

Title:

International Organizations of Educational Planning, Government Policies and School Management and Leadership

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Abstract

The world is amidst a turbulent era with impacts on all aspects of social life and social systems, including that of education, especially in the so-called recessionary economies, as the Greek one. In the framework of the development of a better type of public administration, major international organizations for the economic growth and prosperity, namely the OECD and the European Union, have provided Greece with Guidelines and Better Policies. Recent government policies in education reflecting these guidelines have created an immense agitation among all educational partners, teachers, students, parents and local authorities, as the latter seem not to understand the rationale behind them. The government rhetoric –though echoing different political areas every time- always includes the argument of the necessity of a planning process to respond to the volatility in schools' external environment and to provide an appropriate basis for their internal management and leadership.

This paper investigates the role of the international organizations of Educational Planning in designing governmental educational policies, their impact on the macro-level of recessionary Greece and the role of school management and leadership in coping with problems in Greek schools. Moreover, this paper explores other relational factors of the Greek reality that add to recession and put an extra burden on school praxis, thus making governmental policies and international guidelines difficult to apply and easy to provoke disillusionment to education partners. Finally, the paper discusses the peculiarities of the Greek educational landscape and proposes new paths for research that can facilitate the introduction of structural changes and further development.

Key words: economic crisis, educational planning, government policies, school leadership, Greece

Introduction - The background of this study

In recent years, Greece has been in the eye of the economic recession cyclone caused by the financial markets. One of the 22 most developed countries in the immediate past, the country was found lost in the middle of a problematic institutional context and in the prey of wealthy tax evading citizens. The immediate effects of the situation have been obvious on the socio-economic level: de-structuring and shrinking of the economy, loss of jobs, extended youth unemployment, loss of property due to bank loans, poverty-stricken families. So far, the state's main preoccupations have dealt with reorganizing the institutional structures so as to contribute to growth, as well as to comply with the obligations resulting from the external borrowing agreements, to which the state had resorted to overcome flux problems. In doing so, the Greek state seems to swing back and forth, between its traditional neo-marxist political, economic and –consequently- administrative profile and the neo-liberal austerity and restructuring economy and public administration measures imposed by the international organizations representing the interests of the international, impersonal creditors.

Although much has been said on the role of international organizations and their share in the causes and impacts of crisis (from a macro-economic perspective), little research seems to have been done on the influence of these organizations at the micro level (Gouvias, 2007), for instance, on the Greek schools, in a milieu of crisis .

The structure of the Greek educational system does not encourage (external) researchers to work closely with educational leaders within the school in order to

gather systematic and trustworthy data for an in-depth analysis¹; as a result, there is not enough educational research evidence to rely upon for our discussion.

Consequently, this paper does not present new empirical research; it attempts to bring together work from various fields and literatures, which all provide a specific take on the impact of educational planning organizations on Greek schools' structure, management and leadership in the middle of a raging economic crisis.

Definitions

Discussion in this paper revolves around two principal terms: educational planning organizations and management and leadership in Greek state schools.

Educational planning organizations are international designing and planning entities whose aim is to deliver guidelines and directives to their member states for the improvement of the states provision of education. According to these organizations' rationale, education is one of the most important pillars to ensure economic growth and enhancement and, as such, it deserves special care and support. Support is provided to member states usually in the form of strategic orientations and policy designing guidance. The most prominent among these organizations are the OECD (working closely with IMF's education staff and the EC), the IIEP of UNESCO, and the European Union. In this paper, discussion about these organizations' micro-level impacts on Greek education will be confined to the agency of two organizations, the OECD and the EU.

¹Systematic field research data can be collected easier by ministerial agencies officials who also analyze and interpret data according to their targets and standards. Collection of such data, though conceiving some bias, has also not been done so far.

The most important of the influences of international educational planning organizations discussed in this paper deals with the meaning content of the term “school leadership”. The recent tensions in the Western and/or Europe in the field of education subsume management into leadership (OECD, 2008a, b, c), although the two sets of roles remain distinct: management is more closely associated with maintenance of current operations while leadership involves steering organizations by shaping other people’s attitudes, motivations, and behaviors (Bush & Glover, 2003). A bit earlier, Dimmock (1999) had provided a distinction between school management, administration, and leadership: Management involves routine maintenance of present operations; administration has to do with lower order duties while leadership includes “higher order tasks designed to improve staff, student, and school performance”. The OECD report (2008a) concluded that the above elements “are so closely intertwined that is unlikely for one of them to succeed without the others”.

The international organizations reports have been based on literature and research from decentralized (UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and USA) systems (Leithwood and Day, 2007; Leithwood and Riehl, 2005; Woods, 2005; Moos and Johansson, 2009; Yukl, 2002). In these texts, school leadership appears as an “umbrella” term covering both managerial and leading domains, competences, and skills.

However, the understanding of leadership in the Greek educational context is differentiated. The Greek equivalent word is largely used for the persons on top of the Ministry of Education or anyone with political power in the field to design policy and take decisions. Although the content meaning of the word remains the same, that is, the power and/or role to shape behaviors, performances, and attitudes, leadership is

considered the highest order task attributed to ministers, politicians, or successful entrepreneurs (Mpourantas, 2005). The conceptualization of leadership in western literature is new to the Greek school context. The notion has been introduced quite recently through the recommendations of international organizations (i.e., OECD, 2012). Nevertheless, leadership is still difficult to understand in regard to the roles and responsibilities of the Greek Head teachers, as shown by recent research (Banelli, 2015).

Methodology

This paper draws upon work from various literature contexts, with emphasis on OECD and EU data and the texts of Greece's recent agreements, called Memoranda for brevity's sake. The method chosen for the purposes of this paper is that of the Descriptive Analysis (Wolcott, 1994): a. Collected data are used to inform researchers about the impact international planning organizations have on national government policies b. An attempt is made to analyze the information provided by the data, identify key factors and possible relations among them, and interpret the findings so as to reach an understanding of the issues Greek school head teachers are confronted by in everyday praxis c. Analysis of impacts is accompanied by critical discussion on how these educational planning directives in combination with other crisis factors affect the micro-level of schools.

International Planning in Education: EU and the OECD, their role and methods

The EU's role is to help member states to develop high quality education through the DG EAC support and member states cooperation so as to enhance economic growth and development. EU does not intervene directly in member state legislation regarding the content of teaching and the educational system organization; it

encourages the cultural and linguistic diversity and the mobility of citizens, a fact that actually facilitates the mobility of the working force. It is officially stated: “*While the responsibility for education and training systems lies with the Member States, the EU has a key role in supporting and supplementing efforts to improve and modernize their education systems*”. This is because: “*In a globalised and knowledge-based economy, Europe requires a well-skilled workforce to ensure that it can compete in terms of productivity, quality, and innovation. Recent evidence, however, suggests that there is a growing mismatch of skills between the workforce and labour market, factors which contribute to unemployment and limit growth*”.²

The EU has employed a variety of methods to transmit tendencies, introduce policies and achieve goals in education. This is mainly done through the Open Method of Cooperation, OMC, (Lange and Alexiadou, 2007) and via the so called “soft law”, that is: communiqués of Ministers of Education Conferences (i.e. the recent Yerevan Communiqué), White and Green Books (the European dimension of education, employability and competitiveness), funded³ educational programmes and funded educational networks, as well as “Country Specific Recommendations” and “Monitoring”⁴. Monitoring is based on specific indicators, according to strategic priorities, and each year goals aim at working towards the EC 2020 Strategy indicators.

²http://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/index_en.htm

³ Structural or Social Funding. For example, the compulsory Early Childhood Education initiative is funded by the ERDF, that is, the European Structural and Investment Funds, Regional Development Funds, which “*aims to strengthen economic and social cohesion in the European Union by correcting imbalances between its regions*”, see: ec.europa.eu/regional-policy/en/funding/erdf/, and thus, promote equality

⁴http://ec.europa.eu/education/tools/et-monitor_en.htm

The EU works closely with the OECD⁵: *“The OECD Review of Better Regulation in Greece is one of a series of country reports launched by the OECD in partnership with the European Commission”* (OECD, 2012. p.3). According to their homepage⁶ *“OECD uses its wealth of information on a broad range of topics to help governments foster prosperity and fight poverty through economic growth and financial stability. We help ensure the environmental implications of economic and social development are taken into account”*. Their work is based entirely on quantitative data (on a set of indicators and benchmarks) from member and non-member countries: *“OECD’s work is based on continued monitoring of events in member countries as well as outside OECD area, and includes regular projections of short and medium-term economic developments. The OECD Secretariat collects and analyses data, after which committees discuss policy regarding this information, the Council makes decisions, and then governments implement recommendations”*. OECD has repeatedly been criticized for its heavy statistical methods and standardized tests in education (Sahlberg, 2012) and the lack of qualitative data to corroborate differentiated results from international comparisons. OECD also does not directly interfere with national legislation but through the method of policy recommendations (see: Better Regulation in Europe, Greece, 2012) or reports to general public (Education at a Glance) or ministers (see for example the Secretary General’s Report to Ministers, 2015) affects national government policies, which in turn are “translated” into legislation.

⁵See: <http://www.oecd.org/about/membersandpartners/> for details: *“In the Supplementary Protocol No. 1 to the Convention on the OECD of 14 December 1960, the signatories to the Convention agreed that the European Commission shall take part in the work of the OECD. European Commission representatives participate alongside Members in discussions on the OECD’s work programme, and are involved in the work of the entire Organisation and its different bodies. While the European Commission’s participation goes well beyond that of an observer, it does not have the right to vote and does not officially take part in the adoption of legal instruments submitted to the Council for adoption”*

⁶<http://www.oecd.org/about/whatwedoandhow/>

The International Educational Planning impact on the Greek national level

a. Implications and obligations for the national government regarding the EU and OECD recommendations

Both organizations' directives for better education provision are central to Greece's evaluation for further lending. Although OECD guidance to Greece for growth, amelioration and development of the educational system is not evident in the first two Memoranda, their indicated reforms (Better Policies for Greece) formed parts of the Memoranda annexes and were fully and openly accepted by the Ministry of Education in 2011 (Gurria, 2011).

However, the present government has to deal with these directives, as all of them were explicitly included in the 3rd Memorandum (that is, the 2015 lending Agreement). According to this text, the authorities should have fulfilled certain obligations by the summer 2016: *“The authorities will ensure further modernization of the education sector in line with the best EU practices, and this will feed the planned wider Growth Strategy. The authorities with the OECD and independent experts will by April 2016 prepare an update of the OECD's 2011 assessment of the Greek education system”*. Thus, *“based on the recommendations of the review, the authorities will prepare an updated Education Action Plan and present proposals for actions no later than May 2016 to be adopted by July 2016, and where possible measures should enter into force in time for 2016/2017 academic year”* (p.22).

The alignment with EU standards and the modernization of the education sector also include the Vocational Education and Training reorganization with the aim of capacity building to suit the labour market needs (pp.21-22). Accordingly, Technical Vocational Senior High Schools (EPAL) will have to work together with labour seeking agencies (OAED) to provide their students with apprenticeship opportunities

and human capital skills. It is important to mention that these are not just policy implications but straightforward obligations (key deliverables) “for structural policies to enhance competitiveness and growth”. In the framework of these obligations the current government has established a multi-member committee to examine and come to policy conclusions for education (Educational Policy Committee, in Greek “Epitropi Dialogou gia thn Paideia”, 2016). This Educational Policy Committee first round working results were released in late April 2016. A close examination of these results and their collation with EU’s Monitoring Report and Recommendations on Education (see above) and OECD’s Education at a Glance [Greece] 2016’s results from Indicators reveals their internal relation: extensive discussion on the autonomy of schools to manage their own reality and to work with local authorities, the re-organization of Primary and Secondary Education curricula so as to address the “basics” [as the PISA 2015⁷ results show Greece lagging behind], the evaluation of teachers’ work and their further training, etc.

However, most of these issues seem to be rather controversial. As it is not possible to examine all these controversies in a single paper, only some indicative cases have been chosen for further discussion here:

The **PISA testing** methodology and the **standardization of educational achievement**, has been the major task of the OECD. OECD has introduced four pillars of indicators⁸ in education (OECD 2015), by which classification of the

⁷<http://www.oecd.org/edu/pisa-2015-assessment-and-analytical-framework-9789264255425-en.htm>

⁸OECD (2015), *Education at a Glance*: The four indicator groups are: 1. The Output of Educational Institutions and the Impact of Learning (indicators A1 – A10), 2. Financial and Human Resources Invested in Education (indicators B1 – B7), 3. Access to Education, Participation and Progression (indicators C1-C6), 4. The Learning Environment and Organization of Schools (indicators D1-D8)

country members' educational systems is performed. The 2003 PISA report has indicated a rather low level of Greek students' achievement, as compared to other European countries. However, the PISA results have provoked a great deal of international and contradictory discourse among researchers regarding the relation between the aims and goals of democratic and equalitarian education and standardization of education via tests (i.e. the GERM movement by Sahlberg and Hargreaves, see: Sahlberg, 2012, above, p.6). They question the use of quantitative Indicators for inter-national comparisons which "flattens" or ignores important specific features, thus, producing unfair comments and criticism⁹.

Regarding **the issue of the teachers-students ratio**, OECD supports that this ratio is below its standards in Greece and urges the Greek government to take specific measures: "*In particular, the authorities commit to align [and] the ratios of students per class and pupils per teacher to the best practices of OECD countries to be achieved at the latest by June 2018*" (3rd Memorandum, p. 22). OECD fails to spot that geo-morphological environment conditions (such as, remote, mountainous or island areas) and consequent educational needs of children differ from place to place often making education provision particularly expensive. However, OECD, using specific indicators, measuring certain ratios, reports low quality provision. A typical,

⁹More specifically: a. School age bands are not the same in all countries, b. Goals and policies vary according to national priorities and time periods, c. Socio-economic factors and family background differ dramatically from country to country, often within the same country, d. Needs perspective varies from country to country in Europe making it extremely difficult and untrustworthy to do research based on the instructions provided by a Toolkit, e. Statistics are often untrustworthy, due to [local-national] interpretations of requirements and [due to] inaccurate translation into a target language and then back into English, f. Statistics provided by several countries are often biased or purposely altered (Argyropoulou, 2012,a, b).

rather controversial, example of this OECD practice is the provision of Early Childhood Education in Greece¹⁰.

On the other hand, the **question of school autonomy** had been raised in the beginning of the new millennium and was consolidated as of major importance for the Greek educational system in 2008¹¹. The issue of autonomy seems to be of pivotal role as it decreases the regulatory role of the state (mostly funding by the state) in the schools and exemplifies a rather neo-liberal stance towards education as compared to the neo-marxist (legislated) ideology being in force today. Moreover, it requires a number of fundamental changes in the statutory framework to overturn the public administration background of the Greek educational law before autonomy is legally introduced in schools (Argyropoulou, 2015).

¹⁰Education at a Glance (2011a) OECD Indicators: Country note – Greece, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/44/21/48657344.pdf>. Early Childhood Education has been made compulsory in 2006 after OECD and EU suggestions. Being compulsory, it must be provided to all children, even those few ones [below the OECD teacher-student ratio] living in remote islands or mountainous areas who can move to near larger schools on a daily basis. Consequently, there are small-size, one-teacher schools, in these areas, which cannot comply with the OECD teacher –student ratio. The same may happen with certain Primary schools with one to three teachers per a small number of students. The controversy lies in the fact that compulsory education is protected by the Constitution and offered equally to all children of Greece and at the same time should be avoided or not provided at all in order to catch up with OECD guidelines. The issue has been under fervent discussion lately, as the teacher-student ratio adjustments should form part of the May 2016 Adjustment Programme evaluation key deliverables, according to the third Memorandum.

¹¹The World Bank, the OECD, and later the EU, have pushed forward the trend of decentralization of education and the school autonomy and accountability (Hanushek and Wössmann, 2007, Wössmann et al., 2007, Wössmann, 2007) as the pivotal axes through which reform, restructure and improvement will be achieved in schools: “Many countries have moved towards decentralization, making schools more autonomous in their decision making and holding them more accountable for results” (OECD, 2008, p.11). This indicates that the power in schools moves from in-school decision making- bodies and individuals, such as the teachers’ boards and/or the Head teacher, to either in-and-out school governing bodies, such as, teachers-parents-local authorities, with lesser responsibilities per group, or out-of- school boards, such as the local authorities only.

School autonomy and accountability were associated with **school leadership** and the attempt to improve it¹². “As a result of these trends, the function of school leadership across OECD countries is now increasingly defined by a demanding set of roles which include financial and human resource management and leadership for learning” (OECD, 2008a, p.11).

Although the introductory paragraph of the first volume (OECD, 2008a) points out that: “*School leadership has become a priority in education policy agendas internationally .. It plays a key role in improving school outcomes by influencing the motivations and capacities of teachers, as well as the school climate and environment ... Effective school leadership is essential to improve the efficiency and equity of schooling*” (p.11) it does not provide prior research corroborating these assumptions. This redefinition of school leadership roles and responsibilities in alignment with higher degrees of autonomy, accountability and distributed leadership models and practices, is expected to change the landscape for School Heads in Greece: from the School Headship of the last two decades of the 20th century based on the principle of “*primus inter pares*” it moves to the 21st century idea of Principalship with increasing power of the individual [the Principal] and decreasing collective decision-making opportunities (the teaching board decision-making power). As the School Head is assigned with more power and responsibilities s/he is entitled to higher salary so as to “*make school leadership an attractive profession*” (ibidem, p. 12).

¹²In 2008, OECD publishes a two-volume project under the title “*Improving School Leadership*” based on research completed in the 22 out of the 30 country-members (Greece did not take part in this international survey, p.11). The aim of the project was to put forward the importance of educational leadership as the pivotal lever for improvement and as a tool for achieving autonomy and accountability in schools as part of a decentralization process in national administrative and financial structures of a country. A toolkit with implementation tips for policy makers and practitioners accompanies the two volumes (OECD, 2008c).

As far **the evaluation of the educational system** is concerned the 3rd Memorandum text states: *“The evaluation of teachers and school units will be consistent with the general evaluation system of public administration”* (p.23). The evaluation of the Greek educational system had been agreed long before the first lending agreement on the premise that the 2008 PISA results for Greece were very poor. Evaluation as a process has been a constantly disputed notion among educators in Greece due to: a. its negative content meaning during the dictatorship and long before it, as it has malfunctioned and been associated with negative consequences [even with job loss], b. the contradictory government policies of the last eight years, mostly of neoliberal orientation and repeating –in certain cases- the punishing attitude [of pre-1982 time] on low performing individuals or schools.

In addition, **regulations included in other lending-related legislation affected indirectly but still severely the structure of the educational system** with no evident results of improvement. Such an example is found in the first Memorandum (2010): the proposed (accepted and later legislated) reorganization/decentralization of the Local Authorities Chart by the name of Kallikrates¹³ has severely affected the structure of the Regional and Local Educational Authorities, as the LEA’s have been constructed following the Local Authorities structure: the shrinking of municipalities and the formation of larger municipalities out of the merging of smaller ones led to the abolition of an intermediate administrative level officers in LEAs. Moreover, further austerity measures legislated during the so-called Local Authorities decentralization policy dictated the allocation of responsibility for schools’ functional expenses funds from schools to Local Authorities on the pretext of malfunction, corruption and waste of public money; this decision, out of being impractical for

¹³L. 3852/7.6.2010 (Government Gazette, no 87, issue A “New Architecture of Local Authorities and Decentralized Administration- the Kallikrates Project”, article 103, paragraph 2.

schools, was somehow rather contradictory compared with the OECD's suggestions for school autonomy (OECD, 2008a,b,c), as it intensified the centralization of resources instead of the promised decentralization by removing responsibility for self-governance from schools¹⁴ to municipalities.

Although there has been an explicit internal necessity for rethinking and restructuring education in Greece, so as to meet the new scientific and practical challenges of the developed world, it could be argued that the work of this Committee has been imposed by the country's engagements towards its creditors. Consequently, the Educational Policy Committee will also have a lot of work to do to convince public opinion, to integrate these policy guidelines into their own report and to balance their recommendations both with the statutory framework and the social demand (teachers, students, parents).

b. Other crisis-related constraints with an impact on national Educational Planning

Two major types of crisis-related social constraints regarding education should be mentioned: those associated with direct and/or indirect impacts of the lending agreements and those depending on the generally disturbed social context, though rather irrelevant of the lending agreements. The first group of social impacts refers to labour market upturns and increased unemployment (job losses, especially among young inexperienced people and women) because of either cuts in public

¹⁴This happened for the mere sake of economizing [it had been estimated that 500 million € (euros) would be saved in the five years' duration of the first Memorandum) without taking into consideration problems that would be created in remote island and mountainous areas of the country rather centralized authorities. Evidence from latest research indicates that this was a measure for reaching the goal of 500 million euros expected to be gained from the implementation of Kallikrates and thus fulfilling the obligations of the first Memorandum.

administration personnel, lack of recruitments [due to lending restrictions] or private sector companies' bankruptcy. This impact can be seen both on teachers and students' families. Additionally, the economic crisis hit homes and the housing ability of a significant number of families, especially those with high mortgages. Homelessness has slowly but steadily started unfolding, mostly affecting people living alone, low-income and single-parent families (see similar phenomena in the USA during the housing crisis, Duffield and Lovell, 2009). The second set of social impacts, though not so strong or equally visible in all regions, has to do with the increase of immigrant inflows from war – stricken areas in the Near East. Although this is not the first time Greece receives and hosts immigrants, these particular inflows have caused a political turmoil regarding the management of these populations trapped in Greece due to other European countries refusal to accept hosting their share of immigrants. Since there are a great number of immigrant children, escorted or unescorted, the Ministry of Education will have, sooner or later, to undertake action regarding their education and integration in the Greek schools. In short, there is a high level of poverty -local and imported- reflected in the micro-society of schools, especially those in densely populated underprivileged areas of big cities. Moreover, the pressure for keeping social balance calls for government policies ensuring equality in educational opportunities, anti-racism, anti-sexism, religion tolerance and a holistic approach toward avoidance of social clashing (see also: Torche, 2010).

c. Impacts on the micro-level: the operation of schools and the challenges for the school leaders

School leaders/School Head teachers currently face various kinds of problems: those regarding the teaching staff and the implementation of curricula, those having to do

with the students' achievements and behavior and those dealing with their own managing and leading skills and abilities and their lack of appropriate training.

Government policies stemming from austerity measures led to downsizing the number and the salaries of teachers both in Primary and Secondary Education and to minimizing recruitment of new teachers. Several gaps in teaching positions form a major problem. Fragmentary and temporary remedial measures on behalf of the central government fail to provide a sound and permanent solution. Moreover, teacher in-service training as a regular process has ceased long ago due to scarcity of funds. Thus, the restricted numbers of in-service teachers constitute an ageing population, lacking motivation and training, though they are constantly faced with new challenges (OECD, 2015).

Centrally appointed curricula have been changed many times during the past eight years thus causing more problems than those their reform had been expected to solve. This fluidity of teaching content and material, combined with the various "visions and missions" occasionally expressed by the succeeding parties' Ministers of Education in this period in their attempt to incorporate the OECD and EU guidelines, resulted in instability, lack of trust and discouragement of both teachers and students/ parents.

Though there are occasional references [in social media and newspapers] about students in need and certain schools in underprivileged areas have organized packed meals for their students, as well as free remedial courses to prevent school dropping, yet there are not official data about poverty stricken students probably because of embarrassment.

Head teachers, on the other hand, serve as the mediators between the State [in the form of transferring the government policies into the school] and the school

partners, as well as between the community [the society in the broad sense] and the school. In short, they are expected to cope with four main challenges¹⁵ reflecting both managing and leading capacities:

1. Political and cultural expectations and their interpretation into internal meaning and direction
2. Understanding and empowering teaching staff
3. Structuring and culturing schools with emphasis on interpersonal relations
4. Personal improvement and development

Greek School Heads do not receive specific training for Headship either before or after being appointed to the position. Specific Headship training, either State-provided or individually acquired, is not compulsory for appointment as there are not available funds for such endeavors. Other criteria [seniority¹⁶, postgraduate or doctoral studies, etc] are used. Head teachers' appointments often cause dispute, as each government is accused of passing criteria laws that suit their policies and encourage governing party favoritism. Thus, Head teachers' qualities and capacities lie on their perceptions, experience or knowledge a few of them may have acquired from the voluntary attendance of a relevant post graduate course. As a result, in most cases Heads fail to perceive, foresee or prevent problems arising in their schools. However, the fluidity of the current socio-economic situation does not allow incompetence; today the above mentioned managing and leading capacities seem more urgent than in the past given that adjustment programs obligations exercise extra pressure. Reorganizing the Heads' selection procedure presupposes a redefinition of their roles and responsibilities within a school with modernized and redefined goals.

¹⁵ Abridged and adjusted from *Framework of Reference, 2010*, key deliverable of Leading in Education LLP Project, available on www.leadership-in-education.eu/

¹⁶ Heads, being part of the teaching staff, also constitute an ageing population with their own attitudes and stereotypes.

Concluding remarks: The changing landscape and research-related issues

Education is a structured human subsystem within the wider social system (Bastedo, 2004); it constitutes the first and perhaps most important societal “field” receiving and digesting the socio-economic shocks in a very specific way: it “lives” the shocks (as education is a human environment and each educational partner is a member of the wider social environment) and, at the same time, facilitates the acquisition of knowledge, the learning, about the socio-economic shocks (as it teaches new chunks of knowledge, qualities and skills, concepts and values, beliefs and habits). Consequently, the impacts of the economic crisis on the Greek educational system are multiple and diverse. Suggestions for improving education regard both the meaning and content of teaching and learning and its organizational aspect, as state-provided education consists part of the public administration system. The meaning and content of the Greek educational system has to do with its internal goals, ethics, concepts and values of the Greek society, its own curricula and pedagogy. In this aspect the Greek educational system is unique and any redefinition or reform in it is a matter of the Greek idiosyncrasy and of internal nationally agreed goals and agendas. In terms of a public administration subsystem, it can possibly be redefined, reformed and/or restructured following similar policies with those applied to other public administration subsystems on the premise that this reform and restructure does not affect its internal nationally agreed goals.

Lately, especially during the economic crisis and the recession period, intensive discussion on reforming education in Greece by employing the OECD and EU suggestions has stirred up and several attempts have been made to introduce policies to align with OECD indicators. This discussion, made in the general context of

Greece' obligatory "reform of everything" dictated by its creditors, tends to forget the above assumption of its national idiosyncrasy and specific Greek identity. Any reform should be designed in such a way that it does not "imitate" or "copy" foreign policy and practice but with a mind to the national and local context. In doing so OECD indicators should be interpreted with caution, as they do not always measure identical quality or quantity features or do not meet same needs across the OECD countries.

Moreover, research patterns and methods should also be "reformed" in the sense that they should seek to investigate the new causality relations created by the crisis demands. Given that the constantly changing socio-economic landscape dramatically affects the school microcosm, researching school-related issues should be of primary importance as schools are the policies implementation arena; specific relations between policies designing, planning and implementation need to be investigated in detail, aiming at identifying their effectiveness.

Finally, educational research needs to take new paths or re-walk on already paved but scornfully forgotten paths: without disregarding the importance of quantitative methods, emphasis should be put on probing qualitative methods and/or the intensive combination of both. Multi-perspective considerations in gathering and studying data, such as, function, pedagogy, specific educational needs, equity and equality issues, quality issues and factors, are more appropriate for researching the school internal and external environment, as they provide in-depth, analysis necessary for human environment research.

Thus, reviewing policies and reconstructing public entities, such as schools, will acquire their true meaning and purpose.

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