effects it has in these three documents. We argue that despite claims of heritage belonging to all, it is placed in opposition to history and associated with minority groups.

The term ‘heritage education’ consists of two elements. The first word ‘heritage’ refers to a set of material and social processes by which a heritage community – whether local, national, or global – identifies and evaluates items as meaningful traces of its past and treats and manages them accordingly (Harrison, 2013; Smith, 2006). The second element is ‘education’, which can be seen as a form of both social and knowledge reproduction (Santisteban-Fernández, González-Monfort, & Pagès-Blanch, 2020, p. 26), shaping

CONTACT Visa Immonen  visa.immonen@uib.no

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and moulding the identity of the learner. The form which that identity is supposed to take is determined by the kind of society that educators are aiming for, and in this sense, as John Dewey (1980) argues, education is political (Saltman, 2018). Similarly, one of the functions of heritage is to form and support identity. This creative aspect of heritage is what makes heritage education so attractive to both educational and heritage institutions (Van Boxtel, Grever, & Klein, 2016, pp. 2–3).

Heritage education is present in many educational institutions and their study programmes. In fact, activities which can be called ‘heritage education’ have been practiced since the emergence of the modern concepts of heritage and heritage institutions (e.g. museums), although they have only begun to take shape as a distinct field of practice and research in the twenty-first century (see, however, Dyer, 1986; Tilden, 1957). Subsequently, in recent years, the number of educational programmes, publications and activities under this banner has increased immensely (Delgado-Algarra & Cuenca-López, 2020, p. 3), while museums have been active in discussions on museum education (Hooper-Greenhill, 2010). Yet heritage education is not a school subject or an integrated academic discipline. Consequently, in the national curriculum guidelines analysed in this article, heritage education is not addressed as a coherent entity, and it thus must be teased out from the documents.

The definition of heritage education based on heritage-related practices can be expanded further. The teaching can take the form of formal, informal, or non-formal education (González-Valencia, Massip Sabater, & Castellví Mata, 2020, p. 86). Another distinction can be made between the ways in which heritage is approached in teaching (Savenije, van Boxtel, & Grever, 2014): heritage can be utilised as (a) a teaching instrument for other purposes, like when providing guided tours for tourists, (b) a resource for teaching about history, (c) a communal resource for teaching about the relationship between heritage and society, (d) an essential symbolic agent in teaching about identity-building, and (e) the basis for creating connections between heritage and people (Fontal & Ibáñez-Etxebarria, 2017, p. 180).

Because of its novelty, the institutional character of heritage education is diffuse. In various administrative and didactic texts, heritage education refers to teaching activities related to heritage and is seen as a means to achieve socially significant objectives (Delgado-Algarra & Cuenca-López, 2020, p. 15; Van Boxtel et al., 2016, p. 6). In the 1998 Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, heritage education is characterised as a teaching approach based on heritage. It incorporates active educational methods, cross-curricular approaches, and utilises partnerships between education and culture (Feliu-Torruella, González-Marcén, & Masriera-Esquerra, 2020, p. 53). This definition has endured as the basis for the Council’s subsequent policies (Branchesi, 2007, p. 31).

The European Union is heavily involved in developing heritage education for the advancement of a European identity. In the EU’s framework for cultural heritage, as part of the 2018 European Year of Cultural Heritage, education was singled out as one of the central ways to engage and empower younger generations (European Union, 2019, p. 11). Such an emphasis is apparent in the Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society, or the Faro Convention issued in 2005, stating that cultural heritage should be integrated into ‘all aspects of lifelong education and training’ (Council of Europe, 2005).

In addition to establishing definitions for heritage education and developing related policies and didactics, recent scholarship has also called for a critical approach to this

novel educational field (Santisteban-Fernández et al., 2020, p. 27). It scrutinises not only heritage education practices but also their goals, institutional framework, and historical development from the perspective of power relations, identity construction and social processes (Bender, Messenger, & Shackel, 2019; Santisteban-Fernández et al., 2020, p. 27; Zimmerman, 2019, p. 223). Within this framework, policymaking and the implementation of educational policies form a fundamental bond that defines relationships and interactions between heritage, education, and society. In this article, we argue that the social and political dimensions of heritage education become expressed in national curriculum guidelines. Hence we approach them as policy documents which function as a ‘vehicle or medium for carrying and transmitting a policy message’ (Bell & Stevenson, 2006; Ozga, 2000, p. 33).

Since our hypothesis is that heritage education is already present in school curricula, our task is to explicate it and show what kind of cultural political effects it has. Moreover, instead of considering heritage education simply as a form of history teaching (e.g. Van Boxtel et al., 2016), we approach the subject rather as a practice of creating and using the past in specific ways (Kalela, 2012; Sivula, 2015). We challenge the seemingly stable terms of ‘heritage’, ‘tradition’ and ‘history’. Even in the national curriculum guidelines, the terms are dynamic and denote disparate phenomena depending on their context (Pérez Jiménez, Cuenca López, & Ferreras Listán, 2010; Van Boxtel et al., 2016, p. 4). However, before going into the investigation of the guidelines, we present our research material and methods.

Research material and method

Our analysis is grounded on the national curriculum guidelines for compulsory basic education in Estonia, Finland, and Sweden (Table 1).

Table 1. The statistical data regarding national curriculum guidelines for compulsory basic education in Estonia, Finland, and Sweden.

	Estonia	Finland	Sweden
Words in the document	c. 8300	c. 179,000	c. 71,000
Attestations of ‘heritage’	2	42	52
Attestations of ‘history’	2	148	68
Attestations of ‘tradition’	3	96	97
Levels of heritage	Local, national, European, world	Familial, local, national, European, Western, world	Local, national, Nordic, Western
Minority languages	Russian	Roma, Saami	Finnish, Mäenkieli, Romani Chib, Saami, Yiddish
Expressions and contexts of heritage	Art, culture, language	Art, culture, digital environment, handicrafts, language, museum, UNESCO World Heritage Programme	Art, approach to nature, culture, forms of aesthetic expression, food culture, folk costume, games, handicrafts, language, music, traditional use of land and water

Note: In addition to the attestations of the words ‘heritage’, ‘history’, and ‘tradition’, the table summarises the minority languages mentioned in relation to heritage, and the expressions of heritage as well as contexts in which heritage is mentioned.

The choice of the countries is based on their geographical proximity and the marked differences in their national histories. While Finland and Sweden are Nordic welfare states, Estonia is a post-communist state with more liberal economic policies. All three are members of the EU and have advanced educational systems which provide high-quality and equal-opportunity teaching. Basic education in the three countries is free, compulsory, lasts nine years, and has pupils aged from 7 to 16. Each of the three countries has defined guidelines for basic education curricula published in their official languages. We have based our analyses on these documents, although the direct quotations we use are from English translations if such are available. Pedagogical research, including comparative studies on school curricula (e.g. Ahonen, 2001; Erss, Kalmus, & Autio, 2016; Hardy & Uljens, 2018; Kujala & Hakala, 2020; Laanemets & Kalamees-Ruubel, 2014; Puskás & Andersson, 2018), in the three countries is on a high international level, but this kind of critical discursive analysis of the notion of heritage in national curricula seen as policy documents has been lacking.

The guidelines summarise a set of principles and broader parameters by which teaching in schools must be organised (Tahir, 2007). They provide uniformity to teaching and educational content, and in this manner, they aim at furthering trust and shared understanding between pupils, teachers, and parents (DG Education and Culture, 2014). Although the values and ensuing principles are defined by each country based on its own interests and circumstances (DG Education and Culture, 2014), they also show the global trend of transnational educational policy borrowing (Mundy, Green, Lingard, & Verger, 2016). The three guidelines give much leverage to schools and individual teachers to design the details of their curricula. They are not detailed manuals on how and what to teach (Westbury, 2000).

We approach the documents in the framework of critical discourse analysis (CDA). Reflecting our interest in the social and political aspect of the guidelines, CDA is 'a type of discourse analysis research that primarily studies the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in social and political contexts' (Van Dijk, 2004, p. 352). The main tenet of CDA is that ideology is reproduced in language, and conversely, language is social (Fairclough, 2001, pp. 20–21). Accordingly, we aim at showing how ideological presuppositions are present in the language choices of the documents (Machin & Mayr, 2012).

CDA is an interpretative method which traces themes and patterns in texts. To structure our approach, we employ Martin Reisigl's and Ruth Wodak's (2001, p. xiii) study on race and national identities. Their approach emphasises the historical aspect of discourse. It traces the movement from what is said to what is done, analysing how different categories emerge in the text and work in the wider social and political context. They distinguish five key stages in such textual analysis. Accordingly, our focus, firstly, is on terms used in the guidelines to refer to heritage (referential strategies). In our initial reading of the texts, we singled out the four most important concepts and their morphological variants regarding heritage education: heritage, tradition, history, and past. We calculated their frequency and distribution in the documents, and, secondly, analysed qualitatively how they are defined in the contexts in which they appear (predicational strategies). Thirdly, we studied what kind of effects they have in the documents' whole, i.e. what actions or social groups become associated with them (argumentation strategies) and, fourthly, from what perspective or points of view these concepts and their

characteristics are expressed (perspectivation and framing strategies). Fifthly, we discuss the quantitative and qualitative results in terms how the textual patterns perform ideological actions. We want to know who the audiences of heritage education are and how their relations become defined: who owns heritage?

The guidelines of the three countries share a similar structure. Firstly, they establish general norms and values for education in the framework set by a national education act. The Finnish and Swedish guidelines, in particular, share almost identical aims: democratic ideals, digital competence, entrepreneurship, environmental consciousness, and understanding and living with diversity. From these values, the documents proceed to outline the skills and knowledge that pupils will have gained after completing elementary school. After that, syllabi are defined by subject. Unlike in Estonia and Finland, the same curriculum guidelines in Sweden incorporate also one year of preschool and school-age educare. These sections in the Swedish document, however, do not include direct references to heritage, history or tradition, and are not included in our analysis.

The national curriculum guidelines set by the Swedish National Agency for Education

The Swedish curriculum guidelines are based on the Education Act of 2010 (Skolverket, 2022). At the beginning of the document, it is stated that the fundamental values of education include upholding ‘ethics embodied in the Christian tradition and Western humanism’, and schools should enable the students to find out ‘what makes them unique, which enables them to take part in society’ (p. 5). The document acknowledges that growing internationalisation and mobility requires skills in living with and understanding the value of cultural diversity. This includes the belief that ‘[a]wareness of one’s own cultural origins and sharing in a common cultural heritage provides a secure identity, which it is important to develop, along with the ability to understand and empathise with the conditions and values of others’ (p. 6). Consequently, ‘educating and raising children involve developing and passing on a cultural heritage – values, traditions, language, knowledge – from one generation to the next’ (p. 7). To achieve this mission, schools employ a historical perspective, which enables the pupils to ‘develop an understanding of the present, prepare for the future and develop their ability to think dynamically’ (p. 9). This leads to a guarantee that after compulsory basic education each pupil has gained understanding of ‘Swedish, Nordic and Western cultural heritage’, ‘knowledge about the cultures, languages, religion and history of the national minorities’, and ability to interact in encounters with other people based on information, e.g. about ‘culture, language, religion and history’ (p. 13).

After the introduction, the word ‘heritage’ (*kulturarv*) is used 49 times in the rest of the document. The attestations are mostly related to the syllabi of national minority languages. In the subject of Meänkieli, or the language of the Tornedalians, it is stated that in school years 1–3, the core content includes the ‘life of Tornedalians and other Meänkieli speakers today, based on history and cultural heritage’ communicated in ‘games, music and other forms of aesthetic expressions’ (p. 113), while in years 4–6, the core content includes the ‘cultural heritage of Tornedalians and other Meänkieli speakers in various forms, such as food culture, handicrafts and other forms of aesthetic expression’ (p. 114). Subsequently in years 7–9, the syllabus also encompasses ‘traditional and

contemporary industries such as agriculture, forestry and tourism' (p. 115). In the same vein, the teaching of Romani Chib includes Roma cultural heritage, or 'handicraft traditions, games, music and other forms of aesthetic expression' (p. 128). The syllabus teaches about the living conditions of Roma 'today and throughout history', and food, music, and dance (p. 129). The conditions of Roma culture are compared with the majority and other minority groups (p. 130). Similarly, the core content of Saami languages covers the minority's ways of life today in reference to history and cultural heritage in which an 'approach to nature, the changing seasons and traditional use of land and water' are specified along with games, music, handicraft, and folk costume (p. 190).

In contrast to relatively repetitive attestations of 'heritage' in the document, the word 'tradition' is mentioned almost twice as many times in multiple contexts. In English, the core content includes those 'living conditions, traditions, social relations and cultural phenomena' where the language is used (p. 46), while in home and consumer studies, the syllabus lists 'cultural variations and traditions in different households' (p. 51) and culinary traditions (p. 53), and the core content of physical education and health includes 'cultural traditions in outdoor life and other outdoor activities' (p. 184). In addition, the word 'tradition' is used in describing the teaching of the mother tongue (pp. 89–96). It also appears in the syllabi relating to the minority languages – i.e. Finnish (pp. 97–104), Meänkieli (pp. 111–119), Romani Chib (pp. 126–133), Saami (pp. 188–202), and Yiddish (pp. 140–145) – music (p. 155), and crafts (pp. 37, 39). In contrast, in the syllabus of history, the word 'tradition' is used only once to refer to religious traditions (p. 232).

In the Swedish curriculum, the fundamental values stated include the Christian tradition and Western humanism, and unlike in the two other curricula, also Nordic heritage. Heritage is transmitted cross-generationally, and its significance is justified by its importance for identity formation. Heritage is presented as topical as it is considered key in understanding diversity in contemporary culture and society: living with cultural diversity requires knowledge of heritage. However, after such statements are made in the general introduction, the term 'heritage' is used rather sparingly, and instead, the emphasis is on 'tradition' as an expression of culture. The word 'heritage' is mostly used in connection with customs and languages, especially minority languages.

Estonian Ministry of Education and Research, Act for National Curriculum for Elementary Schools

The Estonian curriculum guidelines were adopted in 2011 (Riigi Teataja, 2023). The document is written in a legal style, and unlike in the Swedish guidelines, the words 'heritage' (*pärand*) and 'tradition' (*traditsioon*) appear with equally low numbers. The fundamental values of the Estonian education are defined in terms of universal and societal values of which the latter include, among other things, 'respect for native language and culture, patriotism, cultural diversity' (§ 2.3). The transfer of respect is built on the socialisation of new generations, which, in turn, requires the 'acceptance of the traditions of Estonian culture, the common European values, and the most significant achievements of the world's culture and scholarship' (§ 2.4). The aim of socialisation is to integrate pupils fruitfully into the Estonian society.

Among the goals of education, the Estonian guidelines list the 'the preservation and development of the Estonian nation, language and culture' (§ 3.7). Subsequently, the

competence that teaching develops in pupils is the appreciation of ‘one’s own and other countries’ and peoples’ cultural heritage and contemporary cultural events’, and ‘cultural and natural diversity’ (§ 4). More specifically, in years 1–3, pupils gain a respect of their ‘homeland, and the state of Estonia’ (§ 7), while in years 4–6, pupils learn to value their ‘nationality and culture among other nations and cultures’ (§ 9), and lastly in years 7–9, they also ‘contribute to the preservation and development of the Estonian language and culture’ (§ 9).

In the syllabus for literature at Estonia’s Russian-speaking schools, it is stated that fostering ‘multiculturalism, tolerance and respect for other national cultures requires love and respect for one’s national culture and understanding of its place in the world’s cultural heritage’. In social studies, by learning history, pupils acquire understanding of ‘the past and cultural heritage of their homeland and world that are necessary for orientation in cultural space’, while in history teaching, the goal is that pupils value cultural diversity and its relevance in the preservation of cultural heritage and define themselves as members of their own ‘people’. Similarly, the goal of art studies is to develop appreciation of cultural heritage in the pupils’ ‘immediate surroundings, Estonia and the world, and teaching emphasises cultural competence and cultural space based on common cultural heritage as part of the learner’s identity’.

The Estonian guidelines define a set of cross-cutting themes which are present in all subject-specific syllabi. Cultural identity appears as a tool for implementing these themes. It is contextualised with the principle that the teaching content and activities should introduce pupils to local, Estonian and world cultural heritage (§ 2), and raise their awareness of the role of culture in everyday life and ‘the development of heritage culture in today’s globalising world’ (§ 3).

Unlike the Swedish and Finnish guidelines, the Estonian document is an act with appendices. The use of heritage also evinces differences to the Swedish and Finnish documents, although in general the status of heritage is similarly framed as the basis of the learner’s identity, and as a resource for social interaction and cohesion. The most common formulation in which the term ‘heritage’ appears refers to local, national, and European or world heritage. Of these, the national level has a much more emphatic role in comparison to Finland and Sweden. Heritage is a device for integrating pupils into the Estonian society, not society in general or local communities. In fact, the document does not speak of communities but of countries, nations, and peoples.

The National Core Curriculum set by the Finnish National Board of Education

The Finnish National Board of Education introduced the new national core curriculum for basic education in 2014 (Finnish National Board of Education, 2016). In this document, the word ‘heritage’ (*perintö*) appears around half as often as the word ‘tradition’ (*perinne*), while ‘history’ is mentioned three times as often as ‘heritage’. The central aims of the guidelines consist of seven transversal competence areas, resembling the cross-cutting themes of the Estonian Act, of which the most pertinent to heritage is ‘cultural competence, interaction and self-expression’. This is related to the ability to read cultural messages and ‘knowing and valuing [one’s] surroundings and the cultural heritage’ (Section 15.2). More specifically, the pupils should ‘learn about cultural heritage and participate

in maintaining and renewing it' (15.2), which allows them to recognise how important art, culture and heritage are for the well-being of individuals and communities.

The introduction emphasises that the school staff must respect pupils' different home environments, including their religion, worldview, traditions, and views on education (2.2). '[E]ducation promotes knowledge and understanding of cultures and ideological, philosophical and religious traditions, including Christian ones, and the heritage of Western humanism' (3.2). To achieve this, the learning environment is extended beyond the school, requiring active co-operation with museums and the cultural sector. Local heritage and the cultural environment are parts of this communal teaching, and through such engagement, pupils 'are guided in recognising and appreciating cultural meanings in their environment and building a personal cultural identity and a positive relationship with the environment' (3.3). This leads them to know and appreciate their 'living environment and its cultural heritage as well as their personal social, cultural, religious, philosophical and linguistic roots' (3.3).

In the Finnish guidelines, a reoccurring word in connection with heritage is 'community', which seems to form the basic unit of pupils' experience of heritage. It is this unit that 'appreciates and draws upon the country's cultural heritage and national languages' (4.2). Community is closely linked to family: in grades 1–2, the 'pupils are guided to appreciate the traditions and customs of their own family and community as well as those of others' (13.2). In the same vein, the teaching of Saami children intends 'supporting the pupils in growing into their language, culture and community and giving them an opportunity to embrace the Sámi cultural heritage' (9.1), and, in the teaching of Roma children in years 1–2, 'the pupils are introduced to the Roma narrative and cultural traditions, drawing on the local Roma community when possible' (Objectives of instruction in the syllabus in Roma language and literature in grades 1–2).

Another subject where heritage is placed in a slightly different context is in the Finnish syllabus of ethics education. Whereas the explicit aim of its teaching is defined, in line with other subjects, as to get pupil to 'familiarise himself or herself with the cultural traditions of Finland, Europe, and the world and to perceive cultural diversity as a phenomenon' (Objectives of instruction in ethics in grades 3–6), they are also expected to get acquainted with the UNESCO World Heritage Programme (Objectives of instruction in ethics in grades 7–9), a unique reference in the three guideline documents. Moreover, getting a good grade requires the pupil to be 'able to name and explain some cultural phenomena related to the cultural heritage of Finland, Europe, and the world' (Assessment criteria for ethics).

In contrast to the Estonian and Swedish guidelines, the Finnish document also makes a subtle allusion to the negative aspect of tradition as something potentially harmful. When addressing pupils' vocational interests, the document emphasises that they must be able to make 'reasoned choices regarding further studies from their own starting points, conscious of the impacts of traditional gender roles and other role models' (15.2), which seems to suggest that traditions might disadvantageously affect career choices.

All three guidelines associate heritage mostly with intangible phenomena, like language and customs, but exceptionally, in the Finnish syllabus for crafts, material culture is referred to explicitly, since '[k]nowledge of the surrounding material world lays a foundation for sustainable development and a sustainable way of living' (15.4.16). Moreover, when teaching design, the crafts syllabus utilises 'local traditions

and opportunities as well as past and present traditions of different cultures in the planning, designing and implementing of projects' (Objectives of instruction in crafts in grades 7–9). When pupils are taught to use 'different traditional and new materials and production techniques creatively and confidently', the syllabus also refers to digital tools and using IT in planning and creating products (Objectives of instruction in crafts in grades 7–9). Moreover, 'the pupils learn about national and international culture and cultural heritage, for example virtually and through visits to museums, exhibitions, and libraries', and 'technologies and online environments are used diversely, responsibly and safely' (Objectives of instruction in crafts in grades 7–9). This is the only occasion in the three documents that a digital learning environment is mentioned in the context of heritage.

The way the Finnish guidelines frame heritage comes close to that of the Swedish ones. Heritage is seen as an assemblage of listed cultural phenomena, and thus has a close affinity with the concept of tradition. The document argues that knowing and appreciating heritage fosters the pupils' abilities to shape and create culture and further their well-being. Local heritage has a finer gradation than the Swedish or Estonian hierarchies and consists of the individual (or pupil), their family, classroom/school, and community.

Results: heritage language and locality as paradigms of heritage education

When the three guidelines are compared, it is apparent that they have much in common, and they share a conception of heritage that is seemingly clear-cut. Heritage is key in understanding the pupils' own background as well as the surrounding community and its shared values. The definition of heritage is not explicit, but conveyed through lists of phenomena: traditions, language, customs, festivals, and narratives. In contrast, heritage is rarely said to consist of material entities like buildings, or sites on UNESCO's World Heritage List. Significantly, heritage is not mentioned in relation to history, but its attestations are present in such subjects as (minority) languages, crafts, and religious studies. History clearly establishes a different relationship with the past than these other subjects. Ultimately heritage and traditions are seen as highly positive phenomena.

Although none of the three guidelines refer to minority languages as 'heritage languages', it is a notion which has significance in analysing these documents. In linguistics, the concept of 'heritage language' usually refers to a second, immigrant or indigenous language, spoken mostly within the family, existing alongside a dominant national language (Fishman, 2006; Polinsky & Kagan, 2007). According to Constadina Charalambous (2021), heritage is a term that features often in discussions of language education in relation to the legacy of the past, 'usually within community attempts to claim and connect with a shared ethnolinguistic or religious background'. In other words, heritage language refers to isolated minority languages without the context of an interactive multilingual and multicultural environment. It is a kind of linguistic museum object which can be passed on to new generations, and such a conception of heritage is implicit in the guidelines as well.

All three documents invest a lot in heritage on the European or global level. While the nation is more significant in the Estonian guidelines, probably due to its post-communist identity, in the Swedish and Finnish documents, locality and the local community are

given particular importance. In Finland, the significance of locality can be partly explained by the distribution of power in Finnish heritage management and the educational system. Firstly, since the 1980s, local and regional museums have become stronger actors in the field because of several state-funded projects. One of the most important was *Suomen Tammi* ('The Finnish Oak'), a co-operative project of the Finnish National Agency for Education and the Finnish Heritage Agency in 1998–2008, which left a still-visible imprint on Finnish heritage education (Grönholm & Vuorihimo, 2005, pp. 45–69). As a continuation of this development, during the last decade, the network of local and regional museums has gone through a major revision. Consequently, they now constitute one of the key actors in heritage education within the field of compulsory basic education in Finland. The heritage education they practice places a lot of emphasis on local heritage (Sivula, 2015). Local and regional museums are responsible for providing heritage education services and materials for compulsory basic education. This has also had consequences for school education, which has become more locally oriented.

Secondly, another development affecting Finnish heritage education is the rise of NGOs. Since the 2010s, non-governmental and intergovernmental organisations have gradually increased their influence in education politics globally as the traditional governmentality of nation states has been eroded (Spring, 2014). Heritage education in Finland is a case in point. The most important of these NGOs is the Association of Cultural Heritage Education in Finland, founded in 2006. It aims at replacing the top-down governmental steering of heritage education with voluntary co-operation between actors across the educational, cultural, environmental and youth sectors. The association's partners include the Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry of the Environment, Finnish National Agency for Education, and Finnish Heritage Agency. The influential semigovernmental position of the association in heritage education has no parallels in Sweden or Estonia.

Discussion and conclusions

From the point of view of politics, heritage education is not an uncontested, historical narrative to be shared, but is, instead, a comprehensive formation which brings out, imposes, and negotiates differences and conflicts. Heritage education acts as an interface between politics, heritage, and communities, and therefore it can serve to highlight the complexity of heritage politics. It can enable the discussion of negotiations and preparative work undertaken for global and national heritage strategies and reflected in national curricula.

Our analysis of the Estonian, Finnish, and Swedish curriculum guidelines for compulsory basic education shows that heritage functions on many levels. On the one hand, all three documents engage with a globally recognisable discourse on heritage as a valuable resource to be utilised in teaching and transmitted to new generations. Heritage is therefore a key to social integration and well-being, and enables fruitful collaborations between schools and heritage actors, such as local museums. On the other hand, the adoption of such a global and European discourse is formulated in line with national policies on education and heritage. For instance, only the Swedish guidelines make references to Nordic heritage. This pan-Nordic identity and sense of community is more

prevalent generally in Scandinavia. The Estonian document, in contrast, constructs a heritage realm where the essential units are nations and countries, an approach which can be used to integrate pupils into the Estonian society.

Heritage is repeatedly defined as lists of mostly intangible but also tangible heritage. Significantly, after the general introductory sections of the documents, the concept becomes replaced by the term tradition and, at the same time, compartmentalised into something related to minority languages and religious or ethnic groups such as the Saami and Roma. The documents share an understanding of heritage as something with a clearly delineable and definite meaning, although at the same time, they implicitly reveal it as a rather heterogenous collection of things. Like 'heritage language', it is a delimited entity, and getting to know it does not bring about messiness and tensions, but, on the contrary, aids social cohesion. Heritage seems to bring people together as a community and nation.

The Finnish guidelines in particular have a rather advanced hierarchy to describe local heritage and its actors. We have linked the interest in locality with the institutional setting of heritage education in Finland, in which local museums and NGOs have become major agents, making local co-operation more important also for the national curriculum. A special characteristic of the Finnish situation is the existence of the semi-governmental Association of Cultural Heritage Education in Finland, to which the state seems to have mostly outsourced the practical level of heritage education.

Much of the scholarly literature on heritage education is based on history education and draws from the distinction between history and heritage. However, our analysis of the three guidelines reveals that heritage is mentioned most often in connection not with the teaching of history, but with that of languages, crafts, and religions. In the educational documents, heritage is a cultural and usually intangible remnant of the past, not a phenomenon to be studied in the same manner as the past is for history. We argue that heritage and history are different modalities which form a distinct relationship with the past but also with each other, and thus the analysis of heritage education cannot merely follow the distinctions and goals defined by historians. Based on the distribution of the concepts of 'heritage', 'tradition', and 'history' in the guidelines, history writing covers everyone in the nation, also majority groups, while heritage is something primarily minorities have.

One of the paradoxes of heritage education is related to the idea of social harmony that heritage brings. Although the fostering of tolerance is often stated as one of the guiding principles of heritage education in policy documents, heritage scholars usually agree that, borrowing Laurajane Smith's (2021, p. 59) expression, '[a]ll heritage is dissonant and contested by someone'. Since heritage is a social and material process, not a stable thing, the form it takes fluctuates according to the power relations in society. Hence, there seems to be a mismatch between the view of heritage studies scholars on the character of heritage on the one hand, and the articulated aims of heritage education in educational policies on the other. However, when put under scrutiny, even within a single policy text, 'heritage' as a concept is not a fixed notion but can change its meaning and political effects. It fluctuates from serving as an explicit means to explore global issues of identity, transgenerational transmission and social integration, to implicitly providing a tool for defining and delineating minority communities, their position in the educational system, and relation to history.

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ORCID

Visa Immonen  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7616-500X>

Anna Sivula  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-3544-7318>

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