

## **Still an issue?**

### **Approaching post-socialist and post-authoritarian education**

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Since the last few decades, scholars from different disciplines have been concentrating on educational policies and practices in post-socialist and post-authoritarian spaces. Many research designs that focus on post socialist and post-authoritarian countries (in the area of education) are based on the implicit idea of the relevancy of post-socialist and post-authoritarian path dependencies (Stark 1992) in education. In this volume, path dependencies are to be understood broadly; they refer to difficult-to-grasp phenomena regarding the lasting influences of the past (e.g. educational policies of the authoritarian era, educational concepts and curricula, etc.) or to the lasting effects of transformation on educational processes (e.g. educational policies, but also how educational praxis is affected by the experience of structural change even if the political and education system have meanwhile been stabilized, educational curricula established, and teacher education reformed (see Hedtke, Hippe, and Zimenkova 2007). Path dependencies are generally considered an important factor in empirical educational research and serve as an explanation for the specifics and developments of educational systems, didactical approaches, teachers' self-understanding, learning environments, and the contents of educational materials and practices. Hence, educational processes and their developments are seen, at least partly, as a product of the past and as being incomprehensible without reference to the (authoritarian) past (Niyozov 2011).

Critical voices claim that strong expectations of path dependencies might obscure new developments in the field of education, pressing them into

the explanatory framework of the post-authoritarian or post-socialist system. Further scholars claim that post-authoritarian or post-socialist policyscapes are specific spaces in their own right (Silova 2011; **Jules and Barton**, in this issue) and should be studied by scholars of education independently from other spaces and other historical contexts such as globalization or Europeanization.

Turning away from path dependencies, we find a comparative perspective on post-socialist and post-authoritarian education. One strain of researchers claims the impossibility of comparing post-authoritarian and post-socialist educational spaces, while others believe we can learn a lot from comparison (Hedtke and Zimenkova 2012; Ferreira et al. 2012). Moving forward, scholars of globalization plead for restraining from »post-XX« perspectives when approaching education in order to grasp commonalities emerging beyond the margins of path dependencies.

Despite their tensions, all these approaches see macro-political changes and developments as influential factors which cannot but find expression in educational policies or/and practices, be it in the form of curricula, teachers' attitudes, learners' perception of the educational setting, educational climate, or other aspects.

This issue neither insists on the concept of path dependencies as the ultimate explanatory scheme for post-socialist and post-authoritarian education, nor does it argue against their explanatory potential. Rather, while addressing many other aspects and foci in the study of *post-* education, the issue seeks to elucidate the challenges of the empirical detection of post-dependencies (or of their irrelevancy) in the study of educational phenomena and materials.

The idea of path-dependencies in education is not only relevant for educational sciences. The specific didactics of different disciplines, from languages to social studies, from history to political science, are also turning their attention to the possibilities of path dependencies in post-spaces in education and their meaning for the specific learning theories and practices of the respective disciplines. Some authors claim to be able to detect specific post-socialist indicators in, for example, history teach-

ing (e.g. addressing the »national congruence« of a country as a special mark of post-Soviet history teaching (Geller 1997)). In civic and political education, there have also been some attempts to make path dependencies visible, as some authors believe that in post-socialist or post-authoritarian contexts, nation-centred, patriotic or nationalist educational discourses are likely to emerge (Gross 2010, 215), which appeal to the construction of national (post-socialist) identities (Heyneman 2000, 180–82). The complexity of the task of detecting path dependencies in post-states rises with other macro-political influences on education, such as Europeanization or globalization. These developments put educational policies, systems, and actors on all levels into situations with varying tensions, e.g. between the »rationalities of nation-state building« and the »rationalities of catching-up with Europe« (Fimyar 2010, 64).

On the level of the actors involved in the educational processes, the (ir)relevance of path dependencies is perceivable in questions about the uncertainty of knowledge production (Lindblad and Popkewitz 2004, ix) and about the teaching profession (Niyozov 2011) regarding both the institutional risks and contents of educational practice. It has become both inevitable and impossible to speak of path dependencies in education, there is lack of established instruments designed to detect or reject the assumption of post-socialist or post-authoritarian path dependencies in concrete empirical cases. I have attempted to develop a draft instrument for post-socialist/post-authoritarian dependency analysis, which I open to discussion among the audience of this special issue.

The *Draft instrument for detecting post-Soviet and post-authoritarian dependencies in social sciences and humanities education* developed by **Tatjana Zimenkova** can be found in the **Annex** of this issue. This draft instrument defines some indicators for detecting path dependencies in education. The instrument was developed for the sphere of citizenship and civic education, but can also be used for the analysis of materials from history and social studies and other related subjects. Based on previous research on path dependencies and breaks in educational processes (see, for example Fimyar 2010; Gellner 1997; Gross 2010; Lindblad and Popkewitz 2004; as well as **Jeliazkova**; **Jules and Barton**; and **Vitrukh**, all in this issue),

the instrument develops categories and guiding questions to be used for the analysis of teaching materials, curricula, and educational programs as well as with interviews with educators that focus on the relevancy of path dependencies. The instrument seeks to provide the researcher with orientation for questions such as: Can the material analysed be considered an expression of path dependency? And if so, is this path influence expressed as continuity or as a break with educational tradition? I am thankful for any criticism of and comments on the instrument.

Keeping in mind the different and partly conflicting perspectives on the issue of post-socialism in educational research, this special issue of *InterDisciplines*: »Still an issue? Approaching post-socialist and post-authoritarian education« brings together scholars reflecting on empirical approaches to post-authoritarian and post-socialist education. The issue unites reflections on possibilities, problems, challenges, routines, and grand narratives of post-socialist and post-authoritarian educational research. Some challenging questions that guided the emergence of this issue are: Do post-socialism and post-authoritarianism still play a role in the conceptualization and routine of empirical research on education? Are there common trends in research on education within post-socialist and post-authoritarian spaces? This issue seeks to detect the disciplines that are occupied with research on post-authoritarian and post-socialist spaces, to describe the methodological debates influencing research designs and research approaches in this sphere, and to demonstrate empirical approaches developed in order to approach post-authoritarian and post-socialist education.

Luckily, we<sup>1</sup> were able to find inspiring authors who bring different perspectives on post-spaces and their importance or irrelevance to educational research. Some of the perspectives presented here are surprising and some cases unknown to the general public. The complexity of the field of post-authoritarian and post-socialist education—its

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1 Here I want to thank Olena Fimyar, who, as a discussion partner, inspired me to edit this volume. I am thankful for her work, time, fruitful comments, and communication with the authors.

interdisciplinary nature, and its common fundamental questions— becomes visible if one looks at the multiple interconnections between the articles in this volume on the level of theory, methodology, research questions, and empirical approaches. Although unfamiliar with each other's work, working in different countries and different disciplines, and elaborating on different phenomena, the authors of this issue demonstrate astonishing commonalities and fruitful interconnections. I have tried to highlight some of the interconnections between the articles in this editorial, however I am certain readers will discover many more, both between the articles and most likely with their own research as well.

The articles' order of appearance is designed to demonstrate the added value of an interdisciplinary approach. Following the interconnections within articles, theoretical and methodological considerations are introduced that are helpful to understanding the approaches in the articles that follow. Naturally, the order of appearance corresponds to the editor's perception of the main challenges of the topics; the reader might find very different connections and argue against the logic suggested here. The editor and the authors are thankful for any further ideas on the interconnectedness and added value of the research presented in this volume.

The volume starts with an article by **Elena Minina**, who approaches the transformations and post-dependencies in the educational sphere through the lens of the neoliberal idea of »educational standardization« and its public perception. The author looks at the benchmark of local pedagogical practices and preferences in the modernization and reform of post-Soviet education in Russia. Approaching the issue with the help of discursive methods, the article contributes to the consideration of post-spaces in the research on education from the cutting edge between policy and discourse research. Minina draws from an enormous database, comprising both official discourse (which positionings »educational standard« as a principle of educational provision) and public discourse (which interprets the same as a reduced list of school subjects subsidized by the state). The rich database allows Elena Minina to contrast the interpretative schemes underlying neoliberal and local interpretations of

educational standards and to expose several points of tension surrounding the concept of educational standards. Her methodology makes it possible to detect concepts at the linguistic, metaphorical, and conceptual levels. Her argumentation takes place along two conflicting frameworks within the standardization debate: state control and pedagogy. One side embraces authoritarian pedagogy and the state monopoly over education, the other is rooted in the local pedagogical tradition of *vospitanie* through creative learning (here we find references to the self-perceptions of educators as addressed by **Margarita Jeliaskova and Mariya Vitrukh** in this issue). Elena Minina demonstrates impressively how, even whilst sharing initial points of reference, values become reversed in the public and in the official discourses. Within this normative evaluation, post-references play an important role: official discourse opposes the progressiveness of educational standards with the »grey uniformity« of Soviet-era schooling, while public discourse frames the standardization reform as a total displacement of personality. Demonstrating the degree of inconsistency originating from the official rhetoric, which creates confusion in the societal debate and obscures the direction of reform, the author makes an important contribution to the discussion of local and pedagogical specifics of post-spaces and of reform processes (here we find relevant references to the approach of **Tavis D. Jules and Teresa Barton** in this issue).

**Margarita Jeliaskova** addresses the challenging topic of the possible irrelevancies of path dependencies in her comparison of high school social studies teachers' views on citizenship education in three European countries: the Netherlands, Bulgaria, and Croatia (teachers' professional self-understanding is also looked at by **Mariya Vitrukh** in this issue). Approaching the topic with specific questions central to the didactics of citizenship education, Jeliaskova challenges the idea of path dependencies empirically through her comparative approach. Posing questions that address the area of professional self-understanding within citizenship education—for example: What kind of citizens do they hope to educate? How do they cope with the challenge of finding a balance between neutrality and indoctrination, etc.—to over 60 teachers in the

three countries, the interviews use both quantitative and qualitative methods. This mixed methodology resulted in variations of four ideal types of views: hierarchical, individualist, egalitarian, and fatalist. The research finds both shared ideas of professional standards among the teachers in all three countries and differing lines of argumentation supporting these standards, thus showing the ambiguousness of the assumption of path dependencies. While demonstrating that group-grid theory as an overarching framework within Q-methodology is a suitable instrument for cross-country comparison, Margarita Jeliaskova shows that this method is essential for the study of (possible) path dependencies, as it allows analysis of genuine interpretations by practitioners without pre-set measures and imposed meanings. The method makes it possible to reflect on the internal diversity of »national contexts« (here an interesting interrelation to the article by **Elena Minina** emerges) and thus to avoid the bias of cultural and political labelling, a point especially relevant for »post« studies.

In her article, **Mariya Vitrukh** touches upon teachers as educational agents in post-spaces and examines their professional identities, discussing the lived experiences of practicing academics in Ukraine (**Margarita Jeliaskova** in this issue analyses teachers' professional self-understanding in post-spaces from a *subject-specific* perspective). Mariya Vitrukh approaches the issue of professional identity from a psychological perspective. She uses the lenses of social identity theory, Kelchtermans' (1993) model of professional identity, and Connelly and Clandinin's (1999) approach to teachers' professional stories as the theoretical basis for her research. Her article opens up perspectives on the group, unfortunately not yet the object of many researchers' attentions, and reconstructs the stories university teachers create about their current professional identity. She demonstrates how these identities evolved through their experiences as university teachers and how their professional stories interrelate with their working environment. Based on her (small-scale) data, Mariya Vitrukh demonstrates the shift from a teacher-centered approach to other approaches such as student- or subject centred, within the department under research. In this article, many

aspects of the (ir)relevance of post-socialist dependencies are articulated: the changing role of knowledge (relevant for both post-socialist education and education in the era of globalization), the changing role of teachers in society, as well as education reforms and their ambiguous impact on teachers' identities and teaching practices. The reform(s) appear to be one of the phenomena that play a central role in the research on post-socialist and post-authoritarian education (see also **Elena Minina's** impressive research in this issue). The description of the specific meanings of the reforms, their emergence, and their (re)framings through the education system and its actors leads to the work of **Tavis D. Jules and Teresa Barton**.

**Tavis D. Jules and Teresa Barton** use Tunisia as a case study in order to examine developments in higher education within transitory democratic spaces. They raise the question of whether and how the revolution acts as an agent of educational contagion as new ideas are imported and old ones realigned in the search for national competency and international legitimacy. Their study explores the emergence of post-revolutionary reforms using the case of Tunisia's recent movement from revolution to elections. With the help of content analyses of Tunisia's higher education policies in the pre-and post-revolutionary period, the authors reconstruct the actors and institutions that facilitated, guided, and supported reform initiatives while looking at the interconnectedness of revolutionary changes and educational transformations. This study seeks to describe why states import new educational reforms on a theoretical level and to delineate who is responsible for these reforms. Jules and Barton thus discuss a very special case of missing path dependencies, in which a strong focus on education brought about societal breaks through people who were enabled through education to change the political system they were brought up by (a fascinating counterpart to this case is described by **Ekaterina Protassova** in this issue). This article is an important contribution to the discussions on »post«-spaces in education, framing »post« as a break, not as a dependency.

**Irina Mchitarjan** approaches the question of path-dependencies from a historical perspective, thus enriching the spectrum of the issue with one



more disciplinary view. Her focus is the educational policy of (nation-)states towards sociocultural minorities. She studies this issue using the example of Russia's educational policy for minorities during history, tracing its developments and specifics from the beginnings of the Russian state until the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Covering this broad time span makes it possible to see historical continuities as well as changes in Russia's educational policies for minorities (this focus on dependencies and changes approaches the topics also raised by **Margarita Jeliaskova** and **Tavis D. Jules and Teresa Barton** in this issue, however it contributes to this topic from a very different perspective and within a different temporal frame of reference). The article is based on a theoretical analysis of educational policies for ethnic minorities. For this analysis, Mchitarjan uses the theory of cultural transmission in minorities, developed by the author herself (Mchitarjan and Reizenzein 2010, 2014, 2013). The study aims at a theoretical understanding of Russian educational policies for non-Russian minorities, thus contributing to the history of education from the perspective of historical sociology. After summarizing the theory of cultural transmission in minorities; Russian educational policies for minorities are analyzed from the perspective of this theory. Thus the article brings an essential perspective and an elaborate knowledge base into this special issue of *InterDisciplines*. The frame of reference suggested by **Irina Mchitarjan** is an essential contribution to understanding the issue of minority language education. The theoretical framework presented by **Irina Mchitarjan** also contributes to understanding the developments of bilingual education in Udmurt and Chuvash described by **Ekaterina Protassova** in this issue.

**Ekaterina Protassova** approaches an under-researched topic: bilingual education in Russia after the end of the Soviet Union. Bringing in rich data from interviews and school statistics and policies regarding post-Soviet transitions in minority language and bilingual education, Ekaterina Protassova delves deeply into the vanishing of Udmurt and Chuvash as minority languages in Russia (both as a statistical reality and as a subjective feeling many native speakers have). Demonstrating specifics of the Russian Federation's bilingual education, Protassova elaborates on

phenomena such as language frontiers between cities and villages and shows how they are reflected in the school system. Her complex analysis detects the ways in which the legacy of Soviet-era educational policies, processes of globalization and urbanization, teacher shortages, and the general belief that the Russian language is an essential competency in professional life influence the situation of the Udmurt and Chuvash languages. Addressing the issue of multilingual education in today's Russia, the author puts her focus on a description of the changes in education for minority language speakers during the years of post-socialist development (for a broader understanding of the history and development of educational policies towards so called ethnic minorities in Russia, see **Irina Mchitarjan** in this issue). The author suggests that the educational policies and educational practices regarding the so called minority languages have resulted in the vanishing of these languages and should be understood as a negative example of how post-Soviet policies have learned from Soviet history. The autonomization of minority peoples (through their languages) is seen as a threat to the nation-state and homogenization with the help of one majority language (Russian) is deemed beneficial to the sustainability of the state (here we see a fascinating link to the article by **Tavis D. Jules and Teresa Barton** in this issue as regards education as a catalyst of change or revolution).

Bringing together different perspectives, empirical and theoretical research, and a disciplinary and methodological plurality of approaches while presenting fascinating work based on large amounts of data and innovative and courageous research approaches, the authors of this volume not only exhibit a great deal of expertise and open up windows for under-researched topics. They elaborate, each for her- or himself, the central terms of post-spaces in educational research. They challenge the very idea of path dependencies with their research, and they challenge themselves while addressing the difficult topic of path dependencies. At this point, my great thanks goes to the authors who accepted the challenge to work on this topic and to managing editor Sabine Schäfer, who supported me and the authors through this process, as well as to the

reviewers, whose difficult work included re-considering their own notion of post-spaces and taking in so many very different perspectives.

Having started an open call for papers, the editor becomes an observer of momentum, that which Germans call *Eigendynamik*, the internal dynamics of developments. For me as editor, reading the articles and reviews and discussing them with the authors was very fruitful. It helped me to detect some commonalities of the research, some common challenges and gaps, as well as common approaches, once again demonstrating the fascinating possibilities and outcomes of interdisciplinarity. The awareness of the challenges of research on post-socialist and post-authoritarian education that arose from this exchange led me to develop the *Draft instrument for detecting post-Soviet and post-authoritarian dependencies in social sciences and humanities education* (see **Annex**); I am looking forwards to discussions on the instrument's development.

It was fascinating to see how many parallel issues the authors raised in their papers. It was a great pleasure of my work as an editor to establish cross-references between authors who do not know each other and who shall most definitely profit from each other's work as soon as this volume is published. Along with our general readers, I wish the authors great joy reading the fascinating and corresponding articles of fellow authors, and I am looking forward to further discussions.

The authors' focus on both policies and public discourses, their understanding that mixed methods as well as interdisciplinarity are needed to approach the issue, their interest in the identities and self-perception of educators, their framing of education as subject and object of change—all these facets of research on education make up this issue and contribute to the question posed at the very beginning of the long process of editing: whether the authoritarian past is »Still an issue?«

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