# Regulation and Inequalities in European education systems

## Context of the Research

Education systems across Europe are changing in the way they are being regulated and how and who takes responsibility for their management. Equality of opportunity has continued to remain an important aspect of educational policy; however, changes in the way education systems operate could have an impact on inequality issues.

This project compared the development of public regulation of secondary education systems in five European countries (England, French-speaking-Belgium, France, Hungary and Portugal). It has analysed how these developments affect local organisation of schooling including the way local actors could contribute to inequality and school segregation. It has also identified regulatory modes for the variable and complex ways that public authorities orientate and co-ordinate policy and activities in response to state regulation, market forces and the demands of local communities. The project looked at how public regulations at central, intermediate and local levels interact with other forms of "quasi-market" like regulation and internal regulation of the schools within local education areas.

## Key Conclusions

The project has considered "regulation" from a political perspective rather than from a functionalist approach. It is thus a multiple process, stemming from various sources, and can result in as much "order" as "disorder" within the education system. The following key conclusions were reached: -

### Changes occurring in the institutional regulation of school systems

1. School systems in Europe are subjected to external economic, social and political pressures as well as internal evolution that are leading to new ways of regulating schools and teaching practice.

2. Although education systems across Europe do vary considerably there has been some convergence in education policies emerging in the last twenty years resulting in: -

   - Growing autonomy of the local schools, but controlled by various methods like evaluation, models of practices and monitoring of practices.

   - The educational systems of countries that have tended to be centralised - like France, Portugal and Hungary - have tended to become more decentralised. Whereas, in traditionally decentralised countries like countries - England and

Belgium - their education systems are becoming more centralised. In many cases this is also resulting in increased power given to private or public "intermediate authorities".

- Growth, at different degrees, of external evaluation both at intermediate education authority level and local school level through external or self-evaluation.

- Legitimating and promotion at different degrees a larger "school choice" for parents. It could mean a policy leading towards a "quasi market" system or more open administrative enrolment devices.

- Policies of diversification of the local school's provision, but often with a common core curriculum being imposed for basic topics or skills especially for pupils from 11 to 14 year olds.

3. These changes of modes of regulation are due to common political or economical factors like: -

- The changing economic context that pushes the school system to raise the average level of competencies, to be more efficient and to adapt education to the "needs of the labour market".

- Political demands for more effectiveness and efficiency of education expenditures with a relative reduction of financial resources in some countries.

- Cultural change in favour of more individualisation of education

- Status anxiety about children's professional and social future, leading some parents (especially from middle classes) to take a more strategical approach towards schools and schooling as they see themselves as "consumers of school goods". As a result there is social pressure in favour of choice, individualisation and diversification of education provision and routes.

- Globalisation and international comparison of school systems having an increased influence on local and national policies through diffusion of transnational "models of governance" as well as managerial or pedagogical models.

4. Although there are factors leading to convergence, differences and diversities of policies still exist. This may be due to: -

- Initial differences among school systems
- The mixing of trans-national "postbureaucratic" models of governance (as "Evaluative State" or "quasi-market" models)
- Hybridisation and recontextualisation of these models to take into account diverse political, ideological, institutional or material specificities
- The additive and "mosaic" character of policies (juxtaposition of older and new systems of regulation, contradictory policies)

5.  Moreover, during the implementation process, hybridisation of policies could lead to contradictions. For example, evaluation is very limited in Belgium because the authorities want to avoid reinforcing competition amongst "school networks" or amongst schools by the publication of their results. But on the other hand, liberty of school choice by parents in Belgium is institutionalised by the constitution and market competition is already well developed. In France, some trends toward "evaluation by the results" are intertwined with more traditional bureaucratic devices and habits.

6.  At the local or regional level, regulation of the school systems can be characterised as growing "multiregulation" featuring: -

    *   Regulation stemming from a growing number of sources (national state, various regional or local public bodies, influence of the parents through choice and market mechanisms).

    *   An increasing variety of tools and means ("post-bureaucratic" devices as evaluation, monitoring, sharing of practices and training along with more classical bureaucratical devices or "pre-bureaucratic" ones.

    *   A growing strength in these various regulations.

7.  However, increasing (multi)regulation doesn't necessarily bring more order, adjustment or fine turning. Contradictions and tensions are also important. This tendency could lead to an increasing fragmentation of the institutional environment of the individual school.

8.  This fragmentation could lead to problems related to inequalities issues. It could also produce incoherence, bureaucratic overload, loss of sense of their intervention, mistrust and resistance from local schools towards any kind of regulation concerning their practices.

**Competition, local regulation and the action of schools**

9.  Within the six local schooling areas investigated, there are significant differences between the formal regulation and actual practice by public authorities on issues like the allocation of pupils amongst local schools. However, competition among schools is present in any local space to a less or to a greater degree.

10. Several factors can favour competition amongst schools like: -

    *   The demographic decline resulting in a surplus of places.

    *   The type of strategies of the population (more oriented to "quality" issues); in this case, parents don't choose only with criteria of "proximity" or convenience, but take also into account the various school offerings, the "school mix", its reputation and its position in the local hierarchy of schools.

- The importance of the stake for schools related to number/characteristics of the pupils (the stake is less important in Lisbon because the number of pupils do not condition funding, number of teachers).

- A limited number of "pupils" of "quality" (i.e. without academic or social problems) or the perceived importance of "problematic pupils".

- The inability of local authorities to avoid or reduce competition between schools, if they wanted, and are allowed to do so.

11. The strategies and actions of the individual schools are affected and oriented by their position and the competition in the local "market", but also by the constraints of national regulations, or pressure coming from local authorities.

12. Headmasters in particular, have to balance between "external constraints and demands" (coming from local authorities, pressure from the parents, from others schools) and internal ones (the demands of teachers, pupils, parents). All these demands are filtered by the headteacher's ethos, preferences and consensus within the school.

13. Various types of school strategies or "logics of action" have been identified: -

- Offensive (*entrepreneurs* who try to conquest new market shares) compared to defensive (*rentiers* who want to maintain and keep their positions) – particularly for those schools that already hold intermediate and high prestige positions.

- Expressive compared to Instrumental schools:

*Instrumental* schools are characterised by:

  - A greater selection of intake
  - A teacher-pupil relationships based on pupils academic identity and teacher authority
  - Parents being viewed as "strategic assets"
  - Esoteric programmes for higher education preparation and "high ability' pupils,
  - The marginality of equity programmes
  - An extensive use of ability differentiation
  - The principal defined as a manager

These activities are more widespread amongst schools occupying a high prestige position.

*Expressive* schools are characterised by:

  - An open intake and programmes aimed at pupils with special needs
  - A teacher-pupil relationships based on familial roles and principles of care
  - The school is seen as part of the local community by some parents
  - Equity is central to the school's philosophy and practice

- Special programmes for educational and behavioural needs
- A minimal use of ability differentiation
- The principal is define more as a leading professional

These activities are more widespread amongst schools occupying lower and intermediate positions of esteem within the locality.

- Specialisation compared to diversification: some schools tend to specialise their offerings in order to keep their intake or to attract new "customers". This could be "special needs students or "high ability" students. Some schools diversify by trying to catch all "customers" by a great variety of different programmes and routes inside the school.

14. There appears to be a clear, but complex, relationship between market dynamics and social inequality resulting in maintaining or developing social segregation; reinforcing institutional differences in student experience and opportunity, and in the resources available for student activities and support.

**Role and limits of local authorities intervention concerning the effects of the market on segregation and inequalities**

15. There are differences in the way local authorities regulate against unexpected or undesired consequences of the trend towards more segregation of the pupils within schools depending on: -

- National regulations that may or may not favour choice and markets; or may or may not allow local authorities to control either schools or parents.

- Political choices and professional ethics of the public agents who consider "market" as "normal" or not, school choice as legitimate or not.

- The difficulties of being efficient in this purpose

16. Public authorities may have difficulty in regulating the "market" due to: -

- The institutional borders of the regulation authority not fitting the actual flow of the pupils to schools.

- Multi-regulation: in the same local area. Various rules co-exist depending on the type of schools (like state, municipal, catholic or Jewish). In fact regulations are coming from different authorities (private and public) that are uncoordinated, resulting in the various regulators being unable to avoid competition amongst schools.

17. Consequently, some regulators/providers could be led to defend "their schools" against the schools of another district or provider thus reinforcing competition.

## Key Recommendations

It is important to carefully consider the national and local context when considering these recommendations, as solutions adopted in different countries do not necessarily have the same effect.

1. As more autonomy is given to individual schools this needs to be counterbalanced by compulsory policy empowering local and/or regional authorities and improving the effectiveness of their regulations.

2. Local and intermediate authorities need the power to ensure that "market forces" within the school system don't lead to increasing or reinforced social segregation and inequalities. This could be achieved by a strong coordination amongst the various regulators, related to private or various public providers present in a specific school district; the harmonisation of rules and regulations concerning recruitment and exclusion of pupils; and what is offered to them within individual schools, as well as the distribution of pupils amongst schools.

3. There is a need for "regulating the regulators" - *meta-regulation.* This process can be developed in various ways amongst the various school regulators and providers, based on a mixture of utilising a higher authority and horizontal coordination. This would enable the same rules to apply to all schools/providers that are in competition with each other within a given district or area. This meta-regulation could limit or reduce competition and segregation amongst schools within the area.

4. This could be done within a given district, but because competition often flows across the borders of districts, there would also be a need for coordination among various school districts

5. There is thus a need for greater dialogue, coordination, communication and coherence between political actors and regulators at all levels, in particular at the intermediary and local level.

6. Regional and national observatories or other mechanisms should be established to limit and monitor the effects and consequences of the development of "school markets" on individual schools and families. Data collected could also help the meta-regulation process.

7. Research has demonstrated that there is an inter-dependent relationship between "attractive" and "unattractive" schools within a local area. There is thus a need, through training and information for professionals, in "favoured" schools especially, to ensure that they have a better understanding of the teaching conditions in other schools and the effect of their own practice on the other schools. The aim would be to ensure that every person and organisation has a responsibility for coping with issues like problem pupils and that it is not just the responsibility of another school. Solutions to the problems of inequality and segregation should not be limited to "specialised schools for special needs students". The functioning of "favoured schools" should also be encouraged to change.

8. Complementary, financing policies could also lower inequalities between schools. More funding for pupils with low socio-economic backgrounds could be an incentive for "prestige" schools to have a more open recruitment policy.

9. However, it is also important to remember that school systems are embedded in societies. The current trends observed at the root of the process of growing segregation and inequalities among schools are also related to general developments in our societies, especially in the labour market or the residential market. Therefore, the action against inequalities should not be limited to the school system only. Social policy against socio-economic inequalities and urban policies against excessive residential segregation should be conducted in parallel to school policies.

## Further Information

The full title of the project is: "Changes in regulation modes and social production of inequalities in education systems: a European comparison". (December 2004).

The project web site at http://www.girsef.ucl.ac.be/europeanproject.htm with details of many papers produced by the project.

## Key Publications

Already published: -

Ball S.J., Thrupp M, Vincent C. Marques Cardoso C., Neath S. (2005, forthcoming) "Gentrification, social class and competition : the complexities of Inner City schooling", *Journal of Education Policy*

Barroso, João (2003). A "escolha da escola" como processo de regulação: integração ou selecção social?. João Barroso (org.). in A escola pública - regulação, desregulação, privatização. Porto: Edições Asa, pp. 79-109.

Barroso, João (2003). Regulação e desregulação nas políticas educativas: tendências emergentes em estudos de educação comparada. João BARROSO (org.). in A escola pública - regulação, desregulação, privatização. Porto: Edições Asa, pp. 19- 48.

Barthon C., Monfroy B (2005, à paraître) « Illusion et réalité de la concurrence entre collèges en contexte urbain : l'exemple de la ville de Lille » *Sociétés Contemporaines,* 57

Demailly L. et Tondellier M. (2004) Les transactions entre l'institution et ses agents : le cas des coordonnateurs de réseaux d'éducation prioritaire, *Les Sciences de l'Education. Pour l'ère nouvelle*, vol 37, 2, 7-33

Draelants, H., Dupriez, V. et Maroy, C. (2003). Le système scolaire en Communauté française, *Dossier du Crisp*, n 59, Centre de Recherche et d'Information Socio-Politique, Bruxelles.

Dupriez V et Maroy C. (2003) « Regulation in school systems : a theoretical analysis of the structural framework of the school system in French speaking Belgium », *Journal of Education Policy*, vol 18, n ° 4, 375-392

Dutercq, Y., van Zanten A. (dir.), (2002). "Evaluation et régulation des systèmes d'enseignement", *Education et sociétés*, n°8.

Maroy, C. (2004) « Choisir l'école de ses enfants, en France et ailleurs » *Sciences Humaines*, n° 46.

Maroy, C (2004) Régulation et évaluation des résultats des systèmes d'enseignement, *Politiques d'Education et de Formation*, vol 11, 2.

Maroy C. (dir.) (2004) Sociologie des régulations de l'enseignement. Une comparaison européenne, *Recherches Sociologiques* , XXXV, 2. (An issue entirely focused on REGULEDUCnetwork)

van Zanten, A. (2002). "Educational change and new cleavages between head teachers, teachers and parents: Global and local perspectives on the French case", *Journal of Education Policy*, vol. 17, n° 3.

van Zanten A. (dir.) (2003) " Modèles d'intégration et dynamiques multiculturelles dans les établissements scolaires en Europe ", *Revue française de pédagogie*, n° 144.

van Zanten A. (2003) " Middle-class Parents and Social Mix in French Urban Schools : reproduction and transformation of class relations in education ", *International Studies in Sociology of Education,* vol. 13, n° 2, 107-123.

van Zanten A. (2004) *Les politiques d'éducation*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, coll. " Que sais-je ? ".

The main results presented in the final report and national monographies will be published in at book by Presses Universitaires de France in 2005.

## Research Institutions

Université catholique de Louvain (Girsef – Cerisis), Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium
Fondation nationale des sciences politiques, (OSC),  Paris, France
Lille I, Université des sciences et technologies de Lille Lille, France
Centre national de la recherche scientifique, (IFRESI), Lille, France
Eotvos Lorand University, Budapest, Hongary
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