

Editorial

Wolfgang Blaas

This volume brings together six papers on the common theme of Privatisation of Education. These papers have been presented and discussed at the PRESOM-workshops in Ljubljana, Slovenia in June 2007 and in Berlin, Germany, in October 2007. PRESOM is short for Privatisation and the European Social Model, a Coordination Action which is funded within the 6th Framework Programme of the EU under Priority 7, Citizens and Governance in a Knowledge-Based Society. The project started on 1st January 2006 and will run until 31st December 2008 (see also www.presom.eu/ and the Introduction by Jörg Huffschmid in "Der Öffentliche Sektor – The Public Sector, Vol. 32, 2006, Heft 3-4).

Though the education group within PRESOM has decided to focus primarily on higher education and university topics, some of the issues dealt with in the papers are well beyond these more narrow limits.

The introductory paper by Blaas is providing a preliminary framework within which the complex dimensions of education privatisation may be put into perspective. A number of basic questions are put forth and briefly discussed: (1) is education a commodity or a public good? (2) what does privatisation mean in this context? (3) what are the instruments and methods of education privatisation? and (4) how may we evaluate education privatisation from an economic and a social point of view?

By staging the discussion into the more general topic of the welfare state, Kwiek opens up the discussion towards transition and global perspectives, and he presents the debate between those who believe that globalization will lead to smaller welfare states and less publicly funded education and those who see more public investment in education as a crucial necessity to keep up in the global economic race. Though the latter position does not seem to have prevailed, Kwiek points to a possible change in the way how the state is being seen by international agents, i.e. from the "minimalist state" to the "effective state" (World Bank). It is argued that education expenditures have to be seen as competing with other welfare expenditures and that therefore the future development of public revenues at large and the pressure for public engagement in education in

particular are crucial determinants of university privatisation.

Zgaga discusses some of the central issues in the context of privatizing tertiary education. Among others, he raises the question of how the delicate balance between the two traditional ends of universities, "the pursuit of truth" and "serving the needs of the economy", might be changing through privatisation in general and by running a university as an enterprise in particular.

In his contribution, Ball addresses first some aspects of the new international education economy. Second he gives some examples of the multiple forms of current educational privatisations, and third changes in the form and modalities of the state provision of education are presented. Finally, some of the relationships among these issues are discussed.

The last two contributions are empirical case studies of education privatisation in Italy and in Greece. First, Acocella and Tomassi describe in detail public and private education in Italy. Then they go on to assess whether more competition between public and private producers would improve the education system and finally, they sum up and give some conclusions, in particular concerning the question of rising inequalities. Second, Toliou delivers a critical view of neoliberal thinking and policies in education, and its influence on the Greek education system. Alternative ways to improve education are suggested.

Vienna, November 2007