Book Review

School autonomy, organization and performance in Europe – A comparative analysis for the period from 2000 to 2015. 1st Edition. By Susana da Cruz Martins, Luís Capucha and João Sebastião, 2019. 136 pp.

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School autonomy is very important for modern education in the twenty-first century. It compels school principals, teachers, and stakeholders to work and respond together to decide what they will do to promote the students' achievement in their schools. Thus, this review seeks to elaborate on the insights of a book about school autonomy in Europe in order to draw out the best practices for the Cambodian context. The book "School Autonomy, organization, and performance in Europe -- A Comparative Analysis for the period from 2000 to 2015," which was written by Susana da Cruz Martins, Luís Capucha, and João Sebastião and published at the Lisbon-based Centre for Research and Studies in Sociology (CIES-Iscte) in 2019, should be considered a very useful work for teachers and administrator. It is one of the most interesting books I have ever read. The book not only provides general concepts such as the autonomy and performance of education systems and policies of autonomy and school organization in Europe but also introduces some innovative ideas for new perspectives on school autonomy for developing education in Cambodia.

This book attempts to contribute to a reflection on the nature of the transformations in school autonomy – those which are underway and those that still need to be put into practice – by seeking knowledge on the direction taken, the pace chosen, the resources mobilized and the objectives of the actors who operate schools. The intention is to focus on the relationship between policies, the ways in which educational systems are organized and the functioning of the institutional mechanisms that operationalize them for citizens. The starting point is the beginning of the 2000s, punctuated by the Lisbon Strategy, as well as the beginning of the PISA Program (OECD).

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Particular attention is paid to the changes which have taken place in education in just 15 years (until 2015).

In this paper, I review a comparative analysis for the period from 2000 to 2015. That analysis provides lots of information about school autonomy in the European context, such as best practices in school autonomy, decision-making by principals, teachers, and stakeholders, community involvement, and the degree of school autonomy in different countries. For instance, the comparison of decision-making between schools, school councils, principals, and teachers regarding instructional design, personnel management, planning, and structure in European and OECD countries shows that the average autonomy of decision-making by schools in Europe is higher than in the OECD countries. Therefore, based on the best practices laid out in the book, it is possible to propose a model of school autonomy for the Cambodian context. This book is divided into two main parts: Part I: autonomy and performance of the education system in Europe, and Part II: policies of autonomy and school organization in national cases. There are ten chapters in total, which are equally divided into Part I and five for Part II. The book also includes a conclusion that contributes to the debate about school autonomy and organization in Europe.

Part I. autonomy and performance of education in Europe

In Part I, there are five different chapters. They include (1) 'School autonomy and administration. Configurations and processes in Europe' by Susana da Cruz Martins, Adriana Albuquerque, and Luís Capucha; (2) 'Autonomy and leadership of school actors' by Susana da Cruz Martins and Adriana Albuquerque; (3) 'Evaluation and accountability processes in schools and education systems. A European characterization' by Susana da Cruz Martins and Bernardo Malcatanho Machado; (4) 'Autonomy, leadership and resources in European schools. What are the effects on performance and equity?' by Susana da Cruz Martins, Helena Carvalho, Luís Capucha, and Ana Rita Capucha; and (5) 'The actors and political action in education. Projections and guidelines for the development of education systems in Europe' by Susana da Cruz Martins, Eliana Durão and João Sebastião.

Overall, Part I of this book is a comparative study of levels of autonomy, process autonomy, dimensions of school autonomy, roles and responsibilities of school principals and teachers in school decision-making, evaluation, accountability, political action, and guidelines in European education systems. For example, in the first chapter there is a comparison of the level of autonomy of other European countries with the OECD countries. In the OECD countries, on average, schools are responsible for about 71% of educational decisions. Comparison of the results shows that schools in 13 non-OECD European countries have autonomy levels well below the OECD average. There are also 11 countries with autonomy proportional to OECD countries and 4 countries with higher levels of school autonomy (levels of more than 90%) compared to OECD countries. This chapter also introduces the dimensions and sections that are important operational components of school

autonomy: (i) instructional design, (ii) personnel management, (iii) planning and structure, and (iv) resources.

Chapter 2 focuses on principals who have decision-making rights regarding student admission, human resource management, and finance in some European countries. School councils tend to have less autonomy in curriculum development, policy-making, and resource management. In particular, teachers only have the right to decide on the curriculum and the evaluation of student learning. Chapter 3 focuses on the comparison of the key factors in the accounting and external evaluation of the school in five areas: quality management, counseling and accounting, financial accountability, coherence between school procedures, and education law. Chapter 4 focuses on a comparison of the provision of a high percentage of public spending to support students and the prioritization of addressing social inequality in relation to school and educational achievements. Chapter 5 compares the roles of actors responsible for education, from government to principals while relating these to revising education policies, the education system, equity of education, and focusing on teachers, based on the results of the PIZA Test.

The first chapter by Susana da Cruz Martins, Adriana Albuquerque, and Luís Capucha focuses upon school autonomy and administration. Configurations and processes in Europe. In the group of OECD countries, schools have responsibility for about 71% of the decisions on educational matters. The 13 European countries which have the lowest rates of school autonomy in relation to the OECD average include those in Southern Europe (Greece, Malta, Italy, Spain, and Portugal), some from Central Europe (Austria, France, Germany, Luxembourg, and Belgium) and others from Eastern Europe (Hungary, Croatia and Romania). It is noteworthy that schools in Greece have very limited autonomy, even when - compared with other low autonomy countries (OECD, 2017).

Higher levels of school autonomy, indicated by rates above 90%, are found in the Czech Republic, the United Kingdom, Lithuania, and the Netherlands. The proportion of tasks assigned to schools within the framework of educational governance is very high, and almost everything is decided at the school level. Those countries with average school autonomy levels are Nordic countries (Sweden, Denmark, and Finland, with some of the Baltics, such as Estonia and Latvia), Ireland, and the other Eastern European countries (Slovakia, Bulgaria, Poland, and Slovenia). Most countries found to have lower-than-average levels of school autonomy in 2011 (for which we have data) show declining trends in recent years (see Luxembourg, Portugal, Germany, Spain, France, Italy, and Greece). How is the division of responsibility at the various levels of government structured in European education systems? The book systematizes the processes of decentralization under two general approaches: territorial decentralization, oriented toward the representation of interests by smaller "subnational" units, and, alternatively, functional decentralization, carried out by parastatal, non-governmental bodies or private organizations (Weiler, 1999). For the last year under review, it was found that a minority of

countries in Europe were central education bodies have more responsibility for decision-making than schools. This group consists mainly of Central European countries (Luxembourg, Germany, France, Belgium, Austria) and Southern European (Portugal, Spain and Greece). The autonomy of school's vis-a-vis the central government seems to be clearly evident in twelve countries. These include some countries in Eastern Europe (Estonia, Czech Republic, and Hungary) and Nordic countries (Denmark and Sweden), as well as Scotland and England. This is in line with what some authors have categorized as evidence of processes of affirmation where the movement towards territorial decentralization is favorable to the strengthening of local decision-making (Ladner et al., 2016).

Regarding the concept of school autonomy, several international organizations or agencies have defined it and proposed dimensions and areas which are useful for operationalization within the framework of a polysemic understanding. A study carried out by the Eurydice Network (2007) focused on three areas of observation: teaching, human resource management, and financial resource management. The OECD has given a consolidated definition of the areas to which these decisions pertain. They are, first, (i) organization of teaching: student admissions, educational paths, lesson times, choice of textbooks, the constitution of classes, supplementary support for students, teaching methods, daily assessment of students. Second, (ii) personnel management: hiring and firing of teaching and non-teaching staff; rights and conditions of service; salary tables; influence on careers. Third, (iii) planning and structures: the opening or closing of schools, creation or removal of a level of education; design of study programmes, selection of study programmes taught at a specific school; choice of subjects taught at a particular school, the definition of course content, creation of qualification exams for a certificate or diploma; certification (content analysis and assessment, scheduling, and administration). Fourth, (iv) resources: allocation and use of resources for teaching staff, non-teaching staff, capital and operating expenses.

Schools in OECD countries amass an average of 375 points of responsibility for decisions taken in those categories (OECD 2015). Several Southern and Eastern European countries (Croatia, Malta, Spain, Romania, Portugal, Slovenia) are below the OECD average, as are some from Central Europe (Luxembourg, France, Austria, Germany) and Scandinavia (Finland). However, countries such as Finland, Germany, and Austria have significant levels of school autonomy except in the category of resource management. There are fifteen European countries above the OECD average, with at least two-thirds of the decisions taken by schools, including those in Eastern Europe (Hungary, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovakia) and Baltic countries (such as Estonia, Latvia or Lithuania), together with some Central European countries with liberal traditions in education (Belgium, Ireland, United Kingdom, the Netherlands), and two Nordic countries (Sweden, Denmark). European countries whose schools were found to have high levels of decision-making power in 2011 were the Netherlands,

England, Estonia, Flemish Belgium, Czech Republic, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ireland, Scotland, Poland, Sweden and Denmark (all were rated above the OECD average). In terms of curriculum organization, personnel management, and resource management, the European countries whose schools were found to have decision-making power below average in 2011 included Italy, France, Austria, Spain, Germany, Portugal, Luxembourg, and French Belgium), The power of schools over curriculum organization prevails over all other dimensions of autonomy, which have a residual weight by comparison.

It is possible to group European school autonomy profiles into three sets of countries. The first group is composed of nine countries, mostly from Northern and Eastern Europe (Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Latvia, Sweden, and the United Kingdom), with robust levels of school autonomy in all indicators considered. Schools in these countries have, on average, a high level of decision-making power both on strictly educational issues (such as the curriculum, assessment, and the definition of disciplinary policies for students) and on the allocation and management of resources and the definition of criteria for student intake. It is the index of total autonomy and the proportion of decisions on educational resources taken by schools that most substantially distinguishes school autonomy in this set of countries when compared to the others.

The second group that emerges from the analysis is composed of twelve countries, including some from Central Europe (Austria, Belgium, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg), Finland, and countries from Southern Europe (Portugal, Italy, Bulgaria and Slovenia), as well as Hungary and Poland from the East. These counties were found to have significant levels of school autonomy in terms of determining criteria for student intake, policies for student assessment, and discipline and curriculum organization. However, these countries are distinguished from the first set on the basis of schools having only intermediate levels of both total school autonomy (68.7% versus 88.9%) and residual autonomy in terms of allocation and management of resources (only 45.2% versus 80.3%). Some of these countries can be considered newcomers to the practice of increased school autonomy.

The third group is composed of only five countries, the remaining Southern European countries (Croatia, Malta, Romania, and Spain) and France. Here, school autonomy is clearly limited, with political power highly concentrated at the levels of the central and regional states. Reform of the education system has proceeded at a relatively slow pace compared to the rest of the countries in the European Union. The difference between this group's total autonomy indices and those of the previous set of countries is minimal (62.9% versus 66.7%), as is the measure of the proportion of decisions taken with regard to student disciplinary policies (86.9% versus 92.2%). It is mainly because of the low proportion of decisions taken by schools regarding student intake and educational resources that these countries were found to be distinct from the others.

In the second chapter, Susana da Cruz Martins and Adriana Albuquerque discuss the autonomy and leadership of school actors. They found that principals have more responsibilities in some countries. These include some from Central-Eastern Europe, namely the Czech Republic, Slovakia, and Poland; some from the North, such as Denmark, Sweden, and Finland as well as Baltics states, such as Estonia and Lithuania; and some others with more liberal traditions in their prevailing approaches to education, like the United Kingdom and the Netherlands. The school principals who have the least autonomy to operate within the organizations they direct are from countries such as Romania, Croatia, and other Southern European countries (including Portugal, Greece, Italy, and Spain). These have more centralized education systems or a recent history of educational decentralization.

Only Spain, Slovenia, the United Kingdom, and Sweden were found to have the greatest dimension of autonomy for principals to be resource management. These countries, however, still have relatively low levels of responsibility for principals in the areas of curriculum development and the application of policies for student assessment. There is a tendency for countries where principals have more responsibility for student admissions to also have more autonomy in resource management. This group predominantly includes Eastern European countries (with Estonia, Poland, Lithuania, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic), but extends as well to include some Nordic countries (Finland and Sweden) and the Netherlands. Decision-making on curricula is the dimension in which principals have the least responsibility in the overwhelming majority of European countries. The next lowest level of autonomy pertains to the dimension of establishing student assessment policies. In short, European schools show that the practices of student admissions and, to a lesser extent, management of the organization's human and financial resources are essentially autonomously carried out by the principal.

While the principal plays an important role in the educational decision-making process among European countries, this cannot be said so unequivocally about the school board (as a collective body or board of governors). Indeed, this collective actor has a secondary position in European school leadership, as can be seen in all areas of autonomy considered. However, in the dimension of defining disciplinary policies, it was found to have above-average autonomy. In countries where the governing body has little power in student admissions, it generally has a greater responsibility, albeit still moderate or limited, in other school operations, such as curriculum definition, the establishment of policies, the application of student disciplinary policies, and practices for resource management. This situation was found in some Central European countries (France, Germany, Luxembourg, Poland) and Northern European states (Lithuania, Estonia, and Denmark).

What is the role of teachers in school decision-making in Europe? The area where teachers are most active is the curriculum, followed by defining student assessment policies.

The greatest variation among European countries was found in the area of the role of teachers in defining student assessment policies. Countries found to be below the OECD average (36%) included only Portugal, Luxembourg, Romania, and Denmark. The position of Greece can also be highlighted, where teachers have a very limited capacity for decision-making. Teacher autonomy in Greece is higher with respect to the determination of disciplinary policies and student assessment but almost non-existent with respect to resource management and administration. However, there are other countries where teachers have equal responsibility in defining policies for student assessment and the curriculum (Austria, Poland, Hungary, Slovenia, Estonia, Slovakia, Lithuania, Spain, and Finland). A very recent Co-operation and Development (2015) study points out that countries such as Portugal should increase teacher participation in defining and operationalizing curricula and in student assessment. It is also recommended that these competencies be reinforced, especially for more qualified and experienced teachers and where disadvantaged students are concerned.

Returning to the topic of school leadership profiles in Europe, decision-making on curricula is the dimension for which principals have the least responsibility in the overwhelming majority of European countries, followed by establishing student assessment policies. How are powers distributed among the various actors, especially between the principals, who assume the top level of responsibility in the school organization, and others? We can identify a set of trends or leadership profiles that reflect the context of their autonomy. Put differently, to a certain extent, it is clear that the leadership of principals is stronger in contexts where there is more school autonomy in diverse areas of activity and less centralized education systems. In other cases, the leadership or input of school boards is roughly equivalent to that of principals. This is the case in Portugal, Romania, Ireland, and Hungary, where the influence of school boards was found to be approximately equal to that of the principal. These are cases of collective leadership in a moderate autonomy context. Finally, another approach entails educational and professional leadership in a diverse autonomy context. These are cases where teachers have an active role in decision-making in schools, especially in terms of an educational nature, such as designing the curriculum and setting assessment policies.

In chapter 3, Susana da Cruz Martins and Bernardo Malcatanho Machado cover evaluation and accountability processes in schools and education systems. According to Leithwood et al. (1999), there are different types of approaches to school accountability, resulting in distinct blends in different countries. These types are the market competition approach, the decentralization of the decision-making approach, the professional approach, and the management approach. Accountability is conceptualized in response to five issues: who is accountable, to whom are they accountable, for what are they accountable, at what level are they accountable, and what consequences they face. The implementation of school evaluation systems is based on specific national circumstances and very different political,

economic, and social contexts, giving different contours and goals for these evaluations (Leithwood et al., 1999). A mapping process was carried out via document analysis based on the information contained in the report Assuring Quality in Education: Policies and Approaches to School Evaluation in Europe (Comm, 2015).

There are four categories of objectives for principal actors to attain related to the external evaluation of schools. First, the objectives of "educational quality control" and "improving the education system" (16 out of 30). Secondly, the objectives for the external evaluation of schools, including "counseling" and "provision of accounts (financial and educational results)". Third, external evaluation programmes (10 out of 30) related to the "consistency between the school's working procedures and the legislation in force," which is more a matter of legal or administrative regulation. Lastly, "direct decisions on the school's capacity for autonomy," "responses to complaints/grievances," and "encouraging school autonomy" are the autonomy criteria pertaining to "school regulation and administration," which are least often mentioned by countries in their external evaluation programmes.

The actors involved in external evaluation programmes include are divided into four types. First, external evaluation is carried out in most cases (23 out of 30) by institutions under governmental jurisdiction at the central level, that is, directly connected to central ministerial state services. Secondly, external evaluation programmes are carried out under ministerial jurisdiction but in conjunction with local/regional delegations of the ministry. Third, in three cases, external evaluation was carried out by institutions under the responsibility of local authorities/regional communities/local government. Such cases include Denmark, Finland, and Hungary. Lastly, the assessment of the actors involved in external evaluation is directly focused on teachers and school management as the main targets (23 cases). Students and parents (in 21 of the cases analyzed) are also often "participants in"/ "targets of" external evaluation. The range of compulsory procedures used for conducting external evaluation includes the following: "analysis of documentation," "school visits," "classroom observation", and "interviews with staff (including teaching staff)." There were four possibilities for the development of correction plans following the evaluation of schools. 1) The most common modality among the cases examined correction plans drawn up by the inspection teams in conjunction with the schools themselves. 2) Cases where the correction plans are drawn up only by the investigative team. 3) Cases where the design of the correction plans is the responsibility of the schools. 4) Cases where the correction plans are drawn up by local authorities/regional communities/local government.

In the fourth chapter, Susana da Cruz Martins, Helena Carvalho, Luís Capucha and Ana Rita Capucha write about autonomy, leadership and resources in European schools. They focus on the effects of these factors on performance and equity. The various relationships that autonomy and school actors have with student results and performance are linked to

socio-economic equity in the set of European countries under analysis. Results regarding the two indicators used, financing of education systems and public support for students (using Eurostat as the source), were also found to be in agreement with the findings of other studies (Hanushek et al., 2011) which have highlighted the non-linear relationship between autonomy and school performance.

School autonomy, in terms of admission and recruitment of students, curriculum, human and financial resources, and setting of student assessment policies, may not be a condition for or a guarantee of better results. The analysis of results explained performance in math in relation to the domains of autonomy under analysis. The curriculum may be the domain of autonomy with a greater impact on student performance in math. In the cases of Estonia, the Netherlands, Denmark, Finland, Belgium, Germany, Ireland, and Poland, there is a high level of in-school decision-making on the curriculum, student assessment policies (Finland is slightly below the others in this area), and student admissions, with 80% or more of decisions in these areas being taken at the school level. The countries with greater school autonomy in resource management can reduce the impact of inequalities.

Regarding leadership, performance, and equity, the more decisions that can be made in the school setting, the better students' school performance tends to be, although this tendency is slight. The same results are obtained when the correlation is considered between the reduction of social inequalities and performance (as indicated by math scores) is considered. This was found in cases such as Slovenia, Poland and Finland. On the other hand, the two worst performers, Bulgaria and Romania, were found to allow for much less decision-making capacity for teachers and principals when compared to other European countries. In Spain, Portugal, and Luxembourg, which have the highest retention rates in Europe and show signs of great inequality, teachers have the lowest levels of decision-making autonomy. At the same time, the decision-making power of school principals is highest in the Netherlands and the Czech Republic, countries which have very different repetition rates from one another.

What are the effects of equity on financing and resources? Two indicators were selected for evaluating funding in education. One is direct student support and the other concerns expenditure on education in euros per student. Regression results showed no significant effects on school performance from the indicator of public expenditure on education per student, measured with scores obtained in math. Ten countries that have the highest expenditure on education per student (Luxembourg, Denmark, Austria, Sweden, Finland, the United Kingdom, Belgium, the Netherlands, Germany, and Ireland) have performed above the OECD average reference value (Pisa, 2016). However, as demonstrated by a general trend, assigning a high percentage of public spending to direct student support is related to prioritizing attention to inequalities in social conditions in relation to schooling and to achievements in addressing the issue.

The last chapter of Part I focuses on actors and political action in education. This chapter is 'Projections and guidelines for the development of education systems in Europe' by Susana da Cruz Martins, Eliana Durão, and João Sebastião. The discussion centers on processes in the evolution of education systems, including academic performances and accreditation, teacher training, and educational networks, while taking into consideration national contexts, traditions, and trajectories. These contexts are marked by the transformations of the relationship of the education system, or more precisely of the schools, with the state, in terms of greater school autonomy and a stronger emphasis on assessment and accountability by organizational key actors. Another important aspect is the engagement of some of the actors with their country's PISA (OECD) results, placing the focus on a supranational perspective. This constitutes a key element in the recognition of a globalized space and an educational configuration extended to a transnational scale. Comparative country data constitutes a source of legitimization for the development of education policies (Lawn & Lingard, 2002). The amplified visibility of national education structures, based primarily on statistical data, places education at the very heart of the political agenda. Among the different discourses, it is evident that there are two groups of countries. On the one hand, those whose actors focus on the importance of autonomy (school and local), and on accountability for educational outcomes (more evident in countries such as the Netherlands, Belgium, and Finland); on the other hand, a group of countries (Poland, Portugal, and Germany), in which the discourses of their actors concentrate on the performance of the education systems, and on the proposition and appraisal of reforms or major action programmes.

PART II. Policies of autonomy and school organization. National cases

In Part II, there are five different chapters. They include (6) 'Denmark. The Danish educational system' by Lejf Moos; (7) 'Germany. German school system and autonomy' by Dominic Orr; (8) 'Italy. The Italian education system and school autonomy' by Maddalena Colombo and Agnese Desideri; (9) 'Spain. Recent changes in Spanish education. A short report with special attention to school autonomy' by Rafael Feito Alonso; and (10) 'Portugal. Educational policies and autonomy in Portuguese schools' by Luís Capucha, João Sebastião, Ana Rita Capucha, and Ana Raquel Matias.

Overall, Part II focuses on comparing the education systems and policies of school autonomy of the five countries: Denmark, Germany, Italy, Spain, and Portugal. The comparative results show that compulsory education is similar among the five countries: children between the ages of 6 and 16 study at the primary and secondary levels. After they finish the general education level, they have the chance to continue to higher education and postgraduate studies that aren't compulsory. There is some difference in the number of years of compulsory education according to the level; for example, in Germany, primary education is only four years, while in Italy, it is five years. In particular, the comparison shows that

school autonomy policy varies. In some of Germany's Landers (federal states), the schools are given less autonomy. In the case of Spain, there has been a strengthening of centralization, in particular through standardized national tests for students. On the other hand, the cases of Denmark and Italy reveal that some of the processes of decentralization and reinforcement of autonomy have given rise to school organizations moving closer toward market dynamics in administrative and educational terms. But in Italy, this has involved a loss of the decision-making capacity of school directors. Another trend that emerged visibly during the period of the financial crisis, especially in the southern European countries, was a reduction of autonomy associated with a restriction of resources, thus limiting the possible decisions that could be taken within the level of school. Portugal, whose education system faced this type of financial cutbacks, also demonstrated somewhat contradictory policy guidelines.

The sixth chapter by Lejf Moos focuses on Denmark. Danish children's educational path includes attending kindergarten from ages 3-6. Approximately 95% of children of that age attend a private or public daycare institution. Education is compulsory in Denmark for everyone between the ages of 6-7 and 16. Each school is responsible for ensuring the quality of education in accordance with the aims of the Folkeskole Education Act and for determining the planning and organization of the education programme (Moos). There are 28,591 classes, with an average number of 19.6 students per class. The total expenditure on education in Denmark was 6.5 % of GDP in 2017, while on average, in the EU it was 4.7 %. In 2018, approximately 21% of students attended private/free-standing schools in Denmark, while the EU average was 18%. A small number of these are attached to religious groups, but most build on the same values and norms as the Folkeskole. Graduates from the Folkeskole school can apply for upper secondary schools as well as vocational/technical upper secondary schools. These schools have had a quasi-autonomous status since 2007, in that they are free-standing enterprises with independent boards answering directly to the Minister of Education. Higher education in Denmark is basically organized according to the Bologna Declaration of 1999. Upon successful completion of one of the upper secondary education tracks, students can apply to attend one out of three kinds of bachelor's programs: a bachelor's in social education, teacher training, or ministered in the academies. Eight universities offer master's programs in various subjects.

The Danish educational system is part of, and thus influenced by, transnational tendencies while also building on Danish structures and culture. Decentralized government has been a very central part of the Danish educational self-understanding and, to some extent, practice, according to the Danish "free school" tradition. During the period 1990-2014, there was a decline in the number of schools in Denmark. Almost 400 schools were closed during this period. Accordingly, the school structure is increasingly characterized by fewer schools, bigger public schools, and more private schools (an indication that more children attend private schools). Relations between the central level, the local level, and the

school level have, accordingly, changed rather profoundly over the past 8-15 years as demands for national standards and accountability have moved from political discourse towards administrative practices. National testing is being implemented in all grades in elementary school, and results are routinely publicized (Moos). In 2011, the quality reports were supplemented by an official disclosure of school ranking according to the test results of students in order to facilitate parents' free choice of schools.

In the seventh chapter, Dominic Orr discusses the case of the German school system and autonomy. Legislation and administration of the Federal Republic of Germany's education system are primarily the responsibility of the Lander. This particularly applies to the school system, higher education, and the further education sector. Schooling begins at the age of six (although this is determined at the state level) with a common stream through primary schooling, which lasts four years for most Landers. The secondary school level is diversified, with the choice of stream for a pupil at the end of secondary schooling based on the pupils' scholastic achievements at the primary level and the recommendation of class teachers.

Some transformations since 2000 are notable. Two major trends have transformed the school system in the last two decades: the decline in the size of the student body and the shift of a large part of the student body to multi-stream schooling, mostly focusing on vocationally-orientated courses. A further significant policy change has been the reduction of the total length of secondary schooling from nine to eight years. The goal was to get young people into the labour market at a younger age. Shortening upper secondary schooling from three to two years was achieved by additional student workload and compressing the curriculum (Marcus & Zambre, 2019). Teachers have traditionally studied to be an educator for a particular type of school in two phases. First, through a five-year programme ending in a state-level exam, and then a further year of practical work in a school followed by a state-level final exam. Following this, they generally receive civil servant status. According to state laws, teachers must undertake continuing professional training annually.

Institutional autonomy refers to how much liberty a school has in making decisions about various aspects of its operations. According to an OECD analysis of governance in education, there are two common types of accountability mechanisms: vertical and horizontal (Burns & Köster, 2016). Vertical accountability is top-down and hierarchical. It enforces compliance with laws and regulations set outside of the school, therefore limiting what a school can do. Horizontal accountability refers to non-hierarchical relationships. It focuses on monitoring how schools and teachers conduct their profession and how they inform and involve multiple stakeholders and are accountable to them concerning the school's goal setting, strategy formulation, decision-making, implementation, and results in terms of quality of educational processes, outputs, and outcomes. In sum, the German schooling system has undergone changes in its basic

architecture, teacher training, and in its governance framework. Reviews of the German school system currently tend to be positive about the results, although major challenges persist. The reform of regulations and steering of schools that have occurred in Germany since the 2000s can be characterized as cautiously moving away from regulatory school accountability to performance accountability with increased school autonomy.

In chapter 8, Maddalena Colombo and Agnese Desideri cover the Italian education system and school autonomy. The first cycle of education is obligatory and lasts eight years. It offers two pathways: primary education (five years) for children aged 6-11 and lower secondary (three years) for children aged 11-14 who have completed primary school. The second education cycle consists of state upper secondary (five years) for students aged 14-19. Since the 2010-11 academic year, there have been three types of upper secondaries: Lyceums (with six distinct curricula: classic, scientific, arts, music and chorus, human sciences, languages), Technical Institutes (with two-course paths, technological and economical, and 11 curricula) and Vocational Institutes (with two-course paths, industry/trade and services, and 11 curricula).

The broader education system in Italy includes further education (extra-university or non-tertiary) through regionally organized post-qualification and post-diploma vocational courses, which offer higher technical qualifications and training to students with a state diploma. Higher education is offered by universities (state and non-state institutions offering traditional and online courses) and the higher arts and music education system (AFAM). Tertiary education follows the Bologna three-level process: first (laurea triennale), second (laurea magistrale or first/second-level master's), and third (doctorate).

Some peculiarities of the Italian education system are the result of its organization, which is currently based on two principles: subsidiarity and autonomy. Subsidiary is both horizontal (the state and local society in cooperation) and vertical (the state gives local-level public administration offices control) (Benadusi et al., 2008; Bifulco et al., 2010). After more than 150 years of centralization resulting from Napoleon Bonaparte's reforms of the early 19th century, recent legislation has changed how the education system is governed, with four levels of responsibility. a) First, the state has exclusive competence for general education matters (e.g., minimum standards, school staff and recruitment, quality assessment, financial resources). b) Second, the regions have joint responsibility with the state over some sectors of the education system (establishment of the school year according to location and climate; distribution of schools within the regional territory). c) Third, local authorities (single municipalities or a network of municipalities, such as in the main metropolitan areas). d) Fourth, since 2000, the Bassanini Law (see below) has allowed schools to achieve a certain degree of autonomy over the delivery of learning goals and

methods, time organization, internal education research, and development/innovation activities.

To describe how the Italian education system has evolved over time, we will discuss the political reforms introduced over the course of recent decades. In the years after 1996, during a period of center-left government, the minister of education, Luigi Berlinguer, and minister of public administration, Franco Bassanini, initiated a major reform of public administration that was reflected in the governance of education. The subsequent reform (Riforma Moratti) was introduced by Silvio Berlusconi's right-leaning government in March 2003. This law sought to ensure school independence while enhancing the links of cooperation between schools and businesses. Thanks to reforms introduced by Giuseppe Fioroni, minister of education in 2007, and his successor, Maria Stella Gelmini, the minister in 2008, the length of compulsory education was extended from eight to 10 years (from age 14 to 16). Matteo Renzi's "good school" ("la buona scuola") reform (Law 107/2015), which was introduced at the start of the 2015-16 academic year, made education and training courses regular (instead of occasional). This law introduced many other important moves towards autonomy. For example, since 2015-16, each school has more staff ("autonomy staff'), head teachers have greater say over the recruitment of teachers (limited to the "autonomy staff' and not extendible to "organic staff'), and head teachers have more say over the assessment of and payment of bonuses to teaching staff. Also, the three-year school plan (PTOF) is made mandatory in each school, with the head teacher and teaching staff responsible for implementation, which is assessed each year in a self-evaluation report.

The introduction of a new and autonomous regime in Italy provoked the "pluralization of the modes of governance" in addition to the traditional model of administrative regulation (the bureaucratic state). According to (Landri, 2009), there are currently three models of school autonomy. The first is the state evaluator model (as in France), the second is the quasi-market model (as in England, the Netherlands, and Belgium), while the third model is the network, in which school processes are characterized by coordination and cooperation between internal and external stakeholders and agents. According to Archer (1979), there is a further model, the local autonomy model, which seems to be a variant of the models described above.

In light of these models, it can be said that Italy today has a hybrid model of school autonomy, in which municipalities link up with schools to establish equal and horizontal relationships that would be consistent with the network model and with its local autonomy model variant. According to Fischer et al. (2002), the majority of head teachers are positive about school autonomy, while others have been more skeptical. However, generally speaking school autonomy has brought positive effects to schools, through the mobilization of the internal and external environment (Benadusi & Consoli, 2004). Italian school autonomy has also been called "functional autonomy", in which the government grants schools some autonomous powers, but not executive powers. Agasisti et al. (2013), in

their study of Italian educational autonomy, set out three archetypes of educational systems. The first archetype is Entrepreneurial, for which the strategies to be followed and the tools to be used are delimited by legal standards but are more specifically determined according to the head teacher's initiative. The second model is Bureaucratic, which follows the law and does not call for anything to be done without being specified by law or beyond the limits set in the law. The third is Chaotic, where many of the actors (head teacher, parents, and teachers) debate their views without reaching a shared decision at the school level.

In conclusion, we can say school autonomy introduced some good elements of innovation in Italy and improved the quality of the education system, particularly in terms of the didactic plan and the capacity for schools to self-improve. However, this reform remains unfinished because autonomous education institutions in Italy lack the resources necessary to put their independence into practice (especially in relation to financial and workforce resource management). Teachers must follow the National Guidelines for the Curriculum for the first and second cycle), and they often claim they feel more like "state functionaries" than "professionals" (Campione, 2005: 66). To make schools more autonomous, the state should undertake the following actions: Support the creation of networks between schools in order to reduce management costs and improve the collaboration between institutes; provide incentives for collaboration between schools and local authorities to assess requirements and corresponding resources; subsidize non-public local authorities to encourage them to fund some aspects of what the school offers; finally, professionalize both the administration staff in schools and the local authorities in order to share the responsibility for school financial management, as they would for any other institution.

The ninth chapter, by Rafael Feito Alonso, is written about Spain and discusses recent changes in Spanish education. The chapter offers a short report with special attention paid to school autonomy. School attendance is compulsory from the age of six through to sixteen being divided into several stages, which are explained below. Infant education is split into two cycles. The first cycle of infant education is not free, but the second cycle is free in state schools provided by colleges (infant and primary schools). The level of primary education is made up of six academic school years from age six to twelve. After primary school, students must enroll in compulsory secondary education (ESO), which generally spans from the age of twelve to the age of sixteen. Once Spanish students achieve ESO certification, they are able to advance to upper secondary education, either on the academic track (known as Bachillerato or Baccalaureate) or in vocational education. Students who successfully complete the Baccalaureate get a diploma. They may then opt for vocational training, university education, or both in some cases. There are two levels of vocational education: Middle-Grade Training Cycles (Ciclos Formativos de Grado Medio) and Upper-Grade Training Cycles (Ciclos Formativos de Grado Superior). By 2010, in accordance with European Commission concepts of Education and Training, Spanish higher education consisted of Bachelor's degrees

(Grado) for four-year programs, Master's degrees for one to two-year postgraduate programs, and Doctorates for post-master education.

The 2015 PISA report has paid special attention to the issue of school autonomy. To this end, PISA has built a school autonomy index considering the percentage of tasks for which the principal, the teachers, and the school governing board have a degree of responsibility in relation to regional or national authorities. PISA has considered five actors involved in education: principals, teachers, school boards, local/regional authorities, and national authorities. Spanish schools show a slightly lower degree of autonomy than the OECD country average. The resulting average index for the OECD is a little more than 70%, while in Spain, this figure is a little less than 60%. In fact, Spain is one of the countries with the lowest degree of autonomy. Bulgaria, Denmark, Latvia and Sweden, among other countries, are above 80%. In the Spanish case, headmasters and teachers hold around 30% of the responsibility for economic and human resources (42% being the OECD country average), 56% for the curriculum (66% for OECD countries), 57% for student assessment (68% for OECD countries), and 19% for student admissions (67% for OECD countries).

Applicants for principal positions are required to have a minimum of two years of teaching experience. Applicants for this position must pass an exam and prepare and defend a "school project," setting out what they intend to achieve at the school and how they will do this. At the school level, the School Council is made up of the management team (which, in addition to the principal, includes the head of studies and the academic secretary) and representatives of the main stakeholders, such as teaching and non-teaching staff, parents, pupils, and the school's local community. The School Council has an important role in ensuring that the school responds to the needs of its community by providing an education of the highest quality possible, approving school plans and budgets, reviewing academic performance and extra-curricular activities, and participating in the selection of principals.

The last chapter of Part II focuses upon Portugal. The chapter is titled, 'Educational policies and autonomy in Portuguese schools' and is written by Luís Capucha, João Sebastião, Ana Rita Capucha, and Ana Raquel Matias. With the elections in 2015 and the entry of a new government, many of the measures and policies prior to 2011 were reinstated, with the political drive once again focused on the need to promote school success, social equity, and access to public education for all children, youth and adults. That includes those with special educational needs and those without economic resources. Vocational courses were ended, national examinations in primary education (ISCED1) were replaced by benchmarking tests, class sizes were reduced, and several programs were underway aimed at boosting success and equity.

Non-compulsory education, pre-primary education (ISCED 0), is optional for children from 3 to 5 years old but is considered to be the first step in what is considered a lifelong learning process by the Portuguese education system. Post-secondary non-tertiary education (ISCED 4) is taught in higher education and in non-higher education establishments that offer Technological Specialization Courses (CET). Currently, higher education is divided into cycles: three-year courses for the 1st cycle (bachelor's degree), two-year courses for the 2nd cycle (master's degree), and four-year courses for the 3rd cycle (doctoral degree), in accordance with the Bologna process.

Structurally, the Portuguese Education System is highly centralized. Despite the efforts made since the 1980s with the creation of various structures, new administrative figures, and management bodies, autonomy is still limited in Portugal. Autonomy is identified by Formosinho and Machado (2014) as "prescriptive", since school activities and education issues, in general, are heavily regulated and tied to long bureaucratic processes. The central government plays a predominant role in the areas of management, planning, coordination, and evaluation. The state is the main employer of teachers and overwhelmingly the financier of public schools. In fact, non-state hiring and financing are absolutely residual. The state is also the designer of the national curriculum and its contents and is responsible for the regulation of school timetables and academic workload. Therefore, Portugal's index of autonomy (measured by a combination of factors in PISA testing) is below the OECD average by about 10% percentage points.

Discussion on school management and organization has stressed the need to understand transparency and fairness in school decisions through the participation of families and other external agents. The main aim has been to address exogenous factors leading to school failure and early school dropout, concentrating on the need to adjust schedules and curricula to individual skills and proficiencies, to labor market demands, and on developing relational and social citizenship skills. Although not directly related to autonomy, the Education Basic Law of 1986 (still the most important legal document concerning Portuguese education policies) opens the way for decentralization. Despite these positive trends in the area of human resource management, operations are still substantially centralized. For instance, teacher recruitment is controlled by the central education services, resulting in little autonomy for schools to contract their teachers (Batista, 2014b). There is, however, also a set of public schools that, in fact, benefit from greater levels of autonomy by having signed "Contracts of Autonomy" (an instrument that emerged in the late 1990s and was reinforced in 2012) (Formosinho & Machado, 2014). By signing such a contract with the Ministry of Education, schools are granted more control over the budgetary management of their resources and more freedom to acquire goods and services. These contracts also provide the conditions for "flexibility in curriculum management," leading to the creation of innovative pedagogical curriculum projects. Along with a redesigned configuration of the school network and clusters, a new school management model emerged in 2008, which remains in place to date. In fact, this model has been a central aspect of autonomy in schools. The General Board stands out, as it is actually the place where participation is

extended to persons outside the school, in particular parents. Since 2008, budgetary management has increased the autonomy of schools. Although funding is strictly state-owned, it is up to the schools, through the principal and the general board, to manage the organization of the budget with clearly defined priorities.

Although the curriculum has a strongly centralized framework with its contents being "traditionally" standardized, schools and teachers have a degree of decision-making choice. Areas where educators have some freedom of choice include the organization of the teaching/learning process and instruction in the classroom, the admission of students, the organization of school schedules, and the constitution of classes (although there are national criteria that regulate these procedures); the adoption and management of optional subjects; and, also, the adoption of textbooks. The national evaluation system has been focusing on student, teacher, and school performance, combining self-evaluation and external evaluation with international evaluation. Specifically, for compulsory education (which includes elementary and secondary levels), tests at the end of each cycle and national exams evaluate the knowledge and competencies acquired by the students in order to improve the system's quality.

This book also provides conclusions and contributions for debate. According to Susana da Cruz Martins, Luís Capucha, and João Sebastião, this study essentially reflects the importance of the autonomy of schools as a crucial linchpin in the organization of the education systems and as increasingly important in education policymaking. The first analytical track drew up a comparative characterization of various features of governance in schools according to the construction and design of education systems in the European context, following an elaboration of a series of approaches and illustrations of national profiles (Denmark, Germany, Italy, Portugal, and Spain). A second analysis concentrated on examining the configurations of school autonomy, obtaining a case-based framework involving aggregates of countries. Finally, the focal point was placed on the relationship between variables related to autonomy, the main relevant actors, and the school outcomes as indicated by performance and equity. These different analytical approaches enabled triangulating the investigation of the essential dimensions of this study, integrating diverse empirical materials.

From a substantive point of view, the two main guidelines encountered in the definition of education policies are shaped by the need to improve student results and performance and by concerns about combatting inequity in its various manifestations. Chapter 5 of the book clearly illustrates the policy priorities: "bridging gaps in performance due to socioeconomic background" and "improving student performance for all." Successful implementation requires policy monitoring and assessment, even during project stages, and capacity-building among key education agents, namely teachers, for improved school performance (Co-operation & Development, 2015). The chapter also differentiates two clear-cut groups: countries with higher performance and few

structural problems to resolve in their education systems (like Finland and the Netherlands) and countries with worse performance but with recent progress that face greater structural challenges or are undergoing reform and restructuring processes (such as Poland and Portugal).

Nowadays, when we consider the functioning of schools, the complexity of education systems, and the preparation of students, we must take into account the scenario of change towards attaining higher standards related to the skills and needs of the students, current demographic dynamics, and the increased complexity of the administration of education systems (Co-operation & Development, 2015). Thus, it is important to take stock of school autonomy in the different European countries as it is an important means to obtain the comparative data and insights needed for improving the administration and management of schools and education systems. One of the key findings of this study is that policies related to school autonomy in Europe (Hanushek et al., 2011) are very diverse (particularly identified in Chapters 1 and 2). This is evident, on the one hand, in the comparison between countries with different levels and configurations of autonomy. School autonomy ranges from countries such as the Netherlands, with high levels of autonomy, to southern European countries, such as Greece, Malta, and Italy, with centrist traditions shaping governance education in their systems. On the other hand, even some of the countries that are currently more configured as centrist exhibit substantial diversity in the trajectory of their policies, with autonomy in some cases reflecting relatively recent events in public administration. In other cases, countries that have historically been at the forefront of processes of autonomy and decentralization in the education area may demonstrate a reversal or weakening of some aspects of autonomy. As the policy agenda and discourse on autonomy gradually took shape globally, a whole policy and technical apparatus evolved related to forms of accountability and scrutiny of its implementation (see Chapter 3). Nonetheless, there does not appear to be a direct relationship between the autonomy levels and the types of procedure endorsed or the consequences (for example, sanctions applied to schools unable to provide a satisfactory response in the process of accountability). Similar to school autonomy, the regulatory logic of school and education systems and organizations varies in the different countries of Europe, ranging from being centered more on the state, on the market, or on the local community. Conversely, the findings indicate that the external assessment of schools, including the procedures and methods of operationalization, is very homogenous in the countries under review.

School autonomy is not the panacea for all the problems of education systems. Chapter 4 clearly illustrates the need to analyze the effect of autonomy on school results and that there are benefits to be gained from strengthening school autonomy in the management of school resources, reflected in the reduction of school year repetition rates, which are higher for the most socio-economically deprived segments of society. School autonomy also appears to have a positive impact on the

dependent variable of student performance, but not very significantly.

Likewise, the analysis of national profiles (see Chapters 6 to 10) does not reveal a clear-cut relationship between the variables. For example, in the German case, some of the Landers (federal states) where the schools are given less autonomy are precisely those with the best student performance. In the Spanish case, there has been an increase in centralization, in particular through standardized national tests for students. On the other hand, events in Denmark and Italy demonstrate that some of the processes of decentralization and reinforcement of autonomy have resulted in school organizations moving closer to market dynamics in administrative and educational terms. In Italy, a paradoxical situation has arisen in which greater delegation of responsibility to schools has been accompanied by a reduction in the decision-making capacity of their directors. Another trend that emerged visibly during the time period of the financial crisis, especially in the southern European countries, was the reduction of autonomy associated with a restriction of resources, thus limiting the possible decisions that could be taken at the level of school. Portugal was found to exhibit such an impact from financial cutbacks, which also resulted in somewhat contradictory policy guidelines.

A broader and more thorough investigation could also throw light on the variations of the types of effects. Special note should also be taken of the possible dangers of greater concentration of powers in schools, to the benefit of schools with more resources. Some authors, Hofman et al. (2008) argue that schools should be in a position to intervene, without bureaucratic obstacles, in their classrooms and different educational spaces, taking into account innovative strategies and their surrounding social contexts. Some authors, Hanushek et al. (2011), stress the weak linearity in the relationship between autonomy and school outcomes (which is also a finding mentioned in Chapter 4 of this study). These authors and the available evidence suggest that school autonomy could lead to better results for students of developed countries with high-performing systems but could be disruptive in the low performance systems of developing countries. Such assertions, which have been substantiated by testing (ibid 2011), reflect a recognition of the need for diversification of reforms or policies according to distinct national contexts. In fact, the conclusions of this study indicate, in a manner very much in line with other research (Hatzopoulos et al., 2015), that it is risky to seek to formulate universal solutions on matters of school autonomy. Here, it is preferable to design policies on autonomy that are adapted to specific scenarios, focused on the achievement of goals regarding equity, and in conformity with the diverse experiences with support for learning of the different European education systems.

The weakness in this book pertains to insufficient discussion paid to the quality of education in relation to students' academic results. Promoting autonomy is really about the quality of education that both the government, the ministry, the schools, the parents, and the students want. The authors should compare all European countries for the dimensions of the education systems, school autonomy, and student achievement. The key question pertains to the relationship between the level of autonomy and the level of education for students or the quality of education.

Another gap in the work is that the authors did not evaluate the dimensions of financial management autonomy using key indicators such as school decision-making authority regarding finances and administration, ability to keep surpluses, ability to invest money, and ability to manage buildings. Of course, the school can grow depending on the budget and the school management's ability to invest, to budget, and to manage and use the budget. Indicators for academic autonomy, such as the ability to decide on issues related to research and freedom to publish, are also not featured in the book. The quality of student growth is indispensable for conducting research, publishing research results as course work, and sharing the results with other students. Furthermore, the dimension of organizational autonomy includes indicators such as the selection of the school principal, dismissal of the school principal, inclusion of external members in school governing bodies, and school autonomy to decide on issues related to quality assurance.

This book is a comparative study of the level of autonomy in European countries in relation to OECD countries and averages, including the systems and policies related to school autonomy. But the authors evaluate school autonomy in relation to the student achievement and miss some potential indicators for the evaluation of school autonomy, such as staffing autonomy, financial management, and academic freedom. If the authors addressed more ways of assessing autonomy, the book would improve in quality and be more interesting for readers.

In the future, schools in Cambodia should apply methods and practices for autonomy because, based on the trends in education, education policy encourages schools to take ownership of decisions on the internal affairs of schools. School autonomy plays an important role in enhancing the performance of principals and teachers through providing them with more authority and responsibility to improve the quality and efficiency of education. Autonomy increases stakeholder involvement in ownership, improves recognition of the different school plans and activities, and encourages the community and stakeholders to perceive the school as their own. It also means that schools have the right to raise, manage, and use funds in accordance with actual needs. Autonomy enables schools to select qualified teachers in terms of knowledge, pedagogical skills, and teaching techniques through clear selection criteria and evaluation exams. With autonomy, staff are also facilitated through rewards or incentives, which provided for by a direct budget package for the school and community. Autonomous schools bring quality competition for other schools in the region by improving the qualifications of teachers, enabling both teachers and students to conduct relevant research activities, and modernizing curricula. For example, new generation schools have their own

decision-making processes for capacity building, creating study clubs for students to increase practical learning, and study clubs for helping slow learners. All of these points may attract students from other schools in the area because students are able to develop their abilities through such opportunities. Therefore, all schools in Cambodia should enjoy autonomy in their work and a high level of professional discretion in order to gain the trust of the community and stakeholders. In addition, autonomy would contribute to achieving the common goal of improving student achievements in accordance with the aims of the Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports and the Rectangular Strategy of the Royal Government of Cambodia. Autonomy is needed for individual self-reliance, developing professional abilities, fostering proactive behavior, and taking responsibility for what must be done to lead progress in schools.

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The authors declare that they have no competing interests. All authors have read and approved the final, published version of the manuscript.

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