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An Epilogue: The Policy Tide for Educational Management and Leadership Development in Small European Countries

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To summarise the findings of this volume we draw attention to four inter-related trends. The first trend is that school leadership is being seen to matter. This volume is a contribution to the mounting evidence that has received increasing academic focus in the last decade which

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suggests that education management generally and school leadership in particular are crucial for the successful implementation of education policy. This has two important consequences: one can be captured under the slogan 'education change happens one school at a time'; the other is that while grand policy schemes may be important to rally support and act as a compass for education actors, if they are not accepted and implemented by school leaders they do not amount to much. This also implies that the training and professionalisation of school principals matters and deserves increased attention, both from researchers and policy makers.

The second trend lies in education and policy research, where research outside the prevailing Anglo-Saxon tradition is growing in volume and prominence. This book is in fact a deliberate contribution to this larger general trend in the social sciences and in studies of public policy, moving away from the Anglo-Saxon perspective, dominated by US and UK academics, towards positions that offer a multivariate perspective. In this volume, we have profoundly European perspectives from a number of the smaller European countries in the south-east and in the north. We hope that the number of country cases have convinced the reader that diverse national contexts matter.

We would go even further and conclude that both national and local contexts matter. In every chapter of this volume, this is repeated in different ways in relation to both the academic and policy perspective: one cannot easily understand or explain developments in a country or region without the particular context. Similarly, the case studies show that when policies are not sensitive to the context and do not involve stakeholders, the level of success in implementing these policies is reduced. This is perhaps the most potent lesson for policy makers that this book offers: stakeholder involvement is crucial. Here, the results are very much in line with what other large-scale studies have found in education leadership (Moss et al. 2013). This is also part of a larger trend within the social sciences, moving away from linear approaches in theorising and researching reality to approaches that recognise the complex relationships of social actors, where policy implementation becomes a matter of 'governance' (Sætren and Hupe 2018).

The third trend might be captured by the metaphor that ‘the tide is turning’ on the predominance of an economic (neo-liberal) perspective of policy related to education management. This has been at the core of the approach by global actors such as the OECD and the EU and it will continue to be very important. But social considerations and shared values like equality and personal development are back on the political agenda—at least in Europe. One could say that the concept of *Bildung* is back! We see this trend at the national policy level when excessive emphasis on international benchmarking is criticised. We see it at the institutional level in the emphasis on educational leadership that is focused not just on efficiency but also on inspiring teachers and students. We see this also in the wider European context where at the international level there is a shift in the focus of the rationale of education—from being primarily its long-term contribution to employment and economic development, to being *also* valued for its role in underpinning social cohesion in increasingly diverse societies. Nowhere is this truer than in the European context.¹

The concept of ambidexterity discussed in Chapter 2 can be of use when considering the implications of these trends. While the term was originally used to explain the rare ability of being equally adept in the use of both left and right hand, in the context of education management policy it refers to the need to keep both the economic and the social perspective in mind. It also emphasises the equal importance of policy at national level and its implementation at local level. At local level, stakeholder involvement is important, but change also requires the individual initiative of school managers. For the school manager, ambidexterity means an emphasis on both the efficient management and the educational leadership and organisation of institutions that can successfully combine teaching and learning.

From a theoretical perspective, the diverse national and regional contexts, made visible by education practices and traditions, might be seen to challenge the seemingly cohesive body of education-related knowledge, as shaped by global institutions and benchmarking initiatives (Spilane 2013). In reality, multiple models of educational leadership may be emerging, shaped by specific national/regional socioeconomic

circumstances. While the Nordic model has already been described by the practices of cooperation and stakeholder inclusion (Moss et al. 2013), this volume opens other small countries' and regions' perspectives of building relevant bodies of knowledge on what works in education leadership and policy, at local, national and regional levels. The editors and authors of the volume hope that it will motivate other education researchers to join the discussion.

Note

1. The conclusions of meetings of the leaders of the European Union took a decisive turn in this direction following the terrorist attacks in Paris and Brussels in 2015 and 2016 (see <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/european-council/conclusions/>). In a recent communication, the president of the European Commission sees education and culture as 'the drivers for job creation, economic growth, social fairness and ultimately unity [in Europe]' (European Commission 2017).

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