

The future of the welfare state: paths of social policy innovation between constraints and opportunities

Urbino, 17-19 September 2009

ACCOUNTABILITY AND PERFORMANCE: THE CASE OF SCHOOLS IN EUROPE

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In most European countries, the state has been the main provider of public schooling (primary and secondary schools) for a long time. State involvement in education pre-dates the development of other welfare services like health care. Public schooling in Europe is one of the areas of the service welfare State for which one would expect the least propensity to introduce new managerialism (Taylor-Gooby and Lawson, 1993; Clarke et al, 2000). Education policy is framed in the public debate as an investment for the future and for a country's productivity (Demailly and Dembinski, 2002). Mass education came to Britain later than in France, Germany and Italy, nor was public expenditure on education conspicuously generous in Britain by international standards in the 1970 (Glennister, 1991). On the contrary, in France, Italy and Germany the historical development of state education, as a field of social policy (Leibfried and Pierson, 1995)¹ and of the welfare state (Marshall, 1950) is interwoven with the institutional formation and consolidation of the nation-state. Beyond a narrow view of the economic benefits of education, the institutional mission of schools in France has traditionally been to strengthen republican values. In Italy, education and schools have served the interest of the state elites in unifying a relatively young and fragile unitary state since 1861 (Sepe, 1995; Melis, 1996). Hence, education is not perceived as a financial problem as such because its administrative salience has been historically inseparable from the creation of the nation-state in many European countries.

Educational accountability has been historically rooted mainly in bureaucratic and professional legitimation (Bacon, 1978; Becher et al, 1981). Bureaucratic channels of accountability vary in

Britain, France, Germany and Italy, depending on the degree of central government's involvement in the definition of national curricula, allocation of financial resources, legal regulations, and assessment practice. Governments exert control on schools in many of these areas. However, bureaucratic accountability pertaining to State education is counterbalanced by the professional norms of teachers (Dale, 1980; Broadfoot, 1985: 278). For instance, the notion of 'standards' in education imply assessment criteria which have been until recently defined mainly by the teaching profession. The school self-evaluation movement has allowed teachers themselves a greater voice in the identification of these assessment criteria. Professionals have undeniably been one of the major sources of influence on the normative climate of state education in Europe.

The relationship between managerialism and the changing patterns of educational accountability in a comparative perspective is still under researched. I will analyse the change of educational accountability as a result of organisational autonomy aimed at the transformation from bureaucratic to managerial types of organisational arrangements. The first section of the paper will discuss how the role of the head teacher has changed recently and whether the structure of school leadership has become more hierarchical and increasingly defined by performance accountability. Broadly defined, performance accountability refers to output measured against goals, which are defined increasingly by central governments and regulators, rather than professionals (Mattei, 2009).

The central question of this paper is whether the new regime of performance accountability (National Commission on Excellence, 1983) and autonomy of schools (OECD 2007) have changed the power and influence of heads, teachers, governors and users. Unlike the growing field of educational management studies in the Anglo-Saxon world, I do not approach these questions by a technical angle. On the contrary, I analyse the effects of the different types of accountability on policy actors and how they contribute to creating a predominant organisational accountability regime within schools (Handy, 1986; Bennett, 1974; Westby, 1988; Tyler, 1988; Caldwell, 1988). I

am concerned with the power relations between the governors of public secondary schools and the head teachers within the new framework of school autonomy and performance assessment in Britain, Germany, France and Italy. This paper contributes to furthering empirically our understanding of a crucial question, namely the effects of managerialism on democratic accountability and the relationship between managers and other actors (Mattei, 2009). Before I discuss the four cases, I will discuss in the next section the reforms introduced and the new methods of performance evaluation, accountability and measurement.

Managerial, Professional, and Democratic Accountability

The recent changes in educational accountability, from bureaucratic controls to managerial accountability for performance of individual schools against standards, make educational leadership the central element of reforms and organisational change at the level of the organisation of a school. Educational leadership is an instrument for goals and priorities setting (Grace, 1993; Dale 1989), and more generally an essential instrument to move from the bureaucratic accountability and legal sanctions towards managerial accountability regimes. This radical transformation creates organisational turbulence to the embedded structures of power and influence of actors (Mattei, 2009). It does also create opposition and tension between managerial and professional norms, as teachers are increasingly marginalised from standards setting and the definition of education criteria. The evaluation of schools based on outputs and exam results, associated with a blurring of the public-private finance and delivery, increases the demand for organisational leadership. Is the traditional school organisation, whereby the head was a *primus inter pares*, being revisited by the demand for single-headed chief executive of schools? What does this change imply for education accountability more widely? This paper will explore the new internal organisational arrangements of secondary schools in Britain, France, Germany and Italy in order to analyse the shift in role and influence of heads of schools, in relation to teachers, governors and users. It will also draw more

general conclusions concerning changing patterns of education accountability in Europe. As far as convergence is concerned, this study analyses the changes at the organisational level foremost, but it also discusses the alignment of individual schools with the systemic level.

Schools in Europe have been subject to a common trend towards greater autonomy from external governments controls. There has been a shift from focus on systemic performance and goals to individual schools. The trend is the most visible in centralised education systems, such as the French and Italian one. The 2005 report by Eurydice (Key Data on Education in Europe) shows that schools are increasingly autonomous in education provision, i.e. the way subjects are timetabled over the school week, teaching methods, choice of textbooks, and pupils' continuous assessment. The same report also indicates that European countries vary the most with regards to the level of autonomy in the management of human resources and hiring of teachers. This indicates the prominent impact of the national administrative settings. For the countries here under investigation (Britain, France, Germany and Italy), the degree of autonomy with respect to the five dimensions identified by Eurydice (educational provision, teaching content and processes, schools regulations, budgeting and staffing) is summarised below (Table 1.1.)

Table 1.1. Schools Autonomy in Five Areas of Decision-making

	Educational provision (timetabling of subjects, number of days per year, start and end of lessons)	Teaching content and processes (textbooks, methods, subjects offered as options, content of teaching programmes)	School regulations and organisation (school rules)	Budgeting (allocation of the overall school budget)	Staffing (recruitment for teaching vacancies and appointment of school head)
Britain	Full autonomy	Full autonomy	Full autonomy	Limited autonomy	Full autonomy
Germany	Limited to no autonomy	Limited autonomy	No autonomy	No autonomy	No autonomy
France	Full to limited autonomy (full for timetabling of subjects, but limited for number of hours per year)	Full autonomy	Full autonomy	No autonomy	No autonomy
Italy	Limited autonomy	Full autonomy	Full autonomy	No autonomy	No autonomy

Source: Author's Elaboration from Eurydice 2005 (Eurostat, Brussels)

Notes: Data refer to 2002-2003.

As part of the PISA 2003 survey, schools heads were asked to identify their main responsibilities in a number of areas. Qualitative content analysis of national legislation, provided in this paper, is necessary to analyse trends at national levels based on actual enactment of reforms by central governments. The table below (Table 1.2) elaborates from the results of PISA survey and focuses on three main areas of decision-making in Germany, and Italy: 1) selecting teachers to be recruited; 2) establishing pupil assessment policies; 3) decisions on school enrolments. In France in 2003 the school questionnaire was not completed by school heads, and in the United Kingdom the response

rate was considered too low to guarantee comparability of data. It is clear that the recruitment of teachers is still a main responsibility of local authorities or central governments. Teachers or the head of teaching departments are reported to have main responsibility for choosing textbooks and an important role also in establishing pupil assessment policies. In Italy this is so to a great extent. School heads suggest having the main responsibility in the enrolment of pupils, which is shared with the board and teachers.

Table 1.2. Areas of Decision-Making and Responsibilities in Schools

	Germany	Italy	UK	France
Selecting teachers to be recruited	Not a responsibility of the school, but of External education authorities	Not responsibility of school, but of External education authorities	NA	NA
Establishing pupil assessment policies	Main responsibility of teachers or heads of teaching Departments	Main responsibility of teachers	NA	NA
Decisions on schools enrolment	Main responsibility of schools head	Shared responsibility of schools head, board and teachers	NA	NA

Source: PISA 2003 Survey of school heads

One of the most prominent changes in educational accountability in developed countries has been the issue of ‘standards’ and ‘performance’ in the provision of education (OECD, 2006; 2007). Teaching is a process which has been increasingly quantified and infused by the logic of efficiency and ‘value for money’. Beginning in the 1980s, the underpinning assumption about the quality of an educational system was its capacity to meet targets and raise standards. The rising salience of the concern for quality came to drive educational expectations and policy ideas, equally in Britain, Germany, France and Italy (only most recently). Secondary schools in Europe are experimenting with new methods to improve their accountability mechanisms, through performance indicators, management by objectives, business plans, quality and teachers’ review, and so on (Adams and Kirst, 1999). League tables have been published almost in every country and measurement has

become one of the key methods to assess the quality of an educational system. There seems to be a new political consensus about performance- based accountability, built upon the value of technical administration and efficiency. Who better than head teachers can become the agents of the new managerial model and encourage teachers to comply with centralised new forms of accountability and controls?

As far as political accountability in public secondary schooling is concerned, the traditional mechanism of representation of local communities is the School Governing Body, predominantly composed of elected councillors or bureaucrats of the relevant local or regional authorities and staff. It was only very recently that members were drawn increasingly from parents. They also are represented in administrative councils and management bodies within schools. Their influence varies considerably across a range of areas. They may have decision making powers or exercise consultative functions. Overall, school-level bodies which include parents are least likely to have decision-making powers in the area of teacher recruitment, the termination of teaching contracts and in matters regarding teaching content. They are most likely to be involved in deciding upon the school plan and drawing up rules for everyday school activity. The institutional structure of a Governing Body is the main institutional mechanism of public accountability. These bodies used to be very large and dominated by the local educational authorities. Recent reforms have changed their role and structure considerably, as this paper will show.

Reforms of British schools and changing role of heads

One of the most radical educational reforms in British secondary schooling, which left long-lasting results on the social relationship of actors involved, was the 1988 *Educational Reform Act*. The thrust of this reform was to grant individual secondary schools budgetary autonomy, allocating central funding directly to them according to the numbers on roll. The Local Management of

Schools introduced delegated responsibility for the budget, formula funding, in which most of a school's budget is based on pupil numbers; devolved responsibilities for staffing matters; and performance indicators in the form of league tables of pupil performance (Thomas and Bullock, 1994: 4). Prior to the reform, local education authorities (LEAs) had the responsibility to allocate funds and to control schools. The centralist policy of the 1988 reforms offered schools financial incentives to opt-out from LEA control over staffing, finance and the curriculum. A majority of parents could vote to take schools out of LEA control, and as such to be directly funded by the central government as Grant Maintained (GM) schools.

In an attempt to empower consumers, the 1988 reform transformed the role and composition of the Governing bodies of schools. Parents acquired a major role as members of governing bodies, together with other lay people. Beforehand, local councillors used to be members of the governing bodies as well as representatives of LEA, who were experts in educational matters. Most of the controls over finance, staffing and even promotion of teachers were transferred from the LEA to the governing bodies. Thus, they acquired a crucial role in replacing the hierarchical bureaucratic accountability structures. Elected parents and lay members hold managers accountable and they are important actors in the internal governance systems, replacing accountability to local councillors.

In the new system of budgetary autonomy and ample room of manoeuvring from local authorities and local politicians, headteachers have acquired a key role as agents of centralist policies. Some scholars have argued that they have become 'autocratic' managers, especially in relation to the teaching profession (Fergusson, 1995: 101). As far as their new role is concerned, headteacher had gained unprecedented budgetary powers, including personnel and equipments. Moreover, they are responsible for teacher's compliance with the central regulations regarding the curriculum. The 1988 reform introduced the National Curriculum and standardised testing across British secondary schooling. This has revolutionised the relationship between managers and teachers, from

horizontal to vertical accountability regimes. For instance, primary legislation suggests that the head teacher has become the “line manager” for all teachers. They make the final decisions over their pay and employment conditions, a prerogative that head teachers in no other European countries enjoy.

The relationship between headteachers and governors is formally one of direct accountability to stakeholders. However, in practice parents and lay members do not have the expertise, and sometimes the information, to challenge the head’s authority or policy decisions. Beforehand, LEA members of the governing bodies had educational expertise and were generally appointed from among the ranks of teachers, so that they could supervise competently the work of the headteacher. Therefore, managerialism, as framed by the 1988 Thatcher policy change and subsequent reforms, dilutes the professional and public opposition to the managerial power of the headteacher. In the name of compliance with central departmental regulations, they have acquired a top-down accountability approach to educational leadership in schools, facilitated by the truncation of the intervening managerial layers of the LEA. As one head teacher suggested, ‘once, local educational authorities did everything. Now, they are much less influential and less powerful. The central hand is descending upon schools through OFSTED.’

The centralisation of the national Curriculum and the standardisation of testing have provided a key incentive for the consolidation of a hierarchical relationship between headteachers and teachers. The 1993 Audit Commission has reported managerial abuses in the excessive financial management of headteachers, and lack of accountability. Headteachers are reported to withhold information from governors and not to consult them before taking decisions.² Managerialism, thus, has become the means to deliver centralist policy objectives at the expense of teachers’ professional autonomy. Once these institutionalised management structures were introduced in schools at the end of the

1980s, they were about to remain for a long time. Managerialism has been a creeping feature of New Labour too, which has pursued similar objectives to the previous Conservative governments.

To sum up, head teachers in Britain have significantly changed their managerial role in the last thirty years. They have increasingly distanced themselves from classroom purposes (Grace, 1993). From pedagogical and moral leadership, they have developed into powerful leaders of institutional change and champions of institutional autonomy of schools. The leadership role of head teachers has been advocated by the educational management gurus (Chubb and Moe, 1990). It is especially the self-governing school that sustains a heavy top down approach and strong managerial responsibilities of head teachers. Collegiality is more symbolic than substantive in autonomous schools in England. As one head teacher suggested, 'the predominant organisational culture in schools nowadays is more individualistic than in the past. The positive aspect of managerialism is that I can subvert the rules in a very individualistic way'.

France

Centralisation, uniformity and neo-corporatism are traditionally identified as the fundamental traits of the French educational system (Archer, 1979; Ambler 1985; Cole, 2001). The central government until the mid-1980s was responsible for the organisation of the educational services throughout the country, the regulation of national examinations, the definition of the content of the national curriculum, the training and recruitment of teachers and the control of teaching methods. Not much was left to the sub national level of government or individual schools as far as educational policymaking was concerned. The highly centralised state was contrasted frequently with the educational system in Britain (Broadfoot et al, 1985). Contrasting State traditions in

France and UK were exemplified in the field of education. In contrast with France, the British State was reluctant to intervene too closely in the autonomy of delivery units.

The modern *école* was built upon a dual power structure: on one hand the State setting rules, and on the other the teacher profession, largely autonomous with regards to their pedagogic activity. From its historical origins, the public school has excluded always users and parents. The long traditions of educational centralisation and the independence of the professions have been mutually reinforcing and have made the system not open to external influences (notably parents and local councillors).

It was only in the midst of the economic crisis of the mid-1980s and the challenges posed by globalisation that a new actor was institutionalised and created between the State and the teachers, that is the '*établissement*' (the school organisation). The E.P.L.E. (*établissement public local d'enseignement*) was a new organisation indicative of an attempt to reorganise the State education by debureaucratisation (Demailly, 1993: 28). The reform of schools, announced in 1975, and only enacted in 1985, with a series of decrees and laws, conferred upon them for the first time in the history of the French Republic responsibilities and new autonomy. Most importantly, the creation of the EPLE has triggered three processes (Demailly, 1993). First, it has modified the relationship between teachers and head teachers by conferring upon the latter an unprecedented right to interfere with the formers' professional decisions. Secondly, the autonomy of schools has created a demand for transparency about what actions they take to fulfil their new responsibilities. Thirdly, the creation of the EPLE has enhanced a process of professionalisation of the head teacher, encouraged to develop new skills, beyond a merely bureaucratic role.

The leadership style of French schools is based on consensus and negotiation between a plurality of actors and interests. No fundamental change to the structures and value of collegial decision-making

has been implemented. The symbolic institutions for the negotiation of all the educational interest are the schools' *Conseil d'Administration*. Governing bodies have become slightly more influential, but they are far from exercising any strategic management functions. A head teacher has defined them as 'symbolic places of participation' (Desagnat, 2005: 39). The 'Conseil d'Administration' of a school is the only institutionalised structure of management and locus of responsibility in French secondary schools. It is composed of thirty members belonging to three different constituencies in equal parts. First, members of the regional councils are represented, the so-called '*collectivité territoriale*'. In the case of the Lycée, this is the Conseil Régional. This group also includes representatives from the municipalities and of the intercommunal organisations. The head teacher, his deputy, and the financial director are also part of the first category. The second constituency is made of members of the teaching staff and school staff and trade unions' representatives. Thirdly, the Conseil d'administration is composed of students and parents' representatives (the users). The total number of parents' members on the governing bodies is five.

Differently from any other country here under investigation, local elected politicians are members of the Conseil d'Administration of the schools. They are present at meetings and are frequently consulted by the head teacher for minor matters as naming a new school (Desagnat, 2005). The 1982 Law Defferre-Mauroy had implications for the local elected members of schools. For the first time, regional elected councillors could become members of the school boards (*élus régionaux*). The Conseil, as described by some reports, is an arena for competition of different social and political interests. Political conflict penetrates within the institutional structure of a school. For instance, if the local elected representative is from the Opposition, he is in a weaker position than the other members of the Conseil and he is subject to the pressure of parents and staff. When the local councillor, on the contrary, belongs to the Majority which controls the local or regional councils, he enjoys a greater authority within the Conseil. In all cases, the head teacher has to play

a very important role of neutrality and has to mediate between different and conflicting partisan interests in the Conseil.

Germany: Dynamic Conservatism

Education and cultural affairs is, in Germany, a policy domain of sole responsibility for the Länder (states). Their jurisdiction is constitutionally guaranteed (Art. 31 of the 1949 Basic Law), so that the Federal State and the government have no formal power to interfere with the Länder's policies on determining the curricula, staff and resources allocation, and, generally, the organisational structure of schools. At the federal level the co-ordinating body for educational policy is the Standing Conference of Ministers of Education, created in 1949. Since the start, the decision making process of such coordinating institution has been veto driven, for unanimity is required. Despite the existence of this coordinating mechanism, education is off-limits for the federal government (Allmendinger and Leibfried, 2003). With respect to autonomy of individual schools, it has traditionally been very contained in Germany, given the strong hold of regional bureaucracies on the education system.

Any discussions of autonomy for schools in Germany benefits from an understanding of the historical and institutional traditions of the State control over education through the administration of the Länder. For the purpose of this paper, I focus on the case of *Selbständige Schule* in North Rhine-Westphalia, and the case of Berlin school system, which stands out from the rest in terms of legislative and administrative impetus to introduced autonomous and self-governing schools.

In 1992, North Rhine Westphalia had introduced a new experimental project for quality development and quality assurance, so-called QUESS. The central idea was the decentralisation of

the school system by providing greater autonomy to individual schools. The project was concluded in 1997 with nineteen schools participating. They developed individual programs, although they had to remain within the scope of existing curricula established by the Regional Ministry. The schools were responsible for self-evaluation, followed by external evaluations conducted by the school boards, which maintained a double function of supervising and providing advice to the schools. From 1997 to 2002 the Ministry for Education of North-Rhine Westphalia launched a project aimed at improving the quality of learning and the efficiency of schools (*Stärkung von Schulen im kommunalen und regionalen Umfeld*). This trajectory of reforms geared towards granting freedoms to individual schools has continued until recently with the 2002-2008 ambitious project called *Selbständige Schule*. So far 270 schools have been involved and have witnessed internal management changes, such as the strengthening of the head teacher's responsibility.³

The Land Berlin has introduced in 2004 a landmark reform of the public school system, which contains as its *Leitidee* the 'autonomy' of individual schools, known as 'self-responsibility' in German (*Eigenverantwortung*).⁴ The main purpose of the law, as presented in its preamble, is to de-bureaucratise the schools' administration (*Entbürokratisierungsoffensive*). This is consistent with the wider administrative reforms in Germany to streamline the bureaucratic machinery. The reform goes one step further in granting schools devolved budgetary autonomy concerning personnel. This is remarkable break with the German schools' administration tradition of heavily centralized staff recruitment. Schools in Berlin will have greater freedoms and devolved responsibilities. A pilot project was launched in 2001 for the duration of four years, so-called *Modellvorhaben eigenverantwortliche Schule* (MES). Thirty-one secondary schools in Berlin took part to the project, sponsored by the Land Berlin. The central idea has been to make schools self-governing and introduced an organisational culture based on service provision and contracts (*Dienstleistungs- und Kontraktkultur*).

The extremely detailed regulatory framework contained in the 2004 Law casts some doubts over the genuine intentions of the reformers concerning the adoption of managerial accountability. Clearly schools are not free in choosing their own internal organisational design and management structures. It is all prescribed in great details by the law. The sixth section concerns the legal form of schools, known as *Schulverfassung*. Paper 69 establishes the responsibilities and powers of the school director (*Schulleiter/in*). Traditionally in Germany the head teacher has had an authoritative role in public schools, since the Prussian times. The school administration is still part of the public administration, according to Paper 7(1) of the German Constitution. At Prussian times, the head teacher was a school monarch with a weak counterweight by other internal bodies, although there has always been a *Lehrerkonferenz*, that is a teaching council. However, it was only at the times of the Weimar Republic that collegiality increased in schools. Unfortunately, the Nazi regime reinstated a highly hierarchical governance system within schools.

The 2004 law in Berlin places the headteacher in a powerful position, not only in relation to teachers, but also parents. However, there are plenty of internal committees and councils which function as consultative bodies, like the *Klassenkonferenzen*, the *Schulkonferenzen*, the *Lehrerkonferenzen* and many others. Paper 69 states that the *Schulleiter* ‘has to inform the representatives of parents’, which is indicative of their weakness in the decision-making process, at least formally. Then the law confers upon head teachers the power of hiring and transferring teachers, which is a radical change from the past. The management of personnel has been one of the areas in which schools in Berlin have received organisational autonomy. Another important role of the headteacher remains that of compliance with the many acts and regulation issued by the Land administration.

Despite the growing autonomy, or self-responsibility, as it is known in Germany, the regional administration keeps a much centralised controls through the *Schulaufsicht*, the school governing

board. It is responsible for the organisation of teaching, for instance. This is the real strategic body of schools, responsible for setting policy goals. The Schulaufsicht remains integral part of the Land's administration (Schulverwaltung) and is composed of members of local authorities and civil servants of the Land, but not parents nor the public.

Notwithstanding these few instances of experimentation in some Länder, the educational system of Germany remains firmly entrenched in the tradition of stabilisation rather than change. Education federalism seems to facilitate 'experimentations', but institutional reengineering is not sufficient to defeat the historical legacy of an educational system which was the envy of Europe (Phillips, 1987). Continuity prevails over change, though reform attempts and windows of opportunities have been present, not least when the shocking negative results of the 2000 OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) of competences of 15-year-olds were published. This created a deep legitimacy crisis in Germany (Leibfried and Allmendinger, 2003: 67), for it seemed that Germany may have been overtaken by other industrialised countries. Unlike Britain, German schools are reluctant to publish their individual schools data on results. This increases the difficulty in assessing the impact of the PISA shock on re-legitimising reforms. The intensity of the public debate did not necessarily translate into radical reforms which would have been possible elsewhere. Strong federalism clearly is a hurdle for introducing reorganisation reforms. However, in the wake of PISA, new or modified procedures of performance evaluations were demanded. Cost-cutting proposals, such as reducing the variety of number of courses, were made (Lingens, 2005),

Italy: One Step Forward and Two Steps Back

The reform of public schooling has been one of the fiercest terrains of partisan competition in the 1990s in Italy (Ferradini, 2002: 259), with ideological positions in defence of the role of the State (centre-left) and the openness of consumerism and marketisation of education, summarised in the

slogan *scuola-azienda*. The ideological underlying dimension of the political process of reforms is remarkably similar to the British one. However, some issues have been consistent across partisan positions during the 1990s waves of legislative output on public schooling. Autonomy of individual schools is one of them. It is claimed to be a necessary condition to improve the efficiency of the educational system.

The major theme of the reform of education in the 1990s in Italy has been the organisational autonomy of schools in the wider context of the decentralisation of the State (Mattei, 1999). The most recent amendment of the Italian Constitution has made education a shared responsibility of the central State and of regional governments (Law no. 3/2001). The educational reforms in Italy in the 1990s have been inserted into the wider administrative and institutional landscape of the reform of the State. Therefore, organisational issues have figured prominently in the public debate and in the legislative output. The reform of education has been primarily that of its bureaucratic administration, concerning the redistribution of responsibilities at different levels of government and within schools between different actors (a vertical and horizontal reconfiguration of authorities). The landmark reform, which transformed the role of schools as agents of the State into autonomous entities, was Law no. 59/1997, which transferred to individual schools budgetary, policy, and organisational autonomy (with the exception of staff management). Thereafter, the Prodi government issued a decree to implement the autonomy of schools (D.p.R. 275/1999): ‘Schools are free to adopt the organisational structure they deem appropriate to their needs as indicative of their planning autonomy. In each school the allocation of teachers and organisation of classes and schedules can be autonomously decided on the basis of the teaching programmes’.

Successive reforms in the 1990s have radically and consistently transformed the highly centralised and bureaucratic Italian educational system into a decentralised system of local school management. The change enacted is profound and unfortunately has not yet raised the necessary attention by the

international community of education scholars. As far as the internal governance of individual high schools is concerned, a major break with the past bureaucratic administration has been introduced by the 2002 guidelines for the internal management of schools, the *Norme concernenti il governo delle istituzioni scolastiche*.⁵ It shifted away management responsibilities from the School Council (Consiglio della Scuola) to the Director (Dirigente Scolastico), contrary to thirty years of participatory management established in the 1970s. The law, which originated from parliamentary bills in the permanent Committee for Education, rather than from the Executive, established that the head teacher or Dirigente Scolastico has the sole responsibility for the management of the school, whereas the Collegio contributes only to the process of defining the priorities and strategic objectives of the school. Clearly the legislation follows the NPM prescription to divide policy from management (Art. 1 section 5).

Within the frame of the new autonomy granted to schools regarding the definition of their internal organisation and structures, the national legislator has intervened to strengthen unambiguously the role of the head teacher, by upsetting a long established power structure which benefited traditionally trade unions, teachers and participatory mechanisms, like committees and collegial structures. The new Dirigente Scolastico is responsible for the financial management of resources and for the achievement of results. He presides not only the School Council, but also the Teachers' Council. He controls the agenda of their meetings and the issues to be discussed. He has a permanent employment contract, whereas the School Council remains in office only for three years. The head teacher is recruited through national public competition and appointed by the Ministry of Education in Rome.

The School Council used to be a highly participatory and powerful management structure. After the 2002 reform, however, it will lose most of its influence in the day to day running of the school. It is made of eleven members, established by national legislation (Paper 4): the head teacher, three

elected representatives of parents, two of students, three teachers, the administrative director of the school and one representative of the local authority. Thus, the Council is slim and composed primarily of users (five out of eleven). The school has full discretion in deciding the methods of election of the members of the School's Council. This body approves the teaching programmes, as developed by the Teacher's Council. It also adopts the annual budget and the school's overall plan. Each school can also autonomously establish new structures for the participation and representation of parents and users.

Conclusions

Contrasting state tradition was exemplified in the field of state education. This is still generally valid. However, convergence of changing patterns of autonomy and accountability of state schools in Europe causes this alignment between education systems and the state tradition to be blurred. Empirical findings suggest that only in Britain have heads of schools gained such prominent role in the governance systems of schools as to challenge the traditional accountability based on professional and bureaucratic types of legitimation. Performance-led ideas have threatened the professions like a virus-like threat, and challenged the stability of that policy community. Unlike the OECD findings, which do not disaggregate data at the level of individual schools (OECD, 2007), instead accounting for leadership structures as one unified collective actor, this study, based also on the comparative analysis of legislation, suggests that heads of British schools have acquired influence over parents, teachers, and governors in the management of schools. They have ample budgetary and recruiting powers, unmatched by their colleagues in Continental Europe.

In the case of French schools, the role of head has changed over time, though less dramatically than in Britain. Heads of schools have acquired greater autonomy in relation to the teaching profession, but still a limited one in the area of financial management. However, differently than in England,

this process has not been associated with top-down managerial accountability, but rather a professionalisation of heads. This is a remarkable development, considering they used to be bureaucratic agents of the State. With the emergence of organisational autonomy (Mattei, 2007; Mattei 2009), they have acquired managerial responsibilities but not at the expense of teachers. Local politicians continue to play an influence in the governing bodies of French schools. More importantly, the local field services of the State, such as the Academies, remain the ultimate source of accountability. Bureaucratic accountability has not been replaced in French schools by managerial accountability, but a process of sedimentation prevails, namely a layering of new practices over old ones, and new structural units built upon existing ones.

The German education system is characterised by federalism (Leibfried, 2003) with ongoing trials of autonomous schools and pilot projects in Berlin, and North Rhine-Westphalia. Among the educational systems under investigation, it represents still the most reluctant one to introduce autonomy and alter the traditional accountability regimes based on bureaucratic and professional accountability. In comparative terms with Britain, for instance, German teachers play an influential role in the internal governance of secondary schools. They are in control of the teaching methods and instructional content, and they are highly involved in defining assessment criteria and practices. The managerial challenge to professionals by heads of schools has not been a prominent phenomenon on continental European schools. The pattern is similar in French and Italian schools. Therefore, in Germany, France and Italy, educational accountability is still based on consensus on the main political goals of State education, which is legitimated strongly by professional codes and norms. Therefore, in Germany and Italy, organisational autonomy of schools has not implied a rivalry between heads and teachers, as in Britain. The continuity of existing systems of democratic and political accountability has facilitated the enduring regime built upon a broad education consensus between the teaching profession and heads of schools. In the specific case of Italy, as a result of the 2002 reform of the internal governance of schools, the head has acquired power against

the governing board. New budgetary powers are also devolved to heads of schools, at the expense of governors. Hence, the losers of reforms are not teachers, but governors.

Empirical evidence reveals similar policy trajectories in the direction of administrative restructuring towards a less rule-bound, less uniform, and more differentiated, flexible, and decentralised system of public secondary education in Europe. As countries depart from very different starting points, clearly the British system appears to be disproportionately different than continental ones. Nowhere in Europe have schools had such an ample discretion over their budgets, their staffing policy as in Britain. As far as autonomy is concerned, British schools enjoy the greatest in Europe. However, schools in France, Italy and Germany are slowly moving towards the British system. This applies to the organisational level foremost. It is claimed that greater autonomy has a general impact at the system level geared towards improving students' performance, for heads can target local needs and choice (OECD 2007).

This paper concludes that one of the most striking institutional developments of the 1980s and 1990s has been the centrality that schools have acquired as separate and autonomous 'organisations' within their national educational systems. Change has occurred at this level of analysis, despite the systematic scarce attention that scholars have drawn upon it. The target of much modernisation of educational bureaucracies in Britain, Germany, France and Italy has been the organisation *per se* (Mattei, 2009). The new actor on the rise is the Organisation of the school, an independent collective actor in a changing educational system, pressured by new demands from the globalisation (Martens, 2007), and the transformations of the State (Leibfried and Zürn, 2005). This institutional change pertaining to the organisational modernisation of educational bureaucracies is supported by the fusion of the old administrative-professional divide, exemplary in France, into a new accountability regime whereby bureaucratic and professional accountabilities are less demarcated.

End Notes

¹ In their classic volume of social policy study, Leibfried and Pierson (1995) take a broad view at social policy, including education, focusing on policies which serve as mechanisms to modify market outcomes. In this paper, the relationship between the State and education is not analysed in terms of quantitative commitments of public expenditure. The normative legitimation of a social policy, such as equality and republicanism, is only remotely summarised in quantitative datasets. For a debate about the trade off between education, as public investment, and social insurance programmes, see Castles 1989 or Heidenheimer 1981.

² Audit Commission, 1993, *Adding up the Sums: Schools' Management of their Finances*

³ 'Verordnung zur Durchführung des Modellvorhabens Selbständige Schule' Ministerium für Schule, Jugend und Kinder des Landes Nordrhein-Westfalen, 12 April 2002; Gesetz zur Weiterentwicklung von Schulen, 27 November 2001.

⁴ Schulgesetz für das Land Berlin, 26 January 2004, GVBl. S. 26

⁵ Parlamento Italiano, VII Commissione Cultura, approved 15 December 2002

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