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State policies, actors' strategies, and parental choice

It is primarily the emergence of new state policies promoting market mechanisms in the field of education that has encouraged research on education markets (Maroy, 2006). In the 1980s, conservative American and British governments, drawing on theories of public choice (Chubb & Moe, 1998), encouraged reforms aimed at reducing the alleged inefficiency and ineffectiveness of the bureaucratic management of schools by increasing their autonomy as well as parental choice (Ball, 1993; Bosetti, 2005; Glennerster, 1991; Uchitelle, 1993). Similar reforms have also been implemented in various European countries for over 20 years (Mons, 2007), often in relation with a decennia-long co-existence of public and state-granted schools. These private schools are most often Catholic or protestant schools operating within a national educational system receiving state grants. The countries of the European Union can be divided into three groups according to the relationship private education has with the public authorities (Eurydice, 2000[1]). In Greece and the UK, private schools receive no public funding. However, this absence of funding does not prevent the state from exercising control over private education institutions. In the UK, most denominational and other schools owned by churches or trustees are considered to form part of the public sector education. In the second group of countries (France, Italy, and Portugal), different types of contracts exist which create a link between private schools and public authorities. Depending on the type of contract, the school receives grants of a more or less significant amount and is freer to a greater or lesser extent with regard to conditions (of teaching, teacher recruitment, etc.) imposed by public authorities. Finally, within the last group, which comprises the majority of countries, grant-aided private schools appear to have much in common with public sector schools. In Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Spain, Ireland, Luxembourg, Austria, Finland, and Sweden, private education is grant aided, either partially or fully, but operates under more or less the same conditions as public sector education. In The Netherlands, financial equality between public and grant-aided private institutions is a constitutional right. The size of these public and non-public school sectors varies strongly between these European societies for specific historic reasons, and non-public schools disappeared in some of these societies as a consequence of the communist regime.

Therefore, despite the dominant discourse of markets and efficiency, it is important not to reduce the existence of possibilities for choice in educational systems to the spread of a liberal ideology and to the educational policies it inspired. Parental choice has been developed in response to changes in the educational strategies of the middle classes, but also in response to the secularization of everyday life in most European states. The secular middle classes were the first to take

advantage of the opening of educational competition (Turner, 1960) that was encouraged by the expansion and democratization of secondary education in the post-war period, but from the 1970s onwards, as the result of changes in economic, social, and academic spheres, they have become less confident in comprehensive school systems. School choice, especially within urban education systems, has become for them a new form of "social closure", permitting access to new social positions and limiting competition from members of the working classes (Ball, 2003; van Zanten, 2004, 2009).

These policies also interact with the strategies of schools. In many countries, and especially in metropolitan contexts, the latter had anticipated policies increasing their autonomy through the development of competitive strategies allowing them to cope with a declining demography and to limit the effects of the massive arrival of students from the working classes and from ethnic minorities in secondary education. These strategies, concerning recruitment and selection procedures as well as educational provision, have a significant impact on the internal organization of schools. They also produce important effects at the local level with respect to hierarchies, segregation, and inequalities among schools (Delvaux & van Zanten, 2006; Felouzis, 2005; Lauder & Hughes, 1999).

Four possible research questions about education markets

Education markets and school choice

Education markets take various forms depending on national traditions and education policies (Maroy, 2006; Meuret, 2007). In some countries, such as Belgium, The Netherlands, or Germany, school autonomy and parental school choice are constitutional rights reflecting a political, religious, and social heritage (Karsten, 1999; Vanderberghe, 1997). In others, such as in the UK, markets have been created by education policies that purposefully encourage competition among schools and parental choice to improve the performance of the education system presented as "fossilized" by uniformity and bureaucracy. In France, unofficial and opaque education markets were at work in many areas before recent reforms allowing for more school choice and were produced by middle-class parents and schools managing to work previous official rules to their advantage (Felouzis & Perroton, 2007; van Zanten & Obin, 2008). These different models can be object of analysis for economists and sociologists as well as for political scientists. These contrasting situations necessarily have an impact on the nature and functioning of education markets that can be explored theoretically and empirically.

Education markets, strategies of families, and strategies of institutions

As education markets are not only shaped by political decisions but also by actors' strategies, especially those of families and schools, research studies have also addressed the factors that influence these strategies. Parental strategies have been studied from different perspectives: individual aims either instrumental (the economic and social advantages of educational credentials and trajectories) or expressive (personal well-being and happiness), individual values, especially in relation to social and ethnic mix in schools, or individual economic, cultural, and social resources. The questions of parental access to information (from official

statistics to "reputations" and to advice from education professionals) and parental "interpretative work" and judgments have also been the object of analyses (van Zanten, 2009, 2010). The links between parental residential and school strategies have also been addressed in some studies (Poupeau & François, 2008).

What regulation for which education markets?

National educational systems can be located on a continuum from those characterized by total free choice of schools to those where there is no possibility for choice (Maroy, 2006; Mons, 2007; van Zanten & Obin, 2008). In all cases, education markets are the result of educational policies. Either in an explicit fashion, for instance, when competition among schools and free choice are considered as means for greater effectiveness or equity, or in an implicit way, when regulation policies, because of their unintended effects and because of actors' capacity to work the system to their advantage, in fact, participate in the creation and reproduction of markets. One could address these questions from the point of view of principles of justice: According to which principle should we limit school choice when education remains the prerogative of parents? One can also analyze education markets in terms of equity and equal access to educational goods, irrespective of place of residence, and the role of public authorities on ensuring similar levels of academic, social, and ethnic mix between schools (Maurin, 2004). A third perspective is the point of view of concrete practices of policy-makers and administrative actors (Laforgue, 2005). How do various policy configurations (e.g., those that integrate private education in existing regulation policies and those that do not) and their interaction with differentiated local contexts restrain or enable the daily actions of administrative and political officials?

Consequences of education markets

One can also study the consequences of education markets from an individual's point of view (instrumental returns from choice conceived as an educational investment, educational performance of pupils; degree of satisfaction of students and their parents, effects of markets on sociability patterns among students, etc.), as well as from a collective point of view (effects on school effectiveness, on social, ethnic, and economic segregation, and on the production and reproduction of educational inequalities). Research seems to be scarce on some individual dimensions. Do parents who can choose have more favorable opinions about schools and about the education system and do they participate more in the collective functioning of schools, as is suggested by some studies on private schools (Coleman & Hoffer, 1987)? The effects on the effectiveness and equity of educational systems have been examined in surveys of the literature (Meuret, Broccolichi, & Duru-Bellat, 2001) and in recent studies based on national and international data (Dronkers & Robert, 2008; François & Poupeau, 2008; Gorard & Fitz, 1998; Lauder & Hughes, 1999; Mons, 2007).

Content of this issue on education markets and school choice

The number of pages available in a special issue is not sufficient to cover all these aspects of education markets and school choice. The articles that we have selected nevertheless provide new insights on key processes and effects.

There is a strong emphasis on international comparison of education markets and school choice. This is quite original, because most scholars and policy-makers treat education markets and school choice as questions confined to the borders of the national states. Several articles in this issue show that these phenomena are comparable across nearly all modern societies.

A second interesting aspect of this issue is that some contributions describe "natural" experiments with education markets and school choice and their consequences. Given the complex nature of these phenomena, real experiments are both practically and politically impossible, even if the researchers were not hampered by ethic considerations. We are happy that a number of the articles in this issue try to get as close as possible to an experimental design, either in reality or on paper. This is important, not to imitate the natural sciences but to get as close as possible to a correct description of the mechanisms or the consequences of education markets and school choice. On the other hand, we also need "thick descriptions" of the subtle processes and mechanisms surrounding education markets and school choice, because they are a necessary complement to the results from a more experimental approach.

The first article, by Peter Robert, is a sequel of an earlier one on school effectiveness (Dronkers & Robert, 2008). Robert improves the older analysis by defining the education markets of 23 Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries on the basis of major divisions in the school system like public–private, tracking either by curriculum or by ability, and schools' practices regarding student admissions. He argues that these segments in the school system create a "market" that locates schools in various positions in the educational "field" and that parents consider these options when deciding about school choice. The position of schools in these markets should have an impact on students' performance even when school composition is controlled. In order to prove his theory, Robert analyzes 23 OECD countries from the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2006 survey (OECD, 2007). His results indicate that high-status families prefer more selective schools, but they do not prefer ability tracking. Moreover, the more selective schools perform better, but ability grouping does not improve achievement. Finally, he shows that religious schools are the most able to compensate the disadvantages of pupils coming from low-status families.

The second article, by Patrick Wolf, describes a school voucher initiative of the District of Columbia Opportunity Scholarship Program, targeted to disadvantaged students in the US capital. Vouchers worth up to $7,500 annually are awarded by lottery to students with family incomes near or below the federal poverty line. Students can then use their voucher at any of 60 participating private schools in DC. Wolf discusses the philosophical underpinning of such a school voucher program. From the perspective of Rawlsian liberalism, an education program is just if it expands opportunity equally for all or if it at least improves the prospects for the "least advantaged" affected group. Since the school voucher initiative is a targeted program not universally available to all students, it must satisfy Rawls' second condition, called "the difference principle" (Rawls, 1971), in order to be viewed as just. As a second step of the article, Wolf presents a rigorous evaluation of the voucher program. This evaluation suggests that the voucher program improves the educational achievement of some of the

disadvantaged students in the US capital. From this point of view, he argues that the program advances the cause of social justice, but with an important caveat.

The third article, by Jaap Dronkers and Silvia Avram, is also a sequel of an earlier one on school effectiveness (Dronkers & Robert, 2008). It applies another research strategy than Robert does, but it also separates the analysis of school choice from that of school effectiveness. The researchers apply propensity score matching to the estimation of differential school effectiveness between the publicly funded private sector and the public one in a sample of 26 countries. This technique allows them to account for selectivity issues involved in the comparison of publicly funded private schools and public schools. Concerning school choice, they find two patterns: choice of private schools by upwardly mobile parents and preference for segregation by (lower) middle-class parents. As regards school effectiveness, their results indicate that, after controlling for selectivity, a substantial advantage in reading achievement remains among students in publicly funded private schools in 10 out of the 26 countries.

The fourth article, by Catherine Barthon and Brigitte Monfroy, discusses the sociospatial aspects of school choice. The authors highlight the importance of taking into account the spatial dimension in the analysis of parents' choices of secondary schools. Their study uses the concept of spatial capital and explores two different subtypes: position capital and situation capital. Barthon and Monfroy explore the sociospatial schooling practices of all pupils between the ages of 11 and 15, living in the city of Lille in the north of France and attending a secondary school in 2006. The Lille example shows the importance of taking into account the configuration of local school provision. It also underlines the relevance of using a multidimensional concept of spatial capital. Parental control over the spatial dimension appears to be a capital in its own right. It is unequally distributed among social groups, which contributes to the production of schooling inequalities in urban environments.

The last article, by Marc Demeuse, Antoine Derobertmasure, and Nathanaël Friant, points to an important possible consequence of education markets and school choice: a high level of socioeconomic segregation between schools. French-speaking Belgium is characterized by a high level of socioeconomic school segregation. Efforts to encourage greater social mixing by financing schools with different school composition differently have met with stiff resistance. In 2008 and 2009, the application of the "social mixing" law that changed registration procedures created social unrest. The purpose of their article is to present some results from a research project that investigated the possibility of modifying the formula for financing schools. Demeuse, Derobertmasure, and Friant propose a generalized formula for allocating funds to schools according to need. They then present a financing formula that takes into account indicators of the social composition of the school population. Various scenarios for differentiated financing are presented, through simulations on the effects of these scenarios for all schools. Finally, the implications of these scenarios are discussed and put into perspective with respect to the different solutions for lowering school segregation that have been experimented in French-speaking Belgium since 2005.

Note

1. See http://eacea.ec.europa.eu/education/eurydice/index_en.php

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