



# Individualising processes in adult education: The case of Swedish for immigrants (SFI)

Dimitrios Papadopoulos



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## Abstract

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Adapting education to individual students is a prominent demand in the context of Swedish for immigrants (SFI). Teachers, schools, and municipal authorities are expected to establish educational frameworks corresponding to the needs of rather diverse student groups. However, such initiatives – defined here as individualising processes – are difficult to implement due to the active engagement in SFI of other societal actors related to labour market and integration policy. Establishing common grounds to address individual students' needs is a challenge for all involved actors, because of their often conflicting agendas. Nevertheless, previous research in the area remains limited and focuses mostly on interactions between teachers and students, without problematising other actors' active involvement.

The present thesis examines how individualising processes emerge and unfold in policy and practice of SFI. Cultural-historical activity theory is employed to trace individualising processes in interactions and negotiations between actors responsible for adapting education to individual students' needs. The thesis comprises three studies, addressing individualising processes (i) in their historical emergence, informed by previous research, (ii) within municipal authorities' organisational frameworks and measures, and (iii) through SFI teachers' collective efforts to overcome emerging challenges. Empirical data consist of public policy texts and semi-structured qualitative interviews with seven municipal officers and 18 SFI teachers from various Swedish municipalities.

The findings suggest that the emergence of individualising processes in the context of SFI is the result of historically shifting societal challenges reflected in the involved actors' current practices. In trying to adapt education to individual

students' needs, municipal authorities are simultaneously engaged in the making of broader objectives, such as in increasing control over – and efficiency within – adult education, or in sustaining social cohesion. The findings also show that efforts to adapt education to individual students' needs elicit tensions, the handling of which leads SFI teachers to either retain their roles as adult educators or to expand their practices over institutional boundaries. By synthesising findings from the three studies, the thesis problematises individualising processes beyond the teacher-student interactions and offers new insights on how efforts to adapt education to individual students' needs have the potential to challenge established practices and offer possibilities for the emergence of creative solutions.

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# 1. Introduction

The present thesis is about individualising processes in Swedish for immigrants (SFI), a basic language education for adult students. Since 2016, SFI has constituted a significant part of Swedish municipal adult education (MAE), and in 2022 it hosted a total of 123,474 enrolled students (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2024). The education was introduced in 1965 with the purpose of facilitating the settlement of foreign workers in Sweden by providing tools for communication and the handling of practical issues related to work and daily life (Lindberg & Sandwall, 2007).

Today, however, SFI has become significantly more multifaceted. Research (e.g., Lundgren et al., 2017) has highlighted its multiple connections to different areas, ranging from language instruction and identity formation to issues of social integration and labour market participation. Thus, the involvement of stakeholders who are not directly related to education is a very common phenomenon. For example, public authorities (e.g., the Swedish Public Employment Service) and other stakeholders often establish connections with SFI to pursue the goals set within their institutional frameworks. As a result, SFI education is embedded in a nexus of policies and practices, and is expected to address a wide range of societal challenges (e.g., illiteracy, unemployment, and social exclusion).

To address the abovementioned issues, the education policy landscape often prescribes individualising processes as solutions to a plethora of problems. In the present thesis, the term ‘processes’ refers to a series of actions or operations that are conducive to an end (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). Individualising processes, therefore, refer to measures and frameworks – put forward in policy and practice – to adapt the whole education to individual students’ needs, backgrounds, and life situations. The SFI syllabus, for example, states that “teaching should be planned and designed together with the student and adapted to the student’s interests, experiences, all-round knowledge, and long-term goals” (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2022, p. 1). Similar articulations, prescribing the enactment of individualising processes, are also found in other key documents, such as the Education Act (SFS 2010:800) and the Ordinance on Adult Education (SFS 2011:1108).

However, this seemingly straightforward demand to adapt education to the needs of individual students entails the initiation of processes that are difficult to cope with and implement. This is because individualising processes emerge in interactions and negotiations that occur in dynamic contexts and at the interplay of various interests (Swedish Institute for Educational Research, 2019). For example, in attempting to comply with demands to enact individualising processes, the actors involved may develop partially contradictory expectations as to what such initiatives entail for students, teachers, the educational organisations that provide SFI, the Swedish municipalities responsible for MAE, and all other stakeholders involved in this education. A point of departure for this thesis is that disagreement between these actors may concern the pedagogies that must be employed to enact individualising processes, the control mechanisms for follow-up procedures, and – crucially – the goals towards which individualising processes should be directed. When problems emerge in the SFI framework, teachers are often considered the main responsible actors, whose (lack of) competence is discussed as a major reason for the failure to address students' needs and the general expectations for SFI education (cf. Swedish Schools Inspectorate, 2018).

Nevertheless, reducing individualising processes exclusively to pedagogical practices in the classroom (e.g., student-centred instruction) risks a narrowed understanding that cannot account for the complexity of contemporary adult education settings and their embeddedness in various areas of public life. Research has demonstrated that, from a wider societal perspective, individualising processes have been elicited by a range of emerging tensions related to major issues of, inter alia, inequality, hypercompetition, and unstable employment conditions in a plethora of contexts and historical periods (e.g., Beck, 1992; Devadason, 2006; Edwards & Miller, 2000; Fejes et al., 2018; Fenwick, 2003b; Henning Loeb & Lumsden Wass, 2014; Jansen & van der Veen, 1997; Kelly, 2001; McLean, 2016; Morrison, 2008; Thompson, 2011). Such studies have demonstrated that individualising processes permeate adult education by materialising in policies and practices, thereby eliciting – and being elicited by – transformations of adult education contexts with unpredictable manifestations.

Therefore, individualising processes may not be seen as a monolithic idea that solely concerns student-centred instruction in the classroom. Instead, they have the capacity to embrace a multitude of meanings. By transcending organisational settings, efforts to adapt education to the needs of individual students engage a plethora of actors from different institutional levels and organisational settings in common undertakings. Individualising processes' loose nature in tandem with

multivoicedness and the different interests involved (Engeström, 2001) are often a source of tensions, as the engaged stakeholders develop partially contradictory understandings and goals, which is followed by the emergence of conflicts and other tensions.

Engeström et al. (2005) argued that in contemporary societies, people must increasingly deal with ideas and practices that are difficult to conceptualise and handle. While individuals engage in their collective undertakings in terms of organisational settings, societies, nation states, or international entities, the imperative emerges for them to learn how to live with, handle, revise, or reject contested ideas and conceptualisations (Engeström, 2020). Such *complex concepts* are “inherently polyvalent, debated and dynamic” in that different stakeholders “produce partially conflicting versions” (Engeström et al., 2005, p. 48). Thus, the formation of complex concepts, such as individualising processes, involves confrontation and contestation.

Research in the social sciences has traced the emergence of this phenomenon back to the ways in which the world that surrounds us gradually grew increasingly fluid, risky, and unpredictable (e.g., Bauman, 2000; Beck, 1992). Galloping technologies, pandemics, and ecological catastrophes constitute global events which require the coordination of a wide range of actors from different (inter)national and institutional frameworks (Engeström, 2007, 2020). Simultaneously, through globalisation processes (see Spring, 2008), institutional boundaries blur, thus opening up opportunities for new types of coordination and problem solving, while also contributing to the emergence of conflicts and other tensions.

When it comes to educational research, grasping such phenomena in their unfolding is a rather difficult task and requires well-informed intellectual and empirical inquiries. Contested educational ideas, conceptualisations, policies, or practices may not always have the magnitude of global phenomena; nevertheless, they may often emerge in arenas where the professional undertakings of teachers and educational organisations intersect with those of policymakers, labour market stakeholders, and other crucial societal actors. Such phenomena, which transcend the specificities of local frameworks, are typical of Swedish MAE, in which notions of individualisation, flexibility, and quality assurance are put forward in terms of policy demands to tackle a range of educational and societal problems (see Fejes et al., 2018; Mufic & Fejes, 2022). Tensions emerge as the meanings and significance assigned to these notions vary greatly between the involved stakeholders, who are often in search of contradictory objectives.

SFI education, in particular, provides a rich context in which to examine individualising processes because of its special character, organisation, and content. First, individualising processes in the SFI policy landscape are explicitly prescribed as solutions to a number of problems and challenges related to the education itself, the life situations of its students, and the needs of the surrounding social contexts (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2022). Second, municipal authorities, educational organisations, and teachers in particular are expected to enact such processes as part of a policy agenda against the educational and societal challenges of illiteracy, unemployment, and social exclusion (Prop. 2021/22:51; SOU 2020:66). Finally, the involvement of different actors in SFI education amplifies the space for different interpretations and, thus, the active outlining of (partially) conflicting formulations of individualising processes (Swedish Institute for Educational Research, 2019), which motivates further research on this topic. The present thesis will, therefore, examine individualising processes in the context of SFI by addressing the above-mentioned aspects.

## 1.1 Aim and research questions

The present thesis aims to examine challenges related to adapting education to the needs of individual students in the context of SFI. As argued above, individualising processes in SFI education are problematised here through the notion of a complex concept (Engeström, et al., 2005), that is, as an idea put forward by policy, which prescribes the adaptation of education to individual students' needs and conditions – while also eliciting disagreement and conflict.

To pursue the aim of this thesis, the study presented herein intentionally engages in three areas of inquiry. First, it is necessary to demarcate the study object. In this thesis, individualising processes refer, on a primary level, to measures and frameworks – both in policy and practice – for adapting education to the needs and conditions of individual students. Nevertheless, and as argued above, individualising processes in adult education have a range of expressions and meanings, as well as they engage different actors in interactions and negotiations. Therefore, it is essential to problematise them under a perspective that can trace their roots in processes of historical and cultural formations emerging from collective human endeavours. In this case, previous research on adult education serves as the means for tracing such processes. Second, formal adult education in Sweden is provided at the municipal level through MAE. SFI, as part of MAE, is subjected to specific regulatory frameworks, permeated by economic considerations and other organi-

sational aspects. Examining municipal authorities' engagement in organising, implementing, and controlling SFI is, therefore, crucial to the establishment of frameworks where individualising processes are played out. Finally, by focusing on SFI teachers' capacity to act as subjects in their professional undertakings, the study opts to gain an enhanced understanding of how individualising processes elicit – and are elicited by – challenges and tensions within contemporary adult education settings.

The thesis poses the following main research question:

- How do individualising processes emerge and unfold in the policy and practice of SFI education?

To address the main research question, the following subquestions are posed:

- i) What kind of societal needs and challenges eliciting individualising processes in adult education are identified in adult education research? (Article I)
- ii) How do individualising processes materialise in policies and practices in adult education research? (Article I)
- iii) How are individualising processes played out within and between object-oriented activities in the context of SFI policy and everyday municipal work? (Article II)
- iv) What challenges emerge when SFI teachers try to adapt education to individual students' needs? (Article III)
- v) What artefacts do SFI teachers employ to overcome emerging challenges? (Article III)

As indicated, the subquestions were problematised in three studies that were conducted in the context of the present thesis.

## 1.2 Structure of the thesis

The remainder of the present thesis is structured as follows: Chapter 2 provides a historical account of the SFI education, positioning it in the framework of MAE. A short overview of the education's history and a presentation of its current policy landscape are then supplemented by previous research on the SFI context. Chapter 3 presents previous research on individualising processes. This includes research related to macro-level analyses of late modernity and the emergence of individualising processes, their engagement in different (inter)national and organisa-



tional contexts, and the practical implications for adult education practitioners and settings. Chapter 4 explains the theoretical framework within which the research was conducted. The main tenets of cultural-historical activity theory are presented, with a particular focus on the concepts employed to address the research question. Chapter 5 describes the methodology followed to create the data necessary for this thesis and then provides a discussion of research quality and ethical considerations. Chapter 6 summarises the three sub-studies that were conducted in the context of the thesis. Finally, Chapter 7 presents the discussion, in which the sub-studies' results are synthesised to formulate the contribution of the thesis and suggest areas for further conceptual and empirical inquiries.

## 2. The context of SFI in a historical perspective

This chapter presents the history of SFI education and its current state. In addition, it provides an account of the wider context within which SFI is organised – namely Swedish MAE. Although SFI had been autonomous until its incorporation into MAE in 2016, the two school forms share parallel histories and evolution. Therefore, it is important to present MAE's origins and historical development to ensure a better understanding of the context in which SFI is organised and implemented. This chapter also presents SFI's current policy landscape before concluding with an overview of relevant research.

Yet, why is historicity relevant here? Crucially, what kind of historical account is presented in the following sections? Like any other educational activity, SFI is not a static framework but rather a dynamic collective endeavour. Throughout previous decades and until the present day, SFI has undergone various transformations related to both its internal organisational features and its societal projection (Lindberg & Sandwall, 2007). To gain an enhanced understanding of how individualising processes emerge and are played out in contemporary SFI educational settings, the focus must be placed on the constant dialogue between shifting societal challenges and needs at different periods and the education's historical development. These “layers of history” (Sannino & Engeström, 2018, p. 46) actively influence current practices, challenges, and opportunities related to individualising processes. In other words, to understand change in any contemporary context, one must apply a historical perspective that enables an examination of the present as “a mix of elements that represent different co-existing and competing historical periods, paradigms or types” (Sannino & Engeström, 2018, p. 48). Thus, the emergence of individualising processes and the ways in which they are played out in the context of SFI can make sense in an analytical account.

## 2.1 Understanding Swedish formal adult education

Adult education has a long history in Sweden, originating in the social movements of the 19th century (Gustavsson, 2013). Educational frameworks for adults were gradually established with the introduction of the first folk high schools in 1868 (Larsson, 2013). Until approximately the 1950s, opportunities for adults' educational participation were arranged mostly through grassroots initiatives in terms of popular education, whereas centralised, state-funded educational options were relatively scarce.

During the 1960s, however, adult education started to gain a central position in the Swedish policy arena. With the introduction of the comprehensive school system, the idea emerged that young learners' participation in formal education should no longer be hindered by their social and economic background (Carlgren et al., 2006). Simultaneously, a gap between the opportunities available for older and newer generations appeared, as lack of a similar school form for adults was becoming increasingly evident. At the time, a dynamic "reserve of ability" was thought to exist within the adult population, previously restricted by economic and social obstacles, and they were believed to deserve opportunities to release and develop said ability (Husén & Härnqvist, 2000). This idea of educational differentiation between talented and less talented individuals, in terms of their academic potential, became a main discourse in Swedish policy. Wärvik et al. (2020) argued that "the question of educational justice between social groups in society was turned into the question of the talented individual" (p. 209) – a process that gradually enhanced social mobility but also increasingly highlighted individual features as the locus of interest for educational policy.

After a large-scale education reform in 1967, MAE was launched; hence, the responsibility for providing formal education to adults was transferred to the municipalities as a separate and well-established part of the educational system (Rubenson, 2002). MAE was founded as education for serving goals related to the redistribution of income and wealth, labour market policy, and individual development. The adult education reform that led to the creation of MAE was largely based on an elitist concept of equality – that is, equal rights to education, regardless of social background, gender, or economic status (Rubenson, 1994, 2002).

Since then, MAE has undergone several transformations and rounds of restructuring in terms of its organisation and relation to the state, which may be regarded

as distinct phases in its history. From its beginning, MAE was considered a means to provide a second chance to those in need of one, offering the equivalent courses from basic, secondary, and upper-secondary education (Henning Loeb, 2007). The years between 1967 and 1975, in particular, saw a gradual formation of long-term societal goals for adult education informed by humanistic traditions and supported by international organisations, such as UNESCO, in promoting better societies and enhanced quality of life (Rubenson, 2006). During the 1970s, equality, democracy, economic growth, and the satisfaction of learners' individual aspirations were goals to be achieved through adult education, the overall aim of which seemed to be a redistribution of resources to achieve parity in standards of living for the whole population (Rubenson, 2002). In this framework, individuals with the lowest educational backgrounds were to be given priority in educational opportunities.

During the 1980s, the institutional features of Swedish adult education became more rigid, as MAE acquired its first curriculum (Lvux 82). This was an era in which the characteristics of adult learners, as a group with unique learning needs and abilities, became a major topic on an international level, giving rise to concepts such as “andragogy” (see Knowles, 1980). Simultaneously, the connection with science and technology and the need to increase human capital were central in discussions on adult education.

During 1990–1997, the role of the state continued to change significantly in relation to MAE (Henning Loeb, 2007). After a serious deterioration in the Swedish economy, governments gradually reduced funding for education. A combination of factors, such as the weakening in the power of the labour movement and a shift from collective values of equality to the valuing of personal freedom, moved the focus towards issues of economic efficiency, even within the field of adult education. Simultaneously, the target group for adult education switched from the previous decades' “reserve of ability” and those individuals with the least education to those who lacked a three-year upper-secondary education.

Eventually, the implementation of the Adult Education Initiative (AEI; sv: Kunskapslyftet) in 1997, along with the creation of a quasi-market in MAE, signalled the beginning of a new period. The AEI was a large-scale programme with the purpose of reducing unemployment and reforming adult education. Relevant research indicated that this restructuring had an enormous impact on MAE (see Lumsden Wass, 2004). In policy making, for example, the focus of MAE moved from the previously important aspects of talented individuals in need of education, and later of equality, towards enhancing employability. The role of adult

education as a means to satisfy learners' long-term needs was suppressed by the goal of satisfying the needs of the labour market and the introduction of short-term educational initiatives (Andersson & Wärvik, 2012). Criticism of this model concerned its emphasis on individual responsibility for one's own development and employability, the susceptibility of MAE to market forces, and the devaluation of concepts such as humanism and creativity in the name of effectiveness and performance, all of which reflected a shift towards a neoliberal political agenda (Beach, 2006; Beach & Carlson, 2004; Fejes et al., 2016; Henning Loeb & Lumsden Wass, 2014).

The aforementioned sceptical voices focused mainly on a major reform that was elicited by the AEI and related to the marketisation of adult education. Through the initiative, folk high schools, study associations, and – crucially – private for-profit organisations were given the opportunity to enter MAE, usually through tendering-based procurement processes. Swedish municipalities gained the option to either (partly) outsource formal adult education or run it internally as, in principle, was the case before the AEI. This has resulted in a rather fragmented and heterogeneous landscape of organisational aspects for MAE throughout Sweden (see Holmqvist, 2022; Lumsden Wass, 2004). In 2022, for example, 51% of MAE students were enrolled in a course or programme offered by for-profit and/or non-public organisations (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2024). A conclusion based on an analysis of the aforementioned research is that MAE today is a rather heterogeneous school form – centrally regulated but nonetheless intertwined with locally established municipal features and organisational aspects.

## 2.2 A short history of SFI and its current policy landscape

In the policy framework of the Nordic countries, education has traditionally been considered a means for tackling unemployment and social exclusion (Arnesen & Lundahl, 2006; Lundh & Ohlsson, 1999). To this effect, SFI was introduced in 1965 to help newly arrived immigrants to acquire basic knowledge of the Swedish language (Swedish National Agency for Education, 1997). Initially, the responsibility for providing SFI courses was shared by the state, trade unions, and various employers from the industrial sector (Lindberg & Sandwall, 2007) and equalled 200 hours of free tuition (Lundh & Ohlsson, 1999). The education was mostly organised in terms of study circles within Swedish study associations, and no offi-

cial curriculum or other regulatory directions related to its content and structure existed. From the beginning of the 1970s, SFI education was gradually provided as part of labour market training (sv: AMU-centra), although study associations continued to be involved (Lindberg, 1996). After a major reform in 1986, a curriculum was introduced (Lsfi-86) and the education was divided into basic and advanced SFI courses, with Swedish municipalities being assigned responsibility for the former while study associations and labour market training centres were responsible for the latter (SOU 2013:76). A new reform at the beginning of the 1990s passed the responsibility for SFI exclusively to the Swedish municipalities as one unified framework, which marked a departure from the distinction between basic and advanced SFI. In the same decade, a grading system and national exams were introduced, followed by the restructuring of SFI into four courses and three study tracks after 2000. Since then, SFI has gradually become a regulated education, directed at adults who have a mother tongue other than Swedish, and it officially became part of MAE in 2016 (Lundgren et al., 2017). In addition, SFI teachers are now expected to have a teaching degree as well as officially recognised competence to teach Swedish as a second language.

As demonstrated above, SFI has a long history. Since it began in the 1960s, it has undergone several significant transformations in terms of its societal projections. Based on analyses of curricula, syllabi, public documentation, and teaching material, Rosén and Bagga-Gupta (2013) identified the following four phases in the history of SFI:

- 1965–1980: SFI was seen as a strategy for facilitating immigrants’ settlement in their new country, and the content of the education was oriented mostly towards male workers in relation to their rights and duties.
- 1981–1993: A pluralistic perspective was proposed within which participants were no longer referred to as workers. Greater emphasis was placed on collective issues, such as students’ rights to participate in society and the potential to empower themselves by transforming their lives through education. Furthermore, linguistic or cultural differences were deemed positive within the confines of SFI.
- 1994–2005: The socio-psychological discourse of pluralism was gradually replaced by a deficit perspective. In this case, a lack of knowledge of the Swedish language was seen as a major societal problem to be tackled. In addition, centralised tests focusing on language skills became a general trend in Sweden.

- 2006 onwards: SFI has been characterised by a market-oriented perspective where language is at the centre of education as an essential factor for participation in the labour market (see also Carlson, 2013).

The teaching material used in SFI throughout its history reflects the above-mentioned shifts with regard to the content, structure, and aim of the education. A change of focus has occurred from an active working life and the knowhow of work-related, practical issues during the 1960s, to the “welfare consumer” of the 1970s–80s, and finally to the importance of education prior to work from the 1990s onwards (Carlson, 2007, 2021). These shifts in focus go hand in hand with the transition and restructuring of MAE, as mentioned in the previous section, reflecting the parallel trajectories of the two school forms until they were merged.

Today, SFI is part of MAE and has, since 2016, been regulated by the Swedish Education Act (2010:800), the Ordinance on Adult Education (2011:1108), the curriculum for adult education (Lvux12), and the latest revised syllabus by the Swedish National Agency for Education (2022).

According to the aforementioned syllabus, the aim of SFI is to provide its participants with the opportunity to develop a functional knowledge of Swedish as a second language by developing tools for communication and active participation in daily life, society, further studies, and work. If necessary, the education provides instruction in basic reading and writing competence to adults who lack such skills or are not familiar with the Latin alphabet (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2022).

In addition to knowledge of the Swedish language, students of SFI are also expected to develop several different competencies. These range from the ability to use IT and digital tools to the capacity for metacognitive reflection on one’s own learning. Additionally, the education should contribute to the development of students’ intercultural competence by providing opportunities for them to self-reflect on their own cultural experiences in relation to life in Sweden.

Because SFI is oriented towards participants with different life situations, experiences, educational backgrounds, and study goals, the education is expected to be planned and provided based on students’ individual needs and characteristics. More specifically, the syllabus states that “teaching should be planned and designed together with the student and adapted to the student’s interests, experiences, all-round knowledge, and long-term goals” (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2022, p. 1). Specifically, the education should have individual students’ needs as a point of departure and facilitate its combination with other

activities, such as work, social orientation studies, internships, or any other education. It is thus crucial for SFI to be as flexible as possible in terms of time, place, content, and work form.

The overall impression given by the syllabus is that SFI's constitutive elements are clearly defined with regard to an individualised approach. In this direction, the education is structured such that it potentially enhances individualisation and flexibility. There are four consecutive courses (A–D) and three possible study tracks (1–3). Entry to the SFI education occurs through one of the three study tracks, mostly depending on previous education. Figure 1 presents the structure of SFI in terms of courses and study tracks.

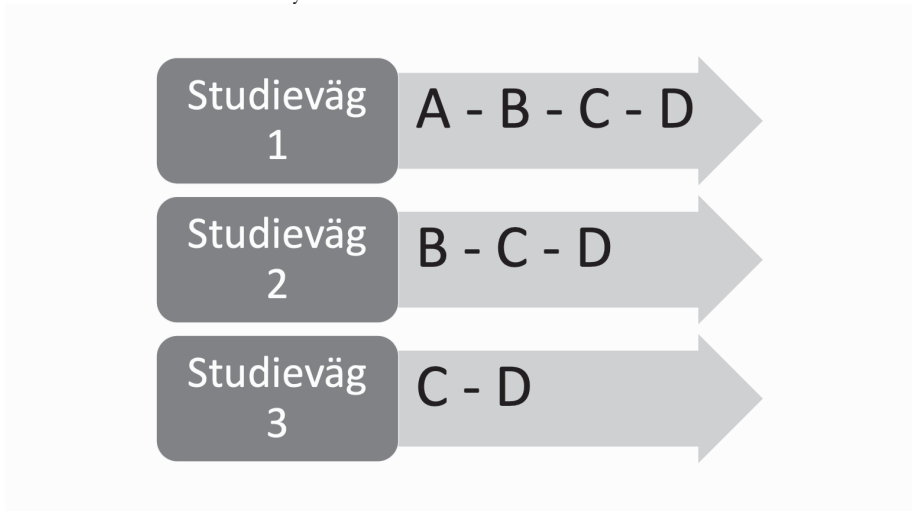


Figure 1 Structure of SFI in terms of courses and study tracks

For example, students with very little – or no – previous education enter SFI through study track 1 and are expected to complete all four courses. Similarly, students with sufficient years of previous education usually enter SFI through study track 2 and go directly into course B and onwards. Finally, students with many years of (academic) education enter through study track 3 and enter course C directly as beginners. It is important to stress, however, that all courses have the same knowledge demands irrespective of the study tracks and that all students are ideally expected to reach and complete course D (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2022).



## 2.3 Previous research on SFI

Research on SFI has provided the overall impression of a tension-laden educational field, embedded in a nexus of different social and political expectations (Carlson, 2013). The topics that have been addressed cover a wide range of problematisations, mostly related to identity formation and negotiations in the context of second language learning, language use and tensions in daily life and at the workplace, pedagogical challenges in the SFI classroom, and issues concerning the organisation and steering of SFI (Lundgren et al., 2017).

Regarding questions of identity, Zachrisson (2014) identified limited links between second language education and students' daily lives, as the content of education was not related to their social reality (see also Eliasson et al., 2022). Feelings of non-belongingness and otherness were accentuated while attachments to students' own ethnic establishments in Sweden were invigorated, leading to increased social isolation. Furthermore, Carlson (2002, 2021) argued that, within SFI education, Sweden was described in a monolithic way as 'purely' Swedish, although the landscape of the population had changed dramatically over the previous decades through immigration. The 'Swedish way' was presented alongside language tuition in the form of customs, ideals, and norms, resulting in the creation of a dichotomy between the Swedes and everyone else. As such, the author argued, the package of 'Swedishness' had gained a normative character that was imposed on participants. Not only were they expected to know about social facts but they also had to adopt them to be accepted in the new society; otherwise, they risked being stigmatised and marginalised. In addition, students often experienced being unfairly attributed negative characteristics based on an essentialised image of culture. Attributes, such as being 'traditional', were expected to be discarded before adapting to a new way of living. The result was the development of a reflexive resistance to 'Swedishness' and a general reluctance towards education as a whole, as the students found themselves trapped between two worlds.

Rosén (2013) concluded that despite the diverse composition of SFI student groups in terms of linguistic resources and cultural backgrounds, the policy was strongly permeated by a dominant Swedish discourse. Having examined different curricula, the author identified a shift of focus from a worker- to a work-oriented perspective, and from pluralism and care taking to integration as participation in the labour market. In other words, students had to be employable as soon as possible. Their various language varieties constituted identity signallers, which either included or excluded them from an imagined community ascribed positive

characteristics, in which Swedish was the norm. Consequently, boundaries emerged against which the participants were constantly contrasted. Simultaneously, the education occurred within strict economic frameworks and, as time boundaries were restricted, values of democracy and empowerment were marginalised (see also Bauer et al., 2023).

Similar examinations have been conducted by scrutinising SFI's multifaceted character. Lundgren (2005), for example, focused on the second language learning of adult illiterate women. The author concluded that these students experienced an attribution of a static identity from their surroundings, in stark contrast to their personal constructions of more dynamic identity formations through education. The role of previous working life experiences and individuals' professional identities in the context of second language learning have also been problematised by Norlund Shaswar (2014) and Colliander (2018). Specifically, Colliander focused on how teachers' professional identity was constructed while they participated in different communities of practice and in responding to learners' needs.

Studies have also examined SFI as a form of second language education in relation to students' social contexts. Norlund Shaswar (2014) highlighted the importance of various linguistic resources in students' writing practices in different social contexts. Furthermore, Rydén (2007) studied how students with very little or no previous education handled situations which required reading and writing competence. The author highlighted the importance of social networks when employing strategies for dealing with such demanding social tasks. Moreover, Sandwall (2010, 2013) examined SFI students' training in the Swedish language in the context of their internships and identified weak communication between the school and the place of internship, leading to limited opportunities for developing language competencies. The political aim of integration (Colliander et al., 2022) and the constructions and perceptions of language competence among adult migrants (Rydell, 2018) have also been problematised in research.

Additionally, studies have focused on the implications of introducing a market logic in SFI and MAE. Lindberg and Sandwall (2007), for example, criticised the emphasis that had been placed on SFI as a labour market instrument. Their study focused on the education's failure to account for development against economic considerations, practice- instead of research-driven tuition, and high drop-out rates. A lack of long-term and research-informed initiatives was identified which, according to the authors, had led to the degradation of SFI as a professional field. This had been further affected by the unstable working conditions for many SFI teachers. Moreover, decision making was often found to be based on statistical

data which could not grasp the complexity and multiplicity of SFI. The authors underlined the importance of re-establishing the professional character of SFI education by recruiting qualified teachers while training those already in service anew.

In the same direction, Beach and Carlson (2004) highlighted the effects of restructuring adult education in a Swedish metropolitan area with SFI as the point of departure. The competition between different SFI providers during tendering-based procurement processes as well as the general adaptation of adult education to a market-oriented perspective were found to have a tremendous effect on SFI, with students being seen as clients and education formulated as a product. Almost 10 years later, Rosén (2013) arrived at a similar conclusion – namely the prevalence of a market-oriented perspective – after examining the historical trajectory of SFI in relation to how categories of SFI participants were constructed and given meaning in different periods (see also Rosén & Bagga-Gupta, 2013).

Regarding individualising processes in the SFI context, research is rather scarce. In studies by Wedin and Norlund Shaswar (2019, 2022) and Norlund Shaswar and Wedin (2019), the importance of adapting instruction to learners' individual language and literacy competences has been raised. Simultaneously, these authors have highlighted the role of promoting practices for meaning negotiation between students, which may nevertheless be hindered in whole classroom interactions; therefore, they may be best enacted in smaller groups.

Finally, Hållsten et al. (2022) directly examined individualisation in SFI. Their problematisation shared the same point of departure with the present thesis – namely that individualisation is a highly prominent policy demand in SFI; however, “it is neither clear nor consistent how this buzzword is defined” (p. 269). By employing a sociocultural conceptual framework, they examined individualisation as adaptations “made by teachers within instruction” and “solely as a pedagogical practice conducted by teacher and students in dialogue” (Hållsten et al., 2022, p. 275). The findings indicate the importance of feedback as a functional educational tool for achieving individualisation, and thus, they were focused on classroom interactions between teachers and students.

In sum, previous research on SFI and the various problematisations that have been raised reveal an educational area permeated by a plethora of expectations and tensions. Although Lundgren et al. (2017) argued that research on SFI is limited in terms of scope, content, and chosen methods, interest in studies in this area has recently increased (e.g., Colliander et al., 2022; Rydell, 2018; Wedin & Norlund Shaswar, 2022). With the exception of Hållsten et al. (2022), there is a striking lack of examinations focused on individualising processes in the context of SFI. This

fact warrants further conceptual and empirical examinations of the topic, which could provide further insights into a policy demand that is highly prominent in SFI yet minimally problematised. Before addressing the aim of the present thesis, however, it is first important to scrutinise and delimit how the emergence of individualising processes is problematised in different (inter)national and organisational contexts as well as what the practical implications for adult education practitioners and settings are. Therefore, the next chapter presents previous research on individualising processes.



### 3. Individualising processes in adult education: an overview of issues addressed in previous research

Mapping out relevant research for the purpose of this thesis is a challenging task. The reason for this is that individualising processes, as measures and frameworks – put forward in policy and practice – for adapting educational frameworks to individual students' unique needs and characteristics, are neither a recent nor local phenomenon delimited to the Swedish context and to adult education alone. Individualising processes in educational contexts have emerged over several decades, both in national and international frameworks (e.g., Carlgren et al., 2006; Devadason, 2006; Fenwick, 2003b; Kelly, 2001; Korsgaard, 2000; Morrison, 2008; Rizvi, 2023; Thompson, 2011). Research in adult education has addressed the topic through different perspectives and by raising problematisations that range from macro-level sociological analyses to examinations of individualised pedagogies in the classroom. This has resulted in a multifaceted – but also fragmented – landscape of knowledge that is difficult to identify, review, and conceptually organise in distinct categories.

To address this challenge, this thesis adopts a specific point of departure when surveying relevant research. Similar to SFI and MAE, adult education systems worldwide – and mostly in the Global North – are seen as collective human enterprises embedded in national and international policy agendas (see Milana & Holford, 2014). As such, they involve a plethora of actors (e.g., students, teachers, principals, policymakers, and labour market representatives) engaged in institutional practices within (inter)national organisations and local educational contexts. The involvement of so many different actors, each with their own unique expectations and agendas, may elicit tensions in their attempts to promote their own interests through interactions and negotiations. Such tensions would reveal latent or explicit societal needs and challenges that need to be addressed and, depending on the actors' standpoint, may concern issues of unemployment, social integration, or personal fulfilment.

Thus, research deemed relevant for the present thesis focuses on the emergence of efforts to adapt education to the needs of individual students in various contexts and different eras, which is nevertheless related to transformations of policies, organisational settings, and professional practices. The following sections present areas of intellectual scrutiny in which individualising processes are problematised as indicated above and are presented under two categories – namely individualising processes in late modernity (3.1) and transformations of policies, organisational settings, and professional practices (3.2).

### 3.1 Individualising processes in late modernity

International research on adult education has often problematised individualising processes at the intersection of global contemporary challenges and individuals' alleged capacity for rational decision making and manoeuvring between problematic situations. A common element in these studies is a keen interest in scrutinising changes in adult education contexts, which emerge as responses to societal needs and are related to a discourse switch from 'adult education' to 'life-long learning' – a phenomenon characterised by Su (2007) as a paradigm shift.

More specifically, a common feature among many relevant studies has been the employment of Beck's conceptualisations of *reflexive modernity* and *the risk society* (Beck, 1992). According to Beck, social challenges are no longer so related to the redistribution of wealth and the struggle between labour and capital – issues that were prominent during the industrial age. Rather, contemporary challenges involve problems of a worldwide character, such as ecological catastrophes and pandemics. Such challenges are very difficult to handle and affect all humans, regardless of their social class, economic prosperity, or any other assets. As a result, traditionally dominant structures, such as class attachment, no longer exert the same influence on people. Individualising processes emerge as modernity enables the proliferation of possible life trajectories while also requiring well-informed decision making in an increasingly uncertain and risky world – hence, modernity must be reflexive.

At the same time, the distribution of opportunities is unequal and, to construct their own biographies, people must learn how to manoeuvre between potential risks. Jansen and van der Veen (1992) argued that individualising processes are both liberating and coercive, in that they hold individuals responsible for things that are out of their control, and therefore, they do not entail "liberation and empowerment, but coercion and humiliation" (p. 279). In a later publication, the au-

thors concluded that societal shortcomings, inherent in modern institutions, had triggered demands for a new kind of citizen. They argued that in states with neoliberal governance models, the idea may prevail that “the *processes of individualisation are not radical enough* and that the modern subject is still too much hampered in its freedom by traditions, state interventions and social or cultural pressures to conform” (Jansen & van der Veen, 1997, p. 272, italicised emphasis in the original).

In examining the case of Canadian adult education, for example, Kulich (1991) argued that its deinstitutionalisation had rendered learning an individual responsibility as the focus moved away from institutionally based education towards independent adult learners. Similar claims have been made for other national contexts, such as Czechia (Kalenda & Kočvarová, 2022), Greece (Prokou, 2014), the Netherlands (Glastra et al., 2004), and Portugal (Abrantes, 2013). In all of the aforementioned studies, individualising processes have been problematised in their mediating and ambivalent role of both enabling personal choice among a range of alternatives while also making individuals exclusively responsible for the anticipated outcomes of specific courses of action.

The identified risks, among which individuals must learn how to manoeuvre, have been related to hypercompetition in the labour market and the instability of employment conditions (Glastra et al., 2004; Kalenda & Kočvarová, 2022). They were also related to new types of social inequality that emerge from individuals’ potential for lifelong learning (Piazza, 2010). Glastra et al. (2004) argued that, due to such risks, people must develop skills in creating their own elective biographies by engaging in constant reflection and well-informed decision making.

Another area of research in which individualising processes have been examined has considered mostly disadvantaged groups and specific kinds of rationalities, which are expected to be enhanced by adult education. A main topic has been the gradual detachment of socially vulnerable groups from their dependency on the state, which presupposes the ability to exert certain degrees of agentic actions. Examinations of collectivistic vis-à-vis individualistic perspectives in adult education, and of the emergence of new social questions regarding the exclusion of individuals at risk, have by and large been central (e.g., Jansen & van der Veen, 1997; Kalenda & Kočvarová, 2022; Kulich, 1991; McLean, 2016; Prokou, 2014; van der Veen, 2010).

Furthermore, labour market participation has very often been deemed the solution to lifting such barriers (Kalenda & Kočvarová, 2022; Prokou, 2014); however, vulnerable groups have still been found to be disproportionately exposed at



the risk of exclusion. To address prominent societal problems, such as poverty and unemployment, individuals must employ rationalities that would help them to overcome such problems (see Jansen & van der Veen, 1997). Thus, the omnipresent social question of collective inequalities has been gradually transformed into a new type of social question that is related to the marginalisation of individuals at risk (van der Veen, 2010).

### 3.2 Transformations of policies, organisational settings, and professional practices

By addressing ambivalences in contemporary societies in relation to the emergence of individualising processes, studies have examined the development of adult education in various contexts, with a particular interest in how its purpose and organisation have evolved over the years (e.g., Biesta, 2006, 2012; Jansen & van der Veen, 1992; Su, 2007; Teräs & Lasonen, 2013; van der Veen, 2010).

Studies such as that of Edwards and Miller (2000) have focused on the implications faced by adult educators. On the same topic, Fenwick (2003b) concluded that individualisation acts as a dominant force in societies and has a detrimental impact on teachers' professional practice. Examining the case of portfolio educators – self-employed teachers detached from educational organisations in terms of employment – Fenwick argued that they had experienced tensions that stem from hard negotiations as well as suffered much deterioration in their well-being and professional practice. In this context, in which the individualisation of careers induces insecurity and risk (Kalenda & Kočvarová, 2022), the idea of autonomous entrepreneurs engaging in lifelong learning has often appeared as a solution.

In the Canadian context, Kulich (1991) argued that adult education had often been driven by contradictory perspectives and that a turn towards instrumentalism had obscured its social character by addressing mostly individual needs rather than societal ones. Many years later, Kulich's conclusions were supported by another study. McLean (2016) examined official discourses on Canadian education for Inuit adults during 1940–1980. Initially, the author argued, the perceived collective deficiencies of Inuit people triggered a number of educational initiatives aimed at their group. Adult education was seen by the state as a means to 'free' Inuit from the barriers of their group belongingness. Over the years, however, the group's deficiency discourses were gradually replaced by a logic of attributing deficits to individuals (individualisation of inadequacy); therefore, the purpose of adult education became more of an endeavour to educate and form subjects of modernity.

As McLean (2016) argued, “[this adaptation to modernity] was no longer to be accomplished by shifting the collective characteristics of Inuit; modernisation was to be accomplished by remoulding individuals, one by one” (p. 18).

Moreover, Edwards and Miller (2000), Mufic and Fejes (2022), and Prokou (2014) have argued that quality assurance, interdisciplinary and transferable skills, the accumulation of credits, and flexible forms of education and employment were ascribed greater importance in adult education policies and practices. As careers became increasingly fragmented and a matter of personal choice and responsibility, the connection between learning and employability was further enhanced. Onnismaa (2003) commented, *inter alia*, that this phenomenon may have engaged individuals in creative, problem-solving educational practices, such as the creation of individual study programmes, rendering adult education a unique school form. The use of individualising tools in instruction was also highlighted much earlier by Rachal (1984).

In the Swedish context, Mufic and Fejes (2022) argued that processes such as auditing, outsourcing through procurement, and the use of economic terminology have been used as standardisation practices for increasing quality. Furthermore, Wärvik (2013) concluded that efforts to standardise individualising processes were often a source of tensions, especially when policy demands were against teachers’ professional and pedagogical values. In such cases, teachers actively worked on educational frameworks to enact different types of individualising processes, often by going against what had been prescribed by policy. Moreover, Henning Loeb and Lumsden Wass (2014) identified demanding processes in individualised educational frameworks, which required self-regulation and effective decision making on behalf of students. This resulted in their detachment from educational organisations as collective entities and contributed to the establishment of adult education as an instrumental enterprise (Fejes et al., 2018). Finally, Muhrman and Andersson (2022) concluded that establishing adult education frameworks which correspond to individual students’ needs while maintaining quality at a high level is a challenging task.

In sum, it is evident that individualising processes in adult education entail a wide array of expressions and interpretations as they are played out in policies, organisational settings, and professional practices. To examine them requires a conceptual framework capable of accounting for the abovementioned aspects. This is the topic of the next chapter.



## 4. Theoretical framework

### 4.1 Rationale for the choice of theory

As Chapter 2 demonstrated, SFI is an education that has been shaped by a range of historical and social factors. Simultaneously, due to its multiple functions and projections, it has had a deep societal impact. For example, particular political, educational, and social intentions are expected to be fulfilled in and through SFI as municipalities, via MAE, provide the framework for the education to be organised, financed, and implemented. This process, however, also involves other important actors with own agendas, which reflect a wide range of societal needs requiring social and political action. Some of these societal needs may concern the integration of marginalised groups, addressing unemployment, reducing illiteracy, or contributing to coherence and well-being in diverse social contexts. In this sense, all involved actors depend on one another to achieve their goals and contribute to their particular objectives; therefore, their common involvement has an impact on both their own frameworks and their common undertakings.

At the same time, individualising processes in SFI are prescribed as solutions to a plethora of challenges, and involved actors may outline partially conflicting formulations since ample space exists for interpretation. This aspect has also been acknowledged by state authorities. For example, a research overview from the Swedish Institute for Educational Research (2019) examined the factors that characterise ‘individualised instruction’ in adult education. The review identified a need for further research in the field by highlighting the term’s ambiguity and its emergence upon a complicated interplay between various factors.

SFI, as a historically formed educational area with the purpose of addressing a number of different political, educational, and societal needs, incorporates interactions between a range of actors and elements. In this framework, individualising processes are expected to be enacted with consequent implications for the involved actors, their practices, and organisational settings. Therefore, individualising processes should be understood as emerging at the nexus of socially and historically situated policies and practices which also embrace new regimes of economic control within the marketised MAE.

To address the multifaceted and polyvalent character of individualising processes, the present thesis examines them through the notion of a complex concept, a conceptualisation initially introduced by Murphy (1988, 2002) and further developed by Engeström et al. (2005). Therefore, individualising processes are assumed to embrace a multitude of meanings, transcend organisational settings, and engage different actors in common undertakings. Their multivoicedness often leads involved stakeholders to develop partially contradictory understandings and to set conflicting goals.

To examine individualising processes through the notion of a complex concept in the SFI context, a conceptual framework is required that can account for the multivoicedness and complicated interplay of the different actors seen in their totality and around their involvement in SFI education. Therefore, the present thesis employs the conceptual framework of cultural-historical activity theory (CHAT; Engeström, 1987, 2001; Engeström & Sannino, 2010). In the remainder of this chapter, the basic tenets of CHAT are presented along with the relevant theoretical and analytical concepts that were employed in the research.

## 4.2 Cultural-historical activity theory and its application on the SFI context

CHAT is a variety of approaches rather than a monolithic conceptual entity (Kaptelinin, 2005), and its roots can be traced back to dialectical materialism and classical German philosophy (Roth & Lee, 2007). The fundamental grounds of CHAT largely lie in the works of Vygotsky, Luria, and Leontiev and rest on the idea that the human mind is not confined within the brain but is rather constituted in the ways humans engage with the world through the mediation of cultural artefacts (Sannino & Engeström, 2018).

The present thesis draws its theoretical framework from the Helsinki school of activity theory, an approach which models activity systems as the prime unit of analysis, emphasises the object orientation of human activities, and highlights contradictions as the main catalyst of change (Engeström, 1987, 2001; Engeström & Sannino, 2021). The following paragraphs provide an account of the different generations of activity theory, each with their own prime unit of analysis. This helps to illuminate the positioning of the thesis within the conceptual and analytical framework of CHAT.

Vygotsky's triad of subject–object–mediating artefact is considered the first generation of activity theory. The principle of mediation is central and builds on

the idea that people do not have direct access to the surrounding world – rather, their interactions are always mediated. Figure 2 presents the model of a culturally mediated action that may be considered as the unit of analysis in the first generation of activity theory (Engeström, 2001).

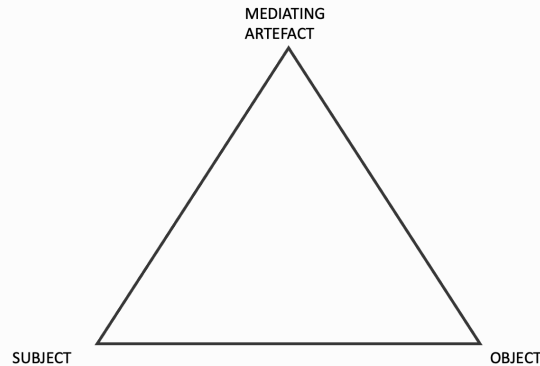


Figure 2 Vygotsky's triad of subject–object–mediating artefact (Engeström, 2001)

Building on Vygotsky's ideas, Leontiev further developed what is schematically called the second generation of activity theory (Bakhurst, 2009). By reflecting on Vygotsky's triad of subject–object–mediating artefact, representing human mediated action, Leontiev argued for the importance of social contexts and the collective character of human endeavours (Leontiev, 2003). The concept of activity and the theoretical account of its hierarchical structure in terms of activities–actions–operations are considered Leontiev's main contributions to activity theory (Sannino & Engeström, 2018). The structure of activity may be exemplified by the case of hunting in primitive vis-à-vis contemporary societies. Members engaged in the same collective activity (hunting) may simultaneously implement different individual or group actions through the division of labour (e.g., some scare and divert the game, while others chase it down) and by using appropriate artefacts (e.g., holding a tool). This process of holding a tool does not require any special thought or preparation; rather, it is conducted in a somewhat automatic and direct manner (i.e., it constitutes an operation in Leontiev's terminology). The actions described in the example above have different goals to achieve per se; nevertheless, they only make sense when viewed within the wider framework of an activity that aims to

satisfy shifting human – and thus shifting societal – needs: to feed members of a community and achieve survival, in the case of a primitive society, or simply to enjoy oneself by hunting an animal in more contemporary cases. The embeddedness, specifically in collective endeavours, uniquely distinguishes individual or group actions when examined in terms of different collective activities. According to Leontiev, human action only makes sense when viewed in the wider framework of collective activities; therefore, the latter should constitute the minimum unit of analysis in examinations of social phenomena (Leontiev, 2003). Activity, thus, constitutes “a relatively durable system in which the division of labour separates different goal-oriented actions and combines them to serve a collective object” (Sannino & Engeström, 2018).

Figure 3 presents the resulting analytical framework from Leontiev’s work that was encapsulated by Engeström (1987) as an activity system model that consists of six components. At the top of the triangle, one can identify Vygotsky’s triad of subject–object–mediating artefact representing culturally mediated action. However, human action is now placed within the wider framework of a collective activity. Through division of labour (each action may have different goals to achieve), a collective activity builds upon actions under formal and informal rules and always aims at the procurement of an object, the ‘raw material or problem space at which the activity is directed’ (Sannino & Engeström, 2018), and which is shared by the same group (community).

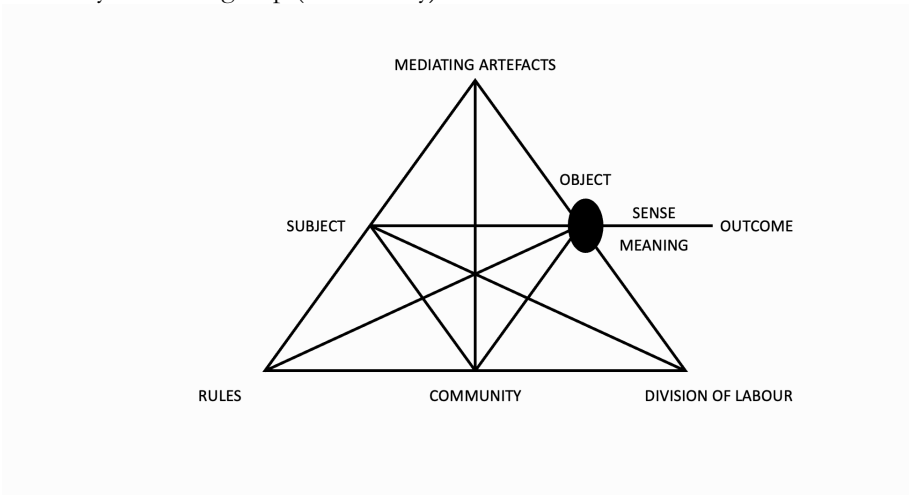


Figure 3 The model of activity system (Engeström, 2001)

Leontiev's unit of analysis was later criticised as being insensitive to cultural diversity (Engeström, 2001). Contemporary societies substantially differ from the society in the Soviet Union at the time the sociocultural approach was born and developed. Human activities, such as schooling or work, are now much more complex and multifaceted. Research on learning, for example, is no longer confined only to school premises but is now expanded over a number of different interacting sites. Yrjö Engeström (1987, 2001) stressed the importance of conceptual tools that are capable of accounting for multiple perspectives. He defined the main principles of the resulting third generation of CHAT as follows: the unit of analysis is again a collective, artefact-mediated, and object-oriented activity system, but it is now seen in its network relations with at least another activity system (see Figure 4). In this sense, human society is understood as a network of interacting activity systems (Roth & Lee, 2007). In addition, the activity systems, as communities of multiple views and traditions formed over long periods of time, are characterised by multivoicedness, where the different positions of the participants require translation and negotiation.

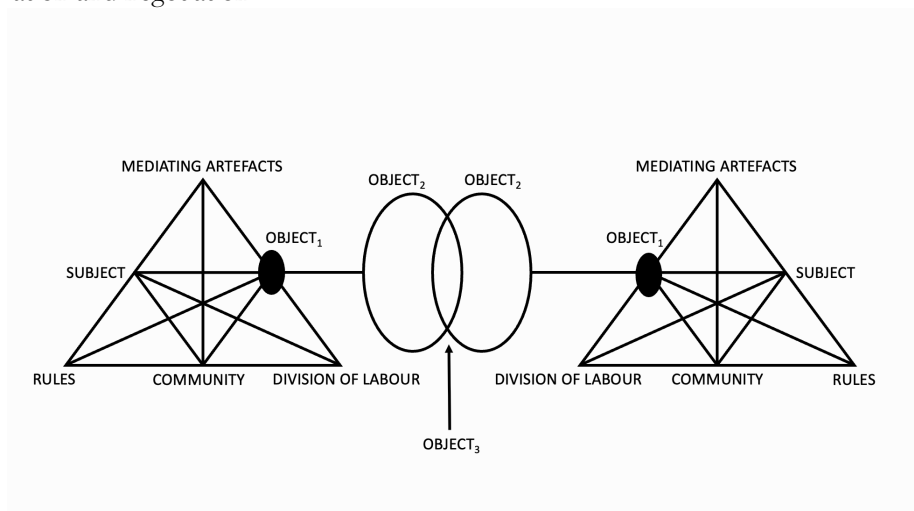


Figure 4 The model of two interacting activity systems as the minimal unit of analysis (Engeström, 2001)

As demonstrated above, CHAT has over the years been characterised by an ongoing intellectual engagement with the different ways in which human societies are organised and the shifting societal needs which demand conceptual tools capable of grasping contemporary challenges. At present, the focus is placed on the emer-



gence of challenges on a global scale (e.g., ecological catastrophes, poverty, and pandemics), the handling of which seems an impossible task. The fourth generation of CHAT (see Engeström & Sannino, 2021; Sannino, 2020) deals with such problems and is in the process of formulating a unit of analysis capable of addressing the global and urgent character of human collective undertakings.

The fact that the development of CHAT is often depicted through different generations does not mean that previous conceptualisations and units of analysis are obsolete. Rather, it is the study object that defines which unit of analysis – and therefore which generation of CHAT – is most suitable for providing appropriate conceptual and analytical tools.

Before positioning the present thesis in the context of CHAT, however, it is first crucial to provide a more detailed account of some concepts that are very central to CHAT, namely object, motive, and contradictions, as they constitute essential analytical tools for achieving the aim of this study.

### 4.3 Tracing the object and motive of activities

As previously mentioned, SFI is an educational field rendered with multi-voicedness and potentially contradictory goals. The plethora of expectations and stakeholders' various degrees of involvement and influence may challenge the content, purpose, and framework within which the education takes place.

Here, the following questions may arise: What is the purpose of SFI? Is it primarily language education or does it have a more prominent societal projection? How do students' individual aspirations count against the needs of the labour market? Is the programme supposed to teach a second language or perhaps also to introduce, organise, integrate or assimilate, include or even exclude its target group? What should be taught, with what means, and for how long? The list of questions may be further supplemented with numerous other dilemmas and conflicting alternatives. Noteworthy, it is far from simple to provide straightforward answers to these questions, as previous research demonstrated (see Lundgren et al., 2017). The possible array of diverse conceptualisations formulated by policy-makers, education researchers, politicians, administrators, principals, teachers, and students with regard to what SFI actually does or should do is rather challenging to capture and analyse in its entirety.

Then, what possibilities are available for addressing such questions? Based on the fundamental principle that human activity is always object-oriented, Leontiev

(2003) suggested that all scientific investigations of activity should target the discovery of its object.

Ontologically, objects appear first in their independent, material form and are then conceptualised as mental images by the subjects – hence the materialistic grounds of CHAT. Furthermore, the relationship between the subject and the object is dialectical, as each presupposes and transforms the other and can only be understood as components of a corresponding activity (Leontiev, 2003).

Nevertheless, the object is a dynamic concept that is not easy to define and capture. Every human activity is elicited by specific needs and is always directed towards an object capable of satisfying them. In this sense, it is the object that distinguishes one activity from another. However, Leontiev's conception of the object has been criticised as a primarily theoretical notion that is missing evidence on how it can be used in empirical research (Kaptelinin & Miettinen, 2005). Further elaborations on the concept may provide more insights.

It is also vital to examine the object in relation to another closely related concept – namely the motive of the activity. According to Leontiev (2003), the object of the activity is its true motive. This potentially confusing articulation may imply that both concepts share the same meaning. However, a motive “impels a human being to set a task and to define a goal, which, being posed under definite conditions, requires the accomplishment of an act aimed at the creation or the procurement of an object that satisfies the motive and need” (Davydov et al., 1983, p. 36). It is upon the encounter of a need with an object capable of satisfying it that a motive emerges (Hyysalo, 2005). Again, the relation between object and motive is dialectical, as the motive is the elicitor of an object-oriented activity while it is evoked by the conjoining of a need that can be satisfied by an object projected in the future (Foot, 2002). Furthermore, an object-oriented activity might well be poly-motivated in that multiple motives cooperatively elicit the object (Kaptelinin, 2005). In the case of SFI, for example, the activity of teachers may aim to procure a series of different societal needs, such as the elimination of illiteracy, promotion of social integration, or covering of the needs of the labour market with well-trained employees. It is therefore crucial to not confound the two notions.

Furthermore, the object is a historically developing entity that is never fully attained or complete (Sannino et al., 2016). Therefore, it should not be seen as a set of specific goals but rather as a horizon of possibilities towards which activities orient themselves. The dynamic and contradictory nature of this concept has been highlighted in several different ways. For example, Nardi (2005) argued for a distinction between constructing an object – in other words, normatively defining

how it should be – and instantiating an object in working towards its realisation. In addition, the object is always in a state of transition and may manifest itself in different ways to different participants of the activity (Foot, 2002). Engeström and Sannino (2010), for instance, distinguished between generalised objects of historically evolving activity systems and specific objects as they manifest themselves to particular subjects at any given time. An example could be the object of education: as a collective activity that has emerged over hundreds of years of human history on the one hand – and one that is therefore difficult to grasp and delineate – and as specific instances of educational phenomena on the other hand, in which practitioners work towards reaching specific goals and, unconsciously, the procurement of an object.

Object reproduction, then, may be seen as a process of keeping collective activities stable and ongoing. Simultaneously, objects evolve as societal needs change. A concept that addresses this polyvalent nature of the object is contradictions, which refer to historically accumulating structural tensions within and between activity systems. Contradictions are theoretical terms and not directly observable; rather, they are manifested empirically with the occurrence and expression of tensions (Engeström, 2001; Engeström & Sannino, 2010). The importance of contradictions lies in the principle that they are the driving force of change and development, since dealing with them leads to a reconceptualised object of the activity capable of accounting for a wider range of possibilities. The following section explains how this is possible through the concepts of expansive learning and transformative agency by double stimulation.

## 4.4 Expansive learning and the emergence of transformative agency by double stimulation

Employing the CHAT concepts of activity, object, motive, and contradictions in the research process assists in contextualising and gaining a better understanding of the phenomena in focus in this thesis. As has been argued, SFI is an education that embraces a plethora of interacting actors with own agendas; therefore, individualising processes may be a source of tensions, especially for the activities of actors who are expected to enact them (i.e., educational organisations and teachers). According to Engeström and Sannino (2010), “practitioners facing major transformations in their work activities are indeed working out contradictions and struggling to overcome the impossible” (p. 20), which is a process encapsulated by the term ‘expansive learning’.

Expansive learning refers to learners who are themselves working on redefining and expanding the object of their activity, thus enabling new and a wider range of possibilities and knowledge (Engeström & Sannino, 2010). Stemming from the material-dialectical grounds of CHAT, the notion of expansive learning redefines Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development as the space for expansive transition from actions to activity (hence a primacy on communities as learners). It is the detection of and dealing with contradictions that play a major role here, since engaging in their analysis stimulates change and leads to the emergence of a new expanded object for the activity (Ellis, 2011). This is succeeded through the employment of a series of epistemic actions, starting by questioning the existing practices within an activity; collectively dealing with identified contradictions; modelling, developing, and implementing new ways of conduct; reflecting; and finally consolidating the new practice (see Engeström, 2001). Expansive learning does not concern all occasions of human learning phenomena; rather, it is about cases where the content and goal of initiatives are not known in advance. By dealing with – and analysing – a problematic object, actors formulate new concepts, thereby expanding the horizon of possibilities and understandings.

One approach to facilitating expansive learning is formative interventions (see Engeström & Sannino, 2010), the design of which is based on participants' collective efforts to understand and deal with historically accumulated contradictions identified in their activity (Sannino et al., 2016). Dialectical in nature, the process incorporates resistance and negotiations, and the resulting concepts are not generalisable in the strict sense but may serve as the point of departure in other contexts. It is important to underline that formative interventions follow specific methodological steps. One such example is the Change Laboratory (for a detailed account, see Engeström et al., 2014).

Nevertheless, the present thesis does not involve any sort of structured intervention in the examined frameworks. Rather, it focuses on involved actors' capacity to act as subjects in their activities and, therefore, on their volitional and agentic actions, which are deemed crucial in examining individualising processes. For this purpose, the notion of transformative agency by double stimulation (TADS) is also employed (Sannino, 2015a, 2015b, 2022; Sannino et al., 2016). TADS is a process of intentionally overcoming seemingly unresolvable issues by actively changing the circumstances that frame problematic situations (Sannino, 2022). Described both as an outcome and a quality of expansive learning, TADS emerges from actors' volition and ability to shape the various activities in which they find themselves and is identified in processes of resistance, negotiation, new

idea formulation, and implementation (Engeström & Sannino, 2010; Sannino et al., 2016). Sannino (2015a) argued that in a world of uncertainties, “it is increasingly important to understand how people form willful actions aimed at changing their circumstances and shaping their uncertain futures” (p. 1).

The principle of double stimulation, stemming from Vygotsky’s legacy and broadened by Sannino (2015a), is of paramount importance in the emergence of transformative agency. In dealing with pressing societal needs, the nature of which may be multifaceted and unpredictable, individuals or collectives often experience a paralysing conflict of motives (first stimulus), in that no course of action is readily available for solving the problem. In this case, the concept of motive means “an urge, impulse, or desire to follow a certain course of action or to pursue a certain object” (Sannino et al., 2016, p. 604). Conflicts of motives can arise in situations of uncertainty when opposing options or aspirations clash, requiring “the courage of deliberate choice” (Sannino, 2015b, p. 8). The enactment of individualising processes, seen as a complex concept, is bound to produce such challenging situations.

To overcome paralysing conflicts of motives, individuals or groups may identify meaningful artefacts (second stimuli) that can be used whenever the situation reappears. Such artefacts can be material tools or discursive entities. What constitutes the second stimulus is their active employment by actors to break out of conflicts of motives (Sannino, 2022, p. 3). By relying on such second stimuli, people may gain control over challenging situations by transforming them into manageable issues.

Transformative agency emerges through the repeated use of second stimuli and the discovery of new possibilities that result in the transformation of both individuals and the problematic situations (Sannino, 2020, 2022). Therefore, the notion of transformative agency is dialectic in that “expanded understandings both enable and are produced by volitional actions, and volitional actions both contribute to, and are stabilised and secured by, transformative agency” (Hopwood & Gottschalk, 2022, p. 46). Within CHAT, individual actions often become sustained joint enterprises that transform collective activity systems, thus transcending the individual/collective dichotomy (Engeström et al., 2022).

## 4.5 Positioning the thesis in a CHAT context

Therefore, how is the present study positioned within the framework of CHAT? The main research question of the thesis concerns how individualising processes emerge and are played out in the context of SFI. As previously mentioned, SFI is

seen as education that involves a number of different actors, such as teachers, principals, municipal officers, and staff from the Public Employment Service. It can now be argued that these actors participate in activities which revolve around SFI education in different ways. Teachers' activity, for example, may be regarded as being oriented towards the teaching of a second language, while the activity of staff from the Public Employment Service could concern students' social integration and transition into the labour market, and so forth. In all cases, an examination of an activity is always dependent on the identification of "the individual or subgroup whose position and point of view are chosen as the perspective of the analysis" (Sannino & Engeström, 2018, p. 45).

To problematise how individualising processes emerge and are played out in the context of SFI, the present thesis focuses (i) on municipal authorities' engagement in organising, implementing, and controlling SFI – thereby establishing frameworks where individualising processes are played out; and (ii) on SFI teachers' capacity to act as subjects in their professional undertakings when they attempt to adapt education to the needs of individual students. Nevertheless, to examine individualising processes through the notion of a complex concept (Engeström et al., 2005), the activities of the aforementioned actors cannot be analysed as isolated collective entities. Instead, they must be problematised in their interactions with the activities of other neighbouring constellations, such as the Public Employment Service, whose influence on how education must be adapted to individual students' needs is crucial. Therefore, the conceptual and analytical framework of the present thesis is grounded upon the third generation of CHAT, in which the unit of analysis is an activity seen in its interactions with at least another activity (Engeström & Sannino, 2021). Chapter 5 presents the methodological framework employed in the present thesis to enable the aforementioned examination.



## 5. Methodological approach

This chapter presents the methodological approach of the thesis. To pursue the research aim, three studies were conducted to address the formulated research subquestions and to offer insights into individualising processes in the context of SFI. The following sections provide an account of the research design, the employed methods, and the analytical strategy applied in the three studies along with challenges which emerged in the process. The chapter concludes with a problematisation of quality issues in research and ethical considerations related to the nature of the data created for the thesis.

### 5.1 Research strategy and design – Why the specific studies?

Developing a research strategy to achieve the aim of the present thesis was a process grounded on the kind of research questions posed and the epistemological stance that stems from the CHAT context. To allow an examination of how individualising processes emerge and how they are played out in SFI policy and practice, it was crucial to address the following aspects:

- i) Present practices related to individualising processes in SFI are seen as incorporating “layers of history actively influencing the present-day actions of the subjects” (Sannino & Engeström, 2018, p. 46). Thus, it was important to employ methods that allowed an examination of the history of the present as a unique mixture of historically accumulated practices, beliefs, and challenges.
- ii) The emergence of individualising processes is understood and examined as a process of concept formation and through the notion of a complex concept (Engeström et al., 2005). Therefore, individualising processes needed to be traced by having the activities of the actors involved in SFI as point of departure and, more specifically, of those actors who are considered as the prime ones in adapting SFI education to individual students’ needs.
- iii) Change is understood as the working out of contradictions emerging within and between the activities in focus and empirically identified through the



expression of tensions (Engeström & Sannino, 2010). The applied methods and analytical strategy should, therefore, enable the identification of tensions.

The present study was designed as a compilation thesis consisting of three sub-studies, in which the abovementioned issues were addressed. The following sections provide an account of how this was achieved.

Initially – and to trace the emergence of individualising processes in a historical context – it was necessary to identify societal challenges that elicit individualising processes in adult education frameworks and the ways in which the latter materialise in policies and practices. The means to make such an examination was research on adult education. To this purpose, Article I was designed as a literature review to select and analyse relevant research that revolves around individualising processes in adult education frameworks worldwide.

The rationale for focusing on an international context was based on the argument that Swedish MAE and SFI, like other adult education systems on a global scale, are school forms embedded in transnational policy agendas (Milana, 2012). Through processes of globalisation in educational contexts and the emergence of international organisations (see Shields, 2013; Spring, 2008), educational policies and practices are no longer confined within national or institutional boundaries; rather, they transcend local frameworks and are spreading worldwide in unprecedented ways. Therefore, tracing individualising processes through a set of international research publications contributed to establishing a historical framework that was also relevant for the context of SFI.

As mentioned in Chapter 4, the conceptual and analytical framework of the present thesis is grounded in the third generation of CHAT, in which the unit of analysis constitutes an activity seen in its interactions with at least another activity (Engeström & Sannino, 2021). A strategic choice had to be made at this point in the research design, where the actors whose activities were crucial for the analysis were selected. Based on the organisational aspects of SFI, the activities of two types of actors were deemed essential for addressing the main research question of the thesis – namely municipal authorities and SFI teachers. Consequently, two empirical studies were designed in which the aforementioned actors' activities were central in the analysis (Articles II and III).

Specifically, the aim of Article II was to analyse how individualising processes are played out in SFI policy and in the everyday work of municipal actors, who are responsible for organising the education. The study had a keen interest in

examining individualising processes at the backdrop of emerging tensions due to adult education's contested roles of educating, contributing to social integration, and accommodating the needs of the labour market. An examination of policy demands was central in establishing an understanding of the framework within which municipal authorities are expected to enact individualising processes in SFI education; then, the study focused more precisely on their practical and organisational undertakings. Therefore, the study was designed as an empirical inquiry, consisting of qualitative interviews and supplemented by a policy analysis.

Finally, the aim of Article III was to examine the challenges that SFI teachers face when they attempt to adapt education to individual students' needs and the corresponding strategies they employ to overcome emerging problems. Identifying through qualitative interviews the ways in which SFI teachers handle conflicting demands that stem from policy, organisations, students, and themselves was crucial for addressing the main research question of this thesis and for providing insights into how individualising processes are played out in the context of SFI.

The following subsections provide a detailed account and discussion of the methodological approach that was developed and employed in the three studies.

### 5.1.1 Literature review

To gather relevant adult education research on individualising processes through a literature review, it was first necessary to establish appropriate search blocks, thereby delimiting the scope of the review to relevant areas. Relevant search terms were identified with the contribution of two librarians from the Gothenburg University Library and the use of the thesaurus function of the Education Research Complete database.

A methodological challenge emerged as the identification of relevant search terms was a demanding task. Two major areas had to be constructed and articulated into search blocks that would consequently be applied in search engines.

First, one search block had to consist of terms relevant to individualising processes. As demonstrated in Chapter 3, individualising processes have emerged in a plethora of contexts and periods, and also under different conceptual and theoretical perspectives. This entailed a potentially wide array of definitions and keywords used in research publications, which could nevertheless concern the type of research relevant to this thesis. An attempt was made to include as many keywords as possible to capture examinations of processes during which educational frameworks were adapted to individual students' needs and conditions.

Second, the search results had to be delimited to adult education research. Constructing a search block for this purpose was also challenging because adult education may present a wide range of organisational aspects, pedagogical methods, and cultural features (see Nordhaug, 1986; Rubenson & Elfert, 2015; Tight, 1996). The aim here was to include search terms that could provide results related to research on frameworks of formal or non-formal adult education, resembling the features of MAE.

Finally, the construction of a third search block was deemed necessary, this time to exclude research that was irrelevant for the purpose of the study but that nevertheless appeared persistently during test searches. This type of research mainly concerned the field of higher education, nurse or medical education, and engineering.

Table 1 presents the three search blocks constructed for the literature review.

Table 1 Search blocks used in the literature review

<b>'individualising processes' block</b>	individual* OR "individualised instruction" OR "individualized instruction" OR "individualised teaching" OR "individualized teaching" OR "individualised learning" OR "individualized learning" OR "student* centered education" OR "student* centred education" OR "student* centered instruction" OR "student* centred instruction" OR "student* centered teaching" OR "student* centred teaching" OR "student* centered learning" OR "student* centred learning" OR "learner* centered education" OR "learner* centred education" OR "learner* centered instruction" OR "learner* centred instruction" OR "learner* centered teaching" OR "learner* centred teaching" OR "adaptive education" OR "adaptive learning" OR "adaptive teaching"
<b>'adult education' block</b>	"adult education" OR "adult learning" OR "adult learners" OR "adult students" OR "continuing education" OR "lifelong learning" OR "lifelong education" OR tafe OR "technical and further education" OR andragog*
<b>block to exclude</b>	"higher education" OR "tertiary education" OR "universit* student*" OR (nurs* W/5 educ*) OR (medic* W/5 educ*) OR (engineer* W/5 educ*)

To achieve an adequate inclusion of relevant records, the search blocks were applied in the following three databases: Education Research Complete, Scopus, and Web of Science. Searches were modified to include peer-reviewed articles, books, and book chapters published in English. The inclusion criteria were informed by the constructed search blocks; that is, the selected records had to concern individualising processes articulated as the adaptation of education to individual stu-

dents’ needs and conditions, as well as adult education frameworks resembling MAE features. Notably, the selection of studies was in no way affected by their theoretical, conceptual, or methodological approaches or by the author’s perception of their scientific rigour.

The datasets were organised using the Zotero reference management software. Table 2 presents the screening process, which was conducted in five rounds based on guidelines provided by Polanin et al. (2019). The process resulted in 22 publications that were deemed relevant for the purposes of the study.

Table 2 Screening process

	<b>ERC</b>	<b>Scopus</b>	<b>Web of Science</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>Round 1</b> (search with blocks)	3,604	1,896	845	<b>N= 6,345</b>
<b>Round 2 (titles and abstracts)</b>	186	173	65	(exclude 5,921) <b>N= 424</b>
<b>Round 3</b> (cross-check/remove duplicates – abstracts)				(exclude 62) <b>N= 362</b>
<b>Round 4 (full texts)</b>				(exclude 236) <b>N= 126</b>
<b>Round 5 (full texts)</b>				(exclude 104) <b>N= 22</b>

### 5.1.2 Policy texts

Regarding public policy, the inclusion criteria were related to the degree to which individualising processes were set as concrete policy goals in the texts. The included documents were as follows:

- Government Bills:
  - Prop. 2014/15:85 (Increased individualisation – A more effective SFI and adult education / sv: Ökad individanpassning – en effektiva sfi och vuxenutbildning)
  - Prop. 2021/22:51(A coherent education for newly-arrived individuals who have compulsory education / sv: En sammanhållen utbildning för nyanlända som har utbildningsplikt)
- Government Official Reports:
  - SOU 2013:20 (Municipal basic adult education – a review for increased individualisation and efficiency / sv: Kommunal vuxenutbildning på grundläggande nivå - en översyn för ökad individanpassning och effektivitet)

- SOU 2013:76 (Swedish for immigrants – freedom of choice, flexibility and individualisation / sv: Svenska för invandrare - valfrihet, flexibilitet och individanpassning)
- SOU 2020:66 (Collaborating forces - for strengthened quality and equality within MAE for students with Swedish as a second language [known as KLIVA report] / sv: Samverkande krafter – för stärkt kvalitet och likvärdighet inom komvux för elever med svenska som andraspråk), along with its preceding Memorandum
- SFI syllabus (Swedish National Agency for Education, 2022)
- Swedish Education Act (SFS 2010:800)
- Ordinance on Adult Education (SFS 2011:1108)

The challenge here was to identify a relevant dataset that could enable a thorough analysis and correspond to the aim of the article. In the present thesis, the year 2016 is regarded as a milestone in the history of SFI because of its incorporation into MAE – a process initiated with the purpose of enhancing students’ progression through education and their transition to the labour market or further studies. Policy texts preceding this period and the consequent evaluations and promotion of revised measures were considered relevant for the examination, as individualising processes were explicitly set as policy goals to be achieved.

### 5.1.3 Qualitative interviews

In Article II, selection of participants for the interviews was based on their capacity to organise, implement, and control SFI education as municipal authorities. In total, seven representatives from five different municipalities participated in the study. All participants had key roles in the context of SFI. More precisely, interviews were conducted with five SFI principals, one head of an Adult Education Unit, and one education coordinator for SFI.

In the process of recruiting participants for the study, questions emerged regarding features of MAE and required a careful selection of interviewees. The reason for this was that MAE, after a major restructuring through the AEI (see Lumsden Wass, 2004), presents rather diverse organisational aspects today. Specifically, municipalities may choose to either (partially) outsource MAE – usually through tendering-based procurement processes – or to run it internally, a scheme that has resulted in considerable differences in how municipalities organise and control adult education (Holmqvist, 2022).

To address this issue, the study adopted a twofold approach. The aim was to include participants from municipalities that presented all three possible organisational features of MAE, namely municipalities with exclusively internally organised SFI, municipalities that had outsourced SFI education to private organisations through tendering-based procurement, and a combination of both public and private SFI education providers within the same municipality. Parallel to this, the ambition was for participating municipalities to also present a satisfactory range of demographic and geographic features. To achieve this aim, the classification categories provided at the time of the research by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions (2016) were used as a guide. Information letters (see Appendix A) were sent to the adult education headquarters of 19 municipalities. This resulted in the final inclusion of five municipalities that pertained to all major categories – namely one large city (or municipality near large city), three medium-sized towns (or municipalities near medium-sized towns), and one smaller town.

Six semistructured qualitative interviews were conducted with seven participants between 2019 and 2021. During the interviews, participants were asked to describe their daily work duties in organising and controlling SFI education. The discussions also revolved around challenging situations related to the enactment of individualising processes and the corresponding strategies employed by the participants to overcome emerging problems. All interviews were individual except for one, in which a principal requested the participation of an education coordinator to better describe their municipality's features and practices. In addition, two interviews were conducted in person at the adult education headquarters of one municipality and four interviews were conducted via Microsoft Teams due to COVID-19 pandemic-related restrictions. The participants were informed about the purpose of the study both orally and in written form. They were also asked to provide their informed consent (see Appendix C) and agreement to record the interview with a digital device. Each interview lasted approximately 60–70 minutes, resulting in 5.9 hours of voice-recorded material. The audio files were transcribed (non-verbatim transcription) producing 91 A4 pages of text.

In Article III, the methodological framework that was developed – and then applied in the research – was inspired by the principles of TADS (Sannino, 2015a, 2015b, 2022; Sannino et al., 2016). Therefore, attention was paid to identifying challenges where teachers had attempted to adapt education to individual students' needs and the corresponding ways in which teachers had attempted to overcome problems by employing meaningful artefacts. It is important to clarify here that the study had a non-interventional character and that TADS was rather employed

as a conceptual resource for examining relevant phenomena and tensions in their unfolding.

Semistructured qualitative interviews were deemed the most appropriate method for addressing the study's research questions as restrictive measures against the COVID-19 pandemic were still active at the time. Information letters (see Appendix B) containing relevant information about participation were sent to the adult education headquarters of 24 Swedish municipalities. Representatives from eight municipalities responded and showed interest in further distributing the information letters to SFI teachers within their municipal boundaries. SFI teachers could directly contact the researcher and, thus, skip mediation from their employers. The process resulted in the recruitment of 18 participants for the study.

A similar issue emerged to that in Article II related to the character of MAE. The challenge here was to address both the diversity of municipalities' demographic features and the wide range of SFI's organisational contexts within MAE. Therefore, the recruitment process, that was again informed by the classification of Swedish municipalities valid at the time of the research (Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions, 2016), resulted in a group of participants from a wide range of geographic and demographic contexts. The diversity of SFI's organisational features was also well represented by including three municipalities that had outsourced the education (SFI was provided by two for-profit educational organisations and one folk high school) and five municipalities that organised SFI internally. Furthermore, the internal structure of SFI also had to be considered, namely that the education comprises four consecutive courses and three study tracks. This issue was addressed as the 18 participants represented all courses and study tracks.

When possible, focus groups were preferred to individual interviews. The motivation for choosing this specific type of inquiry was based on the expectation that allowing a dynamic interaction between participants would enable topics and themes relevant to the study to emerge (Krueger & Casey, 2015). Discussions between colleagues teaching in different courses and study tracks were also thought to highlight the specificities of each domain in SFI; therefore, they were considered to provide more opportunities for identifying conflicts of motives and the employment of meaningful artefacts.

Seven focus groups and four individual interviews with 18 SFI teachers were conducted between 2020 and 2021. Two interviews were arranged in physical settings (at the schools where teachers worked) before COVID-19 restrictive measures were in place, while nine were held using Microsoft Teams. Participants

were informed both orally and in written form about the purpose of the study before providing their informed consent (see Appendix C). All interviews were recorded with a digital device after obtaining the teachers' permission. The themes of the interviews revolved around issues that SFI teachers face in attempting to address individual students' needs and conditions. The participants were encouraged to provide descriptions of their daily work activities and to refer to problematic situations that had posed obstacles and challenges when they had attempted to adapt education to individual students' needs. Descriptions of the strategies employed to overcome problems were also central due to their analytical significance for the identification of second stimuli. Focus groups and individual interviews resulted in a total of 11.4 hours of voice-recorded material. The audio files were transcribed (non-verbatim transcription) producing 162 A4 pages of text.

## 5.2 Analytical strategy

To pursue the aim of the thesis and address the research question, the data analysis was guided by the conceptual framework of CHAT. This section presents the analytical concepts used and the questions posed during the data analysis process.

The selected studies resulting from the literature review, regardless of their theoretical and conceptual frameworks, were analysed as situated problematisations of various study objects, focusing on shifting societal needs (motive-related) that elicit – and are elicited by – transformations of adult education policies and practices (object-related). The idea, in this case, was to track the emergence of individualising processes in adult education research by focusing on the dialectic relationship between societal motives and the object of the activities (Engeström, 2001), as outlined in the selected literature. To achieve this, the following set of analytical questions was posed:

- i) What phenomena are studied in the selected literature?
- ii) How are individualising processes problematised in the studies (e.g., as a lack of quality in education, as organising knots for stabilising educational setting, or as cost-effective measures)?
- iii) What kind of societal needs are supposedly addressed by individualising processes (e.g., increased demands for citizens regarding self-sufficiency and responsibility taking)?



- iv) What are the implications of individualising processes in the contexts of the selected studies (e.g., increased standardisation and control and the deinstitutionalisation of adult education)?

Therefore, the analytical tools used from the CHAT framework, reflected in these four analytical questions, could account for the different meanings assigned to individualising processes in a plethora of adult education contexts; thus, they articulated a suitable analytical context that could incorporate a wide range of perspectives and epistemologies.

In the case of Article II, the data analysis – both for the policy texts and the qualitative interviews – was based on an examination of individualising processes through the notion of a complex concept (Engeström et al., 2005). In addition, the CHAT concepts of object and motive were employed (Engeström, 2001). The main focus of the analysis was the activities of the municipal officers, whose objects were seen as partially shared with the activities of other involved stakeholders, as these were formulated in the data.

The first step was to identify categories of problems that were raised in policy and emerged in the specific municipal frameworks of the empirical data, which formed the grounds upon which individualising processes were elicited and played out. This aim was facilitated by focusing on descriptions of challenging situations which necessitated further adaptations of education to individual students' needs and conditions. A categorisation of relevant issues was performed based on the following criteria: (i) identified tensions/problems (what does not work well); (ii) tools developed to overcome the problems; and (iii) how the object is affected.

In addition, particular attention was paid to solutions and measures proposed by policy and municipal authorities. The overall analytical aim was to trace object transformations of the involved stakeholders' activities, in which individualising processes were played out, by identifying tensions in policy and municipal practice between what has been (i.e., the historical) and the anticipated future. Here, the following analytical questions were posed:

- i) What are they trying to achieve through individualisation in policy and in municipal administration (i.e., societal motives/needs that must be addressed)?
- ii) What kind of tools/measures are put forward in the analysed policy documents and by the municipal actors for bringing about individualisation?
- iii) What kind of tensions can be identified in the activities of municipal actors?

In Article III, the analysis was guided by the principle of double stimulation (see Sannino, 2022), as both teachers' conflicts of motives and their employment of meaningful artefacts were essential elements for pursuing the study's aim. To identify first stimuli – that is, conflicts of motives – particular attention was paid to demands imposed on SFI teachers by different sources. The goal was to map out potential areas in which tensions emerged when different demands to adapt education to individual students' needs clashed with each other, leading to the emergence of challenges in teachers' work. Simultaneously, it was necessary to identify the meaningful artefacts employed to overcome problematic situations to establish an understanding of how individualising processes are played out in the activities of the teachers. The following analytical questions were posed during this process:

- i) What kind of tensions can be identified when teachers try to adapt education to the needs of individual students?
- ii) What artefacts do teachers employ to stabilise/handle the identified tensions?
- iii) What are they trying to achieve by engaging in the abovementioned process?

Table 3 presents a summary of the methods, data material, and analytical concepts employed in the three studies.

Table 3 Methods, data, and analytical concepts of the thesis

	<b>Article I</b>	<b>Article II</b>	<b>Article III</b>
<b>Method(s)</b>	Systematic literature review	Policy analysis Qualitative interviews (individual and group interview)	Qualitative interviews (individual) Focus group interviews
<b>Data</b>	22 peer-reviewed articles	Policy texts: government bills, official government reports, the SFI syllabus, the Education Act, and Ordinance on Adult Education Five qualitative individual interviews with five participants (four SFI principals and one head of an Adult Education Unit) One group interview with an SFI principal and an SFI education coordinator	Four individual interviews with SFI teachers Seven focus group interviews with 14 SFI teachers
<b>Analytical concepts</b>	Activity, motive, and object (Engeström, 2001)	Complex concept (Engeström et al., 2005) Activity, motive, and object (Engeström, 2001)	Activity and object (Engeström, 2001) TADS, first stimulus/conflicts of motives, second stimulus/meaningful artefacts (Sannino, 2015a, 2015b, 2022; Sannino et al., 2016)

### 5.3 Reflections on scientific quality

Enhancing quality in qualitative research is a process that depends on the approach and aim of the study. In this sense, researching can be compared to the everyday activity of cooking, where using and mixing similar ingredients may lead to the creation of different products. Similarly, it is the ways in which one engages with one's study object(s) that define the quality of the end result in research (Anderson & Arsenault, 1998). This process must be coherent, transparent, and open to

assessment. For this purpose, the quality criteria that served as the guiding principle throughout the research are presented in the following paragraphs.

Credibility, often regarded as the equivalent of internal validity in qualitative research, was grounded on the researcher's efforts to address the demands for prolonged and persistent engagement with the study object (Mertens, 2015). A challenge that emerged during the data creation process was related to restrictions imposed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The researcher's inability to visit and engage in the physical settings in which the participants' activities unfolded restricted his involvement with the "community of interest", but it also enhanced the "sufficient distance from the phenomenon under study" (Mertens, 2015, p. 330). Particular attention was paid to minimising the risk of potential bias in the interpretation of data through member checks. Member checks were conducted in situ during the interviews by asking the participants, when necessary, to verify the researcher's understanding of stated incidents, opinions, or any other relevant expressions (Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). In some cases, communication via email was initiated to verify an assertion or statement.

In addition, aspects of dependability were ensured by keeping records of all phases of the research in a logbook. Interview transcripts and all relevant documents have also been made accessible for auditing processes to establish confirmability (i.e., the tracking of the findings back to their source; Mertens, 2015).

The abovementioned quality indicators served as guiding principles to enhance the research criterion of good scientific quality (Swedish Research Council, 2017). The research presented in this thesis, however, was also permeated by ethical challenges that emerged due to the involvement of human participants. The following section presents a discussion of the ethical considerations related to this research.

## 5.4 Ethical considerations

The study was conducted by formulating a data management plan and following the regulations and recommendations from the Swedish Research Council. Promising full anonymity to enhance the protection of the participants was avoided (Swedish Research Council, 2017). Instead, while organising the data, attention was paid to pseudonymising and coding all participating individuals, organisations, and municipalities so that none of them can be recognised. More specifically, due to the topic of the thesis, the research process did not include the handling of any sensitive personal data. All participants provided informed consent and the interviews were recorded using a digital device or, in the case of online

communication, were automatically uploaded to Microsoft SharePoint, as indicated by the University of Gothenburg. Access to the stored data was restricted only to the author and his two thesis supervisors.

Recommendations from the Swedish Research Council (2017) require, *inter alia*, that good research practice entails problematisations of whether a study and its research design are capable of providing answers to the questions posed beforehand. This precaution was considered from the early stages of the research to counteract participants' exposure to potential risks and, particularly in the present thesis, was supported by employing the theoretical and conceptual framework of CHAT.

More specifically, examining individualising processes entailed them being understood as an element that both defines the conditions within which education is to take place and, most importantly, may potentially go against pre-existing values and practices, pose ethical and ideological challenges to involved actors, and require new kinds of collective practices and object transformations. This conceptual approach – accommodating a plethora of organisational frameworks, collective endeavours, and contradictory practices – involved a search of the relevant policy landscape. Crucially, it also necessitated inclusion of interviews with municipal authorities and teachers as an essential part of the data creation process.

Therefore, ethical issues could potentially emerge due to the involvement of municipal authorities and SFI teachers in the research process in tandem with the struggle to achieve a balance between the criterion of individuals' protection and the research criterion of good scientific quality (Swedish Research Council, 2017). The studies' participants were either municipal officers responsible for organising and controlling SFI education (Article II) or SFI teachers, situated in various educational institutions in various municipalities (Article III). As previously demonstrated, the ways in which MAE is organised and implemented today present high levels of variation throughout Sweden, ranging from municipalities that outsource MAE to those that organise it internally, while others have a mixed system (*i.e.*, both private and municipal schools). This situation creates a market-like educational field in which terms such as effectiveness and competition come into play (*e.g.*, Dahlstedt & Fejes, 2018). Within this framework, many teachers work for organisations that must compete to secure funding through the municipalities. Therefore, their struggle to enact individualising processes often occurs under restrictive economic and organisational conditions.

To pursue the aim of this thesis in terms of good scientific quality, it was vital to understand what the municipal authorities and SFI teachers had attempted to

achieve in the enactment of individualising processes, the challenges they had faced, and the strategies they had employed to overcome emerging problems. The fact that the participants were encouraged to talk about the organisations for which they worked, possibly referring to difficult situations related to working conditions and their ability to tackle problems, posed a highly prominent issue that threatened anonymity (Swedish Research Council, 2017). Since the number of participants was relatively small, the risk of employees being identified by their employers was quite high. This risk may consequently have influenced participants' willingness to openly talk about issues that are valuable to the thesis or may have exposed them to risk with regard to their position in the organisations for which they worked – in an often competitive, market-oriented MAE. Thus, the protection of participants was critical and required careful examinations and preparations.

The abovementioned problems resulted from the ways in which MAE is organised and the fact that participant recruitment was conducted in a top-down manner, through initial permission from the leadership of the various municipal and educational organisations. The hierarchical relations found within institutions thus acted as a mediating factor in the research process and caused ethical considerations.



## 6. Findings

The present thesis comprises three articles. This chapter presents summaries of the articles followed by a table that summarises the subquestions posed, the corresponding results of the studies, and the conclusions drawn with regard to the main research question of the thesis.

### 6.1 Article I

Title: Individualising processes in adult education research: a literature review

Author: Papadopoulos, D. (2023)

Published in: *International Journal of Lifelong Education*, 42(1), 8–21

Article I presents a literature review with individualising processes in adult education research as its study object. The rationale for the study took as point of departure the case of Swedish MAE and the policy demands for enacting individualising processes, deemed to be all-embracing solutions to a number of identified societal problems. Swedish MAE is seen as a school form embedded in a nexus of national and international policies and practices, similar to other adult education systems worldwide. Therefore, the focus of the review was international research.

More specifically, the study sought to map out relevant research, as the knowledge landscape on individualising processes in adult education is rather fragmented. The aim was to identify how individualising processes are elicited and the implications for adult education in different eras and frameworks, as these are captured and problematised in the selected studies. Conceptual tools from CHAT were employed to pursue the aforementioned aim. The results from the selected publications were therefore assumed to problematise the study objects in relation to shifting societal needs and challenges (motive-related) that elicit – and are elicited by – transformations of adult education policies and practices (object-related).

The literature review was conducted by constructing two search blocks to define areas of intellectual inquiry relevant to the study (individualising processes and



adult education) as well as a search block to exclude research that was out of scope. The search blocks were applied in three databases and the search was modified to produce results from peer-reviewed articles, books, and book chapters published in English. Out of the 6,345 initial results, 22 publications were deemed relevant to the study through a screening process conducted in five rounds.

The study's results indicated that individualising processes in international adult education research are problematised within the following three interrelated and not mutually exclusive themes: in their mediating role between liberation and responsibility taking; in alleviating the risk of exclusion; and in addressing student diversity.

In the first theme, individualising processes are problematised at the interplay of the human need for personal liberation and the contemporary demands to render individuals as the sole agents responsible for their life situations and trajectories. A common factor among the studies that pertained to this theme is a keen interest in scrutinising transformations of adult education, emerging as responses to societal needs, and related to a discourse shift from 'adult education' to 'lifelong learning'.

The second theme mostly considers disadvantaged groups and specific kinds of rationalities that are expected to be enhanced by adult education for alleviating the risk of exclusion. The issue of the gradual detachment of socially vulnerable groups from their dependency on the state, presupposing the ability to exert certain degrees of agentic actions, is a main topic of such research. Furthermore, examinations of collectivistic vis-à-vis individualistic perspectives in adult education, and of the emergence of new social questions regarding the exclusion of individuals at risk, are by and large central in this theme.

Finally, the third theme concerns research with a focus on the Swedish context and the emerging tensions between policy formulations for the enactment of individualising processes and their application in practice. The studied phenomena in this case are related to quality issues in adult education, emerging tensions for teachers and students, and the effects of individualisation discourses on students' subjectivities.

The study concluded that, in the selected research, the identified societal needs related to the emergence of individualising processes stem from tensions that concern uncertainties and risks in contemporary societies. Such cases can be hyper-competition, unstable employment schemes, or new types of social exclusion. For the case of Sweden, research results have indicated that heterogeneous student

groups in MAE are viewed as challenges that elicit the need to provide individualised solutions, thereby addressing a wide range of societal problems.

In addition, transformations of adult education in the various contexts of the selected studies occur as individualising processes materialise in policies and practices and mainly relate to learning management, the deinstitutionalisation of adult education, new types of pedagogies, and increased negotiations between teachers and students for establishing individualised educational frameworks. More programmes are created to attract at-risk individuals and establish links with the labour market, thus enhancing the instrumental role of adult education. In Sweden, transformations of MAE are related to increased auditing processes, the prevalence of an economic discourse, and standardisation practices to increase quality.

The study concluded by raising the complexity and multiplicity of individualising processes as a study object and by highlighting its resemblance to the notion of a complex concept, which stems from CHAT. Further conceptual and empirical examinations are warranted to address this complexity and provide further insights into the topic.

## 6.2 Article II

Title: Individualising processes in the making: policy complexities and tensions of municipal adult education in Swedish for immigrants

Authors: Papadopoulos, D., Lumsden Wass, K., & Wärvik, G. B. (2023)

Published in: Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research

Article II examines policy demands for adapting educational frameworks to individual students' needs and conditions, focusing on municipal authorities' organisation of SFI. The aim was to analyse how individualising processes are played out in SFI policy and municipal authorities' everyday work in organising and controlling the education. The rationale for the study stemmed from the fact that, although individualising processes are clearly prescribed by policies as solutions to a wide range of problems in SFI and Swedish society, clarity and agreement are lacking as to what such demands entail for organisational frameworks and professional practices.

The study's conceptual framework drew from CHAT and examined individualising processes through the notion of a complex concept – that is, a multifaceted concept with the capacity to embrace multiple and contradictory meanings and to elicit not only challenges but also opportunities for development. Swedish

municipalities, as the public authorities responsible for implementing MAE and thus SFI, were examined in their capacity to act as subjects in networks of interacting activities that partially share the same object.

The empirical data consisted of public policy texts and data obtained through semistructured qualitative interviews conducted with representatives from the municipal authorities of five Swedish municipalities. The selection of policies was based on their relevance to the topic, namely setting individualising processes as concrete policy goals in the context of SFI. In addition, municipal representatives came from a wide range of organisational frameworks and had key roles in organising and controlling SFI.

The study's results indicated that individualising processes are elicited by specific societal needs and challenges, expressed as tensions both in policies and municipal practices. The following three areas of interactions and object formation of the involved stakeholders were identified: the making of an individual student; making of an effective education; and making of a coherent society. In each of these expressions of object formation, emerging tensions elicited – and were elicited by – individualising processes, thereby transforming SFI in different ways.

More specifically, it was argued that individualising processes are elicited by tensions that stem from the inability to teach SFI students in a groupwise manner. Collective efforts are then directed towards facilitating the educational trajectories of students with a wide range of backgrounds and needs. In this case, individualising processes are played out in the making of an individual student by stabilising distinctions between students and creating several different educational trajectories for them.

Moreover, efforts for the making of individual students take place within limiting organisational frameworks. Economic considerations in the marketised MAE create boundaries and require effectivisation measures for optimal provision with the least possible resources. In enacting individualising processes, municipal authorities are thus also engaged in the making of an effective education, which can both address the needs of individual students and comply with strict economic considerations.

Finally, the engagement of a wide range of societal actors in SFI education reveals the education's poly-motivated character and outlines a shared object that is fragmented and contradictory. The overall aim of SFI to educate citizens at risk, thereby contributing to the making of a coherent society, often clashes with initiatives to adapt the education to the needs of the labour market. Here, individualising processes are played out at the nexus of societal needs and tensions

stemming from the intersections of education and labour market policy. As these two systems collide, object transformations of SFI are elicited and drive the education in antithetical directions.

Article II concludes by highlighting the complexity and multiplicity of individualising processes when they are concretised and played out within and between contemporary collective activities. Individualising processes are argued to initially be elicited by an inability to teach SFI students in a groupwise manner, but that they then transcend the boundaries of the classroom and engage a range of actors in processes of destabilisation and restabilisation to address different societal needs. Therefore, municipal policies and practices are transformed in novel and often unpredictable ways.

### 6.3 Article III

Title: Challenges and opportunities in adapting ‘Swedish for immigrants’ (SFI) education to individual students’ needs: An examination of teachers’ work

Author: Papadopoulos, D. (manuscript)

The aim of the study presented in Article III was to examine challenges and opportunities in SFI teachers’ work regarding efforts to adapt education to the needs of individual students. The diversity of student groups, unstable employment conditions, and active involvement of other stakeholders in SFI education render teachers’ work a rather challenging activity, in which individualised instruction is often prescribed by policy as a solution to a plethora of educational and societal issues. The rationale for this study was drawn from the fact that previous research has tended to reduce individualising processes to student-centred pedagogical approaches and to leave other important factors unproblematised.

To pursue the aforementioned aim, the study focused on teachers’ work as a collective activity and employed the principles of TADS to capture emerging challenges and the use of meaningful artefacts. Conflicts of motives (first stimuli) concern problematic situations, which no available courses of action can easily resolve. In attempting to break out of such situations, individuals and collectivities may employ meaningful artefacts, whose repeated use acts as a second stimulus and helps to resolve the conflict.

The empirical data were obtained through semistructured qualitative interviews (focus groups and individual interviews) with 18 SFI teachers from eight municipi-

palties. The participants were employed both by private organisations and municipal schools. They also taught in all four courses and the three study tracks of SFI.

The analysis revealed that the demands imposed on SFI teachers to adapt education to the needs of individual students stem from different sources, such as national and municipal regulations (e.g., the Education Act and tendering-based procurement policies); educational organisations as teachers' employers; demands from other stakeholders (e.g., the Public Employment Agency); students; and teachers' own values regarding their professional conduct. As they stem from such varied sources and the actors involved pursue different objects, the demands can often be contradictory.

The following four areas were identified in which contradictory goals arise in relation to teachers' adaptation of education to individual students' needs and elicit conflicts of motives, which were followed by the employment of meaningful artefacts:

First, conflicts of motives emerge in cases where SFI teachers are expected to establish standardised points of reference to secure a minimum level of objectivity and control, while they simultaneously attempt to enact flexible frameworks that are capable of accommodating the needs of diverse student groups (standardisation and flexibility). Second, teachers often need to strike a balance between promoting the collective character of adult education and attending to individual students' needs, and thus, they experience conflicts of motives (collectivistic and individualistic aspects of adult education). Third, SFI education involves a wide range of societal actors with their own agendas. Teachers often find themselves amidst a plethora of different expectations regarding the goals to be achieved through education. These may be related to collective issues of social participation and democracy or to the satisfaction of the needs of the labour market. The involvement of other actors may fragment teachers' work and inhibit their professional identity and agency in actively shaping SFI education (SFI as a language education and SFI as a labour market instrument). Finally, due to the special composition of the SFI student groups, teachers often face ethical and ideological challenges between their capacity as public officials and their own humanistic values. Maintaining pace with regulations while making life-changing administrative decisions for students is described as challenging (teaching as a regulated profession and teachers as individuals with own educational and personal values).

The study's findings suggested that meeting demands to adapt education to the needs of individual students constitutes a significant part of teachers' work and affects the pedagogical frameworks of SFI in various ways. The study examined

teachers' work beyond the context of the classroom by problematising demands to adapt education to individual students' needs in relation to SFI's multifaceted character related to different societal needs (e.g., tackling illiteracy, promoting social integration, and addressing the needs of the labour market). A major tension in teachers' work was identified, highlighting the contradictory core of the object of teachers' activity – both expanding and stabilising. Despite conflicts of motives stemming from efforts to adapt education to individual students' needs, teachers often succeed in maintaining the education of students as their main object, in line with their 'traditional' role as adult educators within institutions. Nevertheless, the involvement of other stakeholders introduces an array of often conflicting interests, which contribute to the emergence of a new type of object by transcending institutional boundaries, introducing new practices, and expanding teachers' understanding of their work. Thus, placing SFI teachers' efforts to adapt education to the needs of individual students in a cultural-historical perspective enables the identification of not only generic possibilities but also stabilising practices.

## 6.4 Summary of results

Table 4 presents a summary of (i) the subquestions posed, (ii) the corresponding results of the studies, and (iii) the conclusions drawn with regard to the main research question of the thesis:

Table 4 Summary of the results and main conclusions

<b>Main research question of the thesis: How do individualising processes emerge and unfold in policy and practice of SFI education?</b>		
<b>Subquestions addressed in the three studies</b>	<b>Results from the studies</b>	<b>Main conclusions of the thesis</b>
What kind of societal needs and challenges eliciting individualising processes in adult education are identified in adult education research? (Article I)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Hypercompetition, unstable employment, and new types of social inequality as the main areas of insecurity and risk</li> <li>-Need for new skills among individuals: Learn how to become responsible for one's life/be a competent member of society/adopt a reflexive stance towards oneself/acquire a new sort of rationality</li> <li>-Need for at-risk individuals to free themselves from their dependency on the state by developing certain rationalities</li> <li>-Institutions' inherent inability to address contemporary social issues</li> <li>-Policy imperatives for individualised solutions</li> <li>-Increased student diversity</li> <li>-Expectations for students as rational decision makers</li> <li>-Expectation for teachers to be agents of change</li> </ul>	From Article I: Individualising processes emerge within three interrelated and not mutually exclusive themes related to historically and socially conditioned tensions identified through relevant research: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Mediating between liberation and responsibility</li> <li>2. Alleviating the risk of exclusion</li> <li>3. Addressing student diversity</li> </ol>
How do individualising processes materialise in policies and practices in adult education research? (Article I)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-De-institutionalisation of adult education and a shift in focus towards individualised learners and learning management</li> <li>-Emergence of new pedagogical practices</li> <li>-A new type of citizen (the enterprising self) as the goal for adult education</li> <li>-Interdisciplinary programmes, accumulation and transferability of credits</li> <li>-New negotiating processes between teachers/students in creating educational trajectories</li> </ul>	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Fewer social support services</li> <li>-Creation of adult education programmes for at-risk individuals to tackle social exclusion and poverty</li> <li>-Tailor-made solutions render adult education an instrumental activity</li> <li>-Modernity, as the overarching aim of adult education, is to be achieved by remoulding individuals and assigning them a specific kind of decision-making</li> <li>-Standardisation through auditing, procurements and the use of economic terms</li> <li>-Tensions in teachers' professional practice</li> <li>-Students' detachment from educational organisations</li> <li>-Transformation of adult education into an instrumental enterprise</li> </ul>	
<p>How are individualising processes played out within and between object-oriented activities in the context of SFI policy and everyday municipal work? (Article II)</p>	<p>Identified tensions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Inability to teach in a groupwise manner in SFI (leading to the development of tools and measures that allow students with different needs to enter and go through SFI education)</li> <li>-Tensions between strict economic considerations, quality assurance schemes and auditing systems, and also between ensuring students' right to individualised education and limited resources; therefore, effective organisational features should be developed to ensure stability by developing and using tools, such as procurement systems and control mechanisms</li> <li>-Tensions between municipal authorities and other stakeholders / tensions between education and labour market policy</li> </ul>	<p>From Article II: Individualising processes are played out in policy and municipal practice in the making of:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. an individual student</li> <li>2. an effective education</li> <li>3. a coherent society</li> </ol>
<p>What challenges emerge when SFI teachers try to adapt education to individual students' needs? (Article III)</p>	<p>Identified conflicts of motives between the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Flexibility and standardisation</li> <li>-Individualistic and collectivistic aspects of adult education</li> <li>-SFI as a language education and SFI as a labour market instrument</li> </ul>	<p>From Article III: Individualising processes are played out at the interplay of demands imposed on SFI teachers and expressed as conflicts of motives. When possible for teachers, stabilising efforts are</p>



	<p>-Teaching as a regulated professions and teachers as individuals with their own educational and personal values</p>	<p>made to retain their object. When other actors are involved, it is difficult for teachers to retain their object;</p>
<p>What artefacts do SFI teachers employ to overcome emerging challenges? (Article III)</p>	<p>Employed artefacts to overcome conflicts of motives between:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Flexibility and standardisation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Joint collegial assessment</li> <li>-Development of intraschool level tests for assessment</li> <li>-New types of individual study plans that are better adapted to the schools' contexts</li> <li>-Breaking down of learning outcomes into manageable units</li> <li>-Alternative ways of grouping students between and within study tracks</li> </ul> </li> <li>2. Individualistic and collectivistic aspects of adult education: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Online language cafés and other digital spaces to enhance students' communication and social interactions</li> <li>-Special assignments to enhance students' collective activities while working on individual tasks</li> </ul> </li> <li>3. SFI as a language education and SFI as a labour market instrument: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Systematic monthly meetings with stakeholders to establish better communication and cooperation</li> </ul> </li> <li>4. Teaching as a regulated professions and teachers as individuals with their own educational and personal values: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>-Enhancing sense of professional identity to address ethical issues</li> </ul> </li> </ol>	<p>thus, a new object may potentially emerge, that is partly in conflict with the existing one. A major tension in teachers work exists between stabilization and expansion.</p>

In the next chapter, the results of the three substudies are synthesized to address the main research question and aim of this thesis.

## 7. Discussion

The present thesis, which consisted of three studies, examined challenges related to adapting education to the needs of individual students by problematising how individualising processes emerge and unfold in the policy and practice of SFI education. To answer the overall research question, the three studies addressed several subquestions and problematised individualising processes (i) in their historical emergence, informed by previous research; (ii) within municipal authorities' organisational frameworks and measures; and (iii) through SFI teachers' collective efforts to overcome emerging challenges when adapting education to individual students' needs. The following sections discuss the conclusions of the thesis and how they address the main research question.

### 7.1 Individualising processes in adult education: Origins in evolving societal needs

The emergence of individualising processes was traced down within the CHAT perspective employed in this thesis. This entails an understanding of change and development as the result of contradictions in the dialogue between evolving societal needs and of objects capable of addressing them – encapsulated by the concept of motive (Engeström, 1987, 2001).

More specifically, the findings from the study presented in Article I suggest that individualising processes in adult education contexts stem from tensions which contemporary societies need to address and handle, such as hyper-competition, the risks of an unstable labour market, social exclusion, and even the heterogeneity of student groups, which has often been deemed a threat (e.g., Beck, 1992; Fenwick, 2003b; Jansen & van der Veen, 1997). At-risk individuals, in particular, and the imperative of developing certain rationalities were found to be considered societal challenges that have elicited the emergence of individualising processes in adult education (Kelly, 2001; Thompson, 2011).

Moving closer to the Swedish context of SFI, individualising processes were found to emerge from new adult education – and from labour market policy demands and the institutional transformations within adult education. This was par-

ticularly evident around the turn of the millennium when the AEI (sv. Kunskapslyftet) was introduced, which enabled the entry of private for-profit organisations and the introduction of a market logic in MAE (Lumsden Wass, 2004). However, already in the 1960–70s, individualising processes in SFI could be traced as part of the redistribution of income and wealth policy and the processes of educational differentiation, in line with the main principles of MAE (cf. Rubenson, 2002).

Therefore, the first conclusion that addresses the main research question of the thesis is as follows:

The emergence of individualising processes in the context of SFI can be traced in ongoing modernisation processes at the interplay of the following three inter-related and not mutually exclusive themes, which emerge from historically and socially conditioned tensions: (i) mediating between liberation and responsibility, (ii) alleviating the risk of exclusion, and (iii) addressing student diversity.

## 7.2 Establishing, implementing, and controlling frameworks for the enactment of individualising processes: The role of municipal authorities

Municipal authorities' engagement in organising, implementing, and controlling SFI has been crucial in establishing the frameworks within which individualising processes have emerged and unfolded. The findings from the study presented in Article II are in line with those from Article I. Individualising processes in SFI policy and practice were found to be elicited by the emergence of societal needs and tensions from ongoing modernisation processes, such as addressing student diversity, complying with strict economic frameworks in adult education, and accommodating the needs of the labour market. Similar findings for the Swedish context have been reported in studies by Henning Loeb and Lumsden Wass (2014) and Fejes et al. (2018).

However, findings from Article II also revealed collective processes of object formation, having as their point of departure the inability to teach in a groupwise manner in SFI, but also expanding to other areas. The study found that, initially, individualising processes were played out in collective efforts to establish frameworks that can accommodate the needs of rather diverse student groups, thereby responding to a straightforward demand that stemmed from policy and the mu-

municipal authorities' practical arrangements. Such efforts revolved around the making of an individual student in SFI, with the employment of the arranged tools and frameworks described in the study.

Nevertheless, in trying to achieve individualised educational frameworks, municipal authorities expanded their undertakings into other areas, such as the making of an effective education. In this case, endeavours for enacting individualising processes were conducted within the strict economic frames of MAE (see Holmqvist, 2022). Therefore, municipal authorities were engaged in setting up economically sustainable solutions that could afford individualised frameworks; thus, they actively transformed both their organisational contexts and the ways in which individualising processes could be enacted.

Another identified area of object formation was the making of a coherent society. The engagement of other actors in SFI education, with a strong focus on satisfying the needs of the labour market, revealed a loosening of institutional boundaries and often clashed with the societal goals of educating at-risk citizens (cf. Fejes et al., 2018). In working out contradictions that stemmed from the intersections of educational and labour market policy, municipal authorities were engaged in processes that revealed expanded notions of their erstwhile roles and boundaries and resulted in recontextualisations of their involvement in SFI education.

Moreover, Article II – in line with Article I – identified similar societal needs that elicit individualising processes. Most importantly, the study provided insights into how individualising processes were played out in policies and practices by revealing that municipal authorities had engaged in areas of object formation in unexpected ways. Said engagement had led to transformations of their organisational frameworks and practices as well as of the enactments of individualising processes. Here, a contradiction is identified in that through ongoing modernisation processes, institutions 'fall apart' by losing their power while simultaneously growing stronger by creating larger security nets around the individual (cf. Fenwick, 2003a).

Thus, the second conclusion that addresses the main research question of this thesis is as follows:

Individualising processes unfold in policy and municipal practice in the making of (i) individual students, (ii) an effective education, and (iii) a coherent society.

### 7.3 Individualising processes that unfold in tensions between stabilising and expanding the object of SFI teachers

Findings from the study presented in Article III contributed to addressing the aim of the present thesis by focusing on SFI teachers' work. The study provided insights into how individualising processes unfold – this time in teachers' endeavours to overcome emerging challenges when trying to adapt education to individual students' needs – and the corresponding employment of meaningful artefacts for overcoming problematic situations.

The results indicated that the interplay of demands imposed on SFI teachers elicited conflicts of motives, which were expressed as tensions between (i) standardisation and flexibility, (ii) individualistic and collectivistic aspects of adult education, (iii) SFI as a language education and SFI as a labour market instrument, and (iv) teaching as a regulated profession and teachers as individuals with their own educational and personal values. Teachers very often adjusted existing artefacts or constructed meaningful new ones, which they then employed to overcome problematic situations.

Furthermore, in many cases, teachers intentionally created new stabilising frameworks and arrangements within their institutional boundaries to allow space for their own initiatives. Wärvik (2013) drew similar conclusions about VET teachers' resistance to standardised educational tools for individualisation and the consequent development of their own schemes. Article III also revealed tensions that stem from teachers' role as both public officials and socially engaged individuals, which often carried heavy ethical and ideological challenges (cf. Fejes et al., 2018; Henning Loeb & Lumsden Wass, 2014). To address such tensions, teachers invoked the unique features of their profession to help themselves to overcome problematic situations loaded with affective connotations (e.g., when dealing with cases of students facing serious problems).

The study also found that in establishing connections with other stakeholders and engaging in interactions and negotiations, a potential new object emerged in teachers' work. Teachers very often had to re-evaluate their frameworks, develop new understandings, and expand their professional practices. Simultaneously, however, teachers' engagement in stabilisation processes (see Engeström, 2023), as demonstrated by the study's findings, indicate their efforts to maintain their 'traditional' teaching roles (i.e., having the student as their main object) within

organisational frameworks characterised by rapid change and economic restrictions (e.g., a system of outsourcing SFI education through procurement).

The third – and final – conclusion that addresses the main research question of this thesis is as follows:

Individualising processes unfold at the interplay of demands imposed on SFI teachers and are expressed as a major tension in teachers' work between stabilising and expanding the object of their activity. When possible, teachers engage in stabilising efforts to retain their 'traditional' role as adult educators. However, when other societal actors are involved in SFI education, it becomes difficult for teachers to retain their object, and a new object potentially emerges that would be partly in conflict with the existing one.

## 7.4 Contributions of the thesis

The conclusions of the present thesis suggest that meeting demands to adapt education to the needs of individual students constitutes a significant part of the work of municipal authorities and teachers and affects the pedagogical frameworks of SFI in various ways. Similar findings have been reported by Fejes et al. (2018), Hällsten et al. (2022), Henning Loeb and Lumsden Wass (2014), Norlund Shaswar and Wedin (2019), and Wedin and Norlund Shaswar (2019, 2022).

However, the present thesis further problematised individualising processes beyond the context of teacher–student interactions, which traditionally dominate research on this topic (cf. Swedish Institute for Educational Research, 2019). Problematising demands to adapt education to individual students' needs in relation to SFI's multifaceted character (inter alia, to address the societal challenges of illiteracy, social exclusion, and unemployment) enabled the identification of a major tension in the work of municipal authorities and teachers, thus highlighting the contradictory core of the objects of their activities – both expanding and stabilising. This inherent contradiction in the activities of the aforementioned actors demonstrates that their current practices and actions, as identified in the context of this thesis, reflect “layers of historically earlier forms of the activity,” which can be “both restraints and resources” (Sannino & Engeström, 2018, p. 47). Such an instance is, for example, the gradual switch at the core of education from pedagogical practices in terms of study circles (1960s) towards increasing state demands for professionalisation of teachers' work – reflected in the history of SFI and expressed as tensions in the data.

In addition, the involvement of other stakeholders in SFI education introduced an array of often conflicting interests, which contributed to the emergence of a new type of object by transcending institutional boundaries, establishing new practices, and expanding municipal officers' and SFI teachers' understanding of their work. Thus, positioning efforts to adapt education to the needs of individual students in a cultural-historical perspective enabled the identification of not only generic possibilities but also stabilising practices. Sannino and Engeström (2018) asserted that "any real activity, just any real society, is bound to be a mix of elements that represent different co-existing and competing historical periods, paradigms or types" (p. 48). It is in this sense that the findings of this thesis should be interpreted.

Finally, the findings of this thesis can be seen as revealing ongoing modernisation processes in contemporary societies, which are played out through expanding institutions as well as expanding professional practices. Scholars have argued that the world we live in grows progressively more fluid and unpredictable and that the boundaries between institutional practices fade out (see Bauman, 2000; Beck, 1992; Engeström, 2020). Through globalisation, the influence of international organisations, and the emergence of a knowledge economy (see Spring, 2008), constant reflection is required to adapt to the needs of an everchanging and unstable labour market, which imposes higher educational demands on individuals. In addition, the target group for SFI – namely adult students – has changed considerably compared with previous decades (see Colliander et al., 2022; Lindberg & Sandwall, 2007; Lundh & Ohlsson, 1999); today, it presents a wider range of students' personal, educational, and cultural backgrounds. Simultaneously, the erstwhile central role of the state to steer through rigid institutions has been replaced by a focus on self-regulatory practices within marketing and surveillance perspectives (Fenwick, 2003a). The responsibility for making the right choices, accompanied by the risk of eventual failures, is now placed on the individual, while the role of institutions has changed to the provision of flexible solutions adapted to the needs of individuals. Therefore, demands for increased coordination between actors and organisational settings are created, which leads to the dismantling of institutions (see Bauman, 2000; Beck, 1992; Engeström, 2020). The present thesis demonstrated that in the forementioned context the activities of municipal authorities and SFI teachers played a mediating role between the demands of the state and the needs of individuals.

Could the findings of the present thesis be an example of the dismantling of welfare state institutions, not directly visible but nevertheless operating in multiple

ways? Alternatively, could the findings imply the strengthening of institutional and professional practices? The answer to both questions is affirmative, which reflects an identified contradiction in that institutional and professional practices remain strong while simultaneously operating within dismantled frameworks. Returning to the aim of the present thesis (i.e., to examine challenges related to adapting education to the needs of individual students), it can now be argued that the main actors responsible for enacting individualising processes in SFI are engaged in parallel processes of working out challenges in their common undertakings. These processes, although parallel, also intersect in the working out of contradictions, when the different agendas set by societal actors collide and require active engagement. The thesis demonstrated that municipal officers and teachers struggle to enact individualising processes in their contexts, but their initiatives and actions do not always fit in the existing policy and institutional frameworks within which the education of adults takes place. Therefore, they need to transcend their institutional boundaries, negotiate, and establish new types of cooperation and professional practice. In these processes, both their own activities and the activities of the other societal actors are challenged and transformed.

Therefore, the implications for practitioners are immediate and pervasive in how education is organised and implemented – revealing yet not only unresolvable problems but also opportunities for creative solutions within restricted and unstable organisational frameworks. The current practices that were identified in the present thesis may thus be seen as a unique mixture of competing values, traditions, and endeavours, which were very often actively expressed and played a central role in how education is adapted to the needs of individual students. Despite all identified challenges, there is still a lot of potential in the collective efforts of practitioners to address emerging issues and to enhance the all-embracing character of education.

## 7.5 Limitations as incentive for further inquiries

The particular challenges that emerged during different phases of this research, and which potentially posed limitations, have been presented in many parts of the thesis (e.g., the methodological approach [Chapter 5]). This section presents a more general problematisation of the limitations, which may serve as incentives for further conceptual and empirical examinations.



The present thesis examined individualising processes in the context of SFI and contributed to an area of inquiry that is rather under-researched – but one that nevertheless concerns a crucial school form with strong societal projections (Lundgren et al., 2017). By synthesising the findings from the three studies, this thesis problematised individualising processes through the notion of a complex concept and by employing the conceptual framework of CHAT. This entailed an examination that was not delimited to classroom phenomena and individualising processes as exclusively pedagogical practices (cf. Hållsten et al., 2022). Such examinations, such as that of Hållsten et al., are certainly valuable in that they provide insights and potential tools for practitioners who work out contradictions in their daily practices. However, it is also necessary to conduct examinations that are capable of tracing individualising processes out of the classroom and with perspectives that can accommodate the way contemporary societies are organised – that is, in processes of collective object formation that involve different actors and are permeated by disagreement, conflict, or any other types of tensions. Having said that, it is also very important to not omit examinations that focus on the activities of those who are directly the object of individualising processes in SFI – that is, the adult students. A limitation of the present thesis is the lack of the students' perspectives in the examination of individualising processes – an aspect that would certainly add to the richness and complexity of the findings.

Moreover, while the relatively low number of studies ( $N = 22$ ) elicited from the screening process in the literature review presented in Article I does not allow for generalisations, it also indicates a serious lack of research in a critical area. The proliferation of demands to enact individualising processes is highly probable in the future, which should give rise to new kinds of problems and opportunities for development in educational policies and practices. Therefore, further research is required to explore the possibilities and challenges that emerge from engagement with concepts whose potential dynamic and complexity may not be obvious from the start but that nevertheless may have tremendous implications in contemporary collective activities.

Finally, in the present thesis there was not a possibility to observe teachers' work in their classroom engagements due to COVID-19 pandemic related restrictions. Interviews were one of the few options to identify traces of the teachers' object at the time. In future examinations, scrutinising the ways in which practitioners (re)gain their agentive potential should include an examination of their activities in physical settings, with a closer focus on each SFI course and study

track, such that the conclusions drawn can better attend to the specificities of a rather diverse educational framework.



# Svensk sammanfattning

Denna avhandling, som består av tre artiklar och en kappa, handlar om hur individualiseringsprocesser utvecklas och tar form i policy och praktik inom svenska för invandrare (SFI). SFI är en grundläggande språkutbildning för vuxna och utgör sedan 2016 en del av den svenska kommunala vuxenutbildningen (Komvux). Införandet av SFI år 1965 hade som syfte att underlätta integrationen av utländsk arbetskraft i Sverige genom att erbjuda verktyg för kommunikation och hantering av praktiska ärenden relaterade till arbete och vardagsliv. SFI har genom årtiondena utvecklats till en mångfacetterad utbildning som rymmer många aspekter, från språkundervisning och identitetsbyggande till frågor rörande social integration och deltagande på arbetsmarknaden. Utbildningen genomförs ofta i nära samverkan med andra aktörer, som myndigheter eller intressenter från arbetsmarknaden där dessa aktörer har egna mål för samarbetet. Dagens SFI-utbildning bedrivs i ett komplext sammanhang där olika policys och praktiker flätas samman, för att hantera en rad samhällsliga utmaningar, såsom arbetslöshet, integration eller socialt utanförskap.

I de nationella styrdokument som reglerar SFI framställs individualisering som lösningen på en mängd olika utbildnings- och samhällsproblem. I centrala styrdokument, som exempelvis i kursplanen för SFI, skrivs vikten av att skraddarsy hela utbildningen efter individuella elevers behov, bakgrund och livssituation fram. Trots att sådana krav i en mening kan verka okomplicerade behöver ofta nya arbetsformer utvecklas som kan vara svåra att implementera och använda. Sådana individualiseringsprocesser utvecklas ofta i samspel mellan olika institutionella sammanhang och kräver därför ett gränsöverskridande mellan dem.

Tidigare forskning har pekat på att individualiseringsprocesser uppstått som svar på en rad olika spänningar, kopplade till stora samhällsutmaningar som exempelvis rör ojämlikhet, ökad konkurrens och osäkra anställningsvillkor. En utgångspunkt för denna avhandling är därför att individualisering inte enbart kan reduceras till pedagogiska metoder i klassrummet, såsom elevcentrerad undervisning. En sådan ingång kan inte fullt ut förklara den komplexitet som vuxenutbildningen rymmer och dess integrering i olika politikområden.

SFI-utbildningen utgör en rik miljö för att utforska individualiseringsprocesser inte minst beroende dess unika karaktär, organisation och innehåll. I de politiska styrdokumenterna för SFI är individualisering tydligt angivet som lösningen på flera problem och utmaningar som är kopplade såväl till utbildningen i sig som till deltagarnas livssituation och möjligheter att integreras i det svenska samhället. Kommuner, utbildningsanordnare och lärare förväntas anpassa utbildningen efter individuella elevers behov som en del av den politiska agendan för att motverka utbildningsmässiga och samhällsliga problem. Detta öppnar för olika aktörers engagemang i SFI-utbildningen och därmed också möjligheter till olika tolkningar av hur individualisering ska förstås och hur det ska genomföras.

Denna avhandling syftar till att belysa utmaningar relaterade till att anpassa utbildningen till elevers individuella behov. För att uppnå detta, fokuserar studien på tre huvudsakliga områden. För det första granskar avhandlingen individualiseringsprocessers historiska ursprung med hjälp av tidigare forskning. För det andra studeras hur kommunala aktörer organiserar, genomför och kontrollerar utbildningen för att säkerställa att individualisering sker. Slutligen riktas fokus mot SFI-lärares gemensamma ansträngningar att möta de utmaningar som uppstår när utbildningen ska anpassas efter individuella elevers behov.

Avhandlingens övergripande forskningsfråga är:

- Hur uppstår och hur tar individualiseringsprocesser form i policy och praktik inom den svenska SFI-utbildningen?

För att adressera denna huvudfråga ställs följande delfrågor:

- i) Vilka samhällsliga behov och utmaningar relaterat till individualiseringsprocesser inom vuxenutbildning identifieras inom forskning om vuxenutbildning? (Artikel I)
- ii) Hur tar individualiseringsprocesser form i policy och praktik enligt vuxenutbildningsforskning? (Artikel I)
- iii) Hur tar individualiseringsprocesser form inom och mellan objekt-orienterade verksamheter inom ramen för SFI-policy och kommunal förvaltning? (Artikel II)
- iv) Vilka utmaningar möter SFI-lärare när de anpassar utbildningen efter individuella elevers behov? (Artikel III)
- v) Vilka redskap använder SFI-lärare för att hantera nya utmaningar? (Artikel III)

En utgångspunkt för avhandlingen är att SFI ständigt balanserar mellan å ena sidan dagens samhällsliga utmaningar, och å andra sidan, den egna historiska framväxten

och utvecklingen. De historiska inlagringar som SFI bär med sig formar därmed nuvarande praxis.

När SFI infördes 1965 delades ansvaret för att tillhandahålla SFI-kurser mellan staten, fackföreningar och olika arbetsgivare inom industrisektorn. Utbildningen omfattade 200 timmar och var huvudsakligen organiserad i form av studiecirklar inom svenska studieförbund. Det fanns ingen officiell läroplan eller andra reglerande riktlinjer relaterade till innehåll och struktur. Från början av 1970-talet började SFI-utbildning gradvis erbjudas som en del av arbetsmarknadsutbildningen (AMU-centra), även om studieförbunden fortsatte att vara engagerade. Efter en större reform 1986 infördes en läroplan (Lsfi-86). SFI delades nu upp i grundläggande kurser respektive påbyggnadskurser, där kommunerna fick ansvaret för de förra medan studieförbund och arbetsmarknadsutbildningar ansvarade för de senare. Genom en ny reform i början av 1990-talet överfördes ansvaret för SFI helt och hållet till de svenska kommunerna. Under samma decennium infördes betygssystem och nationella prov inom SFI. SFI blev en del av den kommunala vuxenutbildningen (Komvux) år 2016. Syftet med denna integration var att underlätta kombinationen av SFI med andra kurser inom Komvux för att därigenom underlätta vägen till arbete eller vidare studier. Idag utgör SFI en betydande del av Komvux hela verksamhet. Dessutom förväntades nu SFI-lärare ha en lärarexamen samt officiellt erkänd kompetens att undervisa i svenska som andraspråk. Ofta kombineras SFI-utbildning med andra insatser som, till exempel, Etableringsprogrammet, som en del av integrationspolitiken.

Eftersom SFI riktar sig till elever med varierande livssituationer, erfarenheter, utbildningsbakgrund och mål förväntas utbildningen idag planeras och genomföras med hänsyn till elevernas individuella behov och förutsättningar. För att främja individualisering och flexibilitet struktureras utbildningen med fyra på varandra följande kurser (A–D) och tre studievägar (1–3).

Utbildningen i Komvux bedrivs i dag i olika former. Kommunerna väljer själva om de vill tillhandahålla utbildningen helt i egen regi eller upphandla denna helt eller delvis av andra utbildningsaktörer som studieförbund, folkhögskolor och privata utbildningsanordnare. I det senare fallet genomförs upphandlingsprocesser där utbildningsuppdragen läggs ut på entreprenad under en bestämd tidsperiod.

Tidigare forskning om SFI ger en mångfacetterad bild av en dynamisk utbildningskontext, som är präglad av en mångfald av sociala och politiska förväntningar. Studierna spänner över ett brett spektrum av problemområden, främst relaterade till identitetsutveckling och förhandlingar kring andraspråksinläring, språkanvändningens komplexitet och de spänningar som uppstår i vardagslivet

och på arbetsplatsen, samt pedagogiska utmaningar i SFI-klassrummet och frågor om organisation och styrning av SFI (se Lundgren et al., 2017).

Däremot finns få studier som rör individualisering och individualiseringsprocesser. För att studera hur individualiseringsprocesser uppstår och tar form inom SFI bygger denna avhandling på (i) en litteraturgenomgång innefattande en granskning av den internationella forskning som behandlar individualiseringsprocesser inom vuxenutbildningen där 22 publikationer identifierades och analyserades; (ii) på analys av nationella styrdokument för SFI. Gemensamt för de dokument som analyserades är att individualisering skrivs fram som en viktig aspekt av och en utgångspunkt för verksamheten, (iii) kvalitativa intervjuer med sju tjänstemän inom kommunal förvaltning vad gäller att organisera, implementera och kontrollera SFI och därigenom etablera ramar för individualiseringsprocesser; och (iv) kvalitativa intervjuer med 18 SFI-lärare som i sin verksamhet har att anpassa utbildningen till individuella elevers behov. Studierna föregicks av upprättandet av en datahanteringsplan där utgångspunkten var att följa Vetenskapsrådets riktlinjer och att skydda deltagarna från eventuell skada.

Den teoretiska infallsvinkeln för denna avhandling är verksamhetsteori (CHAT) så som den utvecklats av Yrjö Engeström (1987, 2001). Ett centralt begrepp är ”complex concept” med innebörden att individualiseringsprocesser ses som komplexa och inte är lätta att hantera. De kan skapa oenighet och spänningar mellan de aktörer som förväntas anpassa SFI-utbildningen till elevers individuella behov och förutsättningar. För att kunna analysera individualiseringsprocesser genom begreppet ”complex concept” behövs därför ett analytiskt ramverk som kan adressera både SFI-utbildningens mångfacetterade karaktär och den breda involveringen av andra sociala aktörer som har ett stort inflyttande på SFI.

CHAT är inget enhetligt teoretiskt perspektiv utan en sammanställning av olika traditioner och analytiska modell som utvecklats under olika tider. Vygotskys begrepp ’mediering’ var ursprungligen mycket centralt för att förklara mänsklig handling som en interaktion mellan ett subjekt och ett objekt med hjälp av kulturella redskap. Kulturella redskap kan vara både materiella och mentala. Denna modell av mänsklig handling utgör första generationen av CHAT. Leontiev lyfte senare fram betydelsen av att analysera mänskliga handlingar inom ramen för olika verksamheter. En verksamhet inbegriper kollektiva handlingar riktade mot ett objekt för att tillfredsställa sociala behov. Ett objekt är med andra ord inte ett ting utan det som driver en verksamhet. Ett exempel på en verksamhet kan vara jakt, där olika individer tilldelas olika uppgifter för att kunna fånga ett byte och därmed kunna föda medlemmar i en gemenskap. En verksamhet uppstår i förhållande till

ett motiv, dvs ett socialt behov som kan tillfredsställas genom att medlemmar i en gemenskap försöker att uppnå ett objekt.

Objektet inom CHAT utgörs dock inte av en komposition av specifika mål utan utgör snarare en horisont av olika möjligheter mot vilka kollektiva verksamheter orienterar sig. Det går inte att precis definiera ett objekt utan man får genom analysen fånga spår av objektet i de studerade verksamheterna. Engeström (1987) vidareutvecklade Leontievs konceptuella ramverk till ett verksamhetssystem där mänskliga handlingar ska förstås inom ramen för kollektiva verksamheter. Denna modell utgör andra generationen av CHAT

Engeström utvecklade modellen vidare genom att problematisera samtida samhällen som mer komplexa jämfört med tidigare. Den minsta analysenheten i den tredje generation av CHAT är en verksamhet i dess interaktioner med åtminstone ytterligare en verksamhet.

I denna avhandling ligger den tredje generationen av CHAT som grund för den teoretiska infallsvinkeln. Det betyder att fokus läggs på att analysera aktörernas försök att anpassa SFI-utbildningen till elevers individuella behov inom ramen för en verksamhet som interagerar med andra aktörers verksamheter som på olika sätt adresserar/hanterar samma grupp individer (dvs sfi elever). Arbetsförmedlingen, till exempel, är en aktör som har en annan samhällslig funktion jämfört med SFI men som ändå har en stark involvering i utbildningen genom elever som är inskrivna i Etableringsprogrammet. Det kan till exempel ofta hända att Arbetsförmedlingen sätter olika mål för individer som kan vara motsägelsefulla relativt vad som sker inom SFI, som en språkutbildning.

För att uppnå avhandlingens syfte betraktas kommunala aktörers och SFI lärares verksamheter som kollektiva verksamheter riktade mot ett objekt. Genom att positionera dessa två verksamheter som centrala i analyserna blir det möjligt att se hur de interagerar med andra aktörer, hur de försöker lösa problem som resulterar i spänningar och motsägelsefullheter och därigenom också försöka fånga objekten för verksamheterna

Det betyder att förändringar förstås inom CHAT som resultat av motsättningar som uppstår mellan involverade aktörers olika agendor och sätt att bedriva deras verksamheter. Genom att försöka hantera spänningar kan individer som deltar i en verksamhet hitta nya sätt att lösa problem och därmed expandera verksamhetens objekt.

Ett begrepp som också är relaterat till expansivt lärande och som tas upp i denna avhandling är 'transformative agency by double stimulation' (TADS; Sannino, 2022) där man fokuserar på hur individer eller grupper upptäcker nya sätt



att lösa problem som i början verkar vara olösbara. Att komma fram till situationer där ingen lösning är direkt tillgänglig betraktas som en motivkonflikt (first stimulus). Detta gör att individer ofta hittar redskap eller utvecklar nya (materiella eller diskursiva som fungerar som andra stimulus) som kan hjälpa dem att lösa den initiala motivkonflikten.

Dataanalysen grundades på de verksamhetsteoretiska begreppen objekt, motiv och identifiering av spänningar som synliggör motsättningar (Artikel I, II och III), samt principerna för TADS (Artikel III).

I det följande sammanfattas avhandlingens tre artiklar:

Artikel I består av en litteraturöversikt med fokus på individualiseringsprocesser inom vuxenutbildning. Bakgrunden till studien är de policykrav som skrivs fram gällande individanpassning inom den svenska vuxenutbildningen och vilka betraktas som lösningar på flera samhällsproblem. Den svenska vuxenutbildningen kan i detta avseende ses som innefattad i en komplex väv av nationella och internationella policier och praktiker. Litteraturöversikten fokuserar därför på internationell forskning för att få en bredare förståelse av ämnet.

Syftet är att identifiera hur individualiseringsprocesser initieras och vilka konsekvenser de får för vuxenutbildningen i olika tidsperioder och sammanhang, så som de diskuteras i de valda studierna. Som analysverktyg användes begreppen motiv och objekt från CHAT. Studieobjekten från de utvalda publikationerna analyserades med avseende på föränderliga samhälleliga behov och utmaningar (motivrelaterade) som utlöser – och påverkas av – transformationer av vuxenutbildningens policyer och praxis (objektrelaterade).

Studiens resultat pekar på att individualiseringsprocesser inom internationell vuxenutbildningsforskning problematiseras inom tre sammanflätade och varandra icke uteslutande teman: i deras funktion i samspelet mellan frigörelse och ansvarstagande; i deras roll att minska risken för social exkludering; samt som verktyg för att hantera elevernas mångfald.

I det första fallet problematiseras individualiseringsprocesser i samspelet mellan det mänskliga behovet av personlig befrielse och de samtida samhälleliga kraven på att göra individer till ansvariga för sina egna livssituationer och livsval. En gemensam nämnare mellan studierna inom detta tema är ett intresse för att undersöka förändringarna inom vuxenutbildningen som svar på samhälleliga behov, särskilt relaterat till en diskursförskjutning från ”vuxenutbildning” till ”livslångt lärande”.

Det andra temat där individualiseringsprocesser undersöks fokuserar främst på missgynnade grupper, och hur vuxenutbildningen kan bidra till att minska risken

för utanförskap. En central fråga är hur vuxenutbildningen kan bidra till socialt utsatta gruppers frigörelse och därmed också ge dessa grupper förmåga till ett agentskap som minskar deras beroende av staten. Studier av kollektivistiska perspektiv inom vuxenutbildningen jämfört med individualistiska, samt uppkomsten av nya sociala frågor rörande exklusion av individer i riskzonen, är framträdande inom detta område.

Slutligen behandlar det tredje temat forskning med fokus på den svenska kontexten och de ökande spänningarna mellan policyformuleringar för implementering av individualiserande processer och deras praktiska tillämpning. De fenomen som studeras i detta tema är relaterade till kvalitetsfrågor inom vuxenutbildningen, ökande spänningar för både lärare och elever, samt effekterna av individualiseringsdiskurser i den konkreta undervisningen.

En slutsats från studien är att de samhälleliga behov som identifieras i forskningsöversikten och som förväntas lösas med hjälp av individualiseringsprocesser, relateras till spänningar som kommer sig av den osäkerhet och de risker som kan sägas känneteckna dagens samhälle. Dessa spänningar kan vara resultatet av hyperkonkurrens, instabila sysselsättningssystem eller nya former av social utslagning. I den svenska kontexten tyder forskningsresultaten på att heterogena elevgrupper inom Komvux betraktas som utmaningar som motiverar behovet av att erbjuda individualiserade lösningar. Därigenom adresseras ett brett spektrum av samhällsproblem.

De individualiseringsprocesser som belyses i forskningsöversikten visar även på de förändringar som sker inom vuxenutbildningens praktiker, så som undervisningens upplägg och genomförande, avinstitutionalisering av vuxenutbildningen, införandet av nya pedagogiska metoder samt en ökad dialog mellan lärare och elever för att etablera en undervisning som utgår från individens önskemål och behov. Fler åtgärder och program riktas mot individer i riskzonen i syfte att koppla dem närmare arbetsmarknaden. Detta i sig stärker den instrumentella rollen för vuxenutbildningen. I Sverige kan omvandlingen av vuxenutbildningen kopplas till olika inslag av uppföljning och rapportering, framväxten av en ekonomisk diskurs och införandet av standardiseringsmetoder för att förbättra kvaliteten.

Studien avslutas med att betona komplexiteten och mångfalden av individualiseringsprocesser som studieobjekt och lyfter fram dess likhet begreppet ”complex concept” utifrån en verksamhetsteoretisk förståelse. Det framhålls att ytterligare begreppsliga och empiriska undersökningar är önskvärda för att hantera denna komplexitet och för att ge ytterligare insikter om ämnet.

Artikel II undersöker krav i policy på att anpassa utbildningen i SFI efter elevers individuella behov och förutsättningar i relation till hur kommuner organiserar SFI. Syftet är att analysera hur individualiseringsprocesser kommer till uttryck både i nationella och lokala styrdokument för SFI och i kommunernas arbete med att strukturera och reglera utbildningen. Studien tar sin utgångspunkt i att även om individualiseringsprocesser tydligt föreskrivs som lösningar på en rad problem inom såväl SFI som inom samhället i stort, så råder det en osäkerhet och brist på enighet om vad sådana krav innebär för organisationens ramar och för den professionella praktiken. Studiens begreppsliga ram bygger på CHAT och analyserar individualisering genom begreppet ”complex concept”, vilket innebär att individualisering förstås som ett mångfacetterat begrepp som kan rymma flera och ibland motsägelsefulla betydelser. Detta ger upphov till utmaningar – men också möjligheter – för utveckling. Svenska kommuner, som ansvariga för genomförandet av Komvux och därmed SFI, utmanas här i sin förmåga att agera som subjekt i nätverk av samverkande verksamheter som delvis delar samma objekt.

Studiens resultat tyder på att individualiseringsprocesser kan härledas till specifika samhälleliga behov och utmaningar, vilka uttrycks som spänningar både i policy och i kommunal praktik. Tre områden framstår som centrala i analysen och som därmed kan förstås som objekt (i verksamhetsteoretisk mening) när kommunerna försöker anpassa SFI till elevernas behov och förutsättningar: formandet av individuella studenten; formandet av en effektiv utbildning; och formandet av ett sammanhållet samhälle. I varje sådant uttryck för objektformulering skapas framväxande spänningar – som också skapar – individualiseringsprocesser och därigenom bidrar till att transformera SFI på olika sätt.

Mer specifikt visar studien hur individualiseringsprocesser formas av spänningar som uppstår på grund av svårigheten att undervisa SFI-elever i grupp. Kollektiva ansträngningar riktas även mot att underlätta utbildningsvägar för elever med olika bakgrund och behov och erbjuda olika utbildningsvägar för dem.

Studien visar även att utbildningen äger rum inom snäva organisatoriska ramar, vilket sätter begränsningar för hur de individuella insatserna kan bedrivas. Genom att försöka anpassa SFI till individuella elevers behov engagerar kommunerna sig i att åstadkomma effektivitet och en optimal användning av resurserna.

Slutligen pekar den breda involveringen av olika aktörer i SFI på att utbildningen drivs av mångfacetterade motiv (poly-motivated) och att dess gemensamma objekt (i verksamhetsteoretisk mening) framstår som fragmenterat och motsägelsefullt. Trots att SFI har som övergripande mål att utbilda bland annat medborgare i riskzonen och därmed bidra till ett sammanhållet samhälle, står detta

mål ofta i konflikt med initiativ för att anpassa utbildningen till arbetsmarknadens behov. Här utspelar sig individualiseringsprocesser i skärningspunkterna mellan samhällliga behov och spänningar relaterade till utbildnings- och arbetsmarknadspolitik. När dessa två system står emot varandra leder det till objektsförskjutningar inom SFI och dess inriktning samt driver även utbildningen i motsättningsfulla riktningar.

Studien sammanfattas genom att lyfta fram den komplexitet och mångfald som präglar individualiseringsprocesser när dessa äger rum både inom och mellan skilda verksamheter med koppling till SFI. Utmaningarna sträcker sig därmed bortom klassrummets begränsningar och involverar en mängd olika aktörer vilket resulterar i att SFI stabiliseras men också destabiliseras på nya och ibland oväntade sätt.

Artikel III syftar till att undersöka utmaningar och möjligheter för SFI-lärare när de försöker anpassa undervisningen till individuella elevers behov. En utgångspunkt för studien är att SFI har att hantera en heterogen elevgrupp, att upphandlingsförfaranden kan innebära osäkra anställningsvillkor för lärarna och att det finns olika intressenter vars verksamheter relaterar till SFI. Lärarnas arbete i denna kontext kan vara utmanande.

Studiens fokus är lärares arbete som en kollektiv verksamhet. Analysen tar hjälp av principerna för TADS (Sannino, 2022), där fokus ligger på att identifiera motivkonflikter och hur aktörer gör för att komma ur dessa. En motivkonflikt (ett första stimulus) innebär en problematisk situation där befintliga arbetssätt inte kan lösa problemet. För att försöka hantera en sådan situation kan individer och grupper utveckla redskap (ett andra stimulus). Det innebär att olika strategier eller metoder utvecklas som kan hjälpa till att lösa konflikten.

Analysen visar att kraven på SFI-lärare att anpassa utbildningen till individuella elevers behov kommer från olika håll, såsom nationella och kommunala styrdokument (t.ex. skollagen, SFI:s kursplan, lokala riktlinjer för upphandlingsprocesser); den kommunala styrningen och hur arbetsgivarförhållandet ser ut (SFI i egen regi eller som entreprenad); krav från andra intressenter, såsom Arbetsförmedlingen; studenterna själva; samt lärarnas egna professionella värderingar. Eftersom dessa krav kommer från så många olika källor och eftersom de olika aktörerna strävar efter olika mål, kan kraven ofta vara motsägelsefulla och skapa spänningar för lärarna.

Fyra områden identifieras där motsägelsefulla mål uppstår i förhållande till lärares anpassning av utbildningen till individuella elevers behov:

För det första uppstår motivkonflikter när SFI-lärare förväntas skapa standardiserade riktlinjer för att säkerställa en grundläggande nivå av objektivitet och kon-

troll, samtidigt som de försöker skapa flexibla strukturer för att möta de olika behoven hos olika elevgrupper (standardisering och flexibilitet). För det andra måste lärare ofta balansera mellan dels en egen professionell föreställning om att lärande ofta gynnas av att äga rum i ett kollektivt sammanhang, dels att tillgodose individuella elevers behov, vilket kan skapa motivkonflikter (kollektivistiska och individualistiska aspekter av vuxenutbildning). För det tredje involverar SFI-utbildningen en mångfald av samhällsaktörer med sina egna agendor. Lärare hamnar ofta mitt i en mångfald av förväntningar i förhållande till vad som ska uppnås genom utbildningen. Dessa förväntningar kan relatera till frågor om socialt deltagande och demokrati eller till att tillgodose arbetsmarknadens behov. Andra aktörers engagemang kan komplicera lärarnas arbete och hämma deras professionella identitet och handlingskraft när det gäller att aktivt forma SFI-utbildningen som språkundervisning och som arbetsmarknadsinstrument. Slutligen möter lärare ofta etiska och ideologiska utmaningar på grund av den specifika sammansättningen inom SFI:s elevgrupper vilket kan skapa spänningar mellan deras roll som tjänsteman och deras egna humanistiska värderingar. Att följa regelverk som innebär att man fattar avgörande beslut som påverkar elevernas framtid beskrivs som en utmanande uppgift där läraren som tjänsteman och myndighetsutövare och läraren som individ med egna pedagogiska och personliga värderingar ställs emot varandra.

Artikeln resultat pekar på att kravet på att skräddarsy utbildningen efter individuella elevers behov utgör en betydande del av lärares arbete och påverkar undervisningens pedagogiska ramar på olika sätt. En betydande spänning i lärares arbete identifieras, vilket belyser den motsägelsefulla kärnan i objektet för deras verksamhet (i verksamhetsteoretisk mening) som både expanderande och stabiliserande. Studien visar att lärarna upprätthåller elevernas utbildning som sitt primära objekt, i enlighet med deras ”traditionella” roll som vuxenutbildare. Ändå medför krav från andra intressenter, i första hand arbetsförmedlingen, en rad ofta motsägelsefulla intressen. Studien visar att institutionella gränser till viss del överskrids vilket öppnar för ett nytt objekt i vardande där lärarna introducerar nya metoder och utmanas i förståelsen av sitt arbete.

Genom att sammanfatta resultaten från de tre studierna ger avhandlingen en inblick i hur individualiseringsprocesser uppstår och tar form inom ramen för SFI-utbildningen. En huvudslutsats är att dessa processer härrör från nya krav inom vuxenutbildnings- och arbetsmarknadspolitiken samt institutionella förändringar inom vuxenutbildningen, inklusive SFI. Dessa kan ses som pågående

moderniseringsprocesser i dagens samhälle, vilka manifesteras genom både expanderande institutioner och expanderande yrkesverksamhet.

Det har framförts att vår värld blir alltmer flytande och ovisst med suddiga gränser mellan institutionella normer. Globalisering, internationella organisationers inflytande och uppkomsten av en kunskapsbaserad ekonomi kräver konstant anpassning till en ständigt föränderlig och osäker arbetsmarknad, där kraven på högre utbildning ökar för individen. Målgruppen för SFI, vuxenstuderande, har förändrats och innefattar nu en mångfald av bakgrunder av personlig, utbildningsmässig och kulturell karaktär. Statens tidigare centrala roll har ersatts av en betoning på självreglerande praxis inom ett marknadsstyrt samhälle. Individen anses nu ha ansvaret för sina egna val och får därigenom även ta riskerna för eventuella misslyckanden, vilket innebär att institutionernas roll har förändrats till att erbjuda flexibla lösningar som ska anpassas till individens behov. Därmed uppstår behovet av ökad samordning mellan aktörer och organisatoriska miljöer, vilket resulterar i omvandling av institutioner. Avhandlingens resultat pekar på en paradox där traditionella institutionella och professionella normer förblir starka, samtidigt som de verkar inom förändrade ramar.



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## APPENDIX A

### Information letter for study presented in Article II

Dimitrios Papadopoulos

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Mobil 076-93 65 987

E-post: dimitrios.papadopoulos@gu.se

### Förfrågan om deltagande i sfi-studie

datum

Till ledningen i X,

Jag heter Dimitrios Papadopoulos och jag är doktorand vid Institutionen för pedagogik och specialpedagogik, Göteborgs universitet. Jag bedriver doktorandstudier sedan 2017 och mina handledare är professor Gun-Britt Wärvik och universitetslektor Karin Wass. Jag vill fråga dig om du vill delta i ett forskningsprojekt. I det här dokumentet får du information om projektet och om vad det innebär att delta.

Min forskning rör vuxenutbildningen med fokus på sfi-utbildning. Jag har ett särskilt intresse av att se hur individanpassad undervisning sker inom sfi, samt vilka möjligheter och utmaningar den skapar för involverade aktörer. Som sfi-elev, under åren 2014–2015, har jag själv märkt att lärarna bemöts av elevgrupper med olika bakgrund och behov. Detta kan i samband med den stora ökningen i antal elever ställa höga krav på de organisationer som genomför utbildningen. Styrdokumenten pekar på en utbildning som ska motsvara elevers olika behov och förutsättningar men samtidigt finns det mycket utrymme för tolkning kring hur det ska åstadkommas. Konsekvensen blir att kommuner och skolor förväntas ta många egna initiativ. Den här variationen kring organisering och genomförandet av sfi-utbildningen skapar ofta spänningar som jag tror är viktigt att studera närmare.

Syftet med min avhandling är att utforska individualiseringen inom sfi genom en helhetssyn. Det betyder att jag fokuserar på aktörer och dokument från olika nivåer, med speciellt intresse för vad som faktiskt görs på kommunerna och skolorna. En viktig del för att uppnå avhandlingens syfte är att få tillgång till dina dagliga verksamheter. Därför ber jag om ditt samtycke till att få intervjua dig på X (kommunens/organisationens namn).

Detta innebär att jag intervjuar dig individuellt med fokus på dina professionella erfarenheter. Utgångspunkten är att få lära känna din verksamhet och arbete kring sfi-utbildningen. Du behöver inte förbereda något inför intervjun utan diskussionen rör sig om dina beskrivningar. Vi träffas online via Microsoft Teams och diskuterar under ungefär en timme.

Du ska informeras både skriftligt och muntligt kring studiens syfte. Deltagandet är frivilligt och du ska ge ditt samtycke. Dessutom kan deltagandet avbrytas när som helst utan att någon anledning anges. Insamlat material kommer att avidentifieras och behandlas på ett konfidentiellt sätt så att ingen enskild individ, organisation eller kommun kan kännas igen. Deltagares svar och resultat kommer att behandlas så att inte obehöriga kan ta del av dem. Ansvarig för personuppgifterna är Göteborgs universitet och materialet ska förvaras inlåst på institutionens server. Enligt EU:s dataskyddsförordning har deltagare rätt att kostnadsfritt få ta del av de uppgifter om dem som hanteras i studien, och vid behov få eventuella fel rättade.

Du kan nå mig eller mina handledare via epost eller telefon och vi kan gärna svara på ytterligare frågor eller funderingar kring studien. Jag ser fram emot ditt svar.

Med vänliga hälsningar,

Dimitrios Papadopoulos

Doktorand

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## APPENDIX B

### Information letter for study presented in Article III

Dimitrios Papadopoulos

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### Förfrågan om deltagande i sfi-studie

datum

Till skolledningen och lärare i X,

Jag heter Dimitrios Papadopoulos och jag är doktorand vid Institutionen för pedagogik och specialpedagogik, Göteborgs universitet. Jag bedriver doktorandstudier sedan 2017 och mina handledare är professor Gun-Britt Wärvik och universitetslektor Karin Wass. Jag vill fråga er om ni vill delta i ett forskningsprojekt. I det här dokumentet får ni information om projektet och om vad det innebär att delta.

Min forskning rör vuxenutbildningen med fokus på sfi-utbildningen. Jag har ett särskilt intresse av att se hur individanpassad undervisning sker inom sfi, samt vilka möjligheter och utmaningar den skapar för involverade aktörer. Som sfi-elev, under åren 2014–2015, har jag själv märkt att lärarna bemöts av elevgrupper med olika bakgrund och behov. Detta kan i samband med den stora ökningen i antal elever ställa höga krav på de organisationer som genomför utbildningen. Styrdokumenten pekar på en utbildning som ska motsvara elevers olika behov och förutsättningar men samtidigt finns det mycket utrymme för tolkning kring hur det ska åstadkommas. Konsekvensen blir att kommuner och skolor förväntas ta många egna initiativ. Den här variationen kring organisering och genomförandet av sfi-utbildningen skapar ofta spänningar som jag tror är viktigt att studera närmare.

Syftet med min avhandling är att utforska individualiseringen inom sfi genom en helhetssyn. Det betyder att jag fokuserar på aktörer och dokument från olika nivåer, med speciellt intresse för vad som faktiskt görs på skolorna. En viktig del för att uppnå avhandlingens syfte är att få tillgång till lärares dagliga verksamheter. Därför ber jag om ert samtycke till att få intervjua sfi-lärare på X (organisationens namn).

Detta innebär att jag intervjuar sfi-lärare individuellt och i grupper med fokus på deras professionella erfarenheter. Utgångspunkten är att få lära känna deras verksamhet och arbete som sfi-lärare. Deltagare behöver inte förbereda något inför intervjun utan diskussionen rör sig om deras beskrivningar. Vi träffas online via Microsoft Teams och diskuterar under ungefär en timme.

Lärarna ska informeras både skriftligt och muntligt kring studiens syfte. Deltagandet är frivilligt och lärarna ska ge sitt samtycke. Dessutom kan deltagandet avbrytas när som helst utan att någon anledning anges. Insamlat material kommer att avidentifieras och behandlas på ett konfidentiellt sätt så att ingen enskild individ, organisation eller kommun kan kännas igen. Deltagares svar och resultat kommer att behandlas så att inte obehöriga kan ta del av dem. Ansvarig för personuppgifterna är Göteborgs universitet och materialet ska förvaras inlåst på institutionens server. Enligt EU:s dataskyddsförordning har deltagare rätt att kostnadsfritt få ta del av de uppgifter om dem som hanteras i studien, och vid behov få eventuella fel rättade.

Ni kan nå mig eller mina handledare via epost eller telefon och vi kan gärna svara på ytterligare frågor eller funderingar kring studien. Jag ser fram emot ert svar.

Med vänliga hälsningar,

Dimitrios Papadopoulos

Doktorand

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## APPENDIX C

### Informed consent form

#### Samtycke till att delta i forskningsprojekt

- Jag har fått muntlig och skriftlig information om studien och samtycker till att delta.
- Jag får behålla den skriftliga informationen.
- Jag är medveten om att mitt deltagande är helt frivilligt och att jag kan avbryta mitt deltagande i studien utan att ange något skäl.

.....  
Underskrift

.....  
Namnförtydligande

.....  
Ort och datum



Previous publications:

Editors: Kjell Härnqvist and Karl-Gustaf Stukát

1. KARL-GUSTAF STUKÁT *Lekskolans inverkan på barns utveckling*. Stockholm 1966
2. URBAN DAHLLÖF *Skoldifferentiering och undervisningsförlopp*. Stockholm 1967
3. ERIK WALLIN *Spelling. Factorial and experimental studies*. Stockholm 1967
4. BENGT-ERIK ANDERSSON *Studies in adolescent behaviour. Project Yg, Youth in Göteborg*. Stockholm 1969
5. FERENCE MARTON *Structural dynamics of learning*. Stockholm 1970
6. ALLAN SVENSSON *Relative achievement. School performance in relation to intelligence, sex and home environment*. Stockholm 1971
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Editors: Urban Dahllöf, Kjell Härnqvist and Karl-Gustaf Stukát

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10. RODNEY ÅSBERG *Primary education and national development*. Stockholm 1973
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12. CHRISTER BRUSLING *Microteaching - A concept in development*. Stockholm 1974
13. KJELL RUBENSON *Rekrytering till vuxenutbildning. En studie av kortutbildade yngre män*. Göteborg 1975
14. ROGER SÄLJÖ *Qualitative differences in learning as a function of the learner's conception of the task*. Göteborg 1975
15. LARS OWE DAHLGREN *Qualitative differences in learning as a function of content-oriented guidance*. Göteborg 1975
16. MARIE MÄNSSON *Samarbete och samarbetsförmåga. En kritisk granskning*. Lund 1975
17. JAN-ERIC GUSTAFSSON *Verbal and figural aptitudes in relation to instructional methods. Studies in aptitude - treatment interactions*. Göteborg 1976
18. MATS EKHOLM *Social utveckling i skolan. Studier och diskussion*. Göteborg 1976

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27. INGA ANDERSSON *Tankestilar och hemmiljö*. Göteborg 1979

28. GUNNAR STANGVIK *Self-concept and school segregation*. Göteborg 1979

29. MARGARETA KRISTIANSSON *Matematikkunskaper Lgr 62, Lgr 69*. Göteborg 1979

30. BRITT JOHANSSON *Kunskapsbehov i omvårdnadsarbete och kunskapskrav i vårdutbildning*. Göteborg 1979

31. GÖRAN PATRIKSSON *Socialisation och involvering i idrott*. Göteborg 1979

32. PETER GILL *Moral judgments of violence among Irish and Swedish adolescents*. Göteborg 1979

33. TAGE LJUNGBLAD *Förskola - grundskola i samverkan. Förutsättningar och hinder*. Göteborg 1980

34. BERNER LINDSTRÖM *Forms of representation, content and learning*. Göteborg 1980

35. CLAES-GÖRAN WENESTAM *Qualitative differences in retention*. Göteborg 1980

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In the context of Swedish for immigrants (SFI), teachers, schools, and municipal authorities are expected to adapt education to individual students' needs. This policy demand, however, is to be implemented in collaboration with other societal actors related to labour market and integration policy. This thesis examines how individualising processes emerge and unfold within SFI policy and practice. Through three studies, the thesis explores emerging challenges in municipal administration as well as in teachers' efforts to adapt education to individual students' needs. Findings reveal tensions in municipal authorities' initiatives to balance between efficiency and social cohesion. Teachers, meanwhile, grapple with retaining their roles as adult educators amidst a plethora of demands from societal actors outside the school context. By problematising individualising processes beyond traditional teacher-student interactions, this thesis sheds light on the challenges and opportunities elicited by efforts to adapt education to individual students' needs.



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