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MARKETISATION OF EDUCATION: MAIN THREATS AND PROBLEMS

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1. Introduction

The 'New Public Management' rhetoric seems to have invaded Estonian education policy field as the Ministry of Education has initiated a reform plan containing several elements of marketisation and managerialism of education (See Maimets 2004). Following the footsteps of other developed countries, who have introduced similar reforms into their education sectors, the Ministry of Education believes we have found a perfect cure to our educational problems. The declared changes – voucher plans, schools as self-managed units, increased parental choice, etc – are seen as a panacea for solving the problems of educational quality, management and other critical parts of the system. At the same time the possible effects and impact of such reforms have hardly been discussed, the theoretical implications and experience of other countries have not been under any scrutiny. Scant attention has been paid to the success or failure of the 'New Public Management' reforms, which the marketisation of education is clearly part of, in other countries and the specific issues related to reforming the education sector have not been addressed either.

This paper sets out to discuss the topic of marketisation in the education sector outlining the main arguments behind this type of reforms and also the possible effects and impact of marketisation. The question this paper seeks to address is: what are the main issues related to the establishment of markets in education? What might these changes bring along and what they have brought along for the participants in the particular policy field?

The paper begins with a brief background review of the marketisation reforms in education outlining the arguments for introducing such plans and the expected benefits of these steps. Then the paper proceeds with the discussion of main possible threats and problems of these reforms.

The idea behind this discussion is that although the marketisation idea does look simple and promising, it is not generally the case. Introduction of markets in education has a potential to influence several aspects of the system and the likelihood of these changes being overtly positive is quite fractional.

2. Marketisation Idea

Attempts to restructure public education have been increasing in number during the last fifteen to twenty years. “Central to these initiatives are moves to dismantle centralized educational bureaucracies and to create in their place devolved systems of education entailing significant degrees of institutional autonomy” (Power, 342). As Sally Power (Ibid., 343) states, these policy initiatives have in various parts of the world introduced a ‘market element’ into the provision of educational services.

Markets in education were established as part of the larger ‘New Public Management’ reforms in public administration which brought the notion of managerialism and marketisation of the public services to the centre of attention (Chan and Mok, 22). The market orientation has been one of the main elements on the NPM menu (See Manning, 299). The marketization of education emphasizes “consumer choice, competition, privatization, differentiation and accountability in education” (Hudson and Lidström, 49).

The whole idea behind marketisation of education lies in abolishing school districts or attendance zones and changing the financing system of schools. The funding scheme promulgated by the advocates of marketisation will introduce the voucher system of funding which, instead of allocating funds directly to schools on the per-student basis, will provide a certain portion of these funds to children (or parents) directly. And as Astin states, equipped with such a voucher, each student/parent can freely ‘shop’ around for the best school. The school that gets finally chosen will ‘cash’ in the voucher and will get the money. (Astin, 255)

Chan and Mok (23-25) claim in their article that, according to Ball (1990a), the educational marketplace includes altogether five main elements: choice, diversity, funding, competition and organizational style. Astin has basically covered the element of choice and funding. Under diversity it is meant that schools are free to develop their own curricula, use different textbooks or specialize in a field (e.g music, languages, technology) to differentiate themselves from other schools in order to gain a competitive advantage. Competition element includes free competition of schools in the marketplace and abolishing school districts or catchment areas so far used. Organizational style reflects the idea of school-based management, where schools will be responsible for their own budgets, management, hiring

staff and teachers (Chan and Mok, 25). Management is supposed to be outcome based through the specification of performance criteria and the establishment of target-setting and planning processes (Simkins, 320). Accordingly, schools start resembling businesses.

Proponents of marketization argue that the implementation of the educational markets will bring about remarkable change in the education sector and will also improve the problematic aspects of the education system. “The case against the ‘public’ monopoly argument is simple and powerful”, as Stephen Ball (4) says. The financing system of schools is now not linked to the satisfaction of clients, the absence of motives for school managers leads to self-serving strategies, the decision-making of schools is dominated by self interest as is usually claimed by the opponents of monopolies in public sphere (Ball, 4; Peters and Savoie, 422). In addition, the schooling system is said to generate inefficient bureaucracy and the ‘sameness’ of schools and the systems tend to work in a way which depresses standards and inhibits excellence (Ball, 4). These ‘illnesses’ have been in general diagnosed to most of public sector institutions by the NPM advocates (See Peters and Savoie, 422).

The arguments put forward in the debate by the supporters of marketisation are various. Gorard and Fitz (365) group the arguments of the advocates under three headings: liberty, equality and economy. Choice, as Gorard and Fitz (365) say, is freedom and “therefore a good thing by definition.” According to the economic argument, advocates claim that the introduction of choice will raise student academic proficiency and will drive up standards (Gorard and Fitz, 365; Simplicio, 213). The equality argument is that “choice extends to all a privilege already available to an elite” (Gorard and Fitz, 365). In addition, the marketisation is said to increase parental involvement and teachers expertise, raise student interest and eliminate the prevailing same old academic “business as usual” mentality (Simplicio, 213). It is expected that the school system will gain from the competition of schools just as the quality of commercial goods and services is supposed to increase as firms compete with each other in the free market (Astin, 255). Coleman (260) believes that the establishment of choice is a step towards getting the incentives right in the education – both for suppliers and demanders – and if the incentives are misplaced then the source of improvement is clearly missing.

Education reforms containing marketisation elements have been introduced in England and Wales, in the United States, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Scotland, France, Israel (Taylor, 370) and have been under way also in Hong Kong and China (Chan & Mok).

3. Main Threats and Problems of Marketisation

Before proceeding with the specific problems of educational marketisation, it can be mentioned, as Simplicio (213), discussing the voucher system, has said, that on the surface the idea appears ideal. Introducing choice enables all parents freely to choose a school according to the needs and interests of their children without worrying about any school districts. All parents can just select the best school for their children. Besides it is politically a very appealing idea (Robenstine, 234-243; Astin, 259). It is generally very complicated to make a good case against better schools, better education and higher quality.

The following discussion will outline what different authors have claimed to be the threats of marketisation in education – how it might concern the students, impact parents, affect the activities of members of schools, influence local community and even wider social sphere.

3.1. *Advantage only to the advantaged*

Ball (8), discussing the markets in education, states clearly that even though in ideal every parent is free to make a choice on a school he/she wants to educate his/her children, the choice is never actually free for everybody. The fact the one person lives in a rural area with one school only, does constrain the choice possible to no choice at all. In addition, sometimes the transaction costs related to choice are extremely high, so that again choice cannot be free. Gathering information about different schools, quality indicators, admittance standards, etc can be very time-consuming and as will be illustrated later not even among everyone's capabilities. (Ball, 8) In addition, with the introduction of markets and choice, it is quite questionable whether the choice would actually mean anything significant for some people – the benefits promised can certainly be enjoyed by some but not by all. Those for whom the choice is very limited the reformed system might even bring about disadvantages. For example, under the old system the funding of school stayed quite stable as the number of children did not change remarkably in one school district but in the market situation for some parents moving can be an option and the one and only school can be left with a fewer number of students and resources, leaving the ones there worse-off than before.

Although the marketisation was intended to benefit all classes the results rather point to the fact that the main beneficiaries of the reform are those that were well-off anyway before the markets were created. The mistake has generally been made in the aspect of who really wants and is able to make the choice.

The marketisation proponents make some profound assumptions about the functioning of the education market. One of these assumptions is the “belief that parents will actively make informed choices concerning their children’s educational options” (Simplicio, 213) But the problem with this assumption is that it is remarkably hard to find proof that this is really what is happening. On the contrary to the assumption, Simplicio (213) states that the literature does not support the stated contention. In fact, studies suggest that parents with certain characteristics will make any choices at all. (Simplicio, 213). Gewirtz et. al (1995, cited through Robenstine) have argued that there could be drawn a typology of chooser or parents – the privileged/skilled chooser, the semi-skilled chooser, and the disconnected chooser. This typology is strongly class-related as the authors claim and it does refer to general patterns of parents-as-consumers. Though this type of classification is an idealization, the central idea is that, contrary to political rhetoric of parental choice, differences in the choosing process are not exclusively related to individual characteristics but do depend highly on the social class (Robenstine, 234-243). To illustrate the claims of Gewirtz and her co-authors the given typology of choosers is outlined.

“The privileged/skilled parents value the idea of, and have a strong inclination toward, school choice” (Robenstine *ibid.*) This type of parents, generally middle and upper-class, is willing to make a choice on schools because they do possess a substantial capital to engage with the choice. They are equipped with proper economic, social, and cultural capital in order to be able to take advantage of the educational market (Bowe, Ball and Gewirtz , 43) These authors point to the fact that better educated parents are better able to conceive the true essence of schools, see behind the packages and read the right signs that the parents with less cultural capital can’t do. Robenstine refers also to their abilities to understand school systems, discriminate between schools in terms of policies and practices, question, evaluate and challenge teachers. In short, according to Robenstine, “these parents already know the rules, and they know how to work the system to their own children’s advantage.” In addition to their knowledge, these parents are also financially better off to support a wider selection of choices (Robenstine, *ibid.*).

Semi-skilled choosers differ from the previous category of parents in their capacity to make school choice. Although they do have a strong inclination towards choosing schools, their ability to take advantage of the market are remarkably more limited compared to the skilled choosers. Even though these parents might be oriented to the same schools as the skilled parents, they are not as well equipped – “they do not possess the same experiences and inside information about the schools nor the social contacts and skills to pursue their choice as productively” (Robenstine). These parents try to understand schools in terms of very general qualities – they take more notice of media accounts of schools, advertising, examination scores, etc. They try to make a choice based on more visual qualities and characteristics of schools because they do not quite understand the school systems and the schooling game. (Robenstine, *ibid.*)

Disconnected parents, generally working class, are detached from the market and although it is often claimed that these parents are not interested in the education of their children, these parents actually do care very much but they do not see that the choice of schools would somehow benefit their children’s educational success. As these parents, possessing much less cultural capital, see schools pretty much the same, they are not inclined to engage with a comparison of schools. For this type of parents schools choice is not an important question or a process, schools choice instead is more or less predetermined. Consequently, the disconnected chooser, generally depicted as the most likely to benefit from the marketisation process, is at a disadvantage relative to other groups. Even though the disconnected parents want good education to their children, they may not see the need to engage with the process of schools choice. The choice of this type of parents rests on school facilities and distance rather than teaching methods or school policy. Contrary to skilled parents who take into account the individuality of their children in choice of schools, detached parents rely on the collectivity of choosing, following the steps of their friends, relatives and neighbors. (Robenstine, *ibid.*)

In the end, as Robenstine (*Ibid.*) says, “parental choice cannot be separated from the experience, relationships, and environments that constitute and constrain the lives and opportunities of different groups of parents and their families.” Accordingly the choice of school is not free from constraints as proponents of marketisation widely claim. In addition, the introduction of choice does not in the end benefit those targeted and supports the choices

of parents who anyway possess the advantage in choosing schools, despite the prevailing system.

3.2. Increased stratification and inequality

The logic applied in the marketisation process conveys the idea that competition will create a situation where high-quality schools will survive and low-quality schools will stop existing. But the problem with the educational ‘good’ is that it would not be so easy and actually schools do not want to accommodate higher demand. The reason, as Astin (256) says, is that schools are not, first of all, profit-making entities and secondly, schools are not interested in increasing demand from a certain point. In stead of increasing the number of students, which is also possible only to a certain point, schools rather become selective (Ibid.). And as the size of high-quality and successful schools does not increase the possibility of lower quality schools going out of business is also unlikely. As Astin (256) claims: students have to attend school *somewhere*. This is especially the case for students who are in compulsory education.

The selectivity which results from marketisation does have significant effects on school systems – it tends to concentrate the “best” students in a few selective schools. These students are usually talented, high-achieving, highly motivated, which are the qualities selective schools look for. And why should the school be looking for students with expensive learning needs, ‘problem’ children who are difficult to teach and time-consuming to educate? Of course, giving the schools discretion in selection, they do admit only the best among the applicants (Ball, 7). And the reason is that, as the success of schools is evaluated on their credential success, it goes against the logic of the market to admit disadvantaged students (Waslander and Thrupp, 440). Test scores are important and who else than talented students would guarantee high position among top school ratings. In addition, disadvantaged students are much more trouble to teach and educate to reach a certain standard in education.

Astin claims that these valuable students, in turn tend to come from the best-educated and better-off families. Other authors are again convinced that higher socio-economic status does signal likely achievement and through that success for school (Waslander and Thrupp, 440).

Finally, the net effect of selectivity is the stratification of schools according to abilities and socioeconomic status of their students. According to Astin (256), the marketisation and

implementation of choice would only magnify the existing social differences. Astin does illustrate his point by American higher education system. This claim made by Astin (257) does suggest that the best students will be concentrated in elite schools while the less talented and poorer ones are left to the schools in the lowest strata. Ball (8) even makes the point that the chances of admittance to other schools decreases for excluded students because their reputation is already known for other schools.

In the end, a stratified system made up of two types of schools is created – schools that can choose their clients and schools that just have to accept with what is left over from the market (Ball, 8). Hudson and Lidström (50) do agree with the previous discussion concluding that market mechanisms set in place “have had the effect of increasing inequality and reinforcing the selectiveness in the system”. The decline in overall educational standards is likely to happen as increased differentiation of schools sets in – elite schools will prosper and the rest will “enter a spiral decline in which the loss of students will be accompanied by the loss of income and a consequent decline in morale as teachers become constrained in their pedagogical methods (Bowe and Ball 1991, cited through Lauder (426-427)).

Waslander and Thrupp (455) have found out in their study that the concerns of market critics are justified. These authors conducted a quantitative and qualitative study on Greencity, New Zealand, secondary schools and found out that socio-economic segregation between schools did exacerbate more than would be predicted on the basis of residential segregation.

Although the answer to the situation could be the creation of more elite schools, those would also become selective and the benefit for the poorer students would still be zero.

Consequently the total increase in the general quality of schools is questionable. The worst-off do hardly benefit from the market situation and their possibilities for gaining from it are also under considerable doubt. It might be argued that lower-quality schools could introduce some attractive programs for prospective students but that requires resources, which at the same time need to be spend on improving the quality of education – on better teachers, physical facilities, etc. (Astin, 258)

Another issue in the stratification debate relates to the idea that while free to choose parents would be selecting schools based on race, ethnicity, or social status and that would magnifying the existing differences further. (Cookson 1994, Kozol 1992, cited through Coulson). What these authors are suggesting is that giving parents the choice of schools their

children would end up in totally different schools than they attend today and that would lead to segregated schools. In addition, it has been claimed

“that schools have an important role to play in creating the foundations for democracy by bringing together children from different social and ethnic backgrounds so that in learning together they can also foster the attitudes and understandings necessary to live in a democracy” (Waslander and Thrupp, 440).

Increased segregation and stratification can threaten that assumed role and create possible social tensions in the society, which again should not be underestimated.

3.3. *Shift in values*

One important concern of market critics has been the issue how the business logic built into the reformed education system would impact the values of schools and their activities. It has been claimed that the marketisation ideology

“proposes the reduction of education to the status of a commodity, judged via examination results, truancy rates and leaver destinations and image or the ‘surface or skin’ of the commodity – the appearance of the staff and the school – which actually provides the possibility that consumers may be ‘seduced’ by schools ‘hype’ rather than the value of their educational processes.” (Bowe, Ball and Gewirtz, 42)

What these authors are suggesting is that the emphasis of schools is in danger of shifting towards nice packages instead of concentrating on the essence of educational processes. As the external image is becoming more important and a lot of parents, not able to differentiate between an image and the core, do make a choice on the surface of the school, the desire to improve externally is becoming more eminent. This point has been also made by other authors (Robenstine, Ball, 6) who are concerned about the true essence of education and its processes the marketisation can considerably jeopardize.

Robenstine (234-243), for example, argues that competition means a significant drift towards market values: social and educational concerns will be replaced by image and budgetary concerns, cooperation among schools will give way to competition, serving community needs is secondary to attracting parents and able students. Ball (6) claims that it is idealistically assumed that the marketisation process will not affect educational values in the system but these who do make this assumption tend to be generally wrong. Changes which the

marketisation introduces are heavily financially lead and “will rest upon the self-interest of the institutional employees, who want to secure the future of their jobs and to achieve greater rewards (Boyd, cited through Ball, 6). Ball (7) illustrates the idea with the claim that “it seems to be assumed that altruism is subordinate to self-interest in the monopoly schools but that self-interest is subordinate to altruism in the market school.” It seems quite obvious that the systems and the values attached to them do suggest the opposite and it is quite naïve to assume that in a school, whose success does depend heavily on itself, community service would take precedence before high ratings in national test scores.

There is also a paradox related to the situation, where external image becomes one of the central concerns of schools. Waslander and Thrupp (455), using the example of New Zealand, claim that marketing is mostly the concern of lower quality schools because they are in most need of students and also finances. They try to, in order to survive, attract students by marketing strategies and image campaigns, which again is disadvantaging their already disadvantaged students. Consequently, the market forces are pushing the average or poor performing schools to waste resources on activities which at the same time are worsening their situation on the market.

3.4. *The changing role of principals and head teachers*

As the marketisation of education has introduced the individual management of schools as autonomous business units, the nature of work of the school heads has also shifted remarkably. Hudson and Lidström (40) claim that in Britain the marketisation reforms “changed the role of head teachers from predominantly educationalist to increasingly managerial”. In addition, Power (347-348), reviewing the research from Hess (1990), Ford (1992), Bennett et al.(1992), Blackmore et al. (1997), Odden (1995) and Wylie (1994), states clearly that evidence suggests the idea that role changes are being experienced and the most prominent of these changes is that school heads are being forced to perform the role of chief executives more than ever before. This changed role demands more attention to budgetary issues, which again means less preoccupation with leadership roles that stress teaching and learning above all. (Power, Ibid.) Besides greater budgetary responsibilities, which Power indicates to, she also refers to the fact that principals have to pay considerable attention to other managerial issues which include setting visions, developing strategic plans, working on personnel issues, raising funds and marketing the school. (Ibid.) Power also refers to Wylie

(1994) and declares that the schools had to start dealing with the issues formerly performed by the Ministry of Education.

It is quite self evident from the previous that the workload of the school heads had grown with the marketisation of education remarkably. Power (348) even claims that these additional administrative duties might lead to role conflict of principals. She basically refers to uneasiness about some of the implications of their management roles and in addition reveals the concerns about not being able to innovative enough or not being able to address children's learning. It could be inferred from this that the school leaders do feel guilty about the need to engage most of the time in administrative duties. Although these roles are important in running schools and even though head teachers broadly welcome the reforms (Ibid.), the principals seem to be disturbed by the fact that they are losing the opportunity to have an influential say in the true nature and direction of school and learning matters. As the leadership roles do decrease in significance this might have some negative effects in the long run. Especially when educational leadership is found to be strongly associated with effective schooling (Ball, 7). School leaders do sometimes play substantial role in the creation and development of school identity and if such roles gain less and less importance this might mean the loss of advantages compared to other schools and might even destroy the community feeling and spirit of the school.

Besides, when head teachers become too detached from the practice of teaching and learning, their decisions might not be in the best interest of teachers and students (Thomas & Martin 1996, cited in Power, 353). This kind of situation might lead to inappropriate resource allocations and the distortion of priorities and needs.

3.5. *The changing nature of teachers' work*

Power (349) claims that the increased administrative workload cannot be identified only in the principals' case but the similar tendencies can be also seen in the work of teachers. And impact is not actually restricted to work only but negative impact can also be seen on life out of school. Power refers to the research from New Zealand and to the work of Robertson and Soucek (1991), who have studied the impact of devolution in Western Australia and outlines several important findings. Namely, as the administrative functions of teachers have grown in number, they start to report high levels of stress, declining job satisfaction and the desire to

leave the profession. Chan and Mok (23) also, citing the writings of Karmel (1994) and Welch (1996), point to the fact that marketisation has negatively impacted teachers' work, leaving them demoralized and substantially deprofessionalised. When the administrative component of the work, which includes constant meetings, dealing with accountability and control measures, pressure to be entrepreneurial and take into account the scarcity of resources, starts to interfere with the true work of teachers it might have negative effects on the teacher profession in general. When the work of teachers obtains a negative public image conveying a certain message about the profession, then the schools might find themselves in need of qualified teachers and in the long run it might have implications on the quality of education. Besides this, if the image of teachers' profession contains an idea of work entailing annoying administrative duties and lessened attention on teaching as such it can reduce the motivation of teachers. Unmotivated teachers might again not have a very good effect on the results of the students which do count as the measure of success of schools.

3.6. *Effects on the school community*

The marketisation of education has, besides many other aspects, brought along negative effects on the school community in general. There are in general three issues to be discussed. First of all, the emergence of divide between management and teachers has been pointed at. Power (350), agreeing with Simkins (323), says that "in larger schools head teachers increasingly surround themselves with a cohesive 'senior management team'. Power and Simkins both point to the idea that the reinforced role of head teachers, increase in the managerial staff and increased focus on the broad policy of the institution has distanced school heads from the teaching staff. The gap consists of divergence of priorities between the corporate heads and educational staff – the primary concern of managers is the school as a whole and its relationship with the external environment, while the teachers orient first and foremost to individual needs of students (Simkins, 323; Power 350). This growing gap between the managers and the managed leads to the consolidation of vertical management structures and may contribute to an exaggeration of top-down controls. (Power, 350) It is evident that when the staff organization increases in size the priorities of the organization will shift towards system goals and the educational concerns will not be on top of the agenda. Creating additional organization layers to schools does have the effect of decreasing the influence of teachers on school policy (Webb and Vulliamy, 447).

These kinds of changes do have a considerable effect on the organizational culture in the schools. Codd (1993, cited in Power, 350) argues that marketisation of education and the concurrent objective setting, planning, effective management, internal monitoring and etc. will push the organizational culture towards one that is characterized by competition, individualism, high-task orientedness and hierarchy. Simkins (324) is also worried how these processes would impact the evolvement of culture – concerns have been various, one of the issues is the decline in collegiality.

The third issues related to school community is the centralization of decision-making in schools. Power (350-353) refers to several studies that have indicated that marketisation has brought along less participation and collegiality in decision-making. Although the principals have been generally supportive of enlarged participation, the participation has been symbolic in essence. The feeling of distance and ignorance among the teachers, who actually are the ones having the most influential say about teaching and learning issues, does certainly not contribute to the success of school.

3.7. *Threat to local democracy?*

Hudson and Lidström (51) raise the question if the marketisation process has become a threat to local democracy. The issue has become topical in a situation in Britain, where the market reforms have eroded the involvement of local educational authorities in education. Before the reforms local educational authorities were in charge of most of the educational services, including budgets, management, curriculum, teacher recruitment and inspection. The idea of local educational administration has been the freedom to run local school as is best seen to fit local needs and conditions. But in a reformed situation the local authorities have been stripped of their exclusive responsibilities and private companies are taking over those functions turning them into businesses. (Ibid., 51). Private companies are running state schools, taking over career services, teacher recruitment and so on. But businesses do not tend to base their services on local conditions, peculiarities or needs but rather on demand.

3.8. *Responsibility shift*

Marketisation of education relates to another relevant topic – namely the accompanying shift in responsibility for educational outcomes. Brown (79) argues that the establishment of the

market does shift “the responsibility for educational outcomes squarely on the shoulders of the schools and parents.” As long as the school attendance zone and school districts exist and compulsory education has to be received at a local school, the state as the provider of the education is the one responsible for the quality of the outcomes. The schools can also be made responsible for any bad outcomes but the state is the one who runs the school system and is finally responsible. But in a market situation if the school does not produce the results expected, the choice of parents must have been wrong or the school has not been able to respond to the demands of its customers. The state at the same time cannot be blamed for bad results – the role of state is mostly to secure certain minimum of standards. The state is not responsible for emerging inequalities as these are the result of consumers’ choices.

3.9. The missing impact of marketisation?

After discussing the possible impact of marketisation reforms in education, it must be admitted that the reforms may fail to produce the claimed benefits or even generate perverse effects as has been noticed to be the case in many administrative reforms in many different countries (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 6). The marketisation reforms could be accused of not introducing the promised impact if instead of reducing inequality stratification is magnified, if free choice is not in reality extended to those intended, if inefficiency of schools is rising as additional administrative layers are created, if the general quality of education is not increasing as a two-tier system of schools is setting in. Besides, can we really speak of increased teacher expertise while the amount of time intended for teaching is decreasing, can we talk about higher standards when school collaboration in danger, can we speak of taking into account parental opinions when the survival of the schools is the primary goal, can we tell about better educational opportunities in a situation where schools are apt to educate only the most talented. If the democratic role of education, which was mentioned only briefly previously, is claimed to be becoming non-existent, then what advantages is the marketisation really bringing along? Increased choice but only for those who are free to make a choice anyway.

Doubts about the missing impact of marketisation are supported by Whitty *et al.* (cited in Power, 343) who claim that despite the popularity of these market oriented policies, research on education reform from various countries reveals little evidence to support claims of “system-wide improvements” What Whitty *et al.* are implying is that although the

marketisation reforms and choice policies are gaining wide attention everywhere and the reform plans are referred to be taking place all over the world, the important aspects of the reforms has been ignored. Even though the reform initiatives are popular, the improvements and effects promised have been rather modest, often questionable and have not been able to introduce significant systematic advantages.

4. Conclusion

The previous discussion has outlined several issues related to the marketisation of education and revealed that the expected benefits might not be as obvious as the proponents of marketisation generally claim. Moreover the analysis has shown that the introduction of markets can considerably impact several aspects of the education sector – both the demand and the supply side of the education market as well as wider socio-economic situation. Besides, the aforementioned aspects indicate that marketisation can affect local democracy and the perceived democratic role of education policy. In addition, the changes might impact the prestige of teachers' work and professionalism which again might have serious implications on the processes in the education sector. It is very likely that there are several other hidden effects and implications related to the marketisation of education, which have not been brought out here. Due to that any reformer of education policy should approach these type reforms with considerably modesty and reservations.

To make a comment on the educational reform plans of Estonia, it must be said that, taking into account the sensitivity of the education sector in general, any reform plans should be discussed and analyzed thoroughly before implementation and no steps should be taken without proper considerations of the impact of such reform plans. In order to illustrate briefly my point, an example, based on the previous research, could be given. One of the problems of Estonian education has been educational stratification – there exists a general consensus on the issue (See for example Kreitzberg, 8; Aaviksoo, 6; OECD, 26-27). If the claim, that marketisation does increase education inequality and stratification, is true, then the reform plan can hardly bring any positive change to the educational and social sphere. Rather it would worsen the existing situation. The other example relates to teachers' work and the widely known public "prestige" of the profession. Taking into account the low prestige of the profession and the lack of teachers it is highly unlikely that the reforms, which establish self-managing schools and remarkably impact the essence of teachers' work towards increasing administrative responsibilities, can generate a positive shift in the policy area.

Estonian education policy makers' attention should also be pointed towards the general atmosphere around the marketisation reforms. Although the market oriented reforms seem to be widely popular and promulgated, the other side of the coin is that the expected benefits

have been rather modest or as Whitty *et al.* pointed out research reveals little evidence to support claims of “system-wide improvements” Consequently, unless the improvements are highly likely, the education sector should not be subjected to any testing of large-scale reform plans.

Ball (3), one of the starkest opponents of ideology of the market, is convinced that the survival of this ideology has been guaranteed by the skilful avoidance by the marketisation supporters, of any reflexive critique of their approach. Probably the same applies to Estonian policy makers. First of all, I am afraid that in case of Estonia the advocates of the reform have not dug deeper than the surface of the idea. The Estonian politicians are also enchanted with the marketisation idea and are not able to look beyond the situation. And clearly they do not accept any real critique of the reform plans.

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