

## Book reviews

### THE WHOLE WORLD CONSISTS OF CHANGE, ALWAYS TAKING ON NEW QUALITIES

João Barroso (org.) (2006). *The Regulation of Public Policies of Education: spaces, dynamics and actors*. Lisbon: Educa/Educational Sciences R&D Unit

#### CHANGE OF TIMES, CHANGE OF WILLS

Comprehension that the educational world is being reordered is a fact repeatedly underlined and laboriously shown in this book that seeks to question how this new order is being brought about with successive and wide-ranging events<sup>1</sup>. Grasping the forms and paths, the sequences and actors, the meanings and directions and the paradoxes of change in education are the immediate aims encapsulated in the choice of title of this research integrated into the *Reguleducnetwork* involving five European countries (Portugal, France, England, Hungary and Belgium). Over a series of studies an analysis is made of the “institutional, normative and control regulation”, in the form of action (rules, discourses, procedures, etc.) of an entity with authority “to guide the actions and interactions of the actors”, also ascertaining the “situational, active and autonomous regulation” of the actors. The latter aspect leads to “rules (regulations, injunctions, and constraints) that guide the functioning of the system” and courses of action that result both in the appropriation of the institutional injunctions or constraints, and the negotiation and opposing of interests, influences and multiple strategies (see Introduction written by João Barroso).

An attempt is therefore made to grasp the production of the order *in situ* and in the act, as a play or interaction of the constraints (rules) and resources made available to the actors and unequally manoeuvrable and mobilised by these actors in the frameworks of the observed action (see Giddens, 1997). The public policies of education

are hence analysed through a problem in which the structured and organised action (institutional rules and resources) is articulated, translated and reproduced through processes and courses of action marked also by meanings and interpretations, and contextual and local interests and powers.

Therefore, the problem of *regulation*, defined in the selected dimensions (institutional and situational), enable one to identify and understand the configurations, actors and effects of the political action in the specific contexts that are relevant today; in turn, the concepts of “transnational regulation”, “national regulation” and “local regulation” are geared towards grasping the phenomena and social relations whose relevance derives both from the theory, and the empirical realities that stand out in the selected fields of observation. Furthermore, exploration of the public policies of education such as political action makes it crucial to study the mediations, articulations and (dis)connections among processes and regulatory courses of action at multiple levels (see chapter 1 written by João Barroso).

A certain tension is insinuated here between two orders of concepts, deriving from the analytical (institutional, situational framework) and empirical-descriptive (transnational, national, local) framework: the former are analytical dimensions designed to grasp specific social relations that, in different configurations, comprise the latter, or are the latter markedly defined by the predominance or exclusivity of one of the institutional/situational dimensions? In other words, institutional regulation has a decisive expression through the transnational and national regulation while situational regulation is a relevant dimension chiefly and specifically within the scope of local regulation or do such distinctions require theoretical and empirical support? And in line with this discussion what is the status of “intermediate regulation”? It is presented as

an empirical category that focuses visibly on the issues we outlined above: this context is interestingly defined through the syncretic combination between the two conceptual dimensions: is there some analytical meaning to be taken from this? What would it be? The specific multi-dimension nature of either of the contexts of action or the distinct structuring of the different levels of regulation?

The answer given by this book points towards, in my view, a direction that is not given enough emphasis: each context of action (transnational, national, local) is a source and stage of institutional and situational regulation. This is so because political action in our societies is always conditioned by rules (heteronomously and autonomously determined) and resources implemented and made available by actors within the framework of social relations with a certain degree of institutionalisation: “supra-national structures (as is the case for Portugal in the European Union) which although not formally assigned decision-making power in educational issues, control and coordinate, through the rules and funding systems, the execution of the policies in this area (...) cooperation, support, and research and development programmes carried out by different international bodies (World Bank, OECD, UNESCO, European Union, Council of Europe, Soros Foundation, etc.) which bring together specialists, technicians or employees from different countries” (see chapter 2, written by João Barroso)<sup>2</sup>.

Public policies are hence action, in different forms or translations, in all the contexts and moments of its development and the *regulation* can take on an institutional or situational nature at the various levels of action in which it occurs and/or is learned. One such understanding is permitted exactly through the construction of an analytical background that seeks to articulate theoretical concepts (generated and only pertinent within the scope of a theory of which they are part) and empirical categories (which are the starting point and the result of research and whose direction changes depending on the changes in the object that designs and apprehends, in this case, the organisation, formalised to a greater or lesser extent, of our societies)<sup>3</sup>, such that potentially one and other becomes visible and intertwine mutually.

#### WE CONTINUALLY SEE INNOVATIONS

From multiple angles the studies presented in the various chapters bolster the content and question the theoretical construction that brings to light the facets and excerpts of the observed reality. Therefore, exploration of the “intermediate regulation” such as multiple regulation, at the level of the Regional Education Boards (DREs), takes place based on a discussion that mobilises concepts of “means (...) of regulation” as models of “coordination of

collective action”. Two models are identified: one vertical coordination model of bureaucratic and centralised control, and another more horizontal diffused model, of “mutual adjustment”, often grounded on negotiation, as exemplified by the market and also configuring the modes of “autonomous regulation”. These concepts enable one to substantiate the complexity of the DRE action, confirm the ambiguity and duplicity of its intervention, suggested by the plurality of directions outlined by the mission of help, and argue for understanding of the entity as an “intermediate space of miscegenation between political regulation (control) and autonomous regulation”. The study presented also leads us to question the concepts of the “means of regulation” initially mobilised; as such, it is suggested that the power and imbalances of power are intrinsic to the processes and social relations grasped by each of the concepts. Hence, the distinction between the models, and between their combinations derive from the different ways the power is unequally distributed; to whom; leading to what conflicts and institutionalisation of interests; with what results (who wins and who loses); with what effects (in the structure and organisation of societies) (see chapter 2, written by Natércio Afonso).

This experimentation of the heuristic possibilities of the concepts again comes to the fore in the following chapter, again around the topic of intermediate regulation, but this time focusing on municipal council intervention. Herein, a framework is drawn up clarifying the powers and fields of action actually taken on at this level of the political system in education; these range from the domain of participation in the design of the education system, construction and management of facilities and services and support to the populations and schools, to action in the sphere of the curriculum, broadening unexpectedly and, according to the author, expressively the field of influence of the actors of the local state. This time, the local implementation of the central rules is stressed, albeit in “peculiar modes”, also allowing “the emergence of an institutional regulation that is different from the central one”. The multiple regulation supplies, again in this case, specific “factors of ambiguity and adaptation in the central regulation” and space for the “development of process of ‘autonomous regulation’”. On the other hand, the consequences of such a framework, with regard to the fight against inequalities in education, seem to be guided by “a palliative intention of the effects of marginality and social exclusion” (see chapter 3, written by João Pinhal).

The discussion around the ‘market’ in education, ‘free choice’ of school, the combination between this and the ‘school menu’ device as regulators of flows of pupils, all lend weight to the argument that in Portugal a visible transition is taking place from coordination through supply to a significant influence, albeit localised, of demand. Again, the study presented ascertains the ways in which the education service which several segments

of the population has access to is modelled crucially through the specific configuration of the devices and processes of regulation, now mobilised in the contexts of local and organisational action. However, even though the “attractiveness” of the teaching establishments is demonstrably different, and the extent to which schools attach themselves to demand and territories is also variable, the authors state that “the overriding emphasis in the external and internal logics developed by school management continues to be the universal ‘public service’ that is equal to all, even if in practice major defects to this ideal and inequalities are evident” (see chapter 4, written by João Barroso and Sofia Viseu).

The internal coordination of collective action in schools entails not only an extreme complexity but it also presents different characteristics and effects, in terms of the “external conditioning factors” and “internal dynamics”, the dominating “logics of action”, and also the factors involved in the construction of an “elite school”, in one case, or a “school of integration”, in the other situation studied. In situating the regulation as an action in micro-contexts, which is structured and structuring, this study reveals some of its components and dimensions, the ways they intertwine and the effects they give rise to; at the same time it also leads to questions about the results of such modalities of regulation in terms of life opportunities, through education, which are afforded to different population groups in different local contexts (see chapter 5, written by João Barroso, Luís Leandro Dinis, Berta Macedo and Sofia Viseu).

The courses of action adopted in the schools, modelled by the multiple orders of dynamics and conditioning factors already mentioned, also reveal a strong link with “the logics of positioning in the ‘local’ market”. Competitive pressures tend to generate favourable conditions for outside forces, instead of centrality, to focus attention and action on improving the internal functioning or serving the needs of the pupils. Identification of several types of schools – with different dominating guidelines (enterprising, quasi-monopoly, exploratory and adaptive, the latter which may also go down a humanitarian or egalitarian route) and with also unequal capacities to develop sustained and consistent courses of action among the various fields of action considered – suggest, as an important result of the European project in question, the plurality of the practice of the devices of regulation in action, as well as the mutability of the contexts and processes present (see chapter 6, written by Agnès van Zanten).

The final chapter of the book, written by Christian Maroy, emphasises some of the main results that transverse the six territories studied in the five

countries involved in the project (Portugal, France, England, Hungary and Belgium). On the one hand, “convergences” among the educational policies (the autonomy/control and centralisation/decentralisation binomials; external assessment; choice); on the other, the “divergences” and “hybridisation” of the educational policies, as well as the diversity of the devices and means mobilised, also enable one to suggest that it is possible to identify disparate trends, solutions, options and alignments<sup>4</sup>. In this (re)ordering of the social relations in education, the turbulence around the coordination of the collective action seems to trigger noticeable effects in terms of social segregation (and hierarchisation) of schools and social inequalities, deepening disputes concerning education as a human right and public good or a private commodity. Analysis of the case studies leads the author to argue that the disputes, agreements and negotiations show the strategic place occupied by the intermediate regulation undertaken by the local and regional public authorities. This is because, according to Christian Maroy, observation and political action on the scale of the territories make it easier to monitor the development of dynamics of choice and the education market liable to incorporate inequalities and privileges that are incompatible with society options aimed at social cohesion and democratisation (see chapter 7).

#### ANOTHER CHANGE INCITES AWE

Finally, it is understood that the concept of *multiple regulation* is amply documented and can be considered one of the most expressive results which has the widest scope in this research. The complexity and sophistication of its understanding and development are visible and illustrated, both in the discussions around its content and meaning, and in the implications that broaden its meaning, as well as the empirical situations in which its comprehension fits. “Multiple regulation” involves: analytical dimensions (institutional, situational); contexts of action (transnational, national, local, and intermediate); modes/institutions, devices of coordination (status, market, community/tertiary sector<sup>5</sup>). Considering that one can talk about a “system of regulations” which highlights “the essential role of the entities of mediation (...) given that it is there that one surmises or overcomes the conflicts between the various existing regulations” and “that the state should take on the essential function of “regulator of regulations”, i.e. a ‘meta-regulation’”, and important discussion is developed around the transformations of the *means of regulation*, of its components, protagonists and institutional set-ups, today undeniably “always taking on new qualities”<sup>6</sup> (see chapter 1, written by João Barroso).

## ENDNOTES

1. The heading and subheadings of the text are well-known verses of Camões that I take the liberty of borrowing (see Andrade, 1999, p. 144).

2. Taking into account the direction of this discussion, here we just point out “the history of school has been marked, from the beginning, by permanent tension between “administrative reasoning” and “pedagogical reasoning” which configure two distinct modes of regulation (...). The persistence of this conflict ended up giving rise to a compromise policy that, in school management, translated into the coexistence and interface between the “scope of influence of the administrators” and the “scope of influence of the teachers” (Hanson, 1985) and which, at the level of political decision-making, translated into the growing influence of teachers’ unions and associations” (p. 52). Moreover, “These processes of refraction of the institutional regulation, and reconfiguration of its inputs according to a more horizontal and autonomous vision, were clearly identified in the interviews carried out (...). In this process the specific micro-policies and singular solutions are defined that aim to make the needs and interests compatible with the normative framework of the bureaucratic regulation where DREL is the institutional vehicle” (p. 95). It is also stated that “the main characteristics of the methods of institutional regulation of the municipality” point towards “frequent reduction of the councils to the role of mere local operators of norms issued by the central power and, (directly or indirectly) regulated by it” (...), in which “intervention of the municipalities in the regulation of the educational system becomes a field of negotiation, conflict and a permanent “political game”, between the central and local authorities (...), also including a set of municipal initiatives that introduce “factors of ambiguity and adaptation into central regulation, creating new spaces of strategic action of the different actors, with the consequent development of ‘autonomous regulation’ processes” (p. 128). “To manage the high demand, school (...) strengthened control procedures; to enrol it is necessary to present documents proving one’s home address, through a bill or wage slip that confirms one’s area of employment (...). In the academic year of 2003/04 school faced the need to regulate the teacher’s expulsion of a pupil out of the classroom. The solution found was the creation of a conflict management office: after being sent out of class the pupils had to go to this office, accompanied by a teacher or classroom assistant, to make a written record of what had happened and carry out tasks specifically devised by the teacher” (p. 183).

3. We point out here the aforementioned distinction proposed by Tortajada (1986) between the theoretical concepts and the empirical concepts or categories.

4. As such, could it be plausible to talk about a *new world education model*, or, maybe more prudently, to consider the coexistence and dispute of *models* with clearly

differing influences in the construction of a *new educational order* with a worldwide ambition (see Antunes, 2006; Laval & Weber, 2002)?

5. Dale mentions these same kinds of regulation as “institutions of social coordination” (Dale, 1997, 2005).

6. I again cite well-known verses of Camões here, the subsequent lines of which become more interesting: “And, beyond this everyday change, /Another change incites awe, /That it no longer changes as it used to” (see Andrade, 1999, p. 144).

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