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New challenges and opportunities for improving education policy in CEE countries?

More than one decade after the avalanche-like wave of changes in Eastern and Central Europe the education systems of the countries of this region are facing again new challenges. Most of them are linked with the transformation of the relationship between the education system and the broader social and economic environment which leads the reconsideration of the linkages between the education sector and other public policy areas. Administrative decentralisation and the growing desire of civil and professional groups to influence policy and institutional processes also adding to the already high level complexity of the policy environment. Most of the well known, traditional government approaches prove to be inefficient in this environment when concrete policy problems are to be treated. There is an increasing need therefore to reinvent policy and policy-making.

Doing this one has to take more and more into consideration European integration. Not much time ago one would have though that accession to the EU is not among those factors that may have strong influence on national education policies. But, due to the development of the past few years, this seems not to be the case any more. Education has become an increasingly important sector of common policy and it seems that the countries that will join the community will come under pressure to adapt their education policies to some new common paradigms. This may have an impact on all aspect of their education policies, including areas like setting of strategic goals, selecting the appropriate development instruments, choosing the way of governing their system or negotiating all this with social partners.

Although some of the countries of the region may see this as an undesirable restriction of their newly gained sovereignty, most or them probably will *use* the accession process as an instrument to solve their problems. In fact, what countries will have to do in the framework of EU accession is what they should do anyway. The accession will help them to identify earlier the already existing challenges, to elaborate the appropriate answers and to construct efficient instruments for implementing their policies. But what they will be asked to do by the community is what they should do by themselves.

Key problems of CEE education systems and strategic answers

In a recent publication the human development sector specialists of the World Bank presented an overall analysis of the major challenges to education systems in transition economies. One might be surprised by the similarity of the problems each transition country has to cope with, although part of the explanation is in the common past, which meant, for example, co-ordinated policies within the COMECON framework. The World Bank study identified five major problem areas and suggested policy responses for all of them. All such lists are necessarily incomplete.[1] But this certainly is a good for starting point for reflection on education policies in CEE countries in the first decade of the new century.

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[1] More attention could be paid, for instance, to classroom level processes, the effectiveness of learning and teaching or the specific needs of the teaching profession.

Problem areas and development goals
Problem areas and development goals in European and Central Asian countries
- Realigning Education Systems With Market Economies and Open Societies - Combating Poverty by Increasing Educational Fairness - Financing for Sustainability, Quality, and Fairness - Using Resources More Efficiently - Reinventing Governance, Management, and Accountability
Source: *The World Bank, 2001*

The first problem area – realignment of education with the requirements of market economy and pluralistic democracy – is undoubtedly not only the greatest, but also the most complex one that CEE education systems still are facing. Adapting education to today's market economy requires a double effort. Not only the task of shifting from command economy mentalities, attitudes and competencies to those needed in an economy based on market capitalism has to be achieved, but, at the same time, also the job of adapting to the emerging new global or knowledge economy has to be done. Understanding what knowledge economy or globalisation means and elaborating specific answers to the challenges raised by them is a serious task even for the counties of the developed world. This is particularly difficult for CEE countries which are still struggling with the primary transition process. But the same is true as far as society and democracy are concerned. The task is not only push forward society from a totalitarian past to a pluralist, democratic future, but also there is a need to understand the current global transformation of democratic polities and systems of governance. Today's democracy and governance is not the same as twenty years ago. What CEE counties have to do is not to go back to XIX century models or just to follow the post war paradigms of market economy and democratic polity but to join the post-modern models of the XXI. century. Looking at, for example, what OECD says about the school of the XXI century (*OECD, 2001a*) one may sees scenarios that show emerging systemic arrangements that have not much common with what we call today school or school system.

The emergence of the new global knowledge economy and information society put education and training into the foreground of economic development, but this is not yet reflected in what happens in the classrooms of CEE countries (see for example *Duthilleul, 2001*). The results of the recent OECD PISA survey have shown clearly that some of those CEE countries that were proud of their pupils winning student Olympiads present poor result when (a) not only the best but all pupils of an age group are taken into account and (b) instead of giving back memorised factual knowledge pupils have to solve tasks simulating real life situations (*OECD, 2001b*). What CEE countries will have to learn is that reforming teaching and learning is not the same as reforming national teaching plans, that is producing new documents. What has to be changed is the *daily professional behaviour* of teachers which is a much more difficult task than to produce new national curricula or textbooks.

The *second* problem area the World Bank specialists pointed to is poverty and inequalities. Transformation in all CEE countries has everywhere been accompanied by increasing poverty and growing inequalities. The causes of this are mainly but not entirely outside education, and education is one of those fields where action can and has to be done. Pauperisation seriously hit education in several countries, with not only increasing number of children coming from families without adequate income but also with masses of teachers witnessing the shrinking of the value of their salaries. Although child poverty and youth unemployment severely hit most countries of the region only few of them started elaborating integrated policies in this area (*UNICEF, 2000*). After several years of – sometimes hypocrite - strain for educational

equality which also meant forced uniformity this policy goal has rather been neglected in a number of CEE countries. But this is again a problem area where there is no way back to the solutions of the past, for instance unifying services and forcing equal treatments. Equity policies today are based on the application of a variety of context-related solutions, individualisation and specific targeted assistance. This requires renewed institutional mechanism, new administrative styles and the re-invention of the professional background of equity policies. Actions targeted to specific groups hitherto thought to be non-existent, like immigrants or backward ethnic minorities, have, for instance, to be conceived.

The *third* problem area deserving strong policy attention is related to financing. Following the political transformation, the educational systems of CEE countries – similarly to other public sectors – were shaken by two important shocks. On the one hand, due to the shrinking of economic outputs, resources were withdrawn from the system or they were inflated. On the other, the way of distributing them was also radically transformed by overall public financing reforms, privatisation and increasing civil involvement. To put it simply: money was not only less than before but it also came from other and more diversified sources. Achieving general public policy goals, like quality or equity in this new financing context is a much more difficult policy task than it used to be in the old one channel direct command system. The adaptation of the education sector to this new reality of financing is far from being completed in most education systems. It is very difficult, for instance, for new autonomous local actors to accept that the responsibility for the deficit they produce is not taken any more by the central government but they must cover it by issuing new taxes or taking a loan at the financial market (*Halász, 2002*). The safe operation of the education system depends more and more on factors that are beyond the direct control of central national authorities. At the same time they have learn how to use financing as a new regulation tool which, in many cases, replaces other (for example legal) regulation tools.

The *fourth* problem area (efficiency) deserves perhaps the strongest attention for two reasons. One the one hand because in most of the cases it is much less known or recognised as a specific education policy problem area than the others. On the other, because elaborating and applying appropriate policy solutions for this problem are not only particularly difficult but also bearing high political risks. The dramatic efficiency problems of the education systems of some CEE countries (those who have such data) can be the best illustrated by the fact that even if the proportion of their GDP spent on education is similar to other countries, what their teachers earn, in terms of the proportion of their per capita GDP, is half of what teachers in other countries earn. For different reasons (*see the box*) the manpower needs of these systems is higher than that of other systems, therefore the same DDP share allows them to employing only cheap labour force (that is they are forced to keep teachers salaries down).

Solving macro level efficiency problems is one of the most delicate tasks educational policy makers can face. First, new knowledge has to be generated, that is the different and specific causes of inefficiency have to be understood. This requires applied research based on the analysis of international comparative data in educational financing. Second, they have to elaborate a "marketable" policy of efficiency reform. Doing this, they have to bear in mind that efficiency reforms are not only unpopular – causing sometimes the fall of government – but they are often also destructive (especially if they are implemented as last minute crisis interventions not by educational but financial ministers).

Efficiency problems of transition countries

"In general, ECA education systems use more resources than they need to achieve their objectives. These inefficiencies stem from the incentives of the pre-transition period,

when planners, not market forces, determined wages, subsidies, and prices. There were no mechanisms for determining the total costs of anything and therefore no incentives to contain costs. Budgeting norms for different levels of education, in many instances adopted in the 1930s, were never tested for cost-effectiveness. Space norms resulted in wasted space—for example, large lobbies and highly specialised laboratories and workshops that were, and remain, under-utilised. Staffing norms encouraged inefficiencies. For example, resources were allocated by classroom. Each 'class' got a teacher and teaching aides. These budgeting rules encouraged schools to minimise class size in order to maximise the number of teachers and teaching aides. The regional tradition of using, after grade 4, subject-specific teachers who had not been cross-trained in cognate, or 'adjacent ', fields interacted with smaller schools to create diseconomies of scale. Most teachers were certified to teach a single, narrowly defined subject. For example, a physics teacher would not have been cross-trained to teach chemistry. As a result, except in the largest schools, teachers might not teach more than two or three hours per day. Methods of capital budgeting did not allow, let alone force, trade-offs between investment and operational costs. The results were designs that minimised construction costs by increasing operating costs, especially for heating, lighting, and routine maintenance."

Source: The World Bank, 2001

The *fifth* problem is related with governance and management. In most CEE countries decentralisation has become one of the key policy goals in education. Responsibility for education has been redistributed, which does not necessarily mean simple downward vertical devolution of power. In fact, a new multilevel system of educational governance is being emerged with new actors entering the game. The increasing role of parents, professional and civil groups and economic players adds a horizontal dimension to the process of power devolution. Ministries of education now have to learn how to govern the system in this new, complex environment, they have to invent, for instance, new steering tools. They also have to understand that the fact that the diminution of their direct administrative responsibilities does not mean that they have less political responsibilities. Decentralisation requires more and not less government activity. Assuring the fulfilment of basic public policy goals like quality, equity and efficiency becomes more complicated and it requires more sophisticated government approaches (we shall come back to this them later).

Different CEE countries – as shown, for instance, in a recent LGI book on the education sector (*Davey, 2002*) – are unequally prepared to face this challenge. Not all of them have yet realised, the importance of new steering instruments like financial incentives, the initiation of "epidemic" pilot projects, strategic communication or the setting formal procedures for local problem management instead of trying to solve problems from the centre. All this requires new knowledge bases with such components as data gained from targeted surveys, national and comparative international indicators and analysis of dynamic processes. It also demands a new management culture, not only at central but also at local and institutional level. Similarly to more developed countries (*OECD, 2001c*) the development of management through training and many other ways becomes a strategic goal in itself.

One of the messages this article tries to convey is that EU accession may become one of those factors which may provide substantial help in facing all these challenges. One has to bear in mind, however, that the situation of the CEE countries varies significantly from this respect. Those countries, which are already very close to accession can already profit directly from their gradual involvement in EU programs and new policy co-ordination mechanisms. Those, for whom EU accession is to be thought of in longer perspective or those who are

outside the EU integration area must limit themselves to the observation and analysis of the integration processes. While this latter group can rely on international co-operation only in other frameworks – for instance through participating in World Bank led reform programs – it is advisable also for them to follow closely recent EU policies in the education sector.

New EU mechanisms for education policy co-ordination

Although academic circles still may discuss whether education is in the scope of the competencies of the European Union or whether there is anything to be called a common education policy, an even superfluous analysis can reveal not only a coherent community paradigm of education policy but also the emergence of efficient new instruments to implement this policy. The turning point in the development of the educational role of the community was the Lisbon Summit of March 2000 when European heads of states decided to extend the policy co-ordination mechanisms already used in the economic and labour area to the social sector, including education. Since the middle of the nineties national labour policies have gradually come under community control. This process was given a boost by the Amsterdam amendment of the Treaty on the European Union in 1998 which created the legal basis for co-ordinating national employment policies. This would not be much relevant for education if the content of employment policy had not been substantially transformed during the nineties. As opposed to the past, what is now in the focus of employment policy is less social solidarity and distribution of unemployment benefits, but rather fostering the adaptability of the labour force through, among others, training. Lifelong learning has become the most important tool for fighting unemployment and enhancing economic competitiveness. As a result, employment policies are now in great proportion policies of education and training.

Until the end of the last decade most of the development of community education policies occurred under other policy headings other than education. But in 2002 in Lisbon the community organs received from the heads of states a strong and clear mandate to elaborate a new common policy framework for education and to start using a new policy co-ordination instruments called "*open method of co-ordination*" (*Hodson and Maher, 2001, Mosher and Trubek, 2001; de la Porte, 2002*). As the result of this process a number of key documents have been produced which are now forming the base of harmonising education and training policies (*European Commission, 2000; 2001; Council of the European Union, 2002*). In the summer of 2002 the education ministers of the associated countries were invited to the meeting EU education ministers in Bratislava to discuss their involvement into this process, and – as the text of the final communiqué shows – this was accepted.[2]

Community education policy-shaping and co-ordination is still hardly beyond the level of inception. Although the process can already be considered as rather advanced in other sectors that have a strong and direct influence on the education sector (employment policy, territorial development and structural policy or the policy against poverty and social exclusion) the

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[2] "Following the request of the European Council, arrangements for the effective participation of Candidate Countries in the process concerning the future objectives of education and training systems were agreed by the Commission and the Council. The Bratislava Conference aimed to promote this participation. Three strategic objectives for the education and training systems have been fixed (improved quality, facilitation of universal access and opening-up the systems to the
wider world) entailing thirteen associated objectives covering important issues such as basic skills, foreign languages, ICT in education, mobility, teacher training, attractiveness of learning, active citizenship" (Final Communiqué of the VI Conference of European Ministers of Education "Education in the New Millenium" Bratislava, Slovak Republic 16-18 June 2002 - http://www.unesco.org/education/efa/conferences/bratislavia_communique.pdf)

sector specific mechanisms, controlled by ministers of education and negotiated between traditional educational actors are still in the making.

In the perspective of this article – current education policy challenges and possible policy answers in CEE countries – there are two key elements that deserve particular attention in this process. The first is the *actual content* of EU education policy. This is important, because it shows not only what are seen now in the EU as key education policy questions but also what CEE countries will have to consider when adapting their national policies to the current global and regional challenges. Since the shaping of community policies follows a typical "bottom-up" model, that is they emerge as a synthesis of already existing national approaches, they show as much real grass-root challenges as intentions emanating from the supranational level. This is therefore a good orientation point for all countries (not only for those who are members of the community or close to accession). The other element is *the way* policy is formed and implemented. This is important because it gives a good picture of what is meant by new methods of governance which are highly relevant not only in the European context but also at national level in systems characterised by shared responsibility and multilevel responsibility structures. We shall treat these two elements in the following two sections.

EU supported answers to current education policy challenges

The sector specific policy documents which form the basis for future policy co-ordination in education specify three major groups of strategic goals: (1) a *quality/efficiency goal* ("increasing the quality and effectiveness of education and training systems"), (2) *an equity goal* ("facilitating the access of all to education and training") and (3) *a governance and management goal* ("opening up education and training systems to the wider world") (*Council of the European Union, 2002*). It is clear, that this is in harmony with what was presented above as CEE specific education policy problem areas.

Quality improvement has become the policy goal number one in many countries in both the CEE region and the wider European area. What might be new or elucidatory for some policy makers in CEE countries is the changing meaning of quality (see for example *van Bruggen, 2001*). For many decades this term was synonymous with academic excellence to be measured by, for instance, the proportion of pupils entering prestigious universities or winning international academic competitions. Now it is apparently gaining a new sense. Quality education means, before all, the successful appropriation of key competencies needed in work and daily life, the high retention capacity of schools, the assuring of motivation of all for learning or the capacity to meet the needs of an increasingly diversified clientele. Today our idea of a good school is not the same it used to be. A school which is capable to preserve the motivation of pupils with learning difficulties and to offer them better job perspectives may be seen being of better quality that another one which prepares a high proportion of students for university entrance. If the successful appropriation of key competencies is an important sign of quality education, there is a need to define these competencies and also to find successful ways for their development in students. The definition and selection of key competencies to be developed by today's schools is one of the most challenging activities that education policies have to support. This is a work that has already produced valuable international outcomes (see the *box*) which have to be translated to the national context in all CEE countries.

Key competencies

Communication skills in the sense of mastering the language should be seen as an integral component of almost any complex demand-oriented competence. Communications skills are basic skills that include reading, writing, speaking and listening.

Values and value orientations can be considered as a general foundation or component of competence. In fact, value orientation is a fundamental component of action and behavior.

Motivation is crucial component for meeting any goal or demand, and therefore must be considered as a constituent part of any demand-oriented competency and not as a particular competence in itself.

Critical thinking and other cognitive components concern the internal mental structure implied by demand-oriented competencies.

Important domain-specific competencies relevant to particular social issues or particular jobs are in some case included along with general/transversal/overarching competencies. From a conceptual viewpoint a distinction may be useful, although practically a distinction may be irrelevant.

Personal qualities such as honesty, integrity, responsibility, loyalty that contribute to effective action can be viewed as components of competence.

Personal attributes such as a strong positive self-concept that allows the individual to act confidently may be more usefully viewed as an outcome of the acquisition of a reasonable level of other competencies – such as the ability to successfully operate in groups

Source: *Rychen and Salganik, 2002*

Defining and selecting relevant key competencies and setting them as references for quality is much easier than changing real teaching and learning practice so that these competencies are effectively developed in every student. This is partly a matter of professional development of teachers, which is one of the concrete common objectives of education policy as the EU defined them. This requires the identification of professional skills that teachers must possess, the provision of conditions, which support them in their acquisition through initial and in-service training, and through other means and the securing of the entry to the teaching profession of highly qualified and motivated candidates. Promoting "innovative pedagogies" is a major explicit goal of the European policy aiming at creating a "common European area of lifelong learning" supported by both the community educational and social/labour administrations. There are several ways to achieve this goal; some of them (like, for instance, work-based learning, project-oriented learning and learning organised as 'study circles, the exchange of experience between schools and voluntary organisations or companies) are explicitly mentioned in the relevant European strategic documents (*European Commission, 2001*).

Europe is now developing new *forms and means* for quality assurance in school education that are to be studied and adopted by CEE countries, as well (*The European Parliament..., 2001*). These promote transparent quality evaluation systems, which secure both quality education and social inclusion through a "balanced framework of school self-evaluation and external evaluations" with developmental goals and "not restricted to purely administrative checks". They encourage the involvement of school stakeholders (teachers, pupils, management, parents and experts) in the process of external and self-evaluation in order to "promote shared responsibility for improvement". They support "schools learning from one another nationally and on a European scale". An finally they include the development of tools such as indicators and benchmarks, the use of the results of international surveys and – according to the specific needs of different countries – also supports "the publication of results of school evaluation for the larger public". Europe expects now all

countries to have a distinct national program for evaluation and quality assurance, as part of their national education policy strategy.

As we have already refer to it, *equity* is also a policy goal that gain a new meaning. This should not lead any more to equalisation or forced uniformity. On the contrary, promoting flexible learning paths for all is a key element in the new European policy paradigm. This requires flexibility in the planning of curricular programs and qualifications, the opening of schools for those who had left it without appropriate competencies and qualifications and who are willing to come back for a second chance option and the recognition of competencies acquired in practical life, work or other non formal learning settings. A major challenge for all countries, and particularly for those in the previous soviet bloc is to find a new balance between the equity goal and the need for further diversification of services.

Quality and equity, as we saw, are no more policy goals that mutually extinguish each other. On the contrary, at least in the current European policy thinking, these are goals having a mutually reinforcing character. One of the key elements of the current European equity policy, which is to be adopted by CEE countries as well, is the transformation of the teaching-learning process so that all pupils have sufficient motivation to learn. In the new European lifelong paradigm, which is being applied across Europe through co-ordinated policies pupils have to leave formal education with the desire and capacity to learn. A school system that turns a great proportion of pupils against learning and misses to develop in them the desire for self-development is against not only quality but also equity. This requires, among other, the individualisation of learning through specific methods adapted to the particular needs of individuals or through individual learning contracts.

An outstanding element of European equity policies in education is the effort to link social, labour and educational actions, to open this field to social actors outside the education sector and to allow the development of a strong local dimension in this area. Education in itself cannot meet all social expectations that are directed towards it. Without a strong co-operation between the social, labour and educational fields at both locally and nationally the equity goal cannot be reached. In many countries, including the CEE region, there is a strong tradition of sectorial isolation and co-operative capacities are often lacking. Since many of those concrete policy actions that serve the fulfilment of the equity goal appear not in education but in employment and social inclusion (or poverty) policies, the lack of co-ordination between these areas may lead to serious policy ineffectiveness. Education policy makers have to look therefore also to what policy makers do in other areas at national, local and European level. National social or employment policy strategies and action plans, strongly influenced by community guidelines, may contain whole chapters on education that must be known by those who are elaborating national education strategies.

This problem leads directly to the third set of common European education policy goals: the *openness* of education. This goal has several meanings, all of them highly significant. First, this means – in conformity with what has been said above – the openness of the education sector to other public policy areas. Second, it means openness towards social and economic life, towards the civil society and the business community. Third, it means openness towards other countries and the international community. Education policy makers cannot act any more in a closed, isolated world, they have to accept that the walls of the traditionally closed realm of education have fallen. This is particularly challenging for some countries of the CEE region where the return to democracy has often signified the emancipation of teaching and the teaching profession from under external political control or "lay intrusions", and professional autonomy has often became a synonym of academic isolation.

Openness is a challenge both for mentalities and attitudes and for management and governance structures and procedures. This latter has to be stressed particularly in this LGI publication since it has direct implications for the development of local governance or for the shaping of relations between the national and the local level. Managing quality/efficiency, equity and openness requires new management and governance approaches. Some of them have already been created elsewhere and can be learnt through co-operation, but some of them are still to be invented by the countries facing the challenges described above.

Solving problems through changing governance

One of the ultimate goals of policy is solving problems. Good sectorial policies are those that show high level capacity of problem solving. Many would say, that this is not true since the real mission of policy is reaching goals, like those listed in the previous section. Looking at policy-making as problem solving is not in contradiction with this view. When we have to find the way how to achieve quality or equity or to answer why these are not reached in certain circumstances we are in a typical problem solving situation. Conceiving policy as problem solving is just a more pragmatic approach.

When educational problems arise (like misfits between the outputs of the education system and the needs of society or economy, the use of obsolete teaching methods or high proportions drop outs) the solution is often looked for in redefining administrative reallocating responsibilities or reallocating them. That is, a new task (like educational planning, in-service training of teachers or providing second chance education) is assigned to some actors or institutions, or the already existing responsibilities for these tasks is redistributed among them. In the current education systems characterised more and more by openness and by multilevel responsibility-sharing this approach seems not to work any more. A much more sophisticated method is needed. This is what is offered, for instance, by the method of *institutional analysis* which has already been applied to solve education policy problems and to design efficient policies in a number of Central and Eastern European countries.

Institutional analysis starts with a global problem analysis. Policy makers cannot content themselves with pointing to some urgent specific problems which appear on their agenda under the pressures of parliamentary or electoral debates. They have to make a systematic analysis using global analytical frameworks, like what is presented in a recent World Bank publication on educational decentralisation based on six CEE country case studies (see *Table 1*)[3] This analytical framework distinguishes 7 key functions, but – according to the specific national contexts – functions can be regrouped otherwise. The tasks of the analyser using this framework starts with the identification of all the actors (e.g. national authorities, regional pedagogical support institutions, local school boards, parent associations etc.) that may have a role in creating or solving the problems related to the given functions.

Table 1
Functions and levels in school education

	Central	Regional	Local	School	External
1. Personnel (teachers, directors, nonteachers)					
1.1 Salaries					
1.2 Career path (recruitment, promotion, transfer, and so forth)					
1.3 Time and task management					

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[3] The case studies are on Albania, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland and Romania.

1.4 Training (preservice, in-service)
1.5 Evaluation
2. Curriculum
2.1 Content and standards
2.2 Development
3. Textbooks, equipment, instructional materials
3.1 Criteria and standards
3.2 Production
3.3 Procurement/distribution
4. School infrastructure
4.1 Planning (establishing, abolishing, networking)
4.2 Construction
4.3 Maintenance
5. Student enrollment
5.1 Regulations
5.2 Selection criteria (student, school)
6. Quality control
6.1 Student assessment and monitoring
6.2 School assessment and monitoring
7. Financial administration and control

Source: *Fiszbein, 2000*

The real analysis starts after the actors are identified and this matrix is completed. Three consecutive questions have to be raised then for all the identified actors:[4]

(1) Do they have a formal or informal responsibility for the given problem area, or should they have it?

(2) If they have the responsibility, do they have the capacity, the competency or the authority to use this responsibility?

(3) If they have both the responsibility and the capacity, are they motivated or accountable for action?

Different policy responses are to be given for all the three cases. If the problem is bad assignment of responsibilities, they just have to be shifted from one actor to another (e.g. from local school boards to regional authorities). It may happen that logically the responsibilities are appropriately allocated but the responsible actors do not have the capacity, the competency or the authority to use them (e.g. they lack resources or knowledge). In this case the right policy action in competency development or resource allocation. Finally, it may happen that the responsibility is adequately allocated, the responsible actors have the right capacities, competencies or authority but no action happens. In this case there might by a problem with motivation, incentives or accountability. The correct policy action is then the use of financial or other (e.g. political, cultural, symbolic) incentives or the strengthening of evaluation and control.

It is clear, at the first glance, that this is an extremely complex game and the role of the policy maker playing it resembles to that of the conductor of a big symphonic orchestra having to control the interplay of many musical instruments. But this is, in fact, what we call *governance*. As it is defined, for instance, by *Eising and Kohler-Koch* (1999) governance is "structured ways and means in which the divergent preferences of interdependent actors are translated into policy choices 'to allocate values', so that the plurality of interests is transformed into action and the compliance of actors is achieved." This is different form what

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[4] The accent is on the second and the third question. All the more so that these are those that are the most often neglected when governance responses are searched for policy problems.

we – especially in the CEE countries – were used to in our traditions of hierarchical, command line systems of government.

This type of governance and policy making (including all of its three key elements, that is agenda setting, implementation and evaluation) requires much of symbolic interaction such as attentive communication, mutual learning and cognitive adaptation. Learning is a key term in this "new governance". Learning is needed for instance when real competencies are to be coupled with already existing formal responsibilities, when actors have to judge the potential impact of announced incentives on them or when institutional behaviour is to be corrected by evaluation results. It is from this point of view that the new method of European policy co-ordination gain a particular relevance for us. In fact, the conditions that have shaped the new forms EU governance, especially the new open method of co-ordination (OMC) – used now in the social, labour and education areas – have, in fact, much structural resemblance with the conditions in which national governments find themselves today when they have to govern systems increasingly characterised by multilevel responsibility-sharing and by limited possibilities for direct interventions. The EU initiative to co-ordinate national education policies provides therefore a valuable learning opportunity also for national policy makers. Although national governments have much more instruments in their hands than the EU (they can make laws or raise taxes, for instance) much of what the EU is doing can and should be done also by them. Taking part in the EU policy co-ordination process or just following and analysing it may seriously help national policy makers to manage their own policy problems.

The OMC – as defined in the conclusions of the meeting of heads of states in Lisbon – consist of four key elements (see the *box*): (1) issuing guidelines and models, (2) forcing local actors to construct their own action plans according to these, (3) evaluating these action plans and also the real behaviour of the local actors using objective measurements instruments and (3) giving them authoritative feedback and putting them under mutual control. OMC is strongly supported by the creation of European *networks* that bring together such interested partners as state functionaries, policy planners, evaluation experts and statisticians, economic actors or the representatives of the civil society.

Implementing a new open method of co-ordination

"37. Implementation of the strategic goal will be facilitated by applying a new open method of co-ordination as the means of spreading best practice and achieving greater convergence towards the main EU goals. This method, which is designed to help Member States to progressively develop their own policies, involves:

"- fixing guidelines for the Union combined with specific timetables for achieving the goals which they set in the short, medium and long terms;

- establishing, where appropriate, quantitative and qualitative indicators and benchmarks against the best in the world and tailored to the needs of different Member States and sectors as a means of comparing best practice;

- translating these European guidelines into national and regional policies by setting specific targets and adopting measures, taking into account national and regional differences;

- periodic monitoring, evaluation and peer review organised as mutual learning processes."

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Source: European Council, 2000)

As it has already been referred to, in some sectors (e.g. employment and poverty policy) this method is already used successfully. In the education sector its implementation has just started. The common guidelines (with concrete objectives and quantitative indicators to measure the achievement of the different countries) have bee adopted, some elements of

country evaluation and peer monitoring are already working but, for instance, national action plans are still submitted only partially, as specific chapters of national action plans for employment and poverty policy.

The governance and policy-making model represented by the OMC may be seen as the result of a development determined by the fact that the EU, as opposed to national states, does not possess direct command line type political instruments. It was therefore forced to invent this type a "soft governance". But – as already stressed – following decentralisation reforms national governments find themselves from many respects in a similar situation. A national minister of education, who has to influence the behaviour of schools led by principals appointed autonomous local bodies and having budgets controlled by local governments is also forced to invent new methods. A national educational ministry whose inspectors are, in many countries, gradually transformed from command giving officers into professional evaluation and measurement experts cannot rely any more on traditional ways of administering the system. If the complexity of the system reaches a certain level – sometimes as the simple consequence of quantitative expansion – while the information needed *a priory* for policy decisions are rarely present, experimentation and learning unavoidably becomes part of system governance (*Sabel, 2001*). I the appropriate local actions vary significantly according to local circumstances national authorities cannot determine in detail any more what local actors have to do. Instead of this, as the political responsibility remains with them, they resort to "*procedural regulation*", that is they prescribe such general procedures and norms for local actors that force these latter to elaborate the right measures by themselves (*Dunsire and Hood, 2001*). OMC itself can be considered, in fact, as one form of such procedural regulation.

Conclusion

As the result of the transformation of their education system, and also of their system of governance European and particularly Central European Countries have to elaborate and apply new forms and approaches of policy making. Policy makers have to take as a starting point the consideration of such basis public policy goals as quality, efficiency or equity. While setting agendas, implementing their policies and evaluating the outcomes of this latter they also have to use new methods that are in harmony with the new characteristics of educational systems, that is growing autonomy of local actors, teacher professionalism, multilevel responsibility-sharing, high level of complexity and rapid changes. Most of these methods have strong learning and communication dimensions. Enhancing mutual learning through new communication frameworks like networks or professional communities exercising peer control, the development and the use of evaluation instruments and their use for feed backs or the acceptance of administrative experimentation based on trial and error or learning by doing mechanisms are central part of these methods. European co-operation, especially in the framework of the new community level policy co-ordination process will provide an excellent opportunity for CEE policy makers for learning and inventing the new methods the need.

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Vocabulary

Institutional analysis
> A way of elaborating responses to policy problems through a global analysis of institutions and their dynamic (functions, levels, actors and the behaviour of actors).

Governance
> The activity to translate divergent preferences of social actors into policy and to transform this into action, assuring the compliance of the interested actors (see also definition in the text). It is this dynamic which makes governance different from government.

Multilevel governance
> Governance based on the sharing of responsibility between actors at different levels (central, regional, local, institutional). It may also include horizontal responsibility-sharing (with, for instance, social partners).

Open method of co-ordination
> A new method to co-ordinate policies in the social area (employment, social policy and education) in the European Union defined by the 2002 Lisbon European Council (see also definition in the text).

Policy instruments (policy tools)
> The instruments that can be used for the implementation of policies such as legal regulation, institution building, financial incentives capacity building or symbolic pressure.

Procedural regulation
> Prescribe general procedures and norms for local actors which force them to elaborate by themselves the right measures instead of regulating their behaviour directly from the centre.

Public policy goals
> General goals that all public policies have to achieve. Quality, efficiency and equity are the most frequently quoted, but this list can be completed by others, like variety, transparency, accountability, adaptability or stability.

Sectorial policies
> Policies for a given area of social life and corresponding administrative branch (like trade, environment protection, health, education or employment). Real life problems (e.g. environment protection, poverty or unemployment) are overarching different sectors therefore require *inter-sectorial* approaches

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