

Chapter 1

Austerity and the remaking of education policy in Europe since 2008

The literature about education policy-making in Europe tends to keep education closely in focus, while education's wider determinations are presented in less precise ways. We don't wish in this chapter to lose sight of the detail of education – but we do intend to locate the emergence of new forms of governance, management and curriculum in broader contexts of policy and social and economic change. The main aim of the chapter is to understand central features of educational change by analyzing the kinds of flow and pressure, originating outside, as well as within, the field of education, which impact on the education systems of European states and on transnational institutions. Acknowledging the accelerating pace of change, we discuss it in terms of such vectors of transformation as adaptation to the wave of financial and economic shock that began in 2008, the commitment of mainstream political parties and transnational institutions to austerity measures and the consolidation of neo-liberal paradigms, even after the moment of the 'credit crunch' which was momentarily thought to have destabilised them. Alongside these largely economic dimensions of crisis, conflict and change, we will discuss the significance of other forces and events, especially mass movements of migration into Europe, and the renaissance of nationalism and xenophobia that has accompanied them. In complex ways, which vary across European states, these tendencies act to frame educational debates, and to prompt policy changes.

i. Before Neoliberalism

In post-war European societies, market relations were not unequivocally dominant. This was true not only of the Comecon countries of Eastern Europe, but of much of Western Europe too. Hyman (2015: 2) points out that in the latter societies there were ‘important limits to the ways in which labour could be bought and sold’, often imposed through elaborate employment protection legislation, relating to the length of the working day, holiday entitlements, and stipulated levels of pay. Public policy encouraged collective bargaining: agreements negotiated between employers and workers’ organisations were a more significant feature of working life than individual employment contracts. These conditions, which strengthened the position of labour and of trade unions, were reinforced by extensive public welfare systems, established at least in part as the result of pressure from labour movements. Esping-Andersen (1990) noted the ‘decommodifying’ effects of such systems: they removed aspects of social life from the influence of market forces, and reduced the compulsion on populations to remain in the labour market whatever their age, health and family situations. Developments of this sort amounted to an ‘institutionalisation of workers’ rights’ (Hyman 2015) embedded in the world of work. In some national societies in the richer European core popular rights extended also to the provision of effective systems of social security. The situation was different in peripheral regions. Eastern Europe saw a large-scale expansion of social provision, but in conditions in which the autonomous activity of trade unions was prevented (Mazower 1998). In some countries of the south, where forces of the left had been defeated in the 1930s and 1940s by a militant and reactionary right, welfare systems and trade unionism remained for several decades in an embryonic form; political and social rights were curtailed by dictatorships.

Education, in many countries, was a space in which the influence of labour markets and economic programmes was restrained by other kinds of demand. In countries of the south, the political and social obedience of the population was a more important objective than the

training of a skilled workforce (Boyd-Barratt and O'Malley 1995). Thus, although during the 1950s and 1960s global policy organisations placed a strong emphasis on the modernisation of vocational education in 'developing' countries such as Greece, these appeals and recommendations did not lead to significant change (see Traianou in this volume). In more developed countries, for different reasons, the priority of economic goals was also challenged. The Robbins Committee, for instance, appointed by the British government to report on higher education, recognised that it was necessary to attune the university to the needs of competition with 'other highly developed countries in an era of rapid technological and social advance' (Robbins 1963: 8). But it noted, at the same time, that 'education ministers to ultimate ends'; higher education was not just about the making of 'good producers but also good men and women' (ibid). Similarly, in many school systems, practices intended to achieve increased opportunities for working-class students took precedence for both policy-makers and teachers over other, more economically-orientated objectives – see Dreux in this volume for the case of France.

It was a sense of the deep-rooted recalcitrance of education to the adoption of an economic logic which, in 1976, at the end of the long boom, impelled civil servants in England to advise their prime minister that, 'some teachers and some schools may have over-emphasised the importance of preparing boys and girls for their roles in society compared with the need to prepare them for their economic role', and that in consequence, the time might 'now be ripe for a change (as the national mood and government policies have changed in the face of hard and irreducible economic facts)'. (DES 1976: 10). The same kind of critique was set out in one of the first White Papers produced by the post-1992 European Commission. 'The pressure of the market-place [was] spreading and growing 'and 'adaptability [to these processes] is becoming a major prerequisite for economic success' (1993: 92). Education and training systems were not sufficiently susceptible to these pressures and this failing was at

least in part responsible for the problems of employment policy in Europe. The relay mechanisms between ‘education’ and ‘the economy’ needed to be more efficient.

ii. Economic shock and its aftermath

Demands for the adjustment of education to economic requirements have increased not abated; the greater the severity of economic problems, the stronger the requirement that is placed on education to resolve them.

It is over ten years since the crisis of 2008, when the decision by the US financial authorities not to bail out Lehman Brothers triggered a crisis of the financial system, to the point where it appeared for a few months to be on the point of collapse (Gamble 2009). The crisis developed over the following five years into an economic recession that was deep and long-lasting. In the decade since the collapse of Lehman Brothers, European economies and societies experienced a slump in growth rates – only recently counteracted by an easing of monetary policy (Euromemorandum 2018). In early 2016 the eurozone’s overall real GDP was still below its pre-crisis peak. The Greek economy was 28 per cent smaller, Portugal 6.5% and Spain 4.5%. Industrial production in the eurozone was down more than 10 per cent compared to pre-crisis levels. Investment was below 2007 levels in 21 of 28 EU countries (Fazi 2016).

Changes provoked or exacerbated by the crisis have become embedded features of societies. The social and economic settlements of earlier decade had already been rendered fragile by globalisation and by the policy turn embodied in the Single European Act (1986) and the Maastricht Treaty (1992). After 2008, fragility worsened to the point of break-up. Youth unemployment has not fallen below 20% across the EU since 2008 (Fazi 2016). In 2014, nearly one in four persons in the European Union (122.3 million people) was at risk of poverty or social exclusion in, a figure higher than that of 2008. A new working poor had

emerged, in precarious or low-paid jobs. The percentage of children living in a household 'at risk of poverty or social exclusion' ranged from around 15% in Denmark (14.5%) and Finland (15.6%), to over 35% in six countries: Latvia, Spain, Greece, Hungary, Bulgaria and Romania (European Parliament Think Tank 2016: 6).

The labour market has stopped being a stable source of prosperity for many people (Lopez 2017): a precarious class (Standing 2011) has grown in numbers, lacking secure access to regular employment, long-term housing and other attributes essential to a secure and autonomous existence; the labour force has been flexibilised in its conditions of work, and deprived of many of the legal rights it previously enjoyed. Economic misery has driven mass migration from southern and eastern Europe to the more prosperous north. Within states, there has been a 'marked shift in income and wealth away from the majority of citizens dependent on wages and salaries towards those who derive their income from capital' (Euromemorandum 2018: 3). Between EU states, inequalities are stark, between Latvia and Belgium, for instance, there is a five-fold difference in average household wealth (Tiefensee 2018).

Austerity

These embedded features of social and economic life have been kept in place by a policy choice adopted by most national governments, and by European and global institutions – austerity. In organising large-scale bail-outs to avert the collapse of banks, governments in OECD countries had run up significant current account deficits. The banking crisis was transformed for many states into a fiscal crisis, which by 2010 had become a sovereign debt crisis, as the markets began to register that several states had debts they had little hope of repaying (Blackburn 2011). Bond markets, on which governments relied for their borrowing, required plans to cut deficits, through cuts to public spending and long-term adjustments to

deal with issues of public debt. In accommodating to these demands, governments of the centre-left and centre-right worsened the recession: cuts in the public sector served to weaken aggregate demand, contributing to low rates of growth.

In its plainest form austerity involves the reduction of government deficits through cuts to public spending, often accompanied by tax increases. This is an orientation strongly rooted in the post-1992 European Union: the foundation of the European Monetary Union and the EU itself was premised on ‘austrian’ criteria, which stipulated debt and deficit ceilings and low inflation targets (Plehwe et al 2018). Following the crisis, criteria of this sort were more stringently applied: to a much greater extent, austerity measures have been constitutionalized in laws, pacts and treaties. The ‘six pack’ of new laws in 2011 tightened EU surveillance procedures over budget-making. In the same year, the ‘Fiscal Compact’ enabled EU institutions to impose austerity measures on member states with ‘structural deficits’. In 2013, the Treaty on Stability, Co-ordination and Governance wrote these procedures into law, while further legislation – the ‘Two Pack’ imposed stricter requirements for countries in economic difficulties (EU 2012).

Greece, Portugal, Cyprus, Ireland and Spain all felt the impact of this entrenched orthodoxy, in which the bailout of banks by European and global institutions was conditional upon the adoption of austerity policies by national governments, whatever the social costs. However, this policy of extreme constraint is not something that has been implemented only through external intervention. In the Czech Republic, the Nečas government of 2010-13 adopted stringent austerity measures in order to launch an attack on the country’s welfare state - pushing the Czech economy into a second recession (Becker 2016). In Britain, the governments of David Cameron and Theresa May adopted austerity policies enthusiastically, and continued to hold fast to them throughout the post-crisis period; for them, austerity meant

more than a temporary slowdown in state spending: it signified a long-term attempt to shrink the social state, and to convince the British population that this was both a necessary and a virtuous project (Clarke and Newman 2012). In France, the presidency of Emmanuel Macron was likewise marked by a determination to bring the country's budget into compliance with the EU's deficit rules for the first time since the onset of recession: a goal seen as essential to a modernisation of social and political relations in which the influence of collectivist traditions would be reduced. (Khan 2017)

Austerity at European level is thus more than a temporary or conjunctural measure; it has come to resemble a permanent kind of structural adjustment, involving continuous attritional reforms of the public sector (McBride and Mitrea 2017) Merkel, Europe's most powerful politician in the post-2008 years, never tired of saying that 'Europe has 7% of the world's population, 25% of its GDP and 50% of its social spending'. If the region 'was to prosper in competition with emerging countries,' she argued 'it could not continue to be so generous' in its social provision (Merkel 2013). Speaking from the same perspective, German finance minister Wolfgang Schäuble made clear to Greek politicians seeking relaxation of the financial conditions imposed upon their country by EU institutions that the 'overgenerous' European social model was no longer sustainable; the requirements of economic competitiveness meant that it had to be abandoned (Varoufakis 2018). As Traianou's chapter shows, this was a lesson in which Greece was forcibly instructed. In seven years following the Memorandum of 2010, in which Greece – facing bankruptcy – agreed to implement austerity measures in return for loans to cover public debts, the country lost more than a quarter of GDP. Youth unemployment ran consistently at 45%. The health budget fell from 6.8% to 4.9% of GDP. The combined effects of austerity amounted to a 'disaster without precedent since the 1930s' (Kouvelakis 2018: 23).

The consequences for education of this policy orientation were significant, not only because they involved reductions in funding, but also because they demanded a different rationale for education, orientated towards the ideals of competitiveness evoked by Schäuble, Cameron and many other political leaders. This rationale, and the institutional arrangements associated with it, drew from a repertoire of ideas, policies and strategies that had begun to be compiled three decades earlier, a repertoire characterized as neoliberal.

The meanings of neoliberalism

The meanings attributed to neoliberalism are various. There is a hard core of neoliberal thinking which treats the market as a natural reality; to achieve economic equilibrium, it ‘suffices to leave this entity to its own devices’ (Dardot and Laval 2013: 2). This is not a theoretical position which is widely supported. Ronald Reagan famously claimed that ‘I’m from the government and I’m here to help’ were among the most terrifying words in the English language, but neoliberalism as it actually exists is not anti-statist; rather it depends upon state action to bring neo-liberal policies into existence and to protect and extend them thereafter. Neoliberalism – in Harvey’s 2005 definition - is in the first instance a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills. This ‘liberation’ is secured within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade. The role of the state is to create and preserve an institutional framework appropriate to such practices. The neoliberal revolution of the late twentieth century, with its emphasis on the privatization of state assets and the marketisation of state provision, consisted in large part not of the annihilation of the state but of the reconstruction of state forms and institutions in a way that ‘assisted in the production of certain kinds of social relations’ (Dardot and Laval 2013: 130). It was states and global organisations, ‘in close

collusion with private actors' which fashioned rules conducive to the expansion of market finance.' (2013: 130). Writing, much earlier, of European Union policy Grahl and Teague (1989: 33) make a similar point: the European Community's project to complete a single market in the twelve member states by 1992' entailed not the withdrawal of the state from the economy, but the intensification of its work: to achieve market completion it was necessary to devise 'some three hundred detailed directives aimed at levelling the legal, technical and fiscal barriers to thoroughgoing competition on a continental scale'.

This project entailed efforts to change the political balance of forces and had a strong antagonistic and ideological dimension. It sought to undo collective solidarities – those that existed in the form of trade unionism, and those based on the institutions of the post-war welfare state. Labour movements had played a significant part in the creation of national systems of regulation. As decisions about political economy moved to a European scale, these movements had much less influence; the gains they had made in an earlier period were supplanted by a new legal order in which goods, capital, services and labour were enabled to flow freely across Europe, without comparable attention to workers' rights and social protection (Scharpf, 1999). The various economic innovations of neoliberalism should be seen, at least partly, in such a light (Panitch 1987: 136). Financialisation, just-in-time production, privatization, a scaled-down public sector operating according to the rules of new public management, a state watchful and repressive towards its own people - all depended on, and further consolidated, a change in the balance of power between classes, to the advantage of capital in general, and finance capital in particular. In place of the solidarities of post-war social democracy, neoliberalism defined 'a certain existential norm' that 'enjoins everyone to live in a world of generalized competition' (Dardot and Laval: 13).

It is often presented as a transformative force, which over-rides resistance and marginalises other political projects. For a particular period in the 1990s and early 2000s, this claim was

tenable, if not uncontested: Perry Anderson's melancholy judgment at the turn of the century that the 'principal aspect of the past decade' had been 'the virtually uncontested consolidation, and universal diffusion, of neoliberalism' (Anderson 2000: 6) registers the moment of neoliberal triumph. But even when 'consolidation' is not an evaluation that could easily apply to frozen standards of living and increasing inequality of the post-2008 decade challenges to its norm were dismissed in the words of the President of the European Council, as 'ideological illusion' (Tusk 2015) – a refusal to allow a legitimacy to opposing programmes that would like to reduce politics to questions of how to maintain system functionality.

These various definitions and critical debates hold three kinds of significance for education. First, they draw attention to processes of privatization and marketisation, whereby educational institutions model themselves on private sector entities, and education becomes more extensively than in earlier decades, a source of profit for private firms. Secondly, they emphasise the breadth of the neoliberal project, which includes the formation of subjectivities as much as the rising fortunes of the financial sector. As Foucault suggested in 1979, government becomes a sort of enterprise whose task it is to universalize competition and invent market-shaped systems of action for individuals, groups and institution. (Lemke 2001). In this context, a new concept of the 'learner' has emerged, which focuses on the individual and their responsibilities to 'govern' their own development through the lifelong accumulation of skills and competencies; qualities of flexibility, creativity and adaptability are repeatedly emphasized. Thirdly they underline the combative and militant character of the process of neoliberalisation: it carries at its core a project of ending the influence of particular kinds of social and political actor, in favour of policies that expect and endorse competitiveness as a purpose of education, and privilege certain social and institutional actors

as the bearers of this project. This project has been outlined with particular clarity in countries where opposition to such perspectives have been strongly voiced. In a much-noted article, Denis Kessler, deputy president of the French employers' confederation MEDEF, explained that the French social model was the product of a particular historical moment, the aftermath of war, in which the balance of forces had made necessary an alliance with communism around a programme of social reconstruction. Now it was time to find an 'escape route' from 1945 and 'systematically to undo the programme of the National Council of the Resistance'; without such a confrontation it would be difficult to reconnect France to a globalized world (Kessler 2007). This policy of 'systematic undoing' was pursued across Europe: 'there are] 40 years to be dismantled,' wrote Maria Stella Gelmini, Italian Minister of Education, in 2008 (Gelmini 2008).

State authoritarianism, rising populism

Dardot and Laval argue that neoliberalism 'works to reconstruct state forms and institutions' in order to establish the conditions for its reproduction. It is frequently argued that this reconstruction, which affects legal, social and political relations, is inflected in an authoritarian direction. Dominant social groups are now 'less interested in neutralizing resistance and dissent via concessions and forms of compromise that maintain their hegemony, favouring instead the explicit exclusion and marginalization of subordinate social groups' (Bruff 2014: 116). Working to develop this insight, researchers have tracked the punitive nature of new welfare, immigration and penal policies (Wacquant (2009; Clarke and Newman 2012; Fekete 2016), while Gill (1998) traces the ways in which the main features of the neo-liberal order have been 'constitutionalized', in an effort to place them beyond the reach of political decisions, in territory where what is allowable in economic programmes is

decided by judges rather than parliaments. Greece, again, provides the strongest example of these tendencies. Following the interventions of the Troika, beginning in 2010, ‘Greece’s sovereignty on economic issues [has] been reduced almost to that of a protectorate’ (Keucheyan and Durand 2015: 44). In 2015, resistance to austerity policies from an elected government, led by the left, collapsed within a few months in the face of the intransigence of the EU.

Concerns about a growing authoritarianism passed into the mainstream of political analysis. In 2013, the Council of Europe compiled an extensive review of the ‘severe human consequences’ of the economic crisis and of the austerity measures that accompanied it – stressing that these consequences were as much legal, social and political as they were economic. In terms of social provision, vulnerable and marginal groups had been hit disproportionately hard, in ways that compounded pre-existing inequalities and injustices. In some cases, ‘the very capacity of central and local authorities to deliver on the basic promises of a social welfare state’ was at risk. Legally enforceable labour market ‘reforms’ increased precarity, while also holding down levels of pay. Protests against these conditions had been met in several cases by the ‘use of excessive force’ and ‘infringements of the freedoms of expression and peaceful assembly’. The ‘whole spectrum of human rights’ had been affected, including ‘access to justice’ (damaged by cutbacks to legal aid), freedom of expression and rights to ‘participation, transparency and accountability’, so that those most affected by austerity were denied the means through which to challenge its impacts. (Council of Europe 2013 13 - 15).

Of course, the character of European societies cannot be reduced to its authoritarian elements. The recognition of fundamental human rights is embedded in a legally binding EU Charter; in the later part of the twentieth century, many countries saw both legal reforms and de facto social changes which expanded personal freedom – in the areas of gender and sexuality, for

instance, and also recognized to some extent the rights of minorities and regions. However, it is difficult to deny the increasing prominence of powerful counter-tendencies: the Council of Europe survey is complemented by a number of national studies, which make a similar case in a wealth of detail austerity is an important driver of restrictions on human rights, not least the rights of young people (Williamson 2014). The punitive nature of the state's response to protest has often had little in common with the principles of equity enshrined in Europe's Charter of Fundamental Human Rights (OJEC 2000; Costa-Krivitsky 2018a; 2018b).

The linkage between austerity and authoritarianism is strong enough to have generated a new coinage – austeritarianism (Hyman 2015) But austerity, is not the only aspect of the authoritarian turn; it is articulated with another set of issues, in which the response to migration and the European encounter – or re-encounter – with a non-European otherness is an important factor. As a 'theory of political economic practices' (Harvey 2005) neoliberalism is indifferent to cultural difference; it considers human progress to depend on a competitive process which does not a priori privilege any particular social group. In practice, things are different. At least in the period of austerity, neoliberalism has been adopted most unequivocally by parties of the right. These parties have operated on the basis that the 'pure doctrine of the free market that is the animating spirit of neo-liberalism is, by itself, too arid and abstract a creed to offer satisfying fare for any mass electorate (Anderson 2001: 2). The 'ideological supplement' which they have combined with neoliberalism has been based upon an attempt to unify a large section of the national population in opposition to minorities presented as undeserving, criminal, terroristic, dangerous – or simply alien. It is this latter kind of contrast – between national states and their opponents, between Europe and its other – which has increasingly informed policy-making; and it is in this context that some of the traditional themes of conservative politics, which centre on questions of authority and allegiance, have found a new life.

The appeal to xenophobic or nationalist themes by those in mainstream of neoliberal politics has been a feature of politics in many European states. As the effects of austerity became more intense, and popular grievances mounted, new parties emerged with agenda which were nativist to the point of racism – Golden Dawn in Greece, the Freedom Party in Austria, AfD in Germany, the Swedish Democrats, the Lega in Italy, the Front National in France and UKIP in Britain: the Lega's Matteo Salvini, Interior Minister in the Italian coalition government of 2018 pledged to incarcerate and deport 500, 000 Roma, 'street by street, piazza by piazza' (Embury-Dennis 2018). Electoral competition with these parties led more established parties of the right to emphasise their own role as advocates of strong borders, and allegiance to the national culture. In Britain, governments set about creating a 'hostile environment' for migrants, denying access to housing and healthcare; following the Brexit vote in the 2016 referendum, Theresa May, the Prime Minister, denounced 'cosmopolitans' as 'citizens of nowhere'. In France Emmanuel Macron combined an appeal to global rights with policies of deportation (Fassin 2018). The Rajoy government in Spain introduced healthcare charging for migrants in such a way as 'to revitalise 'the boundaries between the citizen-worker and the abject migrant' (Fekete 2016). In this context, the decisions of the German and Swedish governments in 2015 to admit significant numbers of Syrian refugees were momentary exceptions, not the general rule. In 2015 several states closed their border to refugees. By 2018, this policy was in practical terms adopted by the EU as a whole, as it sought to establish holding centres for migrants outside the borders of Europe: there developed a formidable external reinforcement of the EU's perimeter, protected by fences, guarded by naval forces, and linked to an expanded apparatus for the detention and deportation of refugees (Kouvelakis 2018).

It is in this context - in which the many pressures of austerity are combined with a cultural, legal and social politics in which questions of race and religion, nation and identity, loyalty

and authority are a forceful presence - that educational institutions continue to experience a reshaping of their purposes, structures, governance and ethos.

Iii Reshaping Education

The impact of neoliberalism on education has been described as an aspect of a ‘second modernisation’ (Seddon et al 2015). The first modernisation addressed the populations of European societies as members of an industrial workforce, and as citizens of a national state. It offered entry to regulated employment, a level of social protection and access to public services, and the expectation of a rising standard of living, underpinned by state policies which prioritised full employment and social cohesion. Modernisation in its second form was significantly different. It focused on the requirements of global competition in what was claimed to be a knowledge economy, and emphasised that workforces could safeguard themselves only by adapting to change, committing themselves to a lifetime of continuous reskilling. The ‘human capital’ to the development of which education and training systems should be orientated was in need of constant renewal.

The knowledge economy was defined as one in which ‘production and services (are) based on knowledge-intensive activities that contribute to an accelerated pace of technological and scientific advance as well as equally rapid obsolescence’ (Powell and Snellman 2004: 201). Such activities were argued to constitute a large component of economic activities in developed countries (Abramovitz and David 1996); they relied more heavily on the general intellect of the workforce than on natural or other resources, and were often combined with efforts to integrate improvements in every stage of the production process: ‘from the R&D lab to the factory floor to the interface with customers’ (Powell & Snellman, 2004: 201). Tony Blair, in 1995, succinctly expressed the premises of the new economy, and their implications for politics:

‘Technological change is reducing the capacity of government to control a domestic economy free from external influence. The role of government in this world of change is to represent a national interest, to create a competitive base of physical infrastructure and human skills. The challenge before our party... is not how to slow down and so get off the world, but to educate and retrain for the next technologies, to prepare our country for new global competition, and to make our country a competitive base from which to produce the goods and services people want to buy’ (Blair 1995: 20).

Governments, Blair continued, should focus on ‘creating a fully-educated labour force conversant with the skills necessary to implement the new technology’. Education should be lifelong and technologized, and if this was accomplished, then Britain would be transformed not only into a country of ‘innovative people’ but also into the ‘electronic capital of the world’ (Blair 1996: 93, 98, 127), capable of responding to ‘the emergence of the new economy and its increased demands for skills and human capital’ (Department for Education and Employment 2001: 8). Blair thus prefigured the Lisbon declaration of 2000, in which the EU expressed similar ambitions: Europe should ‘become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world’.

This turn in economic thinking was accompanied by a redesign of education systems, so as to produce the new kinds of human capital, the flexible and creative workers, that the knowledge economy was thought to require. There has been a tendency, unevenly present in the education systems of Europe but endorsed in the policy documents of the OECD and EU, for the curriculum to be presented not as a given body of knowledge to be transmitted to students but as a generic set of skills and competences, with a focus on the centrality of the individual learner, supported through active forms of pedagogy and a view of the teacher as a facilitator of ‘personalised’ learning. Because education systems as they developed in the

post-war period were not thought capable of addressing these new priorities, the policy turn has been accompanied by a stronger emphasis on the assessment of learning in relation to the production of closely specified and measurable outcomes, for which institutions from schools to universities are held accountable (Priestley & Sinnema, 2014).

Compatible with the focus on measurable performance are other, system-wide, changes, which involve a complex mix of decentralisation and recentralisation. The UK is sometimes presented (Sahlberg 2009) as the European home of such a programme, seen as a body of ideas generated in the Anglophone world and popularised in the term New Public Management (NPM). As an account of origins, this is broadly true, but it underestimates the extent to which NPM programmes have become a norm across Europe. NPM was introduced in the 1980s initially in the US, New Zealand, Australia and Britain, as a result of the ‘fiscal crisis of the state’ (O’Connor 1973) and of consequential demands to control public expenditure by improving the efficiency of the public sector. NPM reforms combined decentralised operational management and detailed central regulation, introducing to the public sector forms of organisation which ‘approximated to’ the ‘discipline of the market’: ‘lean’ autonomous organisational forms, devolution of budgets and financial control, outsourcing and other market-type mechanisms such as competitive tendering, and performance-related pay. These decentralising tendencies were accompanied by recentralising strategies which favoured a central, stronger executive management, steering sectoral activity through target-setting, evaluation, incentives and sanctions (Hood, 1991). NPM required that public funded activities be accountable through the monitoring of performance in the same way private enterprises are believed to be accountable to investors in terms of sales, profits and dividends. Its guiding assumption was that by making institutions responsible in a competitive environment for their own success or failure, standards would be driven up. But what counted as achievement would be determined not

only by consumer demand but by government decision. It would be central government that set the criteria for success, measured progress towards them and rewarded or sanctioned institutions accordingly. Market arrangements were thus interwoven with state regulation of a stronger and more intrusive kind.

At the heart of NPM reforms is distrust in the expertise of professionals (e.g. teachers, academics) and an attempt to replace it with 'transparent accountability'. Thus, beyond the establishment of quasi-markets, equally important for NPM is the provision of information, usually to government agencies, about institutional performance: a shift towards measurement and quantification in the public sector in the form of 'performance' indicators and/or explicit 'standards' is claimed to increase competition and improve its effectiveness (Power, 1997; Pollitt, 2003; Pollitt and Dan 2011). In addition to these effects on the producers of public services, NPM has a wider impact, serving to transform 'citizens' to 'consumers' by steering them towards a position in which they would make responsible choices on the basis of the wealth of information newly supplied by state-funded bodies. The publication of higher education league tables for example, or the results of school inspections and audits provides information about the performance of these units which allows the funders of the public sector, both government and citizens, to judge its effectiveness and efficiency (Pollitt, 1990; Middlehurst and Kennie, 1995, McNay 1995 in relation to changes in UK higher education).

In the 1990s a series of publications by the influential Public Management Committee of the OECD suggested that most of the developed world had embarked on an NPM path (OECD 1995). Ten years later the organisation insisted that as a result 'most OECD public administrations have become more efficient, more transparent and more customer oriented, more flexible and more focused on performance' (OECD 2005: 10). In the same period funding from the European Commission was directed towards NPM reforms, especially in

the accession countries of Eastern Europe as they prepared to join the single market (Pollitt and Dan, 2011). As advocated by the OECD (2012b) post-2008 austerity accentuated the emphasis on such reforms, through the European Semester, and presented them as a necessary element in Europe's economic recovery (Asatryan, et al. 2016). 'Enhancing the quality of education is central to our efforts to restore long-term economic growth and job creation in Europe,' wrote the European Union President, Jean-Claude Juncker, in 2015, adding that 'quality needs to be continuously monitored and improved, which calls for effective quality assurance systems covering all education levels.' (Eurydice Report, 2015: 1 - 3).

NPM as an education policy construct has thus been worked and reworked through European and international bodies. It is however, a mistake to assume that there is a high degree of convergence between NPM reforms across European nation states. The labels may be the same, but the underlying story differs all the time from country to country (Pollitt, Thiel and Homburg 2007: 4). At the same time the success of NPM projects varies considerably, with results on the ground being much more mixed than global policy organisations are willing to register. In England, an enduring commitment to NPM led to the establishment of a pervasive machinery composed of markets, metrics and performance management not only in education but also in all aspects of public life (see Jones in this volume): 30 years after its first ventures, it continues to be the matrix of new initiatives. The United Kingdom's 'Office for Students', for instance, established in 2018, affects to evaluate the quality of university teaching, and to identify good and bad performance. It is a programme which involves an intense re-regulation of institutional life, as institutions, seeking to meet performance targets, devise new educational cultures in which everyday practice is opened more closely to management scrutiny and specification (Holmwood 2017). However, in several national cases the gap between 'regulatory aspirations and actual provision' is wide (Verger & Curran

2014: 268): teachers and educational institutions lack the capacity to implement changes for which a national mandate exists. In some countries this appears to be a problem of professional development – which inhibits, for instance, the take-up of formative assessment of learners in the Czech Republic (OECD 2012a). In others such problems may be combined with political hostility. The contrast in this context between different regions of Europe is striking. In Eastern Europe, neoliberal education programmes were boldly advocated and readily accepted. In the post-1989 period of transition towards capitalism, education policy development in Visegrad countries was strongly influenced by the prescriptions and the funding opportunities of the World Bank. Entry to the European Union provided further funding for wide-ranging reform of the education sector. The objectives of education systems were presented in terms of developing the competencies, employability and motivation of the future workforce. Higher education was likewise seen as a driver of competitiveness and was charged with improving the flexibility and competitiveness of graduates (Halasz 2015). In Southern Europe, change has been more controversial. In France, thanks to the impact of the social movement and strike wave of 1995, policies identified as ‘neoliberal’ were widely rejected, at least until 2010 (Jones 2009; Dreux, this volume). In Catalonia, the implementation of NPM has been ‘selective and contested’ (Verger and Curran, 2014) though NPM accountability increasingly affects the daily work of teachers (Verger & Pages 2018). In Italy, where the Ministry of Education advocated the publication of pupil test results, in order to improve educational quality through inter-school competition, resistance was strong, albeit ‘mediated by welfarist legacies, consisting in most cases of the effort to defend the status quo rather than to develop critical alternatives’ (Grimaldi & Serpieri, 2014: 173). In Greece’s centralised education system, NPM reforms continue to be weak (Asatryan et al 2016): teachers continue to resist the evaluation of their work, making the country one of the few EU states where the gap between regulatory policies and practices is particularly wide.

Neoliberal policies encountered limits of another sort in Nordic countries, which, more strongly than the states of Southern Europe, possessed a model of education in which ‘social justice and equality’ had a recognised place (Lundahl 2016). The education systems of the five Nordic countries still display ‘a number of common inclusive traits, enabled by continued extensive public funding of education: free of charge education and related services at primary, secondary and tertiary levels, well thought-out pre-school education and childcare, integration of students in need of special support in ordinary classrooms’. In addition, all they retain nine- or 10-year comprehensive compulsory education with little or no tracking. However, as Lundahl reports, ‘decentralization from the state to the local level and various neoliberal policy measures have been applied in all of the Nordic countries, and these changes are undoubtedly undermining the foundations of the Nordic model’. In Sweden private schools were almost non-existent before the early 1990s, but a highly visible commercial school market has developed since then, becoming more pronounced in the 2000s. (see Alexiadou & Rönnerberg in this volume). Similarly, the marketization of education in Sweden ‘affects most aspects of education and schools profoundly – socially, economically, academically and professionally’ – and has changed the relationships between actors in school and their pedagogical identities (Lundahl 2016: 10).

Educational formations

It can be argued that despite resistances and uneven development elements of NPM reforms have slowly penetrated national education systems. For example, in 2004, in only a quarter of EU countries did schools use indicators such as students’ test results to compare their performance with other similar schools or with national averages. In 2015, the proportion had risen to two thirds. Many countries have introduced compulsory national testing mechanisms

and/or provide individual schools with their aggregated test results (Eurydice 2015). The wider use of standardised tests was seen as an important means of improving educational quality, and thus of raising human capital (OECD 2012b). However, the overall direction of these reforms is ambiguous and, as Pollitt and Bouchart (2017) argued, is shaped by national contexts. There are risks therefore involved in awarding neoliberalism a kind of automatic conceptual primacy in explaining social and policy change, and in treating it as a master concept which holds the key to understanding the character of contemporary education systems. National educational practices and traditions continue to play an important part in shaping education policies, to the extent where the concept of a ‘neo-liberal education system’ is only in part productive. To be sure, to write of ‘neoliberalism’ allows the identification of important features of contemporary education systems, in their articulation with political economy. But the term does not in itself point directly towards concrete analysis, and it is useful to think about ways in which it can be revised or elaborated. Althusser, thinking under the influence of Lenin, about similar conceptual problems, proposed ‘social formation’, as a term which enabled analysis of societies as ‘concrete complex totalities’, ‘comprising economic practice, political practice and ideological practice at a certain place and stage of development’. ‘Historical materialism,’ he added, ‘is the science of social formations’ (Althusser & Balibar 1970); it is centrally concerned with economic systems, but is not satisfied that social structures can be ‘read off’ from an analysis of economic foundations. It is not necessary to share Althusser’s structural Marxism to see the value of this approach. A perspective similar to his might see us thinking, not of a ‘neo-liberal education system’, but of an ‘educational formation’, in which different types of educational practice and ideologies were combined, with neo-liberal orientations playing an important but not pre-given role. We might conclude, following the ‘concrete analysis of a concrete situation’, that some practices and orientations were dominant, and that these

reflected particular economic conditions and programmes, but we would not do so prematurely, without fuller exploration of the histories and the social relationships out of which an educational formation was constituted.

‘Educational formation’ gives us a way of thinking about one of the most striking features of national policy-making in education in Europe. The concern for equity and formal rights which is characteristic of most national policy discourses, and which is encouraged by the EU and OECD, is combined in practice with measures that work against such commitments, and which orientate education, at school level in particular, towards ideological frameworks which are communalist and ethnocentric. We referred above to a context in which the pressures of austerity are ‘combined with a cultural, legal and social politics in which questions of race and religion, nation and identity, loyalty and authority are a forceful presence’. Education has been a central site on which the tensions of this combination have been worked through. Here the question of Islam has been central –the enemy against which governments and parties (mainly) of the right have sought to mobilise. Hungary offers a raucous example of such a strategy – see the Chapter by Neumann and Meszaros later in this volume – but there have been striking examples of nativist mobilization in core countries of Europe. In England in 2014 the Conservative-Liberal coalition government claimed that schools in Birmingham has been subverted by Islamic radicals, and launched a full-scale inquiry, in the course of which the national school inspectorate produced reports on schools designed to support a narrative that an ‘enemy within’ had infiltrated their governance and management. (Holmwood and O’Toole 2017). In France, for more than a decade, the issue of the ‘veil’ has been a focus for political agitation. Governments of left and right have regarded the foulard, the hijab and the burqa as threats to the republican values of the French state, while secularist intellectuals insisted that Muslims choose between adherence to their religion and participation in public life (Diallo 2018, Guardian). In Denmark, debates around

the policy of separating learners of Danish as a second language from the mainstream school have highlighted the existence of a kind of ‘left-wing’ chauvinism, which defends the tradition of the ‘people’s high school’, without being willing to admit foreigners to it (Buchardt 2018). In Denmark’s early years education, there are similar tensions. A pre-school system seen as ‘child-centred’ and progressive (Wall et al 2015) is being reshaped by state intervention, so that from the age of one, children from officially-categorised ‘ghetto areas’ will be separated from their parents for at least twenty-five hours a week for mandatory instruction in ‘Danish values’ (Fekete 2018).

In these dramas, replicated across Europe a version of national identity is being reasserted. Students who have been addressed in human capital terms, with reference to the value of learning to their future position in the labour market, are increasingly interpellated by a discourse of citizenship, in which national values, presented as caught up in a civilizational conflict, are increasingly invoked. Grimaldi and Serpieri write optimistically that national educational cultures help create spaces of ‘thought and action... for (re) discovering wider meanings for education and for thinking alternative future societies’ (Grimaldi and Serpieri 2014 177), but their optimism may be misplaced. The ‘wider meanings’ for education may go beyond those of human capital, but their character may well be more nationalistic than educationalists tend to imagine.

Iv. Conclusion

In this Chapter we have explored the kinds of flow and pressure, originating outside the field of education, which impact on the education systems of European states.

We have treated neoliberalism in education as a set of processes which prioritise privatisation and marketization and which construct subjectivities and policies which favour individuality and competition. We have discussed the devastating social and economic effects on nation states of its austerity programme and we have argued that the increasing levels of poverty

severely challenges its earlier luring appeal for reducing unemployment and social inequalities in education. We have argued that this prolonged period of austerity has created other tensions in nation states associated with the deployment of xenophobic or nationalist themes not only by those in mainstream of neoliberal politics, but also by new populist, right-wing nativist parties whose education agenda revolves around protecting a set of imagined national values which marginalise new and old populations. We have shown the insistence of the EU institutions and the OECD on strengthening further their neoliberal agenda through investing on NPM, their main reform mechanism – and we have also discussed the lack of convergence between such reforms in nation states. In these contexts we have introduced the concept of ‘educational formation’ to capture the ways in which nation states combine different types of education practice, old and new traditions and ideologies with neoliberal orientations. These reflections and interpretations form a background to the following chapters, which address the educational policies of the EU, as they have moved through boom and crisis, and the patterns of educational contestation within 5 national states.

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