

**The future of the welfare state.  
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**Welfare-oriented Education Policy  
Wind of Change in the Relationship of Education  
and Social Policy in Germany?**

**A Case Study of North Rhine-Westphalia**

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Paper presented at the 7th ESPAnet conference 2009

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# **Welfare-oriented Education Policy – Wind of Change in the Relationship of Education and Social Policy in Germany?**

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### **1. Field of research**

When discussing aims and challenges of the welfare state in Germany, the topic of education is increasingly becoming part of the socio-political agenda. Principles like lifelong learning, employability and self-responsibility determine the debates over the organization of a sustainable welfare system.

Since good educational opportunities are a better precondition to participate in society, the relationship between education policy<sup>1</sup> and social policy<sup>2</sup> receives more attention both from politicians as well as from political scientists (Allmendinger 2005; Opielka 2005; Esping-Andersen 2004): On the one hand better educational opportunities offer protection against social exclusion and thereby from a higher risk of poverty. On the other hand they strengthen peoples capabilities and with it their employability in Germany: *“Education and skills offer the best odds for people to move on to better jobs”* (Esping-Andersen 1996: 26).

In spite of these positive effects, critics object that education policy is not the cure-all for the welfare state. Old and new inequalities through education have to be considered, too. For example, the social background still influences educational opportunities. Another challenge is the increased competition for better jobs after finishing one’s educational career (results of PISA and OECD-studies).

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<sup>1</sup> In this research project education policy only refers to the school sector.

<sup>2</sup> In German, terms concerning the welfare state differ. The research project adopts the terms of welfare state and social state which are used by Kaufmann. He uses the term welfare state as clasification. Meanwhile, he defines the social state as a special German development (Kaufmann 1989: Christentum und Wohlfahrtsstaat: 93). But, since in English, it is common to talk about the welfare state, in this paper I will only use this term.

With regard to these developments my research project focuses on the following research question: *Is there a change in the relationship between German education and social policy?<sup>3</sup> If yes, what characterises this change?*

To answer this question it has to be considered that the responsibilities of these two policy fields lie on two different institutional levels: social policy is dealt with on a national level, whereas education policy is the responsibility of the federal states.

Due to this, the second question of my research project is as follows: *Do the increasing cross-sectional policies in the educational and social policy sector liberalise the formal separation of responsibilities in these two policy fields?*

In regard to the research concept, in a first step, indicators have been evaluated that characterise the relationship between education and social policy in Germany. Therefore, social and educational reports of the Federal Government as well as the current research in this field have been analysed and evaluated (sample period: 2000 - 2008). The explored indicators have been categorised into three groups: 1. changed understanding of the welfare state: indicators are, e.g., the activating welfare state, demand and support of participation and self-responsibility or education as a new way of social security (preservation and purchasing of status in society). 2. Structural change in society: indicators are, e.g., pluralisation of family and other social structures, the demographic change, the development of a knowledge society and with it a different understanding of education as human capital, education as an instrument to strengthen social integration as well as participation and individual life opportunities. 3. Europeanization and globalisation process: relevant indicators are the Lisbon Strategy, international agreements or international education research studies.

These findings are the basis for the following investigation, a case study of the education policy in four German federal states (Bavaria, Hamburg, North Rhine-Westphalia, Saxony-Anhalt). Using the method of an archival data analysis, I examined to what degree the education policy agenda of the federal states corresponds to the social policy aims and reform concepts of the German federal

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<sup>3</sup> The assumption about this change is based on the following understanding of the role of the welfare state and education in Germany: The German welfare state focuses on collective coverage against social risks of market dependency, and it helps socially disadvantaged members of society (Pofert 2004: 5). Education is traditionally an individual civil right that helps to enhance status in society (Dahrendorff 1965; Klemm 2006: 25f.; Lohmann 2002).

government, or if the interests of the two state levels diverge. Therefore, I include the elaborated indicators in the analysis. I evaluate to what degree they are applicable or if they need further specification.

## **2. Central issue of the paper**

In this paper I present part of my research project, focussing on the case study of NRW. To specify the investigation subject I only consider two central reforms of the current education policy in North Rhine-Westphalia (NRW) – the reform of the main-school<sup>4</sup> and the draft of “autonomous schools in North Rhine-Westphalia”. To answer the two central questions mentioned above, the paper focuses on the following research interests:

1. What educational and socio-political concepts characterise the two reforms, the main-school and the autonomous school in NRW?
2. Evaluation of the reform aims with regard to non-intentional developments.
3. Analysis of the institutional framework that embeds the named measures.

### **2.1. Educational and social-political concepts – problem perception and objectives of the education policy in NRW**

The NRW government of CDU and FDP<sup>5</sup> has declared education policy as one of the main subjects of its coalition agreement. In his government policy statement in 2005, Jürgen Rüttgers (leader of the federal state NRW) describes education as the “new social question of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that is a key element of social regulatory policy”. He focuses explicitly on social deficits in society that are also caused by insufficient educational opportunities. These are, for example, alarming developments of increasing poverty risks, high unemployment rates or an increasing number of people that depend on basic social benefits. These trends lead to the theses that in the long run, the current welfare system won't be able to ensure social security in society (government policy statement 2005). This assumption is primarily justified by changed socio-economic conditions, such as challenges due to demographic changes (declining birth-rate, aging society) or the development from an industrial

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<sup>4</sup> The main-school is a German type of school which is part of the secondary school and finishes with a first school-leaving certificate that qualifies for employment.

<sup>5</sup> CDU: Party of the Christian Democratic Union (conservatives), FDP: Free Democratic Party (liberals).

society to a society based on services that implicate a change in demand on the labour market. Other relevant factors are diversified life styles and family structures, as well as an increasing mixed and multicultural society.

In this regard, current education policy reforms of the North Rhine-Westphalian government aim to improve social participation, improve chances on the labour market and the integration of people with a migration background into society: “Our society must not diverge into educated and uneducated, into excluded and included people.” (government policy statement 2005: 20, 33). Thus, education is primarily understood as a basic principle to participate and to survive in society and with it as a further complement to the traditional German social security system. Therefore, education policy is guided by the education and social principles of equal opportunities and capabilities: On the one hand, the education system has to confront socio-political problems and challenges such as unequal access, education poverty or discrimination of social risk-groups – especially people with a migration background. On the other hand, economic goals such as employability, international competitiveness and the creation of human capital resources for the labour market have to be considered, too.

This education policy concept is mainly based on the conclusions and recommendations of social and educational reports<sup>6</sup> in NRW. These, as well as education studies such as PISA show that in Germany, and especially in NRW, a negative correlation between education poverty and an above average social poverty can still be observed (PISA 2006, Bildungsmonitor 2008). Furthermore, this bias converges to the main objectives on national level. Thus, the ambition of a better calibration of educational, social and economic aims can be understood as an indicator of the societal interest of a sustainable welfare state.

Now, the question is to what extent the described social principles are incorporated in such educational-political measures that contribute to an improvement of social integration and participation. The fact that policies still fail to compensate social deficits in the education system, confirms the constriction that education is not the magic recipe to safeguard the welfare state. In the following, the indicated difference

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<sup>6</sup> The increasing number of education and social reports implies an increasing connection between politics and scientific research. An explicit separation of these two areas is difficult, since academics bring in their knowledge and findings into the development of new reforms. Thus, the political and scientific analysis of education-political aspects is not disconnected. The consequences of this evidence are discussed more in detail in the research project but not in this paper.

between the objectives and reality is to be analysed, focussing on the current education policy in NRW. Inasmuch as it is possible, the main interest refers to the non-intended consequences of these measures with regard to the relationship of education and social policy.

## **2.2. The main-school reform – Aims and non-intentional developments**

Both reforms are not new but they are based on existing structures or other pilot projects in the education system of NRW.<sup>7</sup> Thus, with regard to the main-school reform it is difficult to talk about a change in the bias of education policy, since the concept rather holds fast to the traditional German education system. Supporters of this concept argue that by strengthening this type of school, the high number of pupils without a school-leaving certificate could be reduced. Furthermore, qualified secondary certificates should improve the employment opportunities of the graduates. By this, the main-school contributes to reduce the negative correlation between educational and social poverty – which is still very high in NRW. Additionally, it strengthens the capabilities and competitiveness of the federal state. These assumptions form the theoretical configuration of the reform – but what about the real consequences?

Positively, it can be observed that the number of pupils without a school-leaving certificate in NRW could be reduced during the last years. More pupils graduated, yet especially with regard to higher school certificates (Bildungsreport 2008: 4).

But can this development be understood as a success and with it as a validation of the main-school reform? Having a closer look, we can get another impression: First of all, there is no proof that other types of school could not lead to similar results.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, a bigger part of the reduction of pupils without a school-leaving certificate is not due to a successful school-integration, but it is rather a natural consequence of the demographic change and a decreasing number of pupils in general (Bildungsreport 2008: 5,8). In fact, this development of declining pupil numbers is causing a rise in the number of schools being closed. According to

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<sup>7</sup> The research project comprises a discussion more in detail about the different education reforms, pilot projects etc. in NRW.

<sup>8</sup> „Home background determines educational success, independently of the type of school.” Helmut Fend, article in *Die Zeit*, January, 3<sup>rd</sup> 2008, [URL: <http://www.zeit.de/2008/02/C-Enttauschung?page=1>] (August, 12<sup>th</sup> 2009). Empirical data is given in his Life-Study.

current statistics about the education system in NRW, especially main-schools are affected of these closings (Bildungsreport 2008: 8). That is why associations between main-schools and other types of secondary school are gradually being established (Bildungsbericht 2009: 57).<sup>9</sup> – In regard to these statistical developments, the question is to what extent the concept of the main school reform still matches to the original aims.

Besides the consequences of the demographic change, the main-school has to confront another challenge. Due to public discussions about a changed relevance of education policy for the German welfare state, a shift of the educational attitudes in society can be observed (Schuchert/Maaz 2007). Being aware that the chances on the labour market increasingly depend on good education qualifications, parents try to register their children at a higher type of school than the main-school (Bildungsbericht 2009: 62).<sup>10</sup> The bad reputation of main-schools and the apprehension of stigmatisation and lack of prospects provoke an increasing demand for places at higher types of schools and a declining demand at main-schools (Bildungsbericht 2009: 62f.; Bildungsbericht 2008: 4,8,11): For many pupils the main-school stands for a one-way-street into a life without employment chances and without opportunities to take part in society (Bildung und Lebenslauf: 22). This disadvantage is still enforced by the finding that there is a negative correlation between social background and the allocation to the different type of schools: To this day, pupils in NRW still do not have equal access to education – understood as a means to save but also to improve one's status of life. The results of PISA still show a negative correlation between educational participation and social background in NRW above average (PISA 2003: 30; PISA 2006: 16): "Pupils from the lowest socio-economic level are disconnected from the grammar school." (Bildung und Lebenslauf: 23). This correlation becomes even more visible concerning pupils with a migration background: "Foreigners or evacuated pupils are over-represented in main-schools and schools for special-needing, but they are under-represented in grammar-schools". (Integrationsbericht 2008: 132)<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> More information about these associations: [URL: [http://www.schulministerium.nrw.de/BP/Schulrecht/Gesetze/SchulG\\_Info/imFokus/Verbundschule.pdf](http://www.schulministerium.nrw.de/BP/Schulrecht/Gesetze/SchulG_Info/imFokus/Verbundschule.pdf)] (August, 12<sup>th</sup> 2009)

<sup>10</sup> Cp. article in Fokus-online, Nr. 2 (1995): „Eltern im Schulstress“ [URL: [http://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/bildung-eltern-im-schulstress\\_aid\\_152230.html](http://www.focus.de/politik/deutschland/bildung-eltern-im-schulstress_aid_152230.html)] (August, 12<sup>th</sup> 2009)

<sup>11</sup> Cp. Herwartz-Emden 2008: 63; Bildungsberichte NRW 2006, 2008

According to these developments, it can be concluded that the principle aims of the main-school reform are overlapped by non-intended consequences. Thus, such an education policy cannot be understood as the answer to the social question. In fact, it is not clear what additional benefit – as well as from educational, social and economic perspective – this reform is still able to reach.

### **2.3. The autonomous school reform – Aims and non-intentional developments**

With the draft of the “autonomous school in NRW” the former pilot project of the “independent school” was incorporated into the North Rhine-Westphalian school law. The main intention was to benefit from the schools’ advantage in knowledge compared to the central decision-makers – for example, with regard to decisions concerning the curriculum, staff and earnings, or an appropriate use of the budget (Bildungsbericht 2009: 51; Gutachten IWK: 25f.).<sup>12</sup> “Autonomy and competition as principles of a social regulatory policy are also basic elements of a modern school development” (government policy statement 2005) and with it they are the basis for a better coordination between economic, social and educational aims.<sup>13</sup>

At first, the idea sounds promising that more competition between schools evokes stronger incentives to improve the quality and the profile of a school. But in practise, the specific challenges and problems of the respective schools are hardly to be considered (e.g. social and migration background). Thus, what happens to schools that lack the necessary capacities to deal with these challenges? – Considering in addition the already mentioned demographic factor, more school closings will be the consequence.

The concept of more self-responsibility and autonomy and with it a higher school quality can only be successful, if they are provided with the necessary requirements. That means schools need a sufficient number of teachers as well as adequate school equipment, if they are to attain better quality and competitiveness. Offers like a more

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<sup>12</sup> Cp. statement of NRW School Minister, Barbara Sommer: “We don’t want to develop our school system top down but bottom up from school level” (press release, June, 6<sup>th</sup> 2008: Eigenverantwortliche Schule).

<sup>13</sup> Cp. new school-regulation in NRW [URL: [http://www.schulministerium.nrw.de/BP/Schulrecht/Gesetze/SchulG\\_Info/BroschuereSchulgesetz.pdf](http://www.schulministerium.nrw.de/BP/Schulrecht/Gesetze/SchulG_Info/BroschuereSchulgesetz.pdf)] (August, 12<sup>th</sup> 2009)

intensive care of special needs, all-day or homework-care, supply with lunch or learning-aids provide appropriate financial and staff resources.

What are the consequences for the pupils? Researchers assume that “upper-class” parents will try to register their children at the best school close to their home or even in distant surroundings. Meanwhile, socially disadvantaged families remain bound to their neighbourhood.<sup>14</sup> According to this development, on the one hand families do have more flexibility in choosing the preferred school.<sup>15</sup> On the other hand, only a small number can really benefit from this flexibility and so, the ultimate aim to reduce socio-economic segregation has still not been achieved. There are pilot projects in which less well-equipped schools are promoted by the federal state. These are examples how to countervail the above-mentioned problem. Nonetheless, the budget opportunities of the federal state are limited. Thus, the resulting question is, if in such circumstances additional help from the national level is a possibility to compensate this deficit.

As a first conclusion it can be observed that the presented non-intended developments that exist in spite of the two reforms overlap the intended goals: a compensation of the social deficit in the North Rhine-Westphalian education system has not been achieved, in part, it even became worse. Both examples – the main-school reform and the autonomous school – reveal that the social dimension is a key element of justifying educational-political reforms. Nevertheless, there are still big gaps concerning the implementation of these measures which does not cope with the expectations of an education policy as preventive social policy. Having the principle research question in mind, the question is if the national state might offer a possibility to promote reformability instead of additional blockades. In the following, the third research interest is to be analysed that is the institutional framework in which the assumed changes in the relationship between education and social policy are embedded.

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<sup>14</sup> Cp. DSW/HIS 18. Sozialerhebung [URL: [http://www.sozialerhebung.de/pdfs/Vortrag\\_Middendorff\\_WiKo\\_Soz18\\_Bildungsbeteiligung.pdf](http://www.sozialerhebung.de/pdfs/Vortrag_Middendorff_WiKo_Soz18_Bildungsbeteiligung.pdf)] (August, 12<sup>th</sup> 2009); Analysis of school choice in Germany [URL: [http://www2.geog.uni-heidelberg.de/akbildung/brenken\\_text.pdf](http://www2.geog.uni-heidelberg.de/akbildung/brenken_text.pdf)] (August, 12<sup>th</sup> 2009)

<sup>15</sup> Since the school year 2008/09 parents are allowed to decide about the “appropriate” school for their children. The former school districts for primary schools and vocational schools have been abolished (Bildungsbericht 2009: 55)

## **2.4. Institutional framework**

Parallel to the federalism reform of the year 2006, in the education reform process the number of additional partners on local level has increased (Bildungsbericht 2009: 50f.; Kinder- und Jugendbericht 2005). The draft of the autonomous school is an example for the shift of responsibilities to local schools – and of applying the principle of subsidiarity. In this regard, exchange and cooperative mechanisms with social partners on local level (e.g. youth welfare services, churches, associations, companies) have increased. The 8<sup>th</sup> report of children and youth 2005 found out that in 80% of the municipalities in NRW cooperation projects exist between schools and youth welfare services. Likewise, cooperation between schools and regional market players have been intensified with the aim to improve the change from school into the labour market. With these exchange mechanisms new educational spaces around the school have been generated. By considering the specific regional challenges, they are able to realise both, educational and social objectives.

In the case of NRW it has to be ascertained constrictively that till now, these cooperation projects are only selective solutions that do not cover the whole federal state. Thus, what happens if these projects run out? And what about schools that are not part of these projects? In regard to the decision about a continuation or discontinuation of such projects additional financial abilities or limits of the federal states and the municipalities play a decisive role.

One possibility that is often discussed to compensate investment deficits is the so called demographic return. The idea is to reinvest the capital, gained from the declining number of pupils, into the implementation of further educational reforms. But the archival data analysis did not bring up any references for what the North Rhine-Westphalian government plans to spend these resources on explicitly. Anyway, it has to be admitted that the possible positive effects of these resources are limited and that they are not able to compensate completely the insufficient funding (Dohmen/Fuchs 2009). The expert Prof. Stefan Sell (University of Applied Sciences Koblenz), member of the commission “Chances for children”, makes the point: “the municipalities and the federal states do not have the budget possibilities to withdraw the lack of funding in elementary and primary schools.” (Sell 2007: 5). Even the idea to shift education spending in support of these schools is restricted, since the other educational levels lack funding, too (Sell 2007: 4). In this regard, Sell talks about a “financial joint decision trap” in which the fulfilled federalism reform might have

increased disadvantages of the federal states: those, who have to bear the costs are the municipalities and the federal states. But these are not the ones that benefit from the investment into the primary school sector (Sell 2007: 5). That is why Sell approves a cooperation with the national state level and the social insurance agencies, since they are the ones that benefit most from the positive economic effects of educational investments (Sell 2007: 6).<sup>16</sup>

Such a connection of structure and content aims to ease the political joint decision trap between the relevant levels and players: when talking about education policy as social policy, it refers to societal questions such as participating and access chances for all people. With regard to the authorities of these aims, different institutional levels are responsible. The problem is to adjust these responsibilities appropriately: one example that makes this challenge apparent is the national education summit that was called up by Chancellor Angela Merkel in autumn 2008. The Chancellor wanted to demonstrate with this summit that education policy was not only a concern of the federal states but also a national one too:<sup>17</sup> “Because of the international challenges in the education sector both, the German Federation and the federal states have to take responsibility and have to cooperate with regard to the implementation of education-political aims.” (Löhrmann 2006, Drs. 14/708). Other economic or scientific experts as well as teachers or parents also pointed out that coordination on a national level might be useful with regard to several aspects like teacher education, curricula, education standards or quality assurance. They assumed that a too strong dissection could blockade education reforms and cause “arbitrariness of the distinct interests” (Löhrmann 2006, Drs. 14/833).

Thus, such coordinated education federalism can be both, a chance for the federal states but also a new limitation of their freedom of action: looking at the case of NRW, on the one hand, it benefits by participating in common investment-programmes like the IZBB or FÖRMIG<sup>18</sup>: Numerous new all-day schools, the

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<sup>16</sup> An example for investment opportunities of the national state are regulations for so called vouchers. These are flat charges for children with special needs. If these children are not considered early enough, later social costs can greatly increase. (Sell 2007).

<sup>17</sup> The programmatic key issues of the German government focus on improving educational achievements and the change from school to employment. They aim to ameliorate schools' permeability, reduce schools' drop-outs and repeaters as well as to implement a more profound labour orientation yet at schools. Due to this, teacher education has to be reformed, too, since they have to handle the different reform innovations on-site. Furthermore, the government tends to enhance all-day schools, as a reaction to changed family and labour structures.

<sup>18</sup> The national state gives financial help by participating in several programmes like the IZBB (Investment programme for the future of education and care) and FÖRMIG (programme for children

possibility of pre-school language development surveys and obligatory offers of language improvement have been established. At the same time, this cooperation involves a stronger connection of the education-political reform-aims between the national state and the North Rhine-Westphalian education ministry. Thus, national interests are integrated into the configuration of the education-political agenda of the federal states. Basically, this does not have to be detrimental or wrong. But, looking again at the contribution of authorities, the question again is “To what extent do the federal states parliaments still have rights” (Kuschke 2008). The aim of the federalism reform was to make a clear distinction between the responsibilities of the two state levels. But this separation also influences the above-mentioned support programmes, since the national level is not in charge anymore. In NRW, it is still not clear if and how to continue these programmes. For the present continuation proper funds were granted.<sup>19</sup> But it is still not clear if these resources are enough and how a long-term funding could be arranged. Without any further funding, some of the initiated projects would have to be cancelled again, their original aim would be foiled and a big sum of investments would have been spent without a lasting effect (Löhrmann 2006, Drs. 14/833/ Drs. 14/1055).

On the one hand, the North Rhine-Westphalian government disapproves of a renewed mixing of power between the national level and the federal states.<sup>20</sup> On the other hand, the discussed education reform projects and the observed non-intended consequences are not a satisfying answer to the question, how to solve the social deficits in education policy. Such developments lead to the conclusion that in cases of education-political reforms that aim to improve chances of access and participation opportunities, cooperation between the two state levels is not so far off. In part, it might even be necessary to limit or even to avoid non-intentional consequences, as the ones mentioned above.

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and youth with a migration background). Furthermore, on behalf of the current global financial crisis the government created an economic stimulus package that includes educational investments, too. Next to financial aid the government also supports numerous new research programmes. Even though, this research is done by independent institutes, the government, as principle, is able to influence the key issues to be explored. In doing so, it has also an impact on the education reforms of the federal states, since they justify their activities by the results of the research processes, too.

<sup>19</sup> Cp. Ministerium für Schule und Weiterbildung NRW (2009): Investitionsprogramm des Bundes (IZBB), [URL: <http://www.schulministerium.nrw.de/BP/Schulsystem/Ganztagsbetreuung/InfoGTGS/IZBB/index.html>] (August, 12<sup>th</sup> 2009)

<sup>20</sup> Cp. Koalitionsvertrag 2005: 44; Löhrmann 2006, Drs. 14/708; the Chairman of the KMK, Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, also emphasises: „The federal states are not to be purchased.“ (in: Fokus-Online 2008)

Which is better: Federal agreements or individual approaches on federal state level?  
– Both possibilities, as well as coordination between the two levels are not necessarily mutually exclusive. The claim of the North Rhine-Westphalian government to promote the autonomy and responsibility of schools is one side of the coin. The other side is that many schools are not able to meet the required standards. Some of the deficits are mirrored in insufficient staff and school-equipment, as well as in inadequate teacher training (Bildungsmonitor 2008). These failings have to be abolished, so that schools are able to respond to the changed societal challenges on their own and to be able to make use of their scope of actions gained by the increased autonomy rights.

### **3. Outlook**

In this discussion one must not forget the European and global aspects. Therefore it can be differentiated between political and scientific effects.<sup>21</sup> Even though, the European Union (EU) does not have any direct decision power in the education and social policy fields, it deals with the compatibility of economic, social and education policy aims. In regard to the liberalisation of the European labour markets and the effects on social dimension, the political debates are also determined by questions about the stabilisation of human capital, cross-national qualification standards and equal access to education. With the agreement of the Lisbon Strategy – to create the most competitive, knowledge-based economic area in the world – the EU is interested in strengthening the social environments of their member states. Thus, the social dimension and with it education-political aspects became a topic of the European agenda, too. Among others, this becomes clear by considering the European Social Funds that aims to strengthen the economic and social regions of the Community. NRW, too, benefits from these resources.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> The paper excludes the discussion about the scientific influence on education policy in NRW, but it is done in the real research project.

<sup>22</sup> Further information about the dedication of the ESF in NRW is given by the Ministry of labour, health and social policy in NRW [URL: <http://www.arbeitsmarkt.nrw.de/esf/index.html>] (August, 12<sup>th</sup> 2009); Information about the aims of the ESF can be found on: [URL: [http://www.esf.de/portal/generator/1194/geschichte\\_\\_des\\_\\_esf.html](http://www.esf.de/portal/generator/1194/geschichte__des__esf.html)] (August, 12<sup>th</sup> 2009).

Furthermore, within the framework of the open method of coordination, the European member states agreed on common objectives and requirements with regard to qualification standards or education curricula.<sup>23</sup>

Thus, looking at the education policy of the federal states again, processes of reciprocity and exchange exist from the bottom up, but also top down: on the one hand, the numerous regional pilot projects in NRW exemplify the state's attempt to confront the particular socio-economic challenges on its own. On the other hand, there can be observed a consideration and coordination of agreements with the national and European level, as soon as it refers to matters of comparability or funding.<sup>24</sup>

These reciprocal processes – both horizontally but also vertically<sup>25</sup> - lead to the conclusion that the national state and the EU gain indirect influence with regard to the priorities in the education policy of the federal states. “Provocatively” it could be assumed that the German national state and the EU actually buy the implementation of their proper education aims through financial aid and support programmes or through intergovernmental agreements about common standards. This development is criticised in terms of the joint decision trap: instead of reformability new reform blockades could arise which, in turn, show the limits of coordination between the different institutional levels.

Despite this concern, the question of alternatives remains: what would happen, if the German national state and the European level would not afford the support programmes mentioned? At least, education policies show that as soon as financial support is cut, the continuation of projects or reforms are jeopardized, reduced or even stopped. Looking at NRW, the archival data analysis allows the conclusion that some reforms – and hereby especially reforms with social aims (all-day schools, integration initiatives, or language promotion) – could be initiated and implemented only because of the help of the German national state and the EU.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> These standards shall serve as „translation help between the national qualification systems“ (Drs. 14/6090). They are not an explicit requirement of the EU which has to be implemented by the member state. Instead, every state decides itself on the proper education and qualification standards.

<sup>24</sup> This can be exemplified by the development of compatible German qualification standards which was a result of the exchange processes between the European member states.

<sup>25</sup> Horizontally refers to the coordination between the member states of the EU; vertically refers to reciprocal processes between the EU, the national and the local level.

<sup>26</sup> The LAGA NRW, an agency for migrant people, emphasises: From migrant point of view education policy should become part of European domestic policy. After finishing the economic integration

#### 4. Summary

In sum, it can be observed that the North Rhine-Westphalian education policy primarily focuses on social and economic aims. This orientation includes a stronger perception of education and its relevance for a preventive welfare state. The choice of the above-mentioned reforms mirrors the interest to interlink educational with social and economic aims. Nevertheless, till now, non-intended consequences seem to prevail over the intended aims: in NRW it can be noticed that education chances and opportunities have been improved in general. But only a small part of the population is able to benefit. More competition provokes new selection mechanisms and with it new situations of exclusion. Thus, especially those who need the help of the welfare state, remain “losers” in the system. Social selectivity, because of differing socio-economic backgrounds, still determines the composition of the different type of schools and still continues after finishing formation with good or bad chances to fully participate in society.<sup>27</sup> Till now, the North Rhine-Westphalian government has had little success in improving the negative correlation between a low education career and an increased poverty risk – even though the document analysis confirms the willingness of the decision-makers to put this problem on the political agenda: The amount of proposals from all political colours to improve this deficit has increased. They all agree in the assumption that education is an important instrument to improve the opportunities to participate in society and with it to safeguard a sustainable welfare state.

In this regard, individual projects on regional level – despite of numerous positive effects – still are not able to provide a comprehensive solution, not for the federal state NRW and nor for German society as a whole.

Thus, talking about social aspects there has to be a discussion about the possibilities and the limits of “coordinated education federalism” between the German national state and the federal states level. Who remains to be agenda-setter and who decides about reforms in education policies? Is it the social partners on local level, is it the

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process, now, the EU should enhance a common education area which is focussed on social and economic needs of the population. Only by this, principle goals like equal chances and free movement of labour can be realised.” (LAGA NRW 2001: 20).

<sup>27</sup> An indicator that proves this assumption is provided by the data of employment rates dependent on educational background. (Internationale Bildungsindikatoren im Ländervergleich 2008: 50f.; DSW/HIS 18. Sozialerhebung 2008).

parties, the federal state or is it even the national or European levels which decide on a stronger or less-stronger focus of education policy on the welfare state. A one-sided consideration of the federal states (as it is formally provided by law) does not correspond to the observed reciprocal processes in the education policy field.

This parallelism of exchange mechanisms between the different institutional levels but also with social partners mirrors the interest of the whole society in an education policy as social policy. The discussed structures of coordination and cooperation characterise a changed understanding of education policy and its relevance to the welfare state. The reform examples show that cooperative education federalism does not have to end up in a joint decision trap. Instead, they can be understood as pragmatic solutions for existing reform blockades. Thus, the decision-makers have to decide to what degree they want to make use of the respective scope of actions of the different institutional levels to achieve a compensation of the existing deficits.

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