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**Education as a public and common good:
Revisiting the role of the State in a context of
growing marketization**

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INTRODUCTION

Background

Over the course of the last few decades, education has increasingly been referred to as a public good in education development and human right discourse. The education-related Goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development¹ – *Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all* (hereafter referred to as Education 2030) – outlined in the Incheon Declaration², is grounded on long-established foundational principles that refer to the recognition of education as a human right and as a public good (UNESCO 2015a:5). This vision is also recalled and further detailed in the Framework for Action³ which outlines how to translate into practice the commitments envisaged in the Education 2030 agenda. It is stated that “Education is a public good, of which the state is the duty bearer” (UNESCO, 2015a:10).

On the basis of a general interpretation of the theory of public goods, as developed by Musgrave (1939) and Samuelson (1954), the notion of education as a public good aims to reaffirm the primary responsibility of the State in assuring that *all* children have access to free and quality education. The role of the State is considered fundamental since, as also envisaged in legal frameworks, it is the main actor that has to safeguard the respect of principles of equality of opportunity, equity, and inclusion. This is all the more important given the need to ensure that discriminations are avoided and marginalized or underprivileged groups also have access to quality education opportunities. In this perspective, States have a key role in safeguarding the public interest in education and are expected to directly provide or finance educational opportunities, especially at the basic and compulsory level.

¹ United Nations. 2015. *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. New York, United Nations. (UN General Assembly Resolution 70/1.)

² The Incheon Declaration *Education 2030: Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all* was adopted at the World Education Forum held in Incheon (Republic of Korea), 19-22 May 2015

³ UNESCO. 2015. *Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action: Towards Inclusive and Equitable Quality Education and Lifelong Learning for All*. Paris, UNESCO

The leading role of the State in educational policies and practices is however increasingly being questioned, largely in result of the changing dynamics in the global educational landscape. This is characterized by the greater involvement of non-state actors⁴ in educational policy and provision, as well as by the growing scale of for-profit education at all levels. These changes are undoubtedly the result of several interconnected trends that have seen the increasing involvement of private actors in the funding and delivery of education opportunities. One of the main trends can be attributed to the “remarkable and unprecedented expansion in access to education at all levels” that has occurred worldwide over the last two decades and which has resulted in greater pressures on public financing (UNESCO, 2015b). The resulting public sector capacity constraints have created numerous opportunities for non-state actors to get involved in the sector. Under the trends of education privatization lies the assumption that the private sector can provide better quality education and, when functioning as corporate or business organizations, can be more efficient also in the management of the education system. The growing collaboration with the private sector, and the consequently increasing diversification of actors involved at different levels of the education endeavor, has contributed to the blurring of boundaries between the public and the private. Within this context, it has been argued that the multifaceted process of privatization may undermine the relevance of the concept of the public good as a guiding principle for educational governance (UNESCO, 2015c).

Moreover, the principle of education as a public good, traditionally defined within the contours of the nation-state, is further challenged by the progressive shift in the locus of decision-making from a national to a global level. Indeed, regional and global initiatives in education are increasingly influencing national education policies and practices, sometimes encouraging the development of for-profit private education. At the same time, the trends of globalization and liberalization of markets have encouraged a more utilitarian and individualistic approach to education, based on the human capital theory and on rates of return on investment in education, also promoting private engagement in the sector. Rooted in neo-liberal ideologies, these dynamics enhance the adoption of free-market logics, notably those of choice, economic competition, and

⁴ Throughout this dissertation, the term “non-state actors” refers to civil society organizations, non-governmental organizations, teachers unions, private sector, multilateral and international organizations.

performance. In this perspective, education is conceived merely as an individual socio-economic investment and, therefore, as a marketable, consumable good (Macpherson et al, 2014). Indeed, it has been argued that the introduction of market mechanisms in the education sector may call into question specific aspects of the properties of public goods, since market involvement can lead to some forms of exclusion, thus making education more similar to a private good (Kohlrausch and Leuze, 2007).

Rationale

The issue of determining the extent to which the private sector should be engaged in education has been at the center of an intense debate in the education development field. The growing trend of for-profit actors' involvement in the sector has raised important issues with regard to the nature and purposes of education itself, and the consequences for societal development at large. Whether education is considered to be a public or private marketable good is related to two competing visions of the purposes of education (Labaree, 2011). It raises important questions about both the organization of education and the governance of education systems. This is related to the relations that exist among the State, the market, and other stakeholders involved in education, their respective roles, and the distribution of power that exists among them.

Questions have been raised regarding the viability of the traditional role of the State in education – one that commits States to the primary responsibility to directly fund, provide, monitor, and regulate education opportunities. Indeed, the increasing demand for education at all levels has contributed, along with the Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals global agendas, to an expansion of access to education and to the lengthening of the average duration of schooling across the world. The growth in enrolment, also resulting from the significant global demographic changes, has generated greater pressures on public schooling systems in terms both of funding and delivery of education opportunities, determining the 'failure' of government to provide quality basic education to all citizens.

It has been argued that the notion of the public good (and the role of the public and private sector in achieving this) "will probably always be, and should be, a contested subject" (Mansbridge, 1998). In a context characterized by increased complexity and by

the blurring of boundaries between the public and the private, it is necessary to revisit the concept of education as a public good in order to determine the policy implications with regard to the role of the State in the governance of education systems.

Moreover, given “the peculiar nature of education”, serving both public and private interests (Levin, 2000), and the difficulty to make a clear-cut distinction between the public and private sphere in this field (Robertson et al. 2012), it appears more and more difficult to reconcile the economic private purposes with the public-good aspects of education. Since private providers – also for-profit ones – may be expected to provide public goods (Olson, 1965), and that forms of privatization and of marketization are possible also thanks to the direct intervention of the State, it is becoming increasingly challenging to ensure that economic investments of for-profit actors in the field of education are not guided by mere opportunity for business expansion but are principally aimed at contributing to the public interest.

In this respect, it is more and more evident that a “blanket defence of the public sector, as it is or was, over and against the inroads of privatisation, is untenable” (Ball, 2007). “There is no going back to a past in which the public sector as a whole worked well and worked fairly in the interests of all learners. There was no such past” (Ball, 2007). As acknowledged by many scholars, to address the long-standing crisis in education systems there is need for a shift in culture, a transformative change in order to significantly revisit and reshape the way of functioning of public institutions themselves (UNESCO, 2016; Apple and Beane 1995, 2007; Hirsch, 2016; Tedesco, 1995).

Since the coming challenge is not merely a question of economics, but of democracy (Reich, 2015), reframing the concept of education as a public good should take into consideration both economic and political perspectives which focus on the institutional regulation of goods (Kohlrausch and Leuze, 2007). As argued by the historian and social critic Tony Judt (2010), “the choice will no longer be between the state and the market, but between two sorts of states. It is thus incumbent upon us to reconceive the role of government. If we do not, others will” (p. 9).

Objectives of the study

The new global educational landscape requires a clearer understanding of what the principle of education as a public good possibly means today in light of the changing dynamics in the governance of education both at the national and at the global level. This is all the more important given the renewed commitment, and the ambitious goal of the international community to ensure that “all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes”⁵.

This study maps out trends in, and the rationales for, private engagement in schooling, including the development of public-private partnerships in education, the controversial growth of low-fee private schools in the global South, and the emergence of what some have termed the ‘Global Education Industry’⁶.

It examines how market approaches reshape state institutions and the State-Education relation (Robertson and Verger, 2012). This dissertation also aims at identifying potential challenges that for-profit business engagement in education poses to the role of the State and to democratic policy-making, democratic governance and the societal collective purposes of education.

It takes into consideration how the principle of education as a public good may be recast in light of the increasing variety of stakeholders involved in education. This may be useful in order to understand the conditions under which for-profit participation undermines or contributes to the aim of a public-good approach, that of ensuring free and quality education for all. Defining the role of the State in education will be necessary to avoid the risk that “business interests creep into the formulation of aims and strategy” (Draxler, 2014), thus leading to the privatization of the educational governance itself.

This study aims to examine complementary frameworks for the governance of education that may favor democratic participation and a humanistic approach, while

⁵ Target 4.1 of Sustainable Development Goal 4. United Nations. 2015. *Transforming our World – The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*.

⁶ Verger, A., Lubienski, C. and Steiner-Khamsi, G. (Eds.) 2016. “The Emergence and Structuring of the Global Education Industry: Towards an Analytical Framework”. In Verger, Lubienski and Steiner-Khamsi (eds.) *The Global Education Industry. World Yearbook of Education 2016*. London, Routledge

countering neoliberal influences in the sector. The concept of education as a common good may provide innovative elements for the development of political institutions that enable citizens to have greater voice in the decisions that affect their well-being. It is argued that understanding education as a common good may call for greater cooperation both within and beyond the education sector in order to innovate and rethink education systems substantially.

Research questions

Given the above background and rationale, this dissertation will endeavor to answer the following research questions:

1. Why has the principle of education as a public good constantly appeared in education development discourse over the last few decades?
2. What are the implications of the growing trends of privatization and marketization with regard to the role of the State in education?
3. How might the principle of education as a public good be revisited in order to address the challenges that arise from the governance of education systems in a context characterized by greater complexity and uncertainty?

Nature of the study

The analysis conducted in this study is of theoretical nature. It builds on the work of research I carried out at UNESCO in Paris during my period of secondment at the Education Research and Foresight Unit (Education Sector). In particular, I had the privilege of providing research assistance in the realization of the report of the Senior Experts' Group established by the Director-General of UNESCO Irina Bokova to rethink education in a world of rapid transformation. This UNESCO flagship publication, *Rethinking Education: Towards a global common good?*, aims at revisiting foundational principles for the governance of education systems and at identifying issues likely to affect the organization of learning and the purposes of education in a context characterized by increasing complexity and uncertainty.

The object of my study is in continuity with the theoretical analysis developed in *Rethinking Education*, and looks particularly at the need of revisiting the concept of education as a public good in light of the trends of privatization and marketization which are increasingly affecting the educational landscape both at a national and at a global level.

It could be argued that my theoretical study falls within the category of what some scholars have called ‘research *of* policy’ which is primarily characterized by critical analysis (Desjardins and Rubenson, 2009). This type of research is distinct from the problem-solving approach which characterizes the so-called ‘research *for* policy’ category, according to which the role of research is primarily directed at informing decision-making and policy development by providing tools and solutions for policy action and design. The ‘research *of* policy’ aims instead at clarifying concepts, providing a better understanding of issues which affect education policy, expanding theories and thinking, and unpacking principles. As argued by Desjardins and Rubenson (2009), this more ‘conceptual position’

“developed as a criticism against the narrow interpretation of instrumentalism. The role of research is not primarily seen as coming up with a solution and/or answer to a specific issue but rather helps develop a broader understanding of the underlying problem. This involves widening the debate, reformulating the problem, clarifying goals, and analyzing eventual conflicts between multiple goals. Instead of being of direct instrumental use, the primary function of research is conceptual” (2009, p. 13).

Indeed, if research *for* policy may be required to provide concrete guide for action in order to respond to knowledge or action ‘gaps’, it is also true that these gaps may occur because key concepts/principles may not be clear enough, or should be revisited as they are no longer relevant to changing contexts. This requires that another kind of research is implemented: research *of* policy.

UNESCO is actively involved in research *of* policy. This function reflects the role of UNESCO as an intellectual agency and its main task “as a global observatory of social transformation” (UNESCO, 2015c p. 9). Indeed, besides playing a fundamental role in

technical assistance, support, and coordination in the education global agendas – such as Education for All, now Education 2030 – UNESCO “has an important intellectual leadership role in international education” (UNESCO, 2015c, p. 5). This important function has been developed within the work implemented by the Education Research and Foresight Unit, which today forms integral part of the Section for Partnerships, Cooperation and Research.

It should be recalled that UNESCO is also directly involved in the formulation of policy recommendations and analysis which pertain to the so-called ‘research *for* policy’. Moreover, the role of research within the education sector is also undoubtedly linked to the gathering of data, both quantitative and qualitative, for the monitoring of global education targets.

Given the theoretical nature of my dissertation, the participation in international conferences represented essential moments of my work since I could share findings regarding the reframing of concepts related to my study and receive contributions and feedback from scholars and academics involved in policy decision-making and research. Indeed, during the last few years I had the opportunity to have periods of feedback from scholars and academics who form part of the global education policy community. In particular, I had the opportunity to present a paper at the conference on Global Public Goods, Global Common and Global Democracy organized by the University of Leuven (Belgium) and to discuss issues related to the analysis of the concept of education as a common good. Moreover, I took part in the XVI World Congress of Comparative Education Societies, held in Beijing (22-26 August 2016), one of the most important conferences on international and comparative education studies.

Methodology

In order to provide a clearer understanding of the concept of public goods as applied to education, the study examines the economic theory of public goods and the way numerous scholars and experts have interpreted this notion, especially with regard to the policy implications on the role and functions of the State. The analysis of education policy discourse is essential in order to highlight the conceptual frameworks and

ideological underpinnings both of the actors that support a vision of education seen as a public good and of those who are more in favor of private involvement.

Through the analysis of discourse of the main actors involved in global education policy and the review of the literature, the study attempts to clarify the multifaceted phenomenon of privatization, considering administrative, economic, technical as well as political and social dimensions. Moreover, the analysis of international education database and the review of research provide a detailed and systematic description of trends of private and market involvement in education.

This theoretical study examines the extensive literature developed by several scholars and human rights researches cautioning against the potentially adverse impact that market approaches to education can have on equity and social justice. The review of the literature is grounded in an interdisciplinary perspective which examines political theory, economics, human-rights law, and philosophy as applied to the field of international education development.

Theoretical framework

This dissertation argues that the concept of education as a public good represents a fundamental principle for the governance of education, as found in international education development discourse and research. In order to provide a clearer understanding of what this concept actually implies, this dissertation adopts a political perspective which focuses on the institutional regulation of goods, through which concrete elements that constitute the ‘publicness’ in education systems can be identified. Moreover, given the increasing interactions between State and non-state actors at different levels, this study also explores the concept of common goods as a potential complementary framework to strengthen democratic governance in education in a context characterized by greater complexity. Indeed, the concept of common goods has been increasingly adopted in philosophical-political spheres since its theoretical foundations are grounded in the alternative practices which oppose the spread of market policies that have been occurring both in the private and public domain.

Considering that the policies and issues related to marketization vary considerably at each level of education, this analysis will keep a specific focus on *schooling* since this is the level of education which receives most attention, partly “because it potentially affects the most people or involves the critical functions of education and socializing children” (Minow, 2003). This is not to underestimate the significance of market mechanisms in early childhood, secondary, tertiary or higher education. However, the privatization of each level of education displays itself in diverse ways, with different rationales and results. To discuss all levels would exceed the scope of this thesis. The primary is also the level of education where the role of the State is more clearly established by international conventions and national laws. Moreover, this is the level which, over the last two decades, has been associated with global agendas such as Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals, and on which the debates on privatization have focused most, being this the level of education which has considerably increased worldwide.

Structure of the dissertation

Chapter one, entitled “Education as a public good: a concept with different interpretations”, aims to provide a review of the education development discourse with regard to the use of the concept of education as a public good and to the different interpretations that have been attributed to this concept by the main actors involved in education policy. It aims to revisit the application of the theory of public goods to the field of education and to identify potential implications with regard to the role of the State. The chapter ends by suggesting that it is necessary to reframe the concept of education as a public good given the changing educational landscape, characterized by greater involvement of non-state actors at all levels of the education endeavor, by the “expanding public domain”, and by the blurring of boundaries between the public and the private.

The purpose of the second chapter, “Changes in the global education landscape: growing privatization and marketization of education” is to give a detailed analysis of the phenomenon of privatization in the field of education. It first seeks to identify challenges related to the definition of this term and to the different meanings and

understandings of this concept in education policy discourse and research. It outlines potential methodological implications related to the difficulty of finding a shared definition of privatization and to assess the real scale of the phenomenon. It illustrates the different forms of privatization and how trends and figures vary across and within regions, countries, and cities themselves. Driving forces behind the trends of privatization are identified in: the growing demand for more diversified educational opportunities; the government failure to provide quality basic education for all its citizens; the globalization and the spread of neoliberal ideology. It is finally suggested that the involvement of the market has been progressively taking a global scale and that these are directly linked to the risk of considering education as an industry regulated by the rules of global trade.

Chapter three, entitled “The Global Education Industry”, investigates one particular manifestation of privatization in education which is influenced by neoliberal ideologies and market economics. This chapter provides an overview of the “Global Education Industry” landscape and traces the main actors involved. The analysis identifies potential challenges of for-profit business engagement in education to democratic policy-making, to democratic governance and to the societal/collective purposes of education. It focuses on the growth of low-fee private schools and of public-private partnerships in education as particular manifestations of privatization in which market approaches appear most influential and provides an analysis of the pros and cons of these arrangements.

The fourth chapter, “Reframing the concept of education as a public good”, first illustrates the peculiar nature of education, serving both public and private interests, and outlines two different approaches, one that puts greater emphasis on the public-goods, and the other on private-goods aspects related to market-based approaches to education. Potential effects of marketization on the concept of education as a public good are then identified. This analysis provides insights into how the principle of education as a public good can be reinterpreted, and identifies ‘criteria of publicness’ that refer to both formal and functional conditions, the first related to the democratic governance of education systems, the latter to the development of democratic pedagogy and curriculum. The chapter outlines the policy implications with regard to the different functions of the State by taking into consideration different combinations of lower and

higher levels of democracy and of private actors' involvement. I argue that the State should maintain a fundamental regulatory function and should strengthen its role in the provision and funding of education, especially in those contexts where education systems are not fully developed. Having said this, it is argued that the State cannot be self-sufficient in the funding and management of the education system. The existence and the development of networks at the local, national, and international levels, may give States the opportunity to put forward an alternative educational proposal that builds on the concept of education as a public good, in contrast to a vision of education yielding exclusively private benefits. Finally, I argue that partnerships may provide adequate opportunities both to complement the current functions and role of the Network State and to develop stronger education systems, especially in those contexts where the capacity and the financial opportunities of States need to be improved and supported.

The last chapter, entitled "Education as a common good", endeavors to examine complementary frameworks for the governance of education that may favor democratic participation and a humanistic approach while countering neoliberal influences in the sector. While reaffirming the primary responsibility of the State in the governance of education, understanding education as a common good also requires that the process of producing and benefitting from education is intrinsically shared. Indeed, the concept of common goods is increasingly adopted in philosophical-political spheres since its theoretical foundations are grounded in the alternative practices which oppose the spread of market policies that have been occurring both in the private and public domain. This study suggests that the frameworks of public goods and common goods may be seen as a sort of *continuum* in line with the aim of recuperating the role of the State, not merely seen as a State constituted by separate individuals, but as a 'State-community' which identifies itself in its citizens and in the fulfillment of popular sovereignty. Finally, the notion of education as a global common good is also examined. It calls for the development of global political institutions that enable countries and their citizens to have greater voice in the decisions that affect their well-being. This is necessary to encourage the diversity of approaches while countering dominant development discourse, characterized by a more instrumental vision of education. This dissertation discusses the extent to which the framework of global

common goods may promote the formulation democratic education policies and practices in a global context.

CHAPTER 1

Education as a public good: a concept with different interpretations

The conceptualization of education as a public good in development discourse is problematic. First and foremost, there are theoretical limitations inherent to the transposition of the economic concept of the public good to the field of education. This often leads to a lack of consensus on what the principle implies in terms of rights and responsibilities. Secondly, the conceptualization of education as a public good is now being challenged by the growing private engagement in education, as well as by the growing scale of for-profit education at all levels. Moreover, the principle of education as a public good, traditionally defined within the contours of the nation-state, is further challenged by the progressive shift in the locus of decision-making from the national to the global level. This blurring of boundaries between the public and the private and between the local and the global is undermining the relevance of the concept of education as a public good as a guiding principle for democratic educational governance.

This chapter first looks at how the concept of public goods has been conceptualized in economic theory and the way it has been transposed to education, and then considers why the principle of education as a public good may need to be reframed in light of the changing global educational landscape.

1.1 Growing reference within international education development discourse

This section provides an overview of the concept of education as a public good as understood by the main actors involved in international education development. This will be essential in order to understand, how and why these actors have been referring to this concept especially with regard to the role of the State in education policy and practice, since the time this notion was introduced into the language of international development. Among the most significant actors are UNESCO (which headed the global coordination of the Education for All agenda, today Education 2030), the Global Partnership for Education, as well as numerous international NGOs involved in

education and development. Human rights actors have also been producing this discourse for some years. Although not explicitly envisaged in international human rights frameworks, the concept of education as a public good has been widely mentioned in numerous reports of the Special Rapporteurs on the Right to Education since 2000, as well as in several recommendations of the Human Rights Council, of the Committee on the Rights of the Child, and of the UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights.

The concept of education as a public good was first mentioned within the work of UNESCO during the 1990s to reaffirm a humanistic vision of education, based on principles of respect for life, human dignity, cultural diversity and social justice, in contrast to a more utilitarian and economic approach. The *Education for All* movement, which was first launched at the World Conference held in Jomtien (Thailand), represented a milestone event which urged countries “to intensify efforts to address the basic learning needs of all”⁷ and which reaffirmed the importance of education as a fundamental human right. The humanistic approach that underlay the *World Declaration on Education for All* was grounded on an integrated vision of education which, beyond economic factors, also considered “social, cultural, and ethical dimensions of human development” (UNESCO, 1990). The importance of reaffirming an integrated and humanistic approach to education was in contrast with more utilitarian approaches to education which had been spreading worldwide since the 1970s as a result of neoliberal policies and of the acceleration of economic globalization. Within the instrumentalist perspective of neoliberalism, education is considered as one of the main drivers of economic development (Draxler, 2014). It is in this context that in 1996, the International Commission on Education for the Twenty-first Century, chaired by the Jacques Delors⁸, published the UNESCO landmark report *Learning: The Treasure Within*, commonly referred to as the *Delors Report* in which the authors affirmed that “education is a public good that should be available to all” (Delors et al., 1996). It has been argued that the humanistic and integrated vision of education conveyed in this

⁷ World Conference on EFA, Jomtien, 1990 – retrieved at: www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/leading-the-international-agenda/education-for-all/the-efa-movement/jomtien-1990/

⁸ Jacques Delors is a French economist who has been president of the European Commission for three mandates between 1985 and 1995.

report was based on a vision of “education as a public good with a fundamental role to play in personal and social development”, one that should guide UNESCO’s mission as well as that of the UN family (Burnett, 2008). As discussed by Tawil and Cougoureux (2013), this vision provided a guide for education systems in resistance to the “dominant utilitarian economic approach prevalent at that time”.

With regard to specific levels of education, the participants in the UNESCO 2009 World Conference on Higher Education recognized Higher Education as a public good. In the Final Communiqué (UNESCO, 2009a), they supported the idea that, as a public good, higher education should be the responsibility of governments but also of society at large (§1). With particular regard to issues of funding, it is stated that “Education remains a public good, but private financing should be encouraged. While every effort must be made to increase public funding of higher education, it must be recognised that public funds are limited and may not be sufficient for such a rapidly developing sector. Other formulae and sources of funding, especially those drawing on the public-private partnership model, should be found” (§47).

The notion of education as a public good has also been recalled in the numerous documents produced essentially by UNESCO that contributed to the formulation of the post-2015 education agenda.⁹ These documents assert that “the state is the custodian of quality education as a public good, recognizing the contribution of civil society, communities, families, learners and other stakeholders to education” (UNESCO, 2014a).

⁹ See in particular:

- UNESCO, UNICEF. 2013. *Making Education a Priority in the Post-2015 Development Agenda: Report of the Global Thematic Consultation on Education in the Post-2015 Development Agenda*. UNESCO, UNICEF;
- UNESCO. 2013. *Thematic Consultation on Education in the post-2015 development agenda: Summary of Outcomes*. 18 -19 March 2013 Dakar, Senegal;
- UNESCO’s Executive Board at its 194th session, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0022/002266/226628e.pdf>;
- UNESCO. 2014. *Position Paper on Education Post-2015*. Paris, UNESCO February 2014, ED-14/EFA/POST-2015/1;
- UNESCO. 2014. *Joint Proposal of the EFA Steering Committee on Education Post-2015*. Paris, UNESCO. April 2014;
- UNESCO. 2014. *The Muscat Agreement*. Global Education for All Meeting. Muscat, Oman 12-14 May 2014, ED-14/EFA/ME/3;
- UNESCO. 2015. *Sharm El Sheikh Statement*. Arab States Regional Conference on Education Post-2015: Towards Quality Education and Lifelong Learning for All, Egypt 27-29 January 2015;

In 2015, this principle was reaffirmed in the *Incheon Declaration on Education 2030*, which was adopted at the World Education Forum held in Incheon, Republic of Korea. It was also referred to as one of the core principles informing the Framework for Action. Under the statement “Education is a public good”, the Framework for Action recalls the responsibility of the State as the main duty-bearer and its essential role in setting and regulating standards and norms, while also recognizing the role of all stakeholders in the realization of the right to quality education. The Framework for Action also includes a remark with regard to the private sector involvement in education financing, stating that it “will be essential to ensure that spending on education from the private sector is oriented [...] to reinforce education as a public good”¹⁰. It is therefore evident that UNESCO, as leader of the coordination of the SDG 4 - Education 2030 Agenda *Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning*, considers the concept of education as a public good a key feature of the new global education agenda. The importance of reaffirming this principle is also dependent on the need to identify and develop “new ways to increase public education budgets through greater fiscal capacity, innovative partnerships with non-state actors, as well as through advocacy for increased official development assistance” (UNESCO, 2016b).

Within human rights discourse, the notion of education as a public good was considered by Katarina Tomasevski, the first UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education, as the premise of “any governmental human rights obligations”¹¹. Recent reports transmitted to the UN Human Rights Council and to the General Assembly by Kishore Singh, Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education between the years 2010 and 2016, also highlight States’ primary responsibility in expanding public education opportunities and public investment against the risk of commercialization and “mercantalization of education”¹². Moreover, the formulation of a “Regulatory framework for governing private providers, centered on education as a public good” is

¹⁰ UNESCO. 2015a. *Education 2030 Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action*. Paris, UNESCO. <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002432/243278e.pdf>.

¹¹ Report submitted by the Special Rapporteur, Katarina Tomasevski, on the right to education. E/CN.4/2004/45, 15 January 2004. See also other reports: E/CN.4/2000/6, 1 ; E/CN.4/2001/52, 11; E/CN.4/2004/45, 15

¹² Report of the UN Special Rapporteur Kishore Singh on the right to education. *Privatization and the right to education*. A/69/402, 24 September 2014. See also: *Report on the Post-2015 Education Agenda*. A/68/294, 09 August 2013;

considered of critical importance in setting out responsibilities and accountability requirements. The UN Special Rapporteur also argued that “regulations must ensure that education is accessible to all, works towards the broader public interest and reflects a broad humanistic notion of education”¹³. Together with the principle of education as a human right, which compels States to respect, protect and fulfill the right to education¹⁴, the notion of education as a public good is clearly mentioned by the UN Special Rapporteur in order to counterbalance potential harmful effects of non-state actors’ involvement in the sector, since principles of equity, equality and non-discrimination could be undermined. In this perspective, the State is expected to directly fund, provide and regulate education opportunities. The UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education constantly reaffirms the importance of “safeguarding education as a public good” and this position was reiterated also in the report on the issue of public private partnerships.¹⁵

Partly as a result of the number of reports presented to UN human rights treaty bodies by civil society organizations concerned with the impact of privatization on human rights,¹⁶ the Human Rights Council and the Committee on the Rights of the Child both raised issues about the growing involvement of private for-profit actors in the sector and recommended that all actors should “contribute to education as a public good”¹⁷. In a report presented at the UN General Assembly on 29 June 2016, the Human Rights Council urged

“all States to expand educational opportunities for all without discrimination, recognizing the significant importance of investment in public education to the maximum of available resources, to increase and improve domestic and external

¹³ Report of the UN Special Rapporteur Kishore Singh on the right to education. *Protecting the right to education against commercialization*. A/HRC/29/30, 10 June 2015. §94

¹⁴ CESCR, General Comment N. 13 on the Right to Education (Article 13 of the Covenant)., 21st session, 08/12/1999, E/C.12/1999/10, §46,

¹⁵ Report of the UN Special Rapporteur Kishore Singh on the right to education. A/70/342, 26 August 2015

¹⁶ These civil society organizations include, above all, the Right to Education Project, the Global Initiative for Economic Social and Cultural Rights, Education International, as well as numerous country-based civil society organizations. The full list of UN treaty bodies resolutions and reports is available at this link: <http://globalinitiative-escr.org/advocacy/privatization-in-education-research-initiative>

¹⁷ UN Human Rights Council Resolution. 2015. The Right to Education. A/HRC/RES/29/7, 22 July 2015

financing for education as affirmed in the Incheon Declaration and the Education 2030 Framework for Action, to ensure that education policies and programmes are consistent with human rights standards and principles, including those laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in relevant international human rights instruments, and to strengthen engagement with all relevant stakeholders, including communities, local actors and civil society, to contribute to education as a public good.”¹⁸

As aforementioned, the notion of education as a public good has been recalled also by several civil society organizations involved in education development. Education International, for instance, recalls the notion of “education as a public good” in its discourse, highlighting the importance that “the costs of public education should [...] not be disproportionately borne by poorer citizens”¹⁹. The non-governmental organizations taking part in the NGO Forum at the World Education Forum (Republic of Korea - May 2015), also referred to this notion in order to “reject calls for increased privatisation or commercialisation in education, including any support for low fee private schools and for-profit universities”²⁰. The Global Campaign for Education, known as “the world’s biggest civil society movement working to end the global education crisis” (GCE, 2016), also considers the concept of education as a public good as a guiding principle for any action taken in the sector. In referring to this term, the GCE aims at supporting the idea that education is the primary responsibility of the State that should finance, provide and regulate education in order to overcome inequalities and injustice.

Finally, the Global Partnership for Education, formerly known as the *Education for All - Fast Track Initiative*, also envisages the concept of “Education as a public good” as the first principle listed in its *Strategic Plan 2016-2020* which acts as a guide for the work of the organization (GPE, 2016). With a specific focus on supporting the development of public education systems in developing countries, the Global Partnership for Education enhances public financial capacities of both recipient

¹⁸ Human Rights Council. *The right to education*. A/HRC/32/L.33, 29 June 2016, § 3

¹⁹ *Education For All and The Global Development Agenda Beyond 2015: Principles For A Post-2015 Education And Development Framework*. Bruxelles, Education International

²⁰ *Towards the Right to Inclusive Quality Public Education and Lifelong Learning Beyond 2015*. NGO Declaration, World Education Forum - Incheon, Republic of Korea, May 2015 - ED/WEF2015/NGO/3

countries as well as of donors through contributions to the partnership. The concept of education as a public good can be interpreted as a call for greater consolidation of public education systems through public funding.

Diverse levels of interpretation

As illustrated in the previous section, the notion of education as a public good has been increasingly mentioned in international education development discourse since the 1990s, although with different interpretations and purposes. Interestingly, this notion has been recalled by international actors whose mission is clearly grounded on a human rights framework and whose main concerns are related to principles of equity, social justice, and non-discrimination in education. First and foremost, it has been used to reaffirm a humanistic and integrated vision of education which goes beyond narrow utilitarian economic approaches. It has also been adopted to underlie the public interest, also associated to *the* public good, and enhancing social development, in contrast to a narrow focus on individual private benefits. Finally, it has been recalled as an organizing principle to suggest the need to strengthen the functions and role of the State in a context characterized by the growing involvement of non-state actors in educational policy and provision. These different interpretations can be synthesized in the figure below:

Levels of interpretation of the concept of education as a public good in education development discourse	
<i>As an approach/vision</i>	to reaffirm a humanistic/integrated vision of education in contrast to a more utilitarian approach
<i>As a policy focus</i>	to preserve the public interest and societal/collective development in contrast to an individualistic perspective
<i>As a principle of governance</i>	to reaffirm the role of the State as the guarantor/custodian/main duty-bearer of education in light of the greater involvement of non-state actors at all levels of the education endeavor

Table 1 – Levels of interpretation of the concept of education as a public good in education development discourse (Source: Author)

However, despite the growing reference to this notion in education development discourse since the 1990s, and even increasingly since 2000, questions have been raised regarding the applicability of the economic theory of public goods to the field of education (UNESCO, 2015c; Daviet, 2016). Since processes of privatization increasingly promote education as a tradable commodity, a shift towards the perception of education as a private good seems likely (Kohlrausch and Leuze, 2007).

The following sections explore the economic theory of public goods and its applicability to the field of education. It analyzes different interpretations that many scholars have given to this notion, particularly with regard to the role of the State at different levels. Determining whether the notion of education as a public good is still valid and relevant for education policy has become all the more important in recent years as growing trends of education privatization may lead to the risk of considering education as a mere private or marketable/consumable good. Indeed, when there is a need to state the obvious, it is often an indication that it is no longer the case (Bergan, 2009).

1.2 The transposition of the economic theory of public goods to education

An appropriate analysis of the concept of education as a public good requires a preliminary overview of the traditional theory of public goods. First of all, how has the concept of public goods been defined in economic theory? What does it possibly imply for the role of the State in terms of functions and responsibilities? How has the notion of education as a public good been interpreted in education research? What are the implications for the role of the State? This section examines the concept of public goods as conceptualized in economic theory and highlights the potential limits of its transposition to the field of education.

The theory of public goods

The notion of public goods has always been linked to the functions and role of the State in modern western societies. The concept of “public goods” is rooted in the culture of the eighteenth century (although not explicitly referred to as such) and can be traced

back to classical economics. In his “Treatise of Human Nature”, published for the first time in 1739, the philosopher David Hume was one of the first to analyze the difficulties concerning the provision of “public goods”. About thirty years later, Adam Smith explored this subject in his “Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations”. Hume and Smith were both convinced that State intervention was necessary to distribute goods and services characterized by public benefits. If left to the spontaneous action of individuals or organizations, such goods, it was argued, would not be adequately provided.

Following a major contribution by Richard Musgrave in 1939, a modern and complete theory on public goods was developed for the first time by Paul Samuelson in 1954 with the publication of his foundational paper “The Pure Theory of Public Expenditure”. Samuelson is considered the first economist to propose a theory of public goods in a welfare-state context (Andersen and Lindsnaes, 2007). In his work, he defined public goods as “[goods] which all enjoy in common in the sense that each individual’s consumption of such a good leads to no subtractions from any other individual’s consumption of that good”. This is the property that has become known as non-rivalry.

In addition, public goods exhibit a second property called non-excludability: that is, it is impossible to exclude any individuals from consuming the good. This second characteristic was not mentioned by Samuelson in his work of 1954. Musgrave’s second technical characteristic of a public good, non-excludability, is implicitly added in Samuelson’s 1958 paper. In a strictly economic sense, therefore, a public good has two distinguishing properties: one person’s consumption does not preclude another’s (non-rivalry) and to exclude anyone from consumption is costly, if not impossible (non-excludability). Examples of public goods include clean air, lighthouses and national security: these goods fulfill the characteristics of non-rivalry and non-excludability since it is difficult, and costly, to exclude someone benefitting from them (non-excludability) and since no one’s use detracts from that of others (non-rivalry).

Goods with these two characteristics present several problems for the free market, among others, that of the *free-rider* problem. According to classical economic theory, in the case of public goods, individuals tend to act as “free riders”, a phenomenon

occurring when people make use of the advantages of the non-exclusion situation (Buchanan, 1975). In this situation, the free market does not have the possibility of linking the enjoyment and consumption of a good with payment for its provision or its production. Therefore, if people do not pay for the enjoyment of public goods, less will be invested in such goods than is optimal. In a free market system, public goods will be underprovided (Ver Eecke, 2008, p. 64). Since the market cannot price goods with these characteristics efficiently, public goods have been considered as market failures, requiring some forms of intervention by the State. It should be noted that public goods have been considered a category residual to that of private goods. Indeed, western economic thinking has always given priority to the concept of private goods, because this is directly connected to the wishes of consumers. In this respect, public goods are an “exception to the idea of private goods” (Ver Eecke, 2008).

The classical definition, therefore, highlights the market-state issue: the provision of private goods is assigned to the market and of public goods to the State (Kaul & Mendoza, 2003). However, the analytical understanding of public goods has expanded since the 1950s giving rise to different interpretations among economists. This has led to the multiplication of categories of public goods “to describe anomalies that cannot be fully analyzed by the concept of private good” (Ver Eecke, 2008). These differentiate among, for instance, pure public goods (possessing the two characteristics of non-rivalry and non-excludability) and impure public goods (which possess the two characteristics in different measures) such as common pool resources or club goods (Cornes and Sandler, 1986).

Private and public goods		
	Rivalrous	Nonrivalrous
Excludable	Private good	Network Club good (mostly nonrivalrous inside the club)
Nonexcludable	Good subject to congestion or depletion, yet accessible to all Some global commons (geostationary orbit)	Pure public good Existence value Some global commons (high seas, ozone layer)

Note: Public goods are in the shaded areas.

Table 2 – Private and public goods (Source: Kaul, I., Grunberg, I, and Stern, M.A. 1999)

The complex classification of public goods, and the lack of consensus among economists in determining their nature, has come hand in hand with a discussion on the role of the State in the financing and in the provision of public goods (Malkin and Wildavsky, 1991; Adams and McCormick, 1993; Cornes and Sandler, 1994; Kaul and Mendoza, 2003). It should be noted that at the time when the concept of public goods was conceptualized – mid 1950s – “economists and the world at large favored an active role for the State in the economy and therefore in the provision of public goods” (Desai, 2003). However, some have deemed that the concept of public goods does not directly imply a direct involvement of the State. Indeed, some authors have argued that public goods are nothing but a *social contract* for there are different definitions of the concept, and different countries treat different services as public goods. As clearly stated, they are “public because and only because society chooses to put the goods in the public sector instead of the private sector” (Malkin and Wildavsky, 1991).

In this respect, there are no objective criteria in defining public goods and it appears that technical or inherent characteristics do not justify an intervention of the State. The latter cannot be counted on to optimally provide a public good: “after all, there may be government failure as well as market failure, and governmental failure may be worse than market failure [...]. It all depends on what society decides to do” (Malkin and Wildavsky, 1991). Considerations on methods of taxation, financing and provision of education appear to be grounded on the diverse interpretations given to the theory of

public goods. If we assume that public goods are such only because they reflect a social construct, the financing and provision of educational opportunities will be left to the choices of the political parties that take decisions on the willingness to pay, or not to pay, for a determined good.

It has however been argued that the concept of public good has an ideal content according to which different governmental functions should be articulated. As illustrated by Ver Eecke, the characteristics of the concepts of private and public goods are more or less realized in all goods. Therefore, the question to ask is which aspects of a particular good exhibit the characteristics typical of the concept of private or public good. The author argues that “the concept of ‘public good’ is a valid, even though problematic, concept for analyzing certain economic problems”. While acknowledging the claim that the State cannot always be considered as the optimal provider of public goods (Malkin and Wildavsky, 1991) and that private initiatives can also provide some public goods (Olson, 1965), Ver Eecke demonstrates the validity of the technical characteristics of public goods, and objects to the idea that the concept of “public good” is merely a social construct. In his view, this notion “has a clearly defined ideal content [...] which is present only in varying degrees and has no agreed upon implementation strategy” (Ver Eecke, 2008). In other words, it is acknowledged that the problem of public goods represents a pure economic challenge, since there are no optimal economic solutions. At the same time, non-economic factors may play an important role in the choice of solutions to the problem of public goods. The discussion on public goods therefore requires a broader reflection on socio-economic issues and “must include reflections on political and institutional arrangements” (Ver Eecke, 2008).

Limits of the transposition of the theory of public goods to education

According to a narrow interpretation of the economic theory of public goods, education should be considered as a private good. Indeed, education does not correspond to the classical definition of a *pure public good*, that is, a good that has both characteristics of non-excludability and non-rivalry. Classroom space can be excludable and a higher number of students in a class may affect the quality of education being provided and “consumed”, making it rival (Menashy, 2009). It follows that if education were a

private good, control should be left to individuals, acting through market mechanisms. As argued by an expert working at the World Bank, education is “largely a private good” since most of the benefits accrue to the individual and States should legitimately withdraw its funding and provision.²¹ Others have considered education as a ‘merit good’, one which has the characteristics of both a private and a public good (Musgrave, 1959). In economic theory, a merit good is defined by Musgrave “as a good which is so important that when the competent authorities are dissatisfied with the level of consumption in the free market, they can intervene, even against the wishes of consumers” (1959). Therefore, the provision on the side of the State of some goods such as education is based on ethical/value judgments. The uncertainty regarding the classification of education according to economic theory inevitably results in uncertainty concerning the role and the functions of the State in education at different levels, from policy-making, to funding, provision, regulation and monitoring.

Despite the economic characteristics of education as an excludable and rival good, in most countries it has been turned into a free, non-exclusive, universally available and even compulsory service provided by the State (Daviet, 2016). Indeed, goods such as education and health care, often considered as human rights and with significant public benefits, “may have a public-good component as well” (Sen, 1999). Education has been considered as a good which is “worthy of public debate and policy making” (Kohlrausch and Leuze, 2007). Moreover, education creates collective benefits, in economic terms ‘positive externalities’, which far exceed individual benefits. These collective benefits entail for instance a country’s economic growth, innovation capacity and competitiveness as well as social cohesion and shared values. Private supply does not guarantee the attainment of the level of production that maximizes the collective well-being. In this respect, education can be considered as an “impure” public good. As previously illustrated, education, like all other goods, may exhibit the characteristics typical of the concepts of private or public good simultaneously (Ver Eecke, 2008). Since it has some aspects of a public good, the role of the State with regard to issues of funding (or taxation), provision or regulation can be justified. In addition, the positive externalities of education also justify the involvement of the State. As well as aspects of

²¹ Devarajan, S. 2014. Education as if Economics Mattered. World Bank Blog <http://blogs.worldbank.org/futuredevelopment/education-if-economics-mattered>

economic efficiency, there may be issues of equity and social justice that also justify public intervention of redistributive nature: education may be a means to overcome inequality among individuals.

In addition to the difficulties of determining which of the two categories of private or public good may apply to education, and therefore the resulting difficulty to determine the implications for the role of the State, the principle of education as a public good has been deemed ineffective to counter the consequences of privatization and commodification. Indeed, Daviet (2016) argues that the economic underpinnings of the theory of public goods, grounded in neoclassical economic theory, “conflict with the principles underlying the humanistic approach to education” (p. 5). It may therefore follow that the concept of education as a public good, which has been adopted by international governmental and non-governmental organizations to counterbalance distortive effects of the market in education, may in reality promote greater privatization and a more utilitarian/economic approach. However, even though the concept of education as a public good, does not comply completely with the standard definition of a *pure* public good – being it completed “with ethical considerations that are foreign to it or complement its core line of thought with other economic theories” (Daviet, 2016) – it does imply in any case some sort of intervention on the part of the State. Education can be considered as an “impure” public good which generates positive externalities and positive effects on equity and social justice. In this perspective some form of state intervention is required. Therefore, it seems unlikely that the use of this concept would foster privatization and marketization. On the contrary, the fact that some international aid agencies with clear neoliberal ideological underpinnings do not refer to this concept in their discourse shows that they may be unwilling to consider a strong intervention of the State in the field of education as necessary.

Having said this, it should be acknowledged that economic concept of public good does not provide a concrete guide for action (Daviet, 2016). Even though an intervention from the State is to be expected within the framework of public goods, it still remains unclear whether state functions should refer to the provision, financing or regulation of educational opportunities. As deemed by Ver Eecke (2008), reflections on economic issues should also include reflections on political and institutional arrangements. Indeed, while in economics properties of the respective good are usually

examined, a political perspective instead focuses on the institutional regulation of goods. This may provide concrete elements to identify what should be expected from the State when conceiving education as a public good.

Over the last twenty years, the academic debate on the relevance of this notion, particularly with regard to the role of the State in the governance of education, reflects the different interpretations and uses of the concept of education as a public good.

1.3 Public or private good?

Education as a public good: implications for the role of the State as outlined in research

There have always been different interpretations of the notion of education as a public good in educational and development research. First and foremost, some authors have associated the principle of education as a public good to that of ‘public education’. Again, there are different interpretations of what constitutes ‘public education’. Some have argued that public education can be realized thanks to the efforts of both public and state-subsidized ‘private schools’ (Reid, 2012). Others have made a claim for public education to be a public good, understanding in this case ‘public education’ clearly as an issue of ownership, as “publicly-provided education”. This interpretation is based on the assumption that market and economic approaches to education involve a weakening of democratic participation and social cohesion (Tomlinson, 1986; Labaree, 2000). The notion of education as a public good is understood both in the sense that education serves the public interest – “all of the members of a community have a stake in the adequate education of other people’s children in that community in addition to their own” (Labaree, 2000) – and in the terms of education that is publicly provided.

Considering education as a public good is therefore associated to the need for public investment and public provision in the public schooling system in order to preserve equity and social justice (Riddle, 2014). It is argued that the substantial public benefits of education are “supported by volumes of research, not least into the history of public education systems” (Green, 2014). While acknowledging the dual nature of education, represented as a private and public good at the same time – a fact that should be faced by politicians – it is assumed that the case should be made for education to be a public

good, in the interests of the majority. Indeed, according to Lewin (2015), education is a public good in the sense that its benefits extend to all. As a public good, it should be “available free at the point of service delivery” (Lewin, 2015). Maintaining education as a public service, while not resisting all types of reform, is considered as the best option to reduce inequalities (Green, 2014). The argument is based on the idea that the State should be the ultimate guarantor of principles of social justice and equality and is therefore expected to directly commit to the provision of educational opportunities. As stated by Alexandra Draxler, “if education is a public good, then it should be non-excludable. (...) The only sector that can and might make that happen is the public sector” (Draxler, 2014).

However, other interpretations of the notion of education as a public good do not relate to educational provision or direct investment by the State. In the background paper prepared by the Aga Khan Foundation team for the Education for All Global Monitoring Report 2008, it is stated that “Education is a ‘public good’ with benefits not only to individuals, but also to society at large” (Aga Khan Foundation, 2007). The document provides an interesting analysis of the role of the State in education in the light of the increasing involvement of non-state actors. In the discussion on the principle of the “public good”, the authors underline that “The key point [...] may be government commitment to education, rather than government necessarily doing it all”.

To summarize, it could be argued that education is referred to as a public good given the need to preserve the public interest and to protect fundamental principles of equity, social cohesion, and social justice. The following dimensions are outlined with regard to the functions and role of the State:

- Provision: education as a public good is often associated, although with some differences, to the notion of ‘public education’ or ‘public service’. It implies that the State is primarily responsible to directly provide education opportunities;
- Funding: this dimension, often associated with provision, requires the direct commitment and involvement of the State with regard to issues of financing;
- Regulation: in order to preserve the public interest, the notion of education as a public good implies that the State is the ultimate guarantor of the institutional

framework, including quality assurance and setting of minimum standards to ensure equal opportunities.

The conceptualization of education as a public good however remains ambiguous. Firstly, *education* is often referred to generically, without a clear distinction of how this principle should apply according to different levels and forms of education. Education as a public good at primary level certainly has different implications compared to higher levels of education, as well as when considering different forms of education (formal, non-formal and informal). Having said this, it can be argued that most of the references in development and human rights discourse seem to interpret education as *schooling* that should be free and compulsory.

In addition, if education is to be considered as a public good, and therefore a non-marketable good, it remains unclear whether this means that it is free of charge. If all goods or services come at a price, then the question is how and by whom education should be paid for (Bergan, 2009). Moreover, the general agreement that public authorities have a duty to provide education for all, at least at basic levels, seems to be called into question by the changing educational landscape which sees the increasing involvement of non-state actors at all levels of the education process. As a result, the relevance and validity of this notion as a guiding principle for educational governance, in a context characterized by the blurring of boundaries between the public and the private, and by growing trends of for-profit education, needs to be re-contextualized.

The blurring of boundaries between the public and the private

The State has always played a significant role in the development of public education systems in many parts of the world and has been directly involved in the funding and provision of education since the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century (Green, 2014). In particular, as of the second half of the twentieth century, the expansion of the welfare state in modern societies corresponded to the expansion of education systems and the State has been the main (and sometimes only) actor concerned with the provision of education. The common assumption that education is a public good has therefore been associated to the main role of the State in the delivery and funding of

educational opportunities since these functions are seen as “one of the main rationales for the existence of the state” (Desai, 2003). Robust systems of education were developed and the right to education was inscribed in many constitutions in both developed and developing countries, also as a result of the commitments envisaged in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (art. 26)²² and of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (art. 13)²³, ratified by many countries worldwide.

However, the conceptualization of education as a public good has been called into question over the past three decades by the multiplication of public and private actors involved in education (e.g. international and national public organizations, multinational companies, NGOs) as well as by the diversification of sources of financing. Moreover, the increase in the outsourcing of services, and in the intervention of public institutions acting as enterprises in the market, are all factors which contribute to the blurring of the boundaries between what is public and what is private in education. This is characterized by different forms of interaction between the private and the public, which differ in terms of nature and significance. Examples include the opening of education institutions to for-profit purposes; the establishment of non-public institutions where investment is assured by private as well as public sponsors; the intermediation of public aid by NGOs and so on (see Vinokur, 2004). Moreover, even when education is public, compulsory, and ideally free, the indirect costs borne by the households for uniforms,

²² (Article 26 UNDRHR) Everyone has the right to education. Education shall be free, at least in the elementary and fundamental stages. Elementary education shall be compulsory. Technical and professional education shall be made generally available and higher education shall be equally accessible to all on the basis of merit.

2. Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and to the strengthening of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It shall promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial or religious groups, and shall further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace.

3. Parents have a prior right to choose the kind of education that shall be given to their children.

²³ (Article 13 ICESCR) 1. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to education. They agree that education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of its dignity, and shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. They further agree that education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in a free society, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations and all racial, ethnic or religious groups, and further the activities of the United Nations for the maintenance of peace. 2. The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize that, with a view to achieving the full realization of this right: (a) Primary education shall be compulsory and available free to all; [...]

transportation, lunches, textbooks, or for the maintenance of school buildings, make the boundary between private and public education increasingly unclear. In this perspective, the categories of public and private do not appear sufficiently effective to comprehend the growing diversification occurring in the global educational landscape.

The acknowledgment of a greater concern for the public sphere among the main actors concerned in policy issues – the State, business, civil society organizations, and households – has led to an ‘expansion of the public domain’ (Drache, 2001). In this perspective the ‘public domain’, not be confused with the public sector, or with the provision of public goods, appears to be regulated by private as well as public actors, and private initiatives are somehow expected to contribute to the provision of public goods.

The expanding public domain

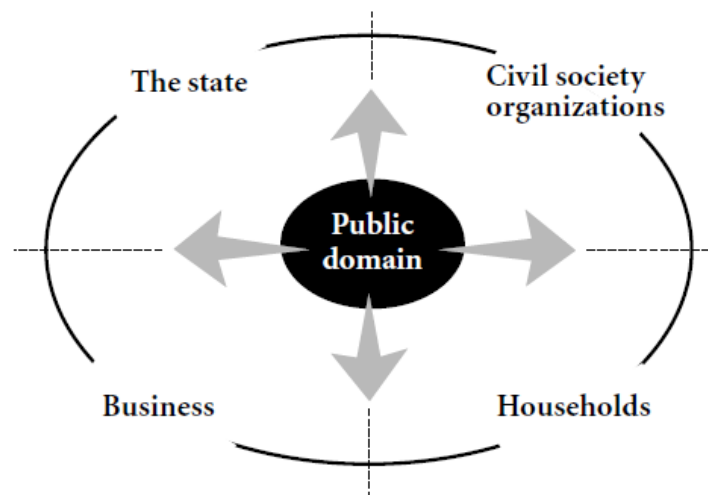


Figure 1 – The expanding public domain (Source: Drache, 2001)

These contrasts between the public and the private lead to some apparent conflicts in defining what lies on each side of the boundary (Starr, 1989). The interpenetration of sources of financing as well as of public and private decision-makers raises the issue of controlling the use of public funds, and especially of managing the educational system. Moreover, the reduction of public funding and the competition between schools,

combined with the authorization to use extra budgetary resources, represents the most effective way to submit, with little fuss, a public educational device to particular interests (Vinokur, 2004). As will be discussed in the subsequent chapter, many argue that the State cannot be counted on to optimally provide education opportunities and private involvement is considered as necessary to address state failure and complement state opportunities. Indeed, the notion of ‘public goods’ becomes increasingly more difficult to define since the State is no longer identified with the ‘public’ but is viewed as merely another economic actor among others (Rizvi, 2016). However, its role remains relevant in today’s context characterized by growing trends of privatization and commercialization of goods. Reframing the validity of the principle of education as a public good is all the more important in the current context as some forms of privatization “recast education not as a public or societal good grounded in democratic principles of justice and equal opportunity but as an individual, atomized and personalized private good” (Macpherson et al., 2014).

The next chapter examines trends in education privatization which is one of the main dynamics that is characterizing the global educational landscape and contributing to the blurring of boundaries between the public and the private, and therefore requires revisiting the principle of education as a public good.

CHAPTER 2

Changes in the global education landscape: growing privatization and marketization of education

Over the last three decades, the phenomenon of privatization in the field of education has gained increasing attention in education development discourse and research. The private sector has always been involved in education, with family, religious institutions and philanthropic organizations playing an important role in its funding and provision. Indeed, publicly provided and funded education systems are relatively recent historical phenomena which have spread consistently in particular since the Second World War. With the emergence of the welfare state, the idea that the State has the primary responsibility for providing education “became a moral and political imperative” (Rizvi, 2016). Thus, it was in a way natural to presume a greater role for the State in the provision of public goods as a response to a presumed preference on the part of the public for public goods (Desai, 2003). In the last few decades, however, despite growing levels of public funding, “education has been increasingly funded by the private sector, often by citizens themselves” (Rizvi, 2016). The focus on the role of private actors has further intensified within the context of the move towards achieving Education for All (EFA). States have used privatization both to address the challenges resulting from the expansion of education at all levels and as a way to respond to the failure of governments to provide quality education. Moreover, privatization has been attached to a neoliberal ideology which assumes the private sector is able to provide better quality education and, when functioning as corporate or business organizations, is also more efficient in the management of the education system.

Trends of privatization in the field of education have been associated to discussions on the respective roles of the State and of private actors in the sector. The difficulty in finding a shared understanding on this issue has different implications with regard to the assessment of the real scale of the phenomenon, as well as to the possibility of undertaking a productive discussion on the advantages or disadvantages of the increasing involvement of non-state actors in education policy and practices. These discussions are to a certain extent related to the difficulties in finding a common set of

criteria and definitions, particularly regarding what constitutes the public and the private in the field of education. Moreover, the phenomenon of privatization is widely debated and highly controversial and is grounded in different political perspectives of the nature and purposes of education. Privatization has been interpreted and translated into educational practices in many ways and the forms that privatization takes at different levels of education varies across time and across systems, as do the rationales used to justify them. Although these rationales are varied, in recent years the arguments in favor of privatization have been increasingly framed within a neoliberal ideology and grounded on a greater reliance on market mechanisms. Therefore, the concept of privatization appears to be intrinsically linked to that of marketization, which favors a vision of education as an individual and consumable good, in contrast to a vision of education seen as a public good. This phenomenon has acquired a global scale and is affecting the ways and forms in which decisions in education are made, and how it is provided, funded, and regulated.

2.1 Privatization in the field of education: the challenges of a definition

Privatization in general, and in the field of education more specifically, is a multifaceted phenomenon which has gained wide circulation since the late 1970s and early 1980s. Privatization has been considered as a “fuzzy concept that evokes sharp political reactions [and which] covers a great range of ideas and policies, varying from the eminently reasonable to the wildly impractical” (Starr, 1988). The term ‘privatization’ remains loosely defined and “its meaning is at best uncertain and often tendentious” (Donnison, 1984).

One of the early definitions sees privatization as “any shift from public to private in the *production* of goods and services” (Starr, 1988). It may include policies along a spectrum of alternatives which runs from total privatization (as in government disengagement from some policy domain) to partial privatization (as in contracting out or vouchers). Others have defined privatization as “the act of reducing the role of government, or increasing the role of the private sector, in an activity or in the ownership of assets” (Savas, 1987). The definition provided by Starr leaves open the possibility that privatization may not actually result in less government spending and

regulation – indeed, may even surprisingly increase them. For example, selling government-owned utilities may result in establishing a new system of public regulation. Setting up a voucher plan for education and housing may produce more public regulation in private schools. In other words, policies conceived as privatization may have unexpected consequences for other dimensions of state intervention.

In the field of education, privatization covers a wide process which encompasses a variety of forms, means, programs and policies for its implementation (Belfield and Levin, 2002; Coomans and Hallo de Wolf, 2005). As for all other sectors, education privatization is a highly political issue that has given rise to many definitions and interpretations, “adding to analytic confusion” (Mazawi, 2013). This is partly due to the semantic fuzziness and lack of clarity regarding the definition of privatization in education, as well as to the blurring of boundaries between the concept of the public and of the private because of the growing involvement of non-state actors, including business, at all levels of education.

One of the most common definitions considers privatization as “the transfer of activities, assets and responsibilities from government/public institutions and organizations to private individuals and agencies” (Belfield and Levin, 2002). A pioneering of education privatization, especially with regard to the changing role of the State, was provided by Françoise Caillods²⁴ a few decades ago:

“Granting a fair amount of administrative and financial autonomy to individuals, institutions, privatizing the management of the schools while maintaining the support of public funds, entering into partnership with other education providers (churches and non-governmental organizations, enterprises, etc.) is increasingly the way a modernized state intervenes in education” (Caillods, 1997).

As already stated, privatization in general, and in the field of education more specifically, is a multifaceted phenomenon. Indeed, some authors advisedly use the plural term *privatisations* to capture the “wide variety of types and forms of privatization involving different financial arrangements and different relationships

²⁴ Former Deputy Director at the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning

between funders, service providers and clients” (Ball, 2007, p. 13). In general, measures of privatization in the field of education aim at introducing higher levels of private sector participation in all domains of education, from policy-making, to delivery, and funding. In this process, a diverse variety of private stakeholders is involved which ranges from parents, community-based groups, to religious institutions, NGOs and philanthropic foundations, businesses conducting nonprofit, for-profit or/and low fee schools, enterprises, corporations, non-philanthropic foundations and private proprietors (Moumné and Saudemont, 2015).

Types of non-governmental entities	State dependent or independent?	Some examples
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Parents • Community-based groups 	Usually privately managed and privately funded	Home-schooling, community schools, parents’ associations ...
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religious institutions 	<p>These institutions can have many different structural organisations. They can be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Privately managed and publicly funded (which can take the form of public funds put into the private institution) • Privately managed and publicly funded with additional fees (in some cases asking for fees from parents and guardians in addition to the public funds) • Publicly managed and privately funded (which can take the form of private funds put into the public system) • Privately managed and funded (in some cases asking for fees from parents and guardians) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Catholic schools under ‘simple contract’, ‘association contract’ or non-contractual in France • Muslim schools under contract with the State or not • Jewish schools under contract with the State or not <p>... Any other kind of cult or faith based institution</p>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NGOs and philanthropic foundations 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • BuildOn NGO provides direct services, indirect services in the US and abroad • CARE Education • Escuela Nueva
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Businesses conducting non-profit, for-profit or/and low fee schools such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enterprises/ Businesses • Corporations • Non-philanthropic foundations • Private proprietors 		<p>Examples of for-profit institutions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Omega Schools - a for-profit chain of Low Fee Private Schools operating in Greater Accra and the Central and Eastern Region of Ghana, created by a private entrepreneur from Ghana with the support of Pearson PLC (international education and media company) through their Affordable Learning Fund (ALF) • Sparks Schools (South Africa) • APEC Schools (Philippines) • Bridge International Academies (Kenya)

Table 3 – Overview of private institutions (Source: Moumné and Saudemont, 2015)

Education privatization may occur in different forms. It may be referred, sometimes simultaneously, to: (a) the increase in the number and proportion of private providers; (b) the raise in the amount of funding contributed by parents or households; (c) the enhancement of private regulation, decision-making and accountability (Belfield and Levin, 2002). Privatization also refers to the outsourcing of specific state activities to private providers and to the introduction of market-based or other self-regulatory governance instruments sometimes involving forms of deregulation of the education sector (Pedró et al., 2015). Ball and Youdell distinguish between two main types of privatization trends and related policies: (a) privatization *of* public education, or “exogenous” privatization, which involves “the opening up of public education services

to private sector participation on a for-profit basis and using the private sector to design, manage or deliver aspects of public education”; and, (b) privatization *in* public education, or “endogenous” privatization, which involves the “importing of ideas, techniques and practices from the private sector in order to make the public sector more like businesses and more business-like” (Ball and Youdell, 2008, p. 9). Here, factors related to the influence of neoliberal ideology and of market mechanisms are taken into consideration. Indeed, although processes of privatization and marketization are not inextricably linked, it is acknowledged that privatization “creates a potentially favourable environment for market activity” (Marginson, 1993).

Diverse forms of privatization

Exploration of constituent elements and distinctive features of privatization may provide a useful framework to identify the nature and scale of welfare restructuring with particular regard to education. Indeed, in welfare states, different combinations of private-public provision, as well as of funding, have given rise to various forms of privatization which contribute to a greater heterogeneity in the schooling sector. The education privatization agenda covers policies such as voucher schemes, charter schools, education sector liberalization, tax incentives, contracting out educational services, public-private partnerships and so on. It is important to note that as education is increasingly regarded as an industry, its key features have acquired the form of other market-driven enterprises with terms such as ‘contract’, ‘voucher’, ‘liberalization’ now included in the vocabulary of education (Rizvi, 2016). The following table exemplifies different options that result from the combinations of public-private / funding-provision in the field of education, through which public authorities can engage with the private sector.

		Funding	
		Public	Private
Provision	Public	I. Traditional public schools	II. Private philanthropic ventures Tuition fees and other user fees in public schools (student loans) Private sponsorship of public schools (Adopt-a-school programs)
	Private	III. Contract schools Charter schools Voucher programs Private school subsidy programmes Private management of public schools	IV. Fee-paying private schools Home schooling Tutoring

Table 4 - Provision vs Financing in Educational Services

(adapted from: Lewis and Patrinos, 2012; LaRocque, 2008; Verger, 2012)

This table exemplifies the complexity of education privatization whereby mixed models exist along with fully public education and fully private education. In the first quadrant (public provision, public funding) there are examples of traditional public schools owned by public authorities and financed with public funds. In the specular case (quadrant IV) the private sector is entitled to both provision and funding of education. Examples range from traditional fee-paying private schools to independent private schools, home schooling and private tutoring. Along with other forms of private schools, such as elite schools, developing countries are witnessing the spread of the phenomenon of the so-called low-fee private schools. These are defined as those established mainly for profit motivations, charging a maximum of an equivalent US\$20 per month (GCE, 2016), and as “different from traditional private schools in the sense that the latter are selective by definition and generally do not target the poor” (Verger et al. 2016). This particular case will be analyzed in detail in Chapter 3 of this dissertation.

In addition to private schooling, another phenomenon that can be associated to the combination between private funding and private provision is that of private tutoring. This is considered as a “hidden form of privatisation behind the façade of public education systems” (Bray and Kwo, 2013), and refers to the provision of extra classes by teachers outside the formal schooling system, often as a result of the low wages that teachers receive. This phenomenon also includes for-profit learning centers where children are tutored after their regular classes, as well as commercial initiatives that prepare students to take examinations for entry into important colleges and professions (Bray and Kwo, 2014). Although it has a long history, private tutoring was once available only to some social classes in some societies as an alternative to schooling. Over the last few decades, however, it has become an increasingly more widespread form of education and has therefore become the subject of a great deal of research (Bray and Kwo, 2013). Private tutoring is widely defined as “shadow education” since much of its scale and shape is determined by mainstream schooling and since it metaphorically ‘shadows’ the operation of formal school systems (Mazawi et al, 2013). Often perceived by educators and policy makers as not directly related to the organization of ‘public’ education and its policy of fairness, private tutoring has increasingly been considered not merely as a ‘private’ phenomenon, but as intrinsically blended into the public provision of schooling. Private tutoring is particularly evident in East and South-East Asia, although it is becoming increasingly recognized as a world-wide phenomenon that surpasses geographic and national boundaries and is expanding globally “in both prosperous and low-income societies” (Bray and Kwo, 2013).

The second and third quadrants refer to options of public/private provision/funding. In the second quadrant, the State holds the responsibility for the delivery of education while the private sector’s role is to finance public schools. Student loans are an example of private funding within public schools. Another example of this combination is represented, for instance, by the “Adopt-a-School Programs”. These programs aim at establishing partnerships between public authorities and Departments of Education and private and community actors for the improvement of public schools. The private sector is called on to assist public institutions, especially in poor areas, with the aim of improving quality, access, infrastructure and community participation. The private sector promotes increased involvement of parents and communities, regular school

monitoring and feedback, training head-teachers and teachers, increased co-curricular activities and improved school facilities. ‘Adopters’ include the ‘private sector’ broadly defined as well as a range of individuals and organizations, including NGOs, Community Based Organizations and concerned citizens (LaRocque, 2008). These programs are present in both developed and developing countries such as Pakistan and the Philippines.²⁵

The third quadrant includes many of the so-called public-private partnerships which envisage that public authorities fund education, whereas the responsibility for delivery is private. These combinations vary from private sector philanthropic initiatives, school management initiatives, the purchase of educational services from private schools, voucher and voucher-like programs, capacity building, and school infrastructure initiatives (LaRocque, 2008). Among these mixed systems it is important to distinguish between schools that are free at the point of use and not-for-profit, and those which involve the charging of fees or which are driven by a for-profit motive, which may also seek public subsidy (GCE, 2016). Most common examples may be found in the widespread phenomenon of charter schools in the USA, wherein school districts or charter boards contract with private providers to manage public schools – the providers are paid a fee to operate the schools and schools remain free to students. In the case of voucher systems, parents receive a voucher to send their child to a school of their choice. The amount of money a school receives from the government depends on the number of vouchers that are submitted by parents for the education of their children. It is argued that this competitiveness would force schools to be more effective and responsive to the demands of the educational market. Voucher systems are based on market mechanisms, which are considered to be more efficient and to give greater flexibility and accountability of the schooling system. Vouchers have been spreading worldwide, and one of the most common examples is the case of Chile, where this system was established during the 1980s under the military regime, where neoliberalism was embraced in most policy domains, but still continues to influence the way education is funded today (Verger et al., 2016; Castro-Hidalgo & Gomez-Alvarez, 2016).

²⁵ More information is available at the following webpages: <http://www.deped.gov.ph/partnerships> ; <http://www.sef.org.pk/aasp.php>

Political and social dimensions of privatization

While prevailing definitions of privatization have been considered mainly in their administrative, economic, and technical dimensions, through the analysis of different combinations of public-private provision-funding, some authors have paid specific attention also to the “[underemphasized] political and social aspects” (Scott and DiMartino, 2009, p. 433). Indeed, privatization processes also change the way schools are managed, financed, governed, and held accountable (Scott and DiMartino, 2009, p. 433). As argued by Wells and Scott (2000), it is important to consider the social and political dimensions of privatization because they can have a profound impact on education opportunities. Indeed, schools can be classified as private or public according to the way they enroll students since enrollment can be limited through indirect mechanisms such as selective recruitment, applicant interviews, stricter discipline codes, and parental involvement requirements. Moreover, voice and governance are theoretically different in public versus private schools because private schools are generally governed by a board of trustees who are appointed, whereas public schools are governed by elected boards that are at least somewhat responsible to their constituencies (Wells and Scott, 2000). Thus, a discussion on the shift towards privatization in education should include issues such as the participation and influence of private actors in the education decision-making process. Moreover socio-cultural implications should also be debated as privatization may change the underlying political values, understandings and capacity for action in society (Wells and Scott, 2000). This is particularly relevant as some forms of privatization give more prominence to the individual economic benefits of education rather than to collective social and civic aims, with implications regarding the value and purposes of education as a private or a public good.

In order to portray the complexity of the privatization process and its different forms, Whitty and Power (2000) refer to the useful three-dimensional framework developed by Burchardt (1997) within the Welfare State Programme at the London School of Economics. While the table illustrated above (see Table 5) classifies combinations of public and private on the basis of the two dimensions of provision and funding, the three-dimensional figure takes into account the decision-making process, which can be

either public or private.²⁶ Although this chart is prior to the classification as illustrated in Table 5, this framework may appear more complete and relevant to illustrate the complexity of privatization in current welfare systems. Indeed, it is considered that ‘funding’ has “two components: the funding of the service and the decision about which provider or how much of the service to buy” (Burchardt, 2013). Based on a “wheel of welfare” (Burchardt, 1997), it shows different combinations of public and private provision, public and private finance, and public and private decision-making.

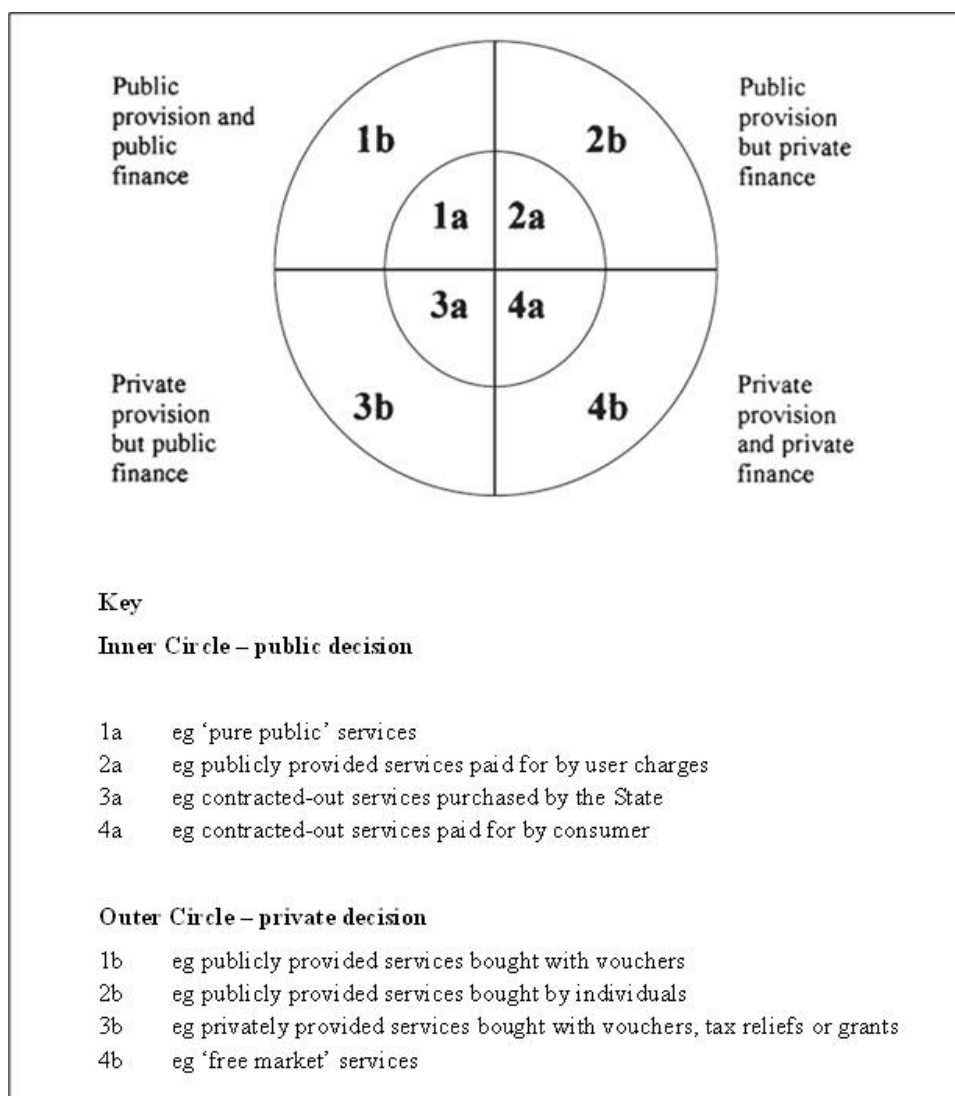


Figure 2 - Classification of public and private welfare activity
 (Source: Bourchardt et al., 1999)

²⁶ The original, and more detailed chart, can be found in: Burchardt, T. 1997. Boundaries between public and private Welfare: a typology and map of services. *CASE Paper / 2*, Centre for Analysis of Social Exclusion, London School of Economics

This chart potentially allows one to distinguish between each of the four sectors by including, for instance, a segment that entails public funding and provision but private decision-making. Indeed, some forms of privatization lead to a shift in accountability from public to private actors. In addition, another aspect that could be suitable for a fourth dimension is the degree to which the activity is *regulated*. This is particularly relevant in the context of increasing involvement of private sector providers in publicly-funded services, since one of the ways in which policy-makers may seek to safeguard the public purse is to impose tight regulations on providers. Since all regulation is public, the range of the ‘regulation’ dimension would presumably be ‘more-less’ rather than ‘public-private’. It may be useful to focus on the degree of regulation to which the privately-provided, privately-decided subsector is subject and how this has changed over time, as some forms of privatization develop without control of the State, leading to a privatization of the governance itself.

As discussed throughout this section, the multifaceted phenomenon of privatization sees administrative, technical, economic, social and political dimensions highly interconnected. These could be synthesized in the following table:

The multifaceted phenomenon of privatization
Administrative Shift in the management of economic and human resources
Technical Greater reliance on private regulation and monitoring
Economic Shift from public to private provision and/or financing of educational services
Political Increasing participation/influence of private actors in the education decision-making process. Greater responsibilities for non-state actors, potential changes in the governance of education
Social/cultural Changes in the underlying political values, understandings, and capacities for action in society.

Table 5 – The multifaceted phenomenon of privatization (Source: Author)

As illustrated, traditional definitions/forms of privatization only focus on the red parts of the table, considering administrative, technical or economic facets of privatization. However, it is evident that, as argued by Scott and DiMartino, privatization is not only about shifts in the modes of ownership and funding of educational provision, but also about who controls and manages the distribution of educational resources (Mazawi, 2013). Therefore, facets of privatization are inevitably also linked to the blue fields since they have a direct influence on the political as well as the socio-cultural domain. Indeed, Mazawi (2013) regards privatization as so enmeshed in wider social and political struggles among a range of social and corporate actors that the “traditional, formalist” distinction between public and private sectors in relation to privatization has somehow collapsed (Mazawi, 2013).

The distinction between ‘public’ and ‘private’ in education

Given the ever increasing interconnection between different forms and practices in privatization policies, the multiplication of public and private actors involved in education, (e.g. international and national public organizations, multinational companies, NGOs) as well as the diversification of sources of financing, it has been argued that the habitual principal difference between the definition of the public and the private in education is becoming less evident (UNESCO, 2015c; Kitaev, 1999; Bangay, 2007; Ball, 2007; Olmedo, 2016). Indeed, it has been suggested that “the definition of ‘private’ is by no means clear-cut in situations where many ‘private’ schools are heavily funded and regulated by the state”, representing a “continuum of public and private funding and control” (Kitaev, 1999). As argued by Starr (1988), identifying what is public and private can be a source of frustration since, behind legal categories of public and private, the boundaries are blurred. Quoting one of his metaphors,

“It is as if, on finding two boxes labeled public and private, we were to open the private box and find two more boxes labeled public and private, which we would do again – and again – opening ever smaller boxes. [...] Moreover, if the boxes have been assembled by reasonably competent lawyers, they may be extremely intricate and some will have misleading labels. But this complexity and the legal manipulation of the categories do not invalidate their usefulness

and underlying meaning. [...] Public and private give us relative locations”
(Starr, 1988, p. 20)

A further source of frustration with the public/private distinction is that the terms do not have consistent meanings from one institutional sphere to another. In the United States, for instance, the difference between public and private schools is not the same as the difference between public and private broadcasting. An American public school is public, not only in that it is owned and financed by the State, but also because it is open to all children of eligible age in a given area. Public is to private not only as state is to non-state but as open is to closed (Starr, 1988). Broadly defined, private education has been referred to

‘all formal schools that are *not* public, and may be founded, owned, managed and financed by actors other than the state, even in cases when the state provides most of the funding and has considerable control over these schools (teachers, curriculum, accreditations etc)’ (Kitaev, 1999: 43).

This definition highlights the complexity of distinguishing between private/public spheres in education, with different arrangements possible in relation to provision/financing/regulation as above mentioned. These contrasts between the public and the private lead to some apparent conflicts in defining what lies on each side of the boundary, contributing to the creation of some forms that are hybrid (Starr, 1988). In this respect, it should be specified that this blurred vision may result in a lack of clarity in terms of roles and responsibilities among the different actors involved in education, with important consequences for the role of the State as the primary guarantor of education as a public good.

It has been argued that according to legal criteria, categories of ‘public’ and ‘private’ refer either to issues of ownership and financing or to issues of management and regulation of educational institutions (Vinokur, 2004). With regard to issues of ownership and financing, a *public* institution is one that provides free education services and is owned and funded by the State or a public authority. A *private* institution can be either for profit or not and can therefore provide either free or marketable education. Private educational institutions are owned by non-state, private, actors (association,

community, enterprise, foundation...) and are generically submitted to the monitoring of public authority (Vinokur, 2004).

Categories of public and private can also be identified by taking into account criteria of management and regulation of educational institutions. The UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning identifies criteria of control and management as determinants for establishing public or private institutions (Kitaev, 2001). This clearly recalls the definition provided by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics which classifies educational institutions as public or private “depending on the body which has *overall control* of the institution and not according to which sector provides the majority of the funding. The body which has the overall control is the one with the power to determine the general policies and activities of the institution including the appointment of staff and, where relevant, the majority of members of the governing body. This power will usually also extend to the decision to open or close the institution” (UIS, 2016). It follows that:

“A **public** institution is one that is controlled and managed directly by a public education authority or agency of the country where it is located or by a government agency directly or by a governing body (council, committee etc.), most of whose members are either appointed by a public authority of the country where it is located or elected by public franchise.”

“A **private** institution is one that is controlled and managed by a non-governmental organization (e.g. a church, a trade union or a business enterprise, foreign or international agency), or its governing board consists mostly of members who have not been selected by a public agency.”

The definition of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development is aligned to that of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics. According to the OECD, the classification of public and private is made according to whether a public agency or a private entity has the ultimate control over the institution. “*Ultimate control* is decided with reference to who has the power to determine the general policies and activities of the institution and to appoint the officers managing the school. Ultimate control will usually also extend to the decision to open or close the institution” (OECD, 2004).

In these cases the demarcation line consists in the control and managing function of these institutions, whereas property or financing criteria are not taken directly into account. Therefore, the participation of the families in the financing of education may be interpreted as a form of privatization when the criteria adopted refer to property and financing. Considering the criteria of management and regulation, the participation of families may represent a form of privatization when the school is controlled and managed by the parents themselves, or if the directors have not been elected by public vote (Vinokur, 2004). Moreover, the public financing provided to education institutions is key in determining an institution as 'public' only when the criteria considered are those of property and financing, whereas according to the definitions of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics or of the OECD, a public institution is as such irrespectively of private or public funding.

It is evident that a common definition of public and private school is still unclear (UNESCO, 2016a, p. 188). The adoption of different criteria for the classification of private and public in education has implications on the real representation of private involvement and its consequences for the governance of education. When considering the criteria of ownership and funding, figures may provide significant information about the distribution and flow of funds as well as the scale of privately-owned institutions. However, the adoption of these criteria may not appear sufficiently satisfactory with regard to issues of governance, notably of control and regulation that may affect the way schools are operated by private or public institutions. At the same time, criteria of management and control, as adopted by UNESCO and the OECD, may provide a more significant analysis for the assessment of private and public institutions with regard to who is ultimately responsible for regulation and governance, but may lack important elements that the other two criteria do provide. Moreover, it is also crucial to underline that definitions of private institutions do not distinguish between for-profit and not-for-profit schools, nor identify if they are fee-paying or free of charge. The difficulty of identifying common tools to apply to the analysis on the issue of privatization is not irrelevant as it may incur a certain degree of difficulty in the building and assessment of the true scale of the phenomenon.

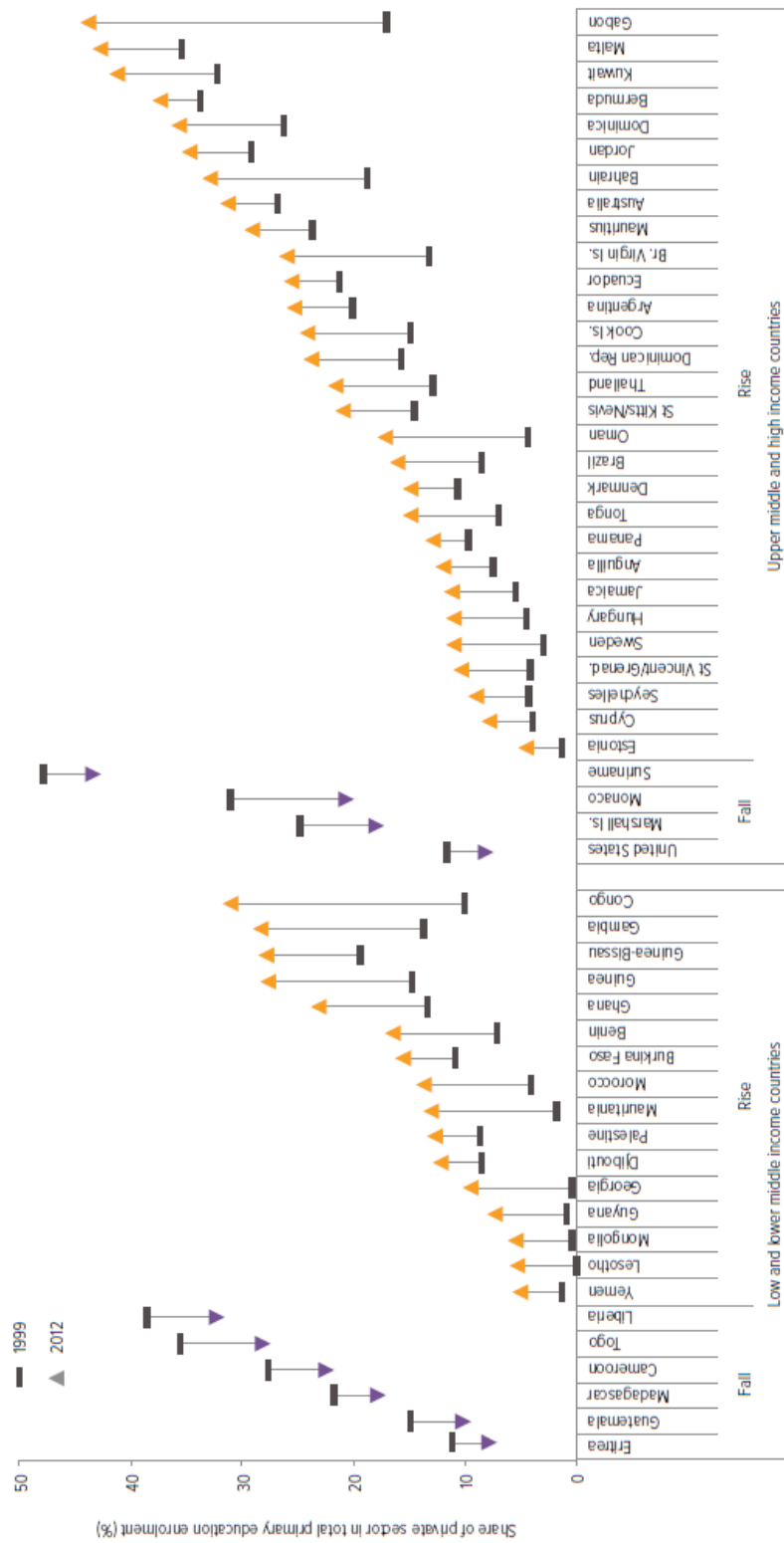
Having said this, throughout the dissertation concepts of public and private educational institutions are aligned to the definitions provided by the UNESCO Institute

of Statistics. This is essential in order to refer to data and trends which are mostly issued by the Institution. However, a clarification needs to be provided with respect to the definition of *private* institutions which are considered to be also generically submitted to the monitoring of public authority and their freedom is limited by the State's regulatory function, which, to a greater or lesser extent, can only be public. Even where schools are owned and managed by the private sector, they are often subsidized by the government who pays the costs of curriculum development, inspection, and examinations. In most cases, the State attempts to maintain some control over all education institutions (both private and public) through regulation. In addition, clarifications will be made when different criteria, rather than those of control and management, are used.

2.2 Trends in education privatization

The trend towards the privatization of education is growing at all levels of provision across the world (UNESCO, 2015c). It is worth noting how the proportion of children going to private institutions at the primary level has increased worldwide in the last three decades rising from 8.9% in 1990 to 13.42% in 2014 (UIS database). This trend is particularly noticeable in developing countries, where this share has increased from 9.1% to 14.08% for the same timeframe. Arab States and Latin America and the Caribbean are the regions where this proportion has increased the most, rising from 5.04% to 9% and from 12.33% to 19.30% respectively (UIS database). With regard to Sub-Saharan Africa, there are countries in this region where the numbers of enrolments in primary education in private institutions are particularly impressive. Between 1990 and 2014, countries such as Uganda, Burkina Faso, Senegal, Congo and Ghana have seen this share increasing twofold, and in some cases even more (see UIS database). Enrolment in private primary institutions has risen in Uganda from 6.8% to 16.18%, in Burkina Faso from 9.11% to 17.31%, in Senegal from 8.88% to 15.38%, Congo from 0.35% to 31.07% and in Ghana from 10.16% to 25.27% (UIS database – see also Figure 3 below).

Enrolment in private institutions as percentage of total primary enrolment by direction of change and country income group, 1999 and 2012



Note: The graph plots all countries with private sector education provision of more than 3% and less than 50% in 1999 or 2012; and where there was a change of more than 3 percentage points between 1999 and 2012. Sources: Annex, Statistical Table 5; UIS database.

Figure 3 – Enrolment in private institutions as percentage of total primary enrolment by direction of change and country income group, 1999 and 2012 (Source UNESCO, 2015d)

Having said this, it is important to note that there are considerable differences also within regions. In Latin America, for instance, the share of private primary enrolment in this period doubled from 13% to 27% in Peru but was constant at about 8% in Mexico and about 9% in Bolivia (UIS database; UNESCO, 2016a). In contrast, in countries like Chile and Belize the share is much higher, standing at about 61% and 82% respectively. Moreover, information is missing in many countries and, even when available, administrative data tend to underestimate the share of private school enrolment, especially in countries where the private sector is expanding and some schools operate without official recognition (Wodon, 2014). In Nigeria, private schools accounted for 5% of primary enrolment in 2005 and 8% in 2010, according to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics. Yet survey data indicate the share was already 13% in 2004 and reached 24% by 2015 (NPC and Macro, 2004; Nigeria NPC and RTI International, 2016).

The share of private enrolment in primary schools, however, not only varies within regions but also within countries. While the share of enrolment in primary schools in Nigeria stood at about 24% in 2015 (according to survey data as above), in the Lagos state over 60% of primary students were enrolled in private schools.

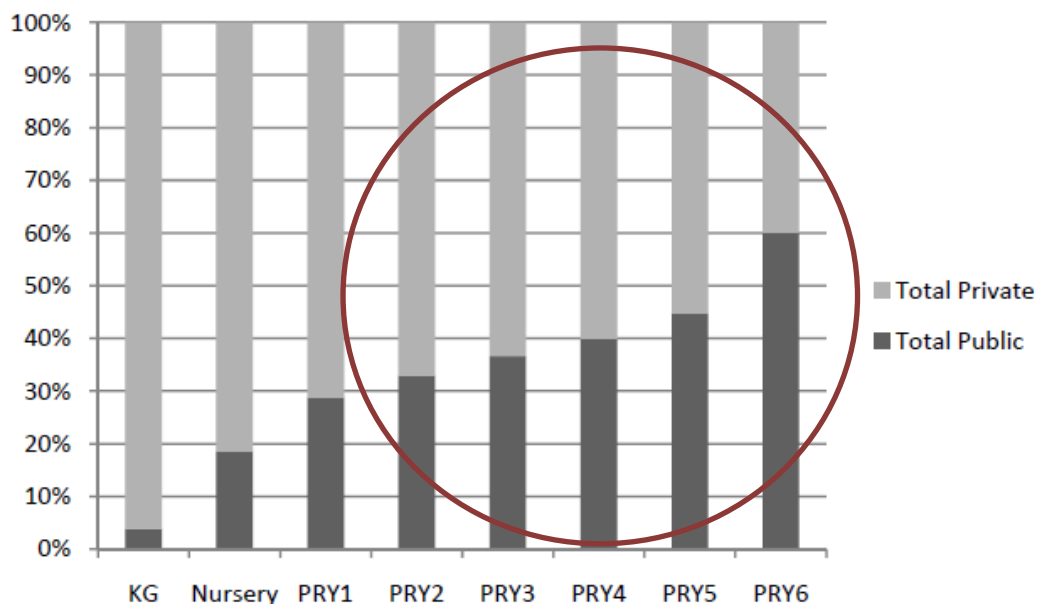


Figure 4 – Total enrolment per primary class level - Lagos state, Nigeria

(Source: Härmä, 2011)

city of Medellín, the second largest city in Colombia, shows that density of most of the public and private schools in the city varies according to the socio economic level of different areas of the city. It is demonstrated that a correlation exists between higher densities of private schools and the wealthier areas, both located in the south (see Figure 6 below).

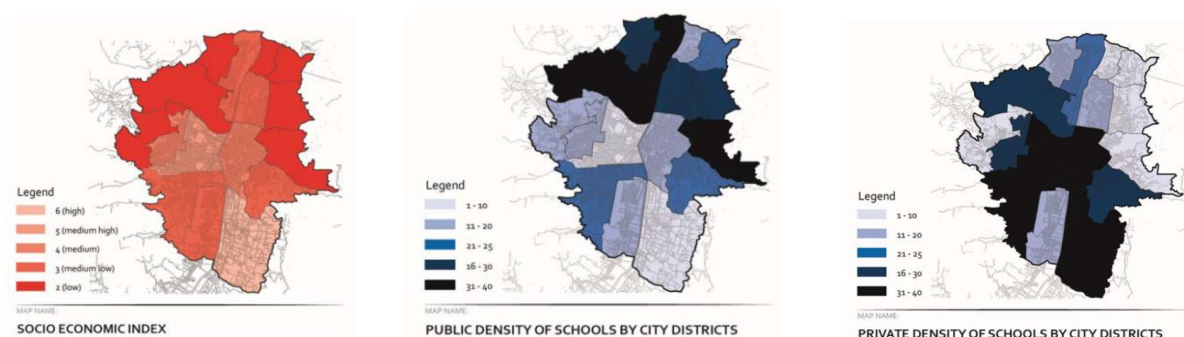
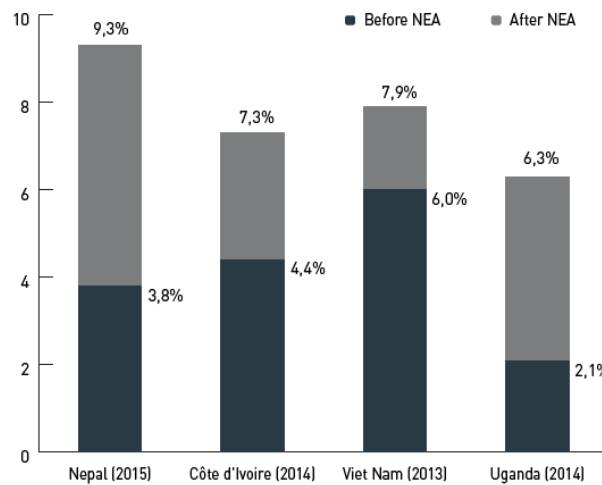


Figure 6 – Densities of public and private schools, Medellín, Colombia (Source: Viteri, 2016)

Finally, it should be recalled that, when adopting the criterion of *funding*, privatization may happen also when there is a shift from public to private (even households) financing. An interesting analysis of the contribution of families to education spending conducted by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics provides a clearer understanding of who, among public and private actors, invests more in education, and in which countries. The National Education Accounts methodology has been developed by the UNESCO Institute of Statistics in order to provide a more complete picture of education financing flows, with regard to different levels of education and all sources of funding, including households'. It is argued that the "NEA framework changes the picture of education financing dramatically. Because published education financing figures tend to focus on the key government actors, the picture is incomplete." (UIS and IIEP, 2016, p. 3). Considering all sources of financing, the total expenditure on education as a share of GDP increases considerably (see Figure 7). By applying the NEA methodology to some countries, it is possible to have a more complete coverage of funding at both government and households level. If total expenditure on education as a share of GDP before NEA appeared to be lower in Nepal than in other countries of the study, standing at 3.8%, after NEA this share rises to 9.3%, which is a share significantly higher than

most other countries. This is mainly due to the additional funding of households, whose contribution represents one-half of education expenditure.



Source: National reports as listed in the references section

Figure 7 – Total expenditure on education as a share of GDP (Source: UIS and IIEP, 2016)

According to the NEA analysis, governments are not always the most important funders of education. In two of the countries analyzed, Nepal and Uganda, “households are major but often forgotten contributors to education funding” (UIS and IIEP, 2016) (See Figure 8).

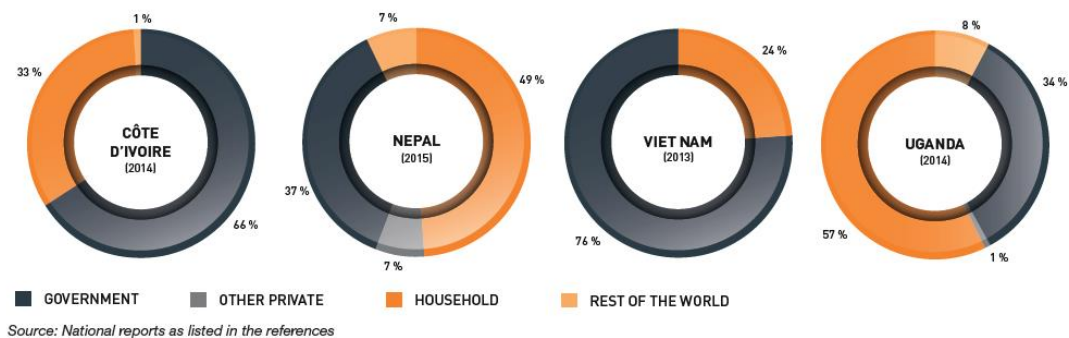


Figure 8 – Total funding for education by source (Source: UIS and IIEP, 2016)

It should be underlined that a high proportion of private spending is concentrated at non-primary level. Primary education receives the largest share of expenditure from government sources in almost all countries taking part in the survey, while other levels

receive more private funding. The NEA analysis also provides a more detailed exploration of household expenditure. Fees and payments to schools are the most significant items in private schools. However payments made outside of schools for items such as uniforms, teaching materials, private classes and other expenses (also referred to as ‘indirect cost’) often represent more than one-half of what households spend on education, also in public schools (UIS and IIEP, 2016).

The significant contribution of households in education funding is also widely acknowledged in a report edited by the UNESCO Institute of Statistics, the UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning and the UNESCO Office in Dakar (2011). With particular focus on Sub-Saharan Africa, a conceptual framework has been developed in order to classify household education expenditure and measure the real scale of the phenomenon. It is estimated that household expenditure represents around 25% of total education expenditure among the sixteen countries of the regions where data were available. This proportion varies according to the level of education, with the smallest proportion going to tertiary education. Spending on education represents a significant part of household spending in general. On average, 4.4% of household expenditure is for educational purposes. Wealthier households tend to allocate a larger share of household expenditure to education since they are more likely to send their children to private schools and their children are more likely to enroll in upper levels of education where tuition fees are usually higher (UIS, IIEP and UNESCO-BREDA, 2011).

This section aimed at drawing a more subtle picture of the complex phenomenon of education privatization. Indeed, official data collected at national level may hide significant disparities in the distribution of private schools within countries, regions and cities themselves. When looking at the phenomenon of privatization, all features should be observed, including the contribution of households to education expenditure and its characteristics. These elements have an enormous impact on the level of fairness and equity in the education system and may be the result of different rationales driving education privatization, seen not only as an administrative, economic and technical phenomenon, but also – and more importantly – as a political and socio-cultural matter.

2.3 Rationales for education privatization

There are several driving forces behind the process of privatization in the field of education. Factors and rationales differ in intensity and in nature between countries leading to different types of privatization. It has been argued that in developed countries, the provision of private schools is nearly always the result of a quest for a diversified demand for education and of the deliberate choice that is alternative to the public system. In developing countries, by contrast, it is often an unmet demand and an inadequate public offering which stimulates the development of private solutions (Kitaev, 2001). However, rationales and factors are not so clear-cut between developing and developed countries. For instance, parental choice is often recalled as one of the main justifications for the growing offer of privatization in developed and developing countries alike.

In attempting to respond to the question “why is privatization happening?”, Belfield and Levin (2002) examine three main sources of pressure: demand-side, supply-side and general. However, this classification may not be the most appropriate since demand and supply are also interlinked and therefore may represent artificial categories. For the purposes of this analysis, the different forces driving privatization are identified and explained according to the following issues:

- Growing demand for more diversified educational opportunities;
- Government failure to provide quality basic education for all its citizens;
- Globalization and the spread of neoliberal ideology

The following sections analyze in detail each of these “driving forces” in order to draw a comprehensive picture of the forces driving the phenomenon of education privatization.

Growing demand for more diversified educational opportunities

Although the factors leading to privatization are highly interconnected, from a demand-side perspective, the growth of private engagement in education may be the result of both an “excess demand” and a “diversified demand” (Belfield and Levin, 2002). Education is often considered by parents as a key instrument for social and economic

improvement/advancement as they seek to provide the best opportunity for their children. Moreover, the growth in living standards, as well as the structure of economies and societies becoming more specialized, has fueled a differentiated demand for schools. These factors may cater for the needs not met by public schools, increasingly perceived as providing standardized, uniform education (Belfield and Levin, 2002).

At the same time, the increasing demand for education has contributed, along with the Education for All and the Millennium Development Goals global agendas, to an expansion of access to education and to the lengthening of the average duration of schooling across the world. Since 1999 the length of compulsory education has expanded meaningfully, rising by one-fourth, or even one-third in many countries worldwide (UIS database). It is estimated that the share of children enrolled in primary school has increased worldwide by almost ten percent, rising from 82% in 1990 to 91% in 2014 (UIS database). This trend is particularly significant in Sub-Saharan Africa, where this share has risen by almost 30 points, ranging from 53% in 1990 to 80% in 2014. Within the same timeframe, Arab States and South and West Asia are the regions where there have also been significant changes in enrolment, increasing by 15 points (from 73% to 88%) and 20 points (from 74% to 94%) respectively (see also Table 6 below).

	Adjusted net enrolment rate(%)		
	Primary	Lower secondary	Upper secondary
World	91	84	63
Low income	81	65	40
Lower middle income	90	80	52
Upper middle income	95	93	77
High income	97	98	92
Caucasus and Central Asia	94	96	84
Eastern and South-eastern Asia	96	91	77
Europe and Northern America	97	98	92
Latin America and the Caribbean	94	92	76
Northern Africa and Western Asia	89	86	67
Pacific	94	98	66
Southern Asia	94	80	50
Sub-Saharan Africa	80	66	43

Table 6 – Primary and secondary education participation indicators, 2014
(Source: UNESCO, 2016a)

The growth in enrolment is also the result of significant demographic changes which have occurred worldwide (UNESCO, 2015c). Total population has increased by more than one billion in the last fifteen years and it is expected to continue growing, although at a slower rate. By 2030, it is expected that the total population will further increase by more than one billion people, reaching 8.5 billion people. It should be noticed that the increase in population has been unevenly distributed, most of this taking place in low and lower middle income countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa and Southern Asia (UNESCO, 2016a).

Total population and percentage change, 2000 to 2030 (projected)

	Total population (millions)			Change 2000–2015	Change 2015–2030
	2000	2015	2030	%	%
World	6 127	7 349	8 501	20	16
Low income	426	639	924	50	45
Lower middle income	2 305	2 916	3 532	27	21
Upper middle income	2 113	2 390	2 567	13	7
High income	1 254	1 373	1 447	10	5
Eastern and South-eastern Asia	2 001	2 222	2 352	11	6
China	1 270	1 376	1 416	8	3
Indonesia	212	258	295	22	15
Southern Asia	1 452	1 823	2 147	26	18
India	1 053	1 311	1 528	24	17
Pakistan	138	189	245	37	30
Bangladesh	131	161	186	23	16
Europe and Northern America	1 041	1 097	1 131	5	3
United States	283	322	356	14	11
Russian Federation	146	143	139	-2	-3
Sub-Saharan Africa	641	961	1 306	50	36
Nigeria	123	182	263	48	44
Latin America and the Caribbean	522	629	716	21	14
Brazil	176	208	229	18	10
Mexico	103	127	148	24	17
Northern Africa and Western Asia	340	463	584	36	26
Caucasus and Central Asia	71	84	96	18	15
Pacific	30	38	46	27	21

Notes: Data for 2030 are projections based on a median prediction interval. Regions and countries are listed by descending order of population in 2015. The countries listed are the ten with the largest populations in 2015.
Source: United Nations (2015).

Table 7 – Population growth (Source: UNESCO, 2016a)

The resulting expansion of access to education at all levels (see Table 6 above) has generated greater pressures on public schooling systems in terms both of funding and delivery of education opportunities. Indeed, the expansion of demand for education has put greater pressure on government budgets in a period of economic crisis, especially in countries where state financial and taxation systems are not fully set up. Private funding has been therefore increasingly considered as a necessary complement to the already constrained public budgets.

Moreover, the growth of enrolments in private schools has also been associated to rising incomes which have followed steady economic growth in recent years, as well as to increased levels of education among parents and in some cases to apparent perceptions of low or declining quality in the public sector (Rolleston and Adefeso-Olateju, 2014).

Government failure to provide quality basic education for all its citizens

It is argued that dissatisfaction towards public education systems and a potential “government failure” that may result from financial constraints, excessive bureaucracy and inefficiency, could also help to illustrate the reasons for private education development (Kitaev, 1999).

Despite greater access to education at all levels, many children still do not have access to primary school. The UNESCO Institute of Statistics estimates that in 2014 almost 61 million children of primary school age were out-of-school. Due in part to high population growth rates, more than half of these children live in Sub-Saharan Africa, representing more than twenty percent of the children living in the region (UIS and UNESCO, 2016). As of 2014, about 25 million children worldwide were expected never to enroll in school (UNESCO, 2016a). Moreover, the most marginalized children – including the poorest, children with disabilities, girls, and those from cultural or linguistic minorities – are being disproportionately left behind. Equity in education is still far from achieved even nearly after fifteen years governments committed to this objective, with girls still not enrolled in primary school at an equal rate as boys, and with highest out-of-school rates in poorest households (UIS and UNESCO, 2016).

Region	Out-of-school rate (%)			Out-of-school number (millions)		
	Both sexes	Male	Female	Both sexes	Male	Female
Caucasus and Central Asia	5.7	5.4	6.1	0.3	0.3	0.2
Developed regions	3.1	3.4	2.9	2.3	1.3	1.1
Eastern Asia	3.0	3.0	3.0	2.9	1.6	1.4
Latin America and the Caribbean	6.0	6.2	5.8	3.6	1.9	1.7
Northern Africa	0.9	1.0	0.7	0.2	0.1	0.1
Oceania	11.5	8.9	14.3	0.2	0.1	0.1
South-Eastern Asia	5.2	5.3	5.1	3.3	1.7	1.6
Southern Asia	6.2	5.8	6.8	11.4	5.5	5.9
Sub-Saharan Africa	21.2	19.2	23.3	34.2	15.6	18.6
Western Asia	10.7	7.8	13.7	2.6	1.0	1.6
World	8.9	8.1	9.7	60.9	28.9	32.1

Note: Data for Oceania refer to 2013.
Source: UNESCO Institute for Statistics database.

Table 8 – Primary out-of-school rates and numbers, 2014 (Source: UIS and UNESCO, 2016)

Moreover, even when children have access to schools, incomplete schooling and poor quality education contribute to insufficient levels of acquisition of basic skills. According to UIS data, “[i]n a quarter of the world’s countries, less than half of children are learning basic literacy and numeracy skills, and about 80% of those not learning these basic skills live in sub-Saharan Africa. In total, 250 million children are not learning the basics” (UNESCO, 2014b).

The number and distribution of teachers are important policy parameters that help to determine the quality of education. The pupil/trained teacher ratio²⁷ is an indicator that reflects the capacity of education systems in terms of trained human resources. High ratios – exceeding 40:1 in primary education and 25:1 in secondary education – can signify overcrowded classrooms and an overloaded teaching workforce. Most countries with more than 40 pupils per teacher in primary education are in sub-Saharan Africa (UIS database).

²⁷ According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, “a trained teacher has ‘at least the minimum organized teacher training requirements (pre-service or in-service) to teach a specific level of education according to the relevant national policy or law’. The requirements usually include pedagogical knowledge (approaches, methods and techniques of teaching) and professional knowledge (instruments and legal frameworks governing the teaching profession). Some programs may also cover content knowledge (curriculum, subject matter and use of relevant materials” (UNESCO, 2016a p. 330)

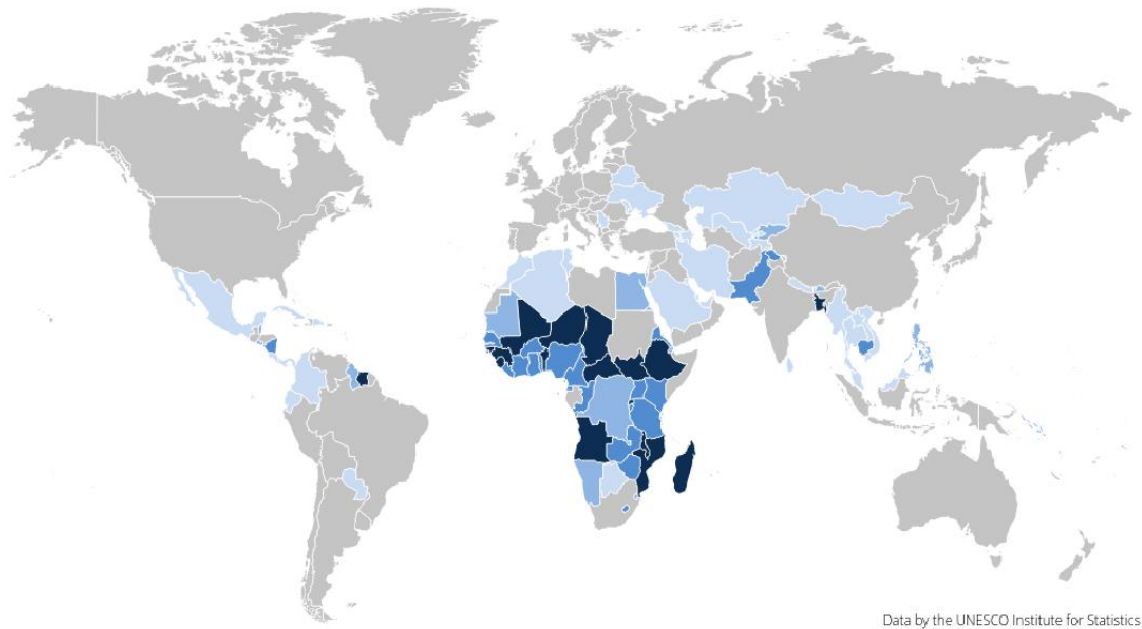
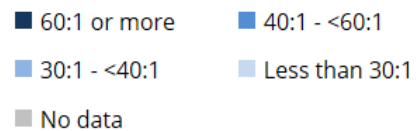


Figure 9 – Pupil/trained-teacher ratio (UIS database)



In order to put greater emphasis on the learning crisis which affects many poor countries worldwide, in the years preceding the adoption of the new global agenda for education, several international organizations have encouraged a shift from a focus on mere ‘access’ to education, to a focus on access *plus* learning. This concern for learning has been at the center of the work of the Learning Metrics Task Force, convened by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the Brookings Institution, the latter known also for having launched the ‘Global Compact on Learning’, whose goal has been to give a contribution to addressing the learning crisis that affects the world’s poorest children and youth. It should be stressed that the promotion and value of learning, in and of itself, has had long tradition in international education debate since the 1970s.²⁸ Having

²⁸ The idea of lifelong learning (at that time called lifelong education), for instance, was first introduced as early as 1972 through the landmark publication, *Learning to Be: Education in the World of Today and Tomorrow*. The Education for All (EFA) movement launched in Jomtien, Thailand, in 1990 was based on a collective commitment to meet the basic *learning* needs of all. Several years later, the 1996 publication, *Learning: The Treasure Within*, commonly referred to as the *Delors Report*, proposed an integrated vision of education based on the four pillars of learning to be, to know, to do, and to live together. The Dakar Framework of Action in 2000 also contributed to the idea that *learning* constituted a cornerstone

said this, it is true that the subsequent focus in international educational development has been on the access to formal education (within the Education for All movement, and even more so within Millennium Development Goals agendas), with little attention given to the quality of learning. As illustrated above, despite expanding access to primary education, basic learning levels are frequently very low. In addition, the need to respond to high economic constraints has resulted in a quest for more efficient ways of governing education systems, hence the centrality and urgency of assessing the quality of education and of learning outcomes. In response, many have called on countries and the international community to work together to improve *quality* and *learning* which have become key principles of the Goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development: *Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.*²⁹

Moreover, mismanagement, lack of accountability and corruption are symptoms of the so-called “government failure”, that is imperfection in government performance (Orbach, 2013). It has been argued that “government[s] should be credited for recognizing the failure to achieve learning outcomes, despite increased resources being made available” (UNESCO, 2015d, p.257). The lack of transparency of many public authorities has led to increasing demands for participation and accountability, particularly in light of corruption and inefficiency in education systems and failure to deliver basic services despite more investment (UNESCO, 2015d). Recent estimates suggest that developing countries lose about US\$100 billion annually in revenue from multinational tax avoidance through offshore investments (UNCTAD, 2015). “Illicit financial flows, defined as illegal movements of money or capital between countries, are symptoms of governance failures, weak institutions and corruption” (OECD, 2015; UNESCO, 2016a).

Against this backdrop, the private sector is often perceived to be more efficient in the management of the education system and to provide higher quality education where

for the EFA Agenda, as it was ‘designed to enable all individuals to realize their right to learn ...’ (2000: 29). In particular, Goal 6 of Education for All commits world leaders to: ‘Improving every aspect of the quality of education, and ensuring their excellence so that recognized and measurable learning outcomes are achieved by all ...’, a clear example of how the goals set out in the Agenda were already much respondent to the notions of quality education and of learning.

²⁹ More information about the Education 2030 agenda available at the following link:

<http://en.unesco.org/education2030-sdg4>

class overcrowding, which is often a feature of public schools, is avoided. Private schools are also perceived to be more accountable than government ones, enhancing greater transparency of the education process. Indeed, beyond economic considerations, a range of other values also influence parents' educational choices. These include educational, social, religious and moral values. Evaluations of the relationships between teachers and parents, the responsibility and accountability of schools to parents and pupils, the use of corporal punishment, and the availability of extra-curricular and enrichment activities are all considerations that refer to the so-called 'calculus of care'³⁰ which often replaces mere economic considerations in the choice of schools (Rolleston and Adefeso-Olateju, 2014). According to a study of the Department for International Development, there is consistent evidence that in private schools users participate in and influence decision making more than in public schools (Ashley et al., 2014). Moreover, it is considered that better quality education is achieved also thanks to greater teacher accountability to employers in private schools than in the public sector wherein they are considered not to teach well and "fail to attend school regularly" (Walford, 2011). Although this issue is highly debated, and "much of the evidence also indicates that private school teachers are often less formally qualified, have low salaries and weak job security" (Ashley et al., 2014), the resulting perception of greater accountability is a feature that the public sector should take into serious consideration.

Neoliberal ideology and marketization

At the same time, globalization and the expansion of the neoliberal ideology which has been spreading since the 1980s are considered the main factors shaping current forms of education privatization worldwide, and influencing both supply and demand-side pressures across the world. Neoliberalism has become to some degree a system of thought, a model of reason that frames human interactions mainly in economic terms (Rizvi, 2016). This phenomenon has been leading to a greater market involvement in the education sector. Indeed, despite the fact that the use of the private sector in education has a long history, "what is new about these manifestations is their *scale*,

³⁰ This expression is used by Noddings (2005) to emphasize the importance of an 'ethic of care' in an increasingly achievement-oriented educational environment.

scope and *penetration* into almost all aspects of the education endeavour” (Macpherson et al., 2014) – education is increasingly conceptualized as a commodity and the learner as a consumer (Robertson and Verger, 2012; Labaree, 2011). More explicitly, education is increasingly valued for its contribution to the process of capital formation whereas the citizen is considered as a mere investor and consumer, and not as a member of a society expressing a specific set of values, of experiences and traditions (Rizvi, 2016). This phenomenon appears not only to privatize the production and consumption of goods that were once publicly financed and provided, but also to recast the purposes of education and its organization. For all these reasons this particular form of privatization, also referred to as marketization, should be dealt with more closely.

In dealing with the phenomenon of the growing engagement of the private in education, it is important to identify, beyond economic rationales, the highly political nature of privatization itself (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010). Within the last three decades, educational privatization has been attached to an ideological assumption about the superiority of the private sector over the public, especially with regard to remedying what many conservative and neoliberal advocates consider as the failure of public schools to provide excellent education given public resource allocations (Scott and DiMartino, 2009; Rizvi and Lingard, 2010). This ideology differs from the liberalist economic approach as coined by Adam Smith, who conceived the State as having a major role to play in the intellectual and moral education of the people (Laval, 2003). It is today a more radical version of the liberal doctrine, as theorized in the work of Milton Friedman (1962) and, later, in that of Chubb and Moe (1990) which legitimizes business engagement in the big educational market. In contrast to Keynesian policies which encouraged a strong intervention of the State for reconstruction after World War II, advocates of neoliberalism considered the private sector as a necessary tool to increase competition, generate efficiencies and innovation in all sectors of society (Robertson and Verger, 2012; Scott and DiMartino, 2009; Rizvi and Lingard, 2010). In general, neoliberalism questions State intervention in the direct production of goods and services, be they transportation, health or education and deems its appropriate role limited to the regulation and preservation of an institutional framework. Milton Friedman already addressed the debate of government intervention in the field of

education in a famous article in 1955³¹. While he considered governmental financing in the early years of education appropriate, due to the positive externalities of education for citizenship – or what he called the “neighborhood effects” – he did not justify direct government involvement in the administration of schools. He considered the *voucher scheme* as the best option to respect parents’ freedom of choice thanks to increased competition between different types of schools constituted “by private enterprises operated for profit, nonprofit institutions established by private endowment, religious bodies, and some even by governmental units”. These approaches resulted in a series of national and local deregulatory policies (Scott and DiMartino, 2009). In this perspective, the role of the State would be limited to ensuring the quality of the service provided by private schools. As Milton Friedman concludes:

“The result of these measures would be a sizable reduction in the direct activities of government, yet a great widening in the educational opportunities open to our children. They would bring a healthy increase in the variety of educational institutions available and in competition among them. Private initiative and enterprise would quicken the pace of progress in this area as it has in so many others. Government would serve its proper function of improving the operation of the invisible hand without substituting the dead hand of bureaucracy” (1955).

For advocates of neoliberal ideology, a shift from public control to market control of schooling is considered desirable in order to make schools more efficient and effective. The political rationale underpinning the vision of education as a public good, one that implies a strong role of the State and sees education as necessary for achieving public and societal aims, is shifted to a market rationale, which considers education as an individual private good (Labaree, 2011). Within a neoliberal economic perspective, the education discourse is characterized by an instrumentalist human-capital theory, as formulated by T.W. Schultz and Gary Becker in the 1960s. Human capital theory provides education with an explicit economic value, seeing it as an important explanation for economic progress. Proponents of human capital have continued

³¹ Milton Friedman. 1955. *The Role of Government in Education*, available at www.schoolchoices.org/roo/fried1.htm

“calculations of rates of return as empirical justification to show that education is a good investment” (Rose, 2003). In this perspective, education is considered in terms of human capital in which private personal investment is considered to be suitable, and perhaps even necessary, especially with regard to the benefits, the greater earning capacity and other advantages to the individual that education would enhance (Rizvi, 2016).

Since the 1980s, the aims of neoliberal ideology have been translated into policies marking shifts towards greater reliance on the mechanisms of the market in the management of social services and goods such as education. It was suggested that, without privatization, the tax burden on citizens could not be reduced, making it difficult for them to choose whether or not to buy the services they needed or wanted. Many of these arguments were further developed in theories of “New Public Management” which suggested that the business ideas that had proved successful in the private sector could also be applied to the management of public services (Rizvi, 2016). The term “New Public Management” was coined by Christopher Hood (1991) to refer to a clustering of elements that included performance targets, specification of standards and indicators, results-driven allocations, inspection, and the outsourcing of a range of activities that had once been a central part of the public sector. These reforms were adopted in several countries “across the West” and promoted in developing countries especially in Latin America (Ball and Youdell, 2008). With a specific attention on outputs and performance rather than on inputs and process (Clarke, 2004), these reforms fostered private engagement in the field of education and encouraged the idea that schools could be easily “managed” as private companies. The approach of “educational management” consisted in bringing a set of methods, ideals and concepts from the private sector in the field of education (Ball and Youdell, 2008). The planning of educational objectives, the management of human resources, the adoption of accountability systems and of common core standards opened market opportunities to a broad range of edu-businesses (Ball and Youdell, 2008; Verger et al., 2016).

These changes have been blending the public and private sectors to the extent of considering education a “quasi-market” (Belfield and Levin, 2002; Kitaev, 1999; Ball and Youdell, 2008; Labaree, 2011; Whitty and Power, 2000). According to Belfield and Levin (2002), the “quasi-market” envisages that the government maintains an important

role in terms of accountability and quality assurance. Its activity is however completed by mechanisms which derive from the private sector: competition among suppliers of educational service which are not for-profit; regulation of entry and exit from schooling; introduction of voucher or funding mechanisms that encourage policies of choice. Levačić (1995) suggests that the distinguishing characteristics of a quasi-market for a public service are “the separation of purchaser from provider and an element of user choice between providers”. The concepts of privatization and marketization are highly interconnected. It is argued that, although “privatization does not in itself constitute market relations, it creates a potentially favourable environment for market activity” (Whitty and Power, 2000, p. 178). Yet, beyond privatization, we are witnessing today an increasing marketization of education, a “general shift to the embrace of business-oriented principles and highlights” (Cucchiara et al., 2011). And this shift has been occurring on a global scale, and has been promoted by international organizations and private actors which are progressively playing a key role in the governance of education worldwide.

2.4 The global scale of market engagement

Why has market engagement in education acquired a global scale over the last three decades? Indeed, growing trends in globalization have led to a greater transnationalization of education policies, also referred to as “policyscapes” (Carney, 2009) or policies that are no longer understood only in the context of national decision-making. Indeed, trends of privatization can be observed in all countries worldwide. “Globalization, linked with market liberalization, has both pressured and encouraged governments to seek more efficient, more flexible, and more expansive education systems” (Belfield and Levin, 2002). States have been increasingly involved in a global economy where rules and paradigms are highly influenced by neoliberal ideology. Indeed, despite the different social, political, historical, and economic traditions, there is remarkable similarity in the ways in which nations have addressed respective issues in the governance of education (Rizvi, 2016).

As illustrated above, this economic ideology is permeated by a particular vision of education seen as a necessary tool for the construction of human capital and therefore

constituting a suitable investment for economic growth and progress of individuals and countries. This vision has permeated most practices of institutions and discourses, and is consistent with the concept of ‘neoliberal imaginary’ (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010), according to which “people have begun to make sense of their identity and social relations. As an imaginary, it suggests both the ways in which we need to interpret the world and imagine the ways it should be” (Rizvi and Lingard, 2010).

In developing countries the neoliberal ideology has been translated into specific policies and practices, grounded on a particular approach that considers education not only as a human right, but primarily as a key instrument for economic growth and development³² (Rose, 2003; Klees, 2012). This vision is also the result of increased attention in the field of education on the part of international organizations and aid agencies which have encouraged reforms towards privatization of the education systems by giving assistance in many developing countries since the 1980s (Klees et al. 2012; Belfield and Levin, 2002). The comparative policy work of international organizations such as the OECD, the World Bank and UNESCO has become increasingly influential (Rutkowski, 2007). Regional and global policy networks have risen, leading to greater levels of cooperation across nation-states whose policies are increasingly characterized by a common set of interests and policy priorities (Rizvi, 2016).

Education has been considered as a “miracle cure” (Klees, 2012) by the World Bank, whose lending in primary education increased consistently during the 1970s representing one-quarter of the lending in education by the end of the decade (Rose, 2003). From a historical perspective, the cluster of policies and practices implemented over the 1980s, and inspired by dominant neoliberal ideology, came to be referred to as the Washington Consensus³³, in policy and development circles. It consisted in a set of ten economic policy prescriptions considered as constituting the “standard” reform package promoted for crisis-wracked developing countries by Washington, D.C.-based institutions such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the US

³² It should be specified that the notion of development, commonly highly debated and widely contested, is simplistically enshrined into neoliberal ideology. “In most parts of the global periphery, neoliberalism appears as a *development agenda*, a strategy for growth and prosperity” (Connell, 2013).

³³ The term was coined in 1989 by the English economist John Williamson.

Treasury Department.³⁴ These “Washington institutions” (Rose, 2003) have dominated development practices over the last three decades adopting a narrow economic view with regard to development. Policy instruments are reflected in the Structural Adjustment Programs³⁵ implemented by the World Bank and by the International Monetary Fund, which aimed to rely on market forces and reduce State intervention and expenditure in the field of education to a minimum (Ball and Youdell, 2008; Rose, 2003). These Programs have been highly criticized because of their apparent negative social impact (Samoff, 2012; Ball and Youdell, 2008; Klees, 2012; Robertson et al., 2012). Moreover, a former Chief Economist at the World Bank acknowledged that those strategies did not “promote the development of the poorest countries in the world”.

“No doubt, the Washington Consensus represented, in part, a reaction to the failures of the state in attempting to correct those of the market. But the pendulum swung too far in the other direction and for too long” (Stiglitz, 2004).

As a result, a complementary relationship between the State and the market was considered more appropriate in order to mitigate the detrimental consequences for economic and social development. This shift came to be known as the “post-Washington consensus” (Stiglitz, 1998). However, it is apparent that little has changed in the approach of these institutions towards development and education issues. The notion of human capital and the application of rates of return analysis still characterize the post-Washington consensus era (Rose, 2003). Indeed, through its commercial branch, the International Finance Corporation (IFC), the World Bank continues to offer financial support to companies wanting to start up or to expand their activities in public service markets.

³⁴ The prescriptions included policies in such areas as macroeconomic stabilization, economic opening with respect to both trade and investment, and the expansion of market forces within the domestic economy.

³⁵ SAPs consisted in the application of forms of conditionalities to developing countries, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, to get new loans and for obtaining lower interest rates on existing loans. SAPs generally implement “free market” programs and policy. These programs include internal changes (notably privatization and deregulation) as well as external ones, especially the reduction of trade barriers.

“IFC helps build capacity in private education in emerging markets to complement the offering of the public sector and to create more opportunities for children, youth, and working adults” (IFC website: *IFC's Priorities in Education*³⁶).

Since the 1990s, the discourse of a market for education goods and services has also been reinforced by the World Trade Organization's (WTO) General Agreement on Trade in Services³⁷ (GATS). This Agreement represents an influential mechanism to promote the market in education in that it opens national education systems up to international service providers (Ball and Youdell, 2008; Rose, 2003; Robertson, 2002). The GATS constitutes an emerging regulatory framework for international 'flows' of private education services. Within this framework, the WTO has a mandate on trade in education services with the “intention to create the conditions for greater liberalisation (...) and to create a market system of educational provision” (Rose, 2003). It is argued that rich countries, specifically those from the Anglo-Saxon world, are both the most active in constructing the emerging global education market, and reap the most benefit from it (Verger and Robertson, 2012). The education sector includes primary, secondary, post-secondary and adult education services, as well as specialized training such as for sports. The GATS makes exceptions for trade in services that are supplied by government authorities (Art. 1.3b GATS), that is “supplied neither on a commercial basis, nor in competition with one or more service suppliers” (Art. 1.3c GATS). This would be in principle the case for compulsory education, which should not be provided on a commercial basis or in competition with one or several service providers. However, as many critics point out, the vast majority of countries fulfill at least one of the conditions envisaged in the GATS, having a mixed education system in which the private sector also provides education and competes with the public sector (Verger and Robertson, 2012; Robertson, 2002). The introduction of education into the frameworks

³⁶ IFC: *Demand for education is soaring. The number of higher education students is projected to more than double by 2025.*

www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/Industry_EXT_Content/IFC_External_Corporate_Site/Health+and+Education/Priorities+Education/

³⁷ The General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS) is a treaty of the World Trade Organization (WTO) that entered into force in January 1995 as a result of the Uruguay Round negotiations. It followed the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.

of GATS has generated a new wave of political transformations in the field of education (Verger and Robertson, 2012).

The constitution of the GATS became a turning point in the development of the so-called “Global Education Industry” (Verger et al., 2016). “Education, a once relatively protected and decommodified sector, is being liberalised and transformed into a multi-billion dollar industry, powered by market-liberalising proponents in the developed economies” (Robertson, 2002). The specific case of the Global Education Industry will be analyzed in detail in the following section. The global arrangements that result from the spread of neoliberalism pose questions with regard to the status of education as a public good and the threat of considering it as an industry regulated by the rules of global trade (Robertson, 2002).

CHAPTER 3

The Global Education Industry

As illustrated in Chapter 2, private engagement in the field of education is not a new phenomenon. The private sector has always been involved in education for centuries with an important role in its funding and provision. The idea of public education, or of a public education system, has more recent origins and can be traced back to the development and building of welfare systems as of the second half of the twentieth century. Over the last few decades, however, several factors have contributed to a rise in the involvement of private actors, especially in developing countries. Privatization has been associated to the need to meet the growing demand for education, despite increasing levels of public investments, and to subsidize state provision and funding. The increasing reliance on the private sector has also resulted from the difficulties of governments to provide quality basic education for all, and from a need of greater relevance of education to specific needs. Under the trends of education privatization lies the assumption that the private sector can provide better quality education and can be more efficient also in the management of the education system. “That said, the new privatization is growing up in the shadow of a well-established industry that also is part of a highly institutionalized corporate culture” (Burch, 2009). This trend has been widely criticized over the last two decades. Some scholars have referred to the “education service industry” (Robertson et al., 2002; Ball, 2007) or to the “New Education Privatization” (Burch, 2006 and 2009) to refer to the growing engagement of corporate actors and to the adoption of market norms and rules in the field of education. Within a global perspective, some authors have also used the term “Global Education Services Industry” (Robertson, 2002) to indicate the extent that this trend has reached at a global level, with the involvement of multilateral and international actors.

James Tooley, an academic³⁸, a businessman, and a policy entrepreneur previously consultant at the World Bank, first used the term *Global Education Industry* in 1999, to refer to the expansion of private schooling in developing countries.³⁹

³⁸ James Tooley is Professor of Education Policy at the Newcastle University (United Kingdom)

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has used this term too, but essentially in reference to the Information Technology edu-business.⁴⁰

More broadly, the questions and issues raised by the growing engagement of the market in education have inspired the elaboration of the World Yearbook of Education of 2016 on the *Global Education Industry* (GEI). The phenomenon is described as follows:

“Now, more than ever before, a broader range of educational services are produced, exchanged and consumed on a for-profit basis and through supra-national interactions. This phenomenon is evident with services that go beyond traditional private schools and universities and include, to name a few, alternative forms of educational provision (including e-learning), test preparation services, edu-marketing, the provision of curriculum packages, private tutoring and other supplemental education services, certification services, teacher training, recruitment of university students, and school improvement services. All these services – and the actors that provide them – constitute what we call the Global Education Industry”⁴¹.

The Global Education Industry constitutes “an increasing globalized economic sector in which a broad range of educational services and goods are produced, exchanged and consumed, often on a for-profit basis” (Verger et al., 2016). It represents an industry sector in expansion which generates billions of dollars annually. It has been calculated that the value of the education market, globally speaking, was \$4.9 (USD) trillion in 2015 (GSV-Advisors), indeed a potential sector for large profits. During the last decade, in the US alone, revenues of the for-profit education industry more than doubled, reaching \$125 billion in 2012. Market opportunities in education are increasingly present at the compulsory level, which was once almost exclusively the

³⁹ “This monograph aims to give a flavor of the private education sector in developing countries – what I call the ‘global education industry’”. (Tooley, 1999)

⁴⁰ The OECD organizes the Global Education Industry Summit www.oecd.org/education-industry-summit

⁴¹ Verger, Lubienski, and Steiner-Khamsi (2016, March 14). *The rise of the global education industry: Some concepts, facts and figures*. Available at: www.educationincrisis.net/blog/item/1308-the-rise-of-the-global-education-industry-some-concepts-facts-and-figures

responsibility of the State. This trend is spreading in both the global North and the global South (Verger et al., 2016; Burch, 2009).

The GEI refers to a variety of activities and programs involving the direct participation of for-profit actors in decision-making, regulation, monitoring and provision seen as potential market niches. These range from the direct provision of education goods and supply of education services, to the introduction of market-oriented competition, the access to financial capital markets, or to a more general integration of edu-businesses into the education sector (Verger et al., 2016).

3.1. The Actors involved in the Global Education Industry

The Global Education Industry field embraces a wide range of economic actors which include chains of for-profit private schools, big education corporations and conglomerates, consultancy firms, philanthropic foundations, and advocacy networks (Verger et al., 2016). Influential actors also include venture capitalists, market research firms and lobbying associations (Burch, 2009). Therefore, the education sector appears as an increasingly profitable market. Some say that many corporations support voucher initiatives in the hope of landing possible lucrative contracts for providing education services to a new clientele (Belfield and Levin, 2002). Others suggest that corporate actors promote managerial reforms in education in order to strengthen the education system and therefore to enhance competitiveness in the global economic environment (Verger et al., 2016a). Businesses and other types of corporations make use of advocacy networks in order to promote educational change both at national and global levels. *Todos pela Educaçao*, for instance, is a Brazilian business coalition that has contributed to the construction of a new hegemonic educational project for Brazil based on premarket policy ideas (Verger et al. 2016b). At the global level, the Global Business Coalition aims at enhancing connections between corporations and education, and at legitimizing their private authority in education (Bhanji, 2016). Among its members, the Global Business Coalition includes Accenture, Discovery Communications, Gucci, Intel Corporation, Lenovo Group Limited, Hewlett-Packard, Pearson plc, Western Union.⁴²

⁴² Further information can be found on the Global Business Coalition for Education webpage: <http://gbc-education.org/>

As argued by Bhanji (2008) “these new forms of private authority are transnational in scope and mobilise global corporate social engagement norms to legitimise their influence over the broad frame and direction of their activities in education”.

Among the most influential actors it is worth mentioning the case of Pearson plc, the world’s largest edu-business (Hogan et al., 2016). Although traditionally a book publisher – it owned the *Financial Times* and Penguin Books as well as shares of the Financial Times Stock Exchange and of *The Economist* – Pearson plc entered the education market with a promise to its shareholders that an investment in education would “pay the best interest” (Pearson plc, 2012:8). Pearson has contracts with different organizations all over the world (Ball, 2012). The company has been engaged by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) as one of the contractors to help develop the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests and has sponsored the importance of these tests to bring about successful education reforms (Hogan et al. 2016). Although most of its education revenue comes from its business in North America, its action has been expanding in developing countries during the last few years. Indeed, Pearson’s growth prospects are fuelled by a significant socio-economic trend related to the global increase of the middle class, which is expected to double in size to more than three billion by 2020, especially in developing countries where the demand of education has been increasing due to higher incomes (Pearson plc, 2012:8). Pearson plc is undergoing a process of “transforming itself into the world’s most significant and important education company ... They are trying to dominate the world of education online and offline”⁴³. Its attention seems to be turning towards developing countries also because of the recent “decline in comparable sales” and “a bigger-than-expected slowdown in the key U.S. market for textbooks”⁴⁴. Its action is expanding in the nations of the Global South particularly with support for low-fee private schools in sub-Saharan Africa and Asia through the *Pearson Affordable Learning Fund* (PALF) project. These chains of schools are based in markets where Pearson wants to have a greater influence. PALF may ensure that such investments in

⁴³ Interview to Ms Jennifer Reingold, Senior Editor at Fortune: <http://fortune.com/2015/01/21/everybody-hates-pearson/>

⁴⁴ “Pearson Nine-Month Sales Decline on U.S. Courseware Slump” - www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2016-10-17/pearson-reports-nine-month-sales-drop-on-u-s-courseware-slump

education are scalable and can generate potentially influential revenue. The fund makes investments in education entrepreneurs who deliver high quality, for-profit education solutions for the low-income segment in the developing world.⁴⁵ Their action is focused on countries where the supply of education is not sufficient to guarantee that every child has access to high quality education. Consequently,

“[...] the entrepreneurs today are going to be key drivers and upgraders of new systems, new decentralized systems that will be able to provide that supply” (Katelyn Donnelly, Interviewed on September 2015 at the Latin America Education Summit).

Pearson tends to use its corporate social responsibility (CSR) policies as a business strategy to claim that “commercial goals and social purpose are mutually reinforcing” (Pearson plc, 2012:34). It considers its mission as a commitment to support educational improvement and the sharing of best practices (Hogan et al. 2016). Indeed, “business growth is articulated in relation to the taking up of a moral position, and a position in relation to education policy and ‘policywork’” (Ball, 2012).

The striking and very important point about the ‘education businesses’ is that most are run and managed, and in several cases were created, by former public sector workers who held senior positions in local authority educational bureaucracies (Ball, 2007). It has been shown that there is a considerable movement of personnel between the State and the private sector (Ball, 2007; Burch, 2009). Indeed, as well as corporate or collective actors, the GEI also includes consultancy firms and individual policy entrepreneurs who promote education innovations that favor the expansion of the GEI. These actors are more and more often in charge of some tasks that were “traditionally carried out by public servants, such as research, policy analysis, creation of policy texts, and evaluation of programs and policies” (Verger et al., 2016a). This may be partly due to their capacity to transit across different fields and to connect with different organizations among which are some of the most important global consultancy and law firms such as PricewaterhouseCoopers, McKinsey and KPMG, and well-known policy

⁴⁵ Further details on programs and activities are available on PALF website: www.affordablelearningfund.com

entrepreneurs including Michael Barber, also PALF's Chief Education Advisor, and James Tooley, founder and owner of the Low-fee private schools chain Omega School (Verger et al., 2016). These actors, also referred to with the term *consultocracy*, are gaining more and more power in policy networks often raising issues of conflict of interest and of democratic control (Verger et al., 2016a).

It should be noted that, as observed by Au and Lubienski (2016), the “emerging global education industry is not necessarily based in for-profit business models of schooling”. Indeed, along with profit corporations, non-profit entities have also played a significant role in shaping emerging education markets at the local and global levels, leading the way in the restructuring of the public school sector. A new philanthropic approach to education, known also as *philanthrocapitalism*, has become essential to understanding the recent changes and directions of national and international political agendas in different parts of the world (Olmedo, 2016). These actors foster and promote market-based solutions to educational problems (Ball, 2012). New philanthropic actors include foundations and initiatives such as the Clinton Global Initiative, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the Zuckerberg Education Ventures or the Hewlett Foundation. Alongside their different philanthropic activities, they are also active investors and funders of low-fee private school chains such as Bridge International Academies in developing countries (Ball, 2012). The mission of these actors in the field of education is justified by the concept of education as a “good business”, both from the economic and human point of view (Hogan et al., 2016). Within the field of philanthropic engagement, it is therefore compelling to distinguish between foundations with genuine philanthropic interests and those whose philanthropic and business aims are compatible and reinforce each other, so that they can “do good and have their profit too” (Strom, as cited in Santori, Ball & Junemann, 2015, p. 39).

All these entities, with their efforts, actions and ideologies, are part of a “common organizational field” and are changing the ways and forms in which education is funded and delivered, exerting increasing influence at the level of public policy and politics (Burch, 2009; Olmedo, 2016).

3.2. The growing phenomenon of Low-fee Private Schools

Within the global education industry landscape, the phenomenon of Low-fee private schools deserves specific attention since it reveals the “complex well-networked assemblage of global actors that are in the business of education privatisation and that stand to make a considerable profit from it” (Kamat et al., 2016). The phenomenon of low-fee private schools became known globally through the work of James Tooley who “discovered” them while exploring the bylines of Hyderabad’s Old City (India) during his consultancy for the International Finance Corporation in 1999. In his book, “The Beautiful Tree: how the world’s poorest people are educating themselves”, Tooley describes the “grassroots privatization” of education as an act of self-determination. Tooley’s idea about the role of the State in education is clear:

“I want to see private schools emerge and then the state just move aside from education” (Tooley, 2009).

According to Tooley, the State is irrelevant and ineffective, and should be forced out of the education sector. He considers this ‘grassroots’ form of privatization as a ready market in need of restructuring and rationalizing to make it a far more profitable enterprise than it is. His controversial book, which presents the low-fee sector as ‘the poor’s best chance’, caught the attention of powerful factions of international policy elites and influential private actors. This strongly opposes the idea that the State has a fundamental duty to provide basic education for all (Lewin, 2007; Watkins, 2004).

This phenomenon of unrecognized or ‘spontaneous’ forms of private schooling by lower-income households had not been addressed and debated in international development and domestic policy until recently (Srivastava, 2013, 2016). Initially, it was merely considered as a fragmented phenomenon “insufficient in scope to warrant concerted study” (Srivastava, 2016) and was generally seen as an appropriate solution to ensure that all children were able to access basic education, especially in developing countries (Verger, 2016b; Srivastava 2013, 2016). However, as a result of the expanding trend of education privatization, the case of low-fee private schools attracted widespread attention and reached the highest levels of global education policymakers, influencers, and advocates, gaining greater importance as well as a controversial role

within the debates on the post-2015 global education agenda. Indeed, it is progressively acknowledged that this privatization modality has been spreading in many developing countries, backed by increasing corporate involvement, thus warranting serious attention. Once representing a nebulous set of private schools owned and operated by local communities or “individual village entrepreneurs” (Walford, 2015), claiming to serve socially and economically disadvantaged groups, “the second wave is strongly entrenched within increased corporate engagement, business practice, and commercialization” (Srizastava, 2016). This move “has the potential to change the market from one which consisted predominantly of small, local ‘edupreneurs’, usually operating single schools in their local community, to one in which ‘global edupreneurs’, with a profit orientation, are proactively and deliberately organizing themselves as an alternative to government provision of education” (GCE, 2016).

Definition of Low-fee Private Schools

The definition of low-fee private schools was first operationalized one decade ago by Prachi Srivastava, who provided a description of what seemed like an atomized phenomenon of individual schools ‘mushrooming’ in specific contexts where there was little or poor quality state provision (Srivastava, 2013). A first set of studies was conducted in India, spurred by the acknowledgment of the changing nature of private provision in the country, which led to the first operationalization of the phenomenon. Srivastava (2007a,b) defines Low-fee Private Schools as those private schools targeting disadvantaged groups, entirely self-financed through fees, independently run, charging a monthly tuition fee not exceeding one day’s earnings of a laborer at primary and junior levels (up to grade 8) and two days’ earnings at secondary and higher secondary levels (grades 9 through 12).⁴⁶ In this respect, LFPSs are set up and are owned by an individual or group of individuals for the purpose of making a profit, and are supposed to be “affordable” for low-income families (Phillipson adapted in Srivastava, 2013).

Due to the passivity of both governments and the international community in addressing the challenging reality of the many children that are out of school or are not

⁴⁶ The term Low-fee Private Schools is often used interchangeably with Low-cost private schools. However, “in the literature on the topic, the term *low-fee* has progressively replaced that of *low-cost* because the latter is even more subjective than the former” (Verger et al., 2016a).

learning the basics, Low-fee Private Schools are spreading in several developing countries, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, in South Asia and to a certain extent in Latin America. Indeed, the not-in-school children represent a huge market opportunity for private education providers and investors (Verger et al., 2016a). “However, there are different perspectives when it comes to determining the real size of this phenomenon, with its promoters eager to exaggerate its dimensions and skeptics downsizing it” (Verger et al., 2016a). One of the main reasons why it is difficult to calculate the real dimension of LFPSs is that many of these schools are often unregistered and, consequently, the evolution of this type of school cannot be properly quantified and tracked through official data. These shortcomings are reproduced in the collation of international administrative data which largely rely on official Education Management Information Systems and national data collection systems, thus complicating the acquisition of evidence across studies (Srivastava, 2013). For these reasons, capturing trends within the low-fee private sector is rendered difficult, and is largely dependent on individual researchers revisiting field sites where this is possible.

Another reason why it is difficult to quantify LFPSs as a schooling sector is that it represents a relatively new phenomenon, the definition and boundaries of which are conceptually contentious. Indeed, “[p]art of the problem in analyzing low-fee private schooling is that much like the rest of the private sector, the low-fee private sector is heterogeneous” (Srivastava, 2013). Low-fee Private Schools may be unrecognized or recognized, urban, peri-urban or rural, single operators or part of a chain; they may provide schooling at a single level (usually primary) or at multiple levels (nursery and primary or even low-secondary). That is why initial understanding of low-fee private schools needs to be interpreted with caution and nuance, in tune with the changing contexts in specific countries over time (Srivastava, 2013).

In any case, most scholars agree about the existence of a new privatization trend that, despite its heterogeneity, is different from more conventional forms of privatization. LFPSs are different from traditional elite private schools in the sense that the latter are selective by definition and generally do not target the poor. LFPSs are also different from schools run by nongovernment organizations (NGOs), communities, or churches, in that the latter also target the poor, but they are usually established on the basis of

social, communitarian, or religious motivations, and not necessarily on the basis of economic or for-profit ones.⁴⁷

Facts and figures

According to existing research literature, the phenomenon of Low-fee Private Schools is growing in some countries in the Global South, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa (with Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria, Uganda and Malawi mentioned most frequently), in South Asia (especially in India and Pakistan), and in a number of countries in Latin America. Despite claims of ‘scale’ put forward by the corporate-backed low-fee private sector, the total number still makes up only a tiny proportion of state provision, concentrated in some cities and regions of lower and lower-middle-income countries, especially in those where the economic growth rate is accelerating significantly (Srivastava, 2016). However, as a sector it has attracted increased interest, and has received economic and political support from multinational education companies, private investors and some international institutions (GCE, 2016). Private sector involvement in education is thought to offer better quality education and improve access by filling the gaps in state provision, and offer greater efficiency and innovation. Influential economic and political actors argue that shortcomings in public education systems can and should be put right by increased private sector involvement (Patrinos et al. 2009).

Many edu-entrepreneurs and policy entrepreneurs see Low-fee Private Schools as a profitable investment in the ‘lucrative market of education’ which is currently estimated to be worth around US\$44 trillion globally.⁴⁸ In particular, Pearson is considered as one of the most important investors in LFPSs across Asia and Africa.⁴⁹ The Pearson

⁴⁷ As noted by Verger et al. (2016a), however, “it is difficult to establish a clear barrier between for-profit and not-for-profit school operators. In many countries, despite schools not being legally allowed to operate on a for-profit basis, there are schools that are de facto for profit, in the sense that they have benefits and find alternative ways to channel them” (p. 204).

⁴⁸ Strauss, V. (2013, February 9) *Global education market reaches \$4.4 trillion – and is growing*. Available at:

www.washingtonpost.com/news/answer-sheet/wp/2013/02/09/global-education-market-reaches-4-4-trillion-and-is-growing

⁴⁹ It was recently reported as investing a £10 million fund in low-fee private schools across Asia and Africa – Tran, 2012. See: <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2012/jul/03/pearson-invest-private-education-africa-asia> .

Affordable Learning Fund is a key player in some of the most publicized initiatives scaling up low-fee private schooling. Pearson's chief education adviser is Sir Michael Barber, formerly head of Tony Blair's Service Delivery Unit, and an old friend of Tooley's. During the last few years, Pearson invested in Omega Schools, allowing it to expand quickly throughout Ghana. Pearson is also reported as investing in Bridge International Academies, one of the world's largest chains of low-fee nursery and primary schools.⁵⁰

LFPs not only receive economic contributions from global business actors but also, albeit in lesser quantities, from bi-lateral and multi-lateral agencies.⁵¹ Among international aid agencies is the Australian Agency for International Development, the Canadian International Development Agency, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the UK Department for International Development (DFID) which is known for being one of the most significant global education donors, spending a commendable GB£905 million in bilateral aid for education in 2013, most of which aimed at supporting and improving public sector education delivery. However, a growing number of DfID investments are also supporting the expansion of low-fee private schools and helping governments to fund private schools to deliver education. Examples include funding initiatives promoting private schooling in Pakistan, Nigeria, Kenya, Uganda and India. In particular, the agency invested in the development of low-fee private schools run by Bridge International Academies, operating in Kenya, Uganda and Nigeria⁵².

Other multi-lateral agencies provide support to these schools through the implementation of specific educational programs. These include the UNDP⁵³,

⁵⁰ Wilby, P. (2013, November 12). Professor James Tooley: A champion of low-cost schools or a dangerous man? *The Guardian*. Retrieved from: www.theguardian.com/education/2013/nov/12/professor-james-tooley-low-cost-schools

⁵¹ "Our research has shown that approximately 3.1% of the funds disbursed by the analyzed agencies through 2007-2011 have been provided to the low-fee non-state education sector, and only 2% has been provided to the LCPS sector. This extremely low percentage is incongruent with the level of education that is currently being afforded to some of the world's most impoverished areas by LCPS and NGO sponsored programs." International Support to Low-Cost Private Schools (May 2013).

⁵² DFID impact fund: Fund snapshot, November 2015 - <http://www.theimpactprogramme.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Novastar-Snapshot.pdf>

⁵³ Fast Facts: United Nations Development Programme, <http://www.undp.org/content/dam/undp/library/corporate/fast-facts/english/FF-PPPSD.pdf> (September 2011)

UNICEF⁵⁴ and the World Bank Group (Niemerg, 2013). Although the World Bank, like the DfID, directs the majority of its funding to strengthening public education systems in low-income countries through the International Development Association, the World Bank Group is also known for promoting private schools as an affordable option for the poor, considered as an answer to state failure (Verger and Bonal, 2012). Although financial support for private provision is still relatively small compared to the aid granted to public education systems, the trend may be growing, as suggested by more recent investments including a newly approved operation in Burkina Faso.⁵⁵ The International Finance Corporation, the private sector investment branch of the World Bank, has been investing in companies delivering education which encompass elite private schools, low-fee private schools and local banks that finance private schools. In particular, it has started approving important loans for LFPS chains that operate in sub-Saharan Africa including a recent investment of US\$10 million in the expansion of Bridge International Academies.⁵⁶ As described by the IFC project documents, one of the goals of this investment is to “create a ‘demonstration effect’ to show the viability of this private model of education and *attract other companies to employ similar strategies*” (GCE, 2016).

Thanks to the support received from foreign investors, of which Pearson is one of the most significant, some LFPSs are extending their operations and developing into chains of schools. Among the most well-known chains of private schools are GEMS (Global Education Management Systems)⁵⁷, ARK (Absolute Returns for Kids), Spark Schools in South Africa, Lekki schools in Nigeria, Innova Schools in Peru, and Bridge International Academies, and Omega schools.

⁵⁴ Delivering Education Services to the Poor: What Role for the Non-State Sector?, [http://www.unicef.org/eapro/Education_knowledge_product_100417\(1\).pdf](http://www.unicef.org/eapro/Education_knowledge_product_100417(1).pdf) (April 2010)

⁵⁵ World Bank press release (2015, April). *World Bank Supports Access to and Quality of Pre-school and Secondary Education in Burkina Faso*. <http://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2015/04/02/world-bank-supports-access-to-and-quality-of-pre-school-and-secondary-education-in-burkina-faso>

⁵⁶ International Finance Corporation, World Bank Group (2014). *IFC supports expansion of primary education with investment in Bridge International Academies*. https://www.ifc.org/wps/wcm/connect/news_ext_content/ifc_external_corporate_site/news+and+events/news/bridgeschools_feature

⁵⁷ The annual revenues of GEMS exceed USD \$500 million (Sharif cited in Ridge et al., 2016)

In particular, Bridge International Academies is currently operating in Kenya, but has already expanded its activities to Nigeria Uganda and Liberia and is planning to expand also to India⁵⁸.

“Ten years from now we plan to be the global leader in providing education to families who live on \$2 a day per person or less. We will be operating in at least a dozen countries, and have 10,000,000 pupils coming to class every day”.⁵⁹

Omega schools are present in Ghana, and have grown to 20 schools and 11,000 students in 3 years⁶⁰. It has been funded and is owned by the university professor and advocate of Low-fee Private Schools, James Tooley who also co-founded and owns Empathy Learning Systems⁶¹, a chain of low-fee private schools active in India.

Standardization through technology

One of the features of these school chains is that they are expected to generate economies of scale. This is possible thanks to the standardization of the educational ‘product’, which is achieved through strict teaching-learning content and processes. Comparing the educational model developed by Omega Schools to the model of the fast-food conglomerate McDonald’s, James Tooley asserts that “[t]here is ... every reason to think that a similarly deeply understood and standardized learning process could become part of an equally successful model of private school provision, serving huge numbers of the poor” (Tooley, 2007). This standardization objective is illustrated in the creation of the easily replicable “academy-in-a-box” or “school-in-a-box” model (Omega schools website): a franchising approach based on uniformity, deemed to be easily replicable in different contexts (Riep, 2014a). These chains tend to reach economic efficiency by serving the largest amount of students at the lowest possible cost. It is argued that the “McDonaldization” of education is reached through the exploitation of teachers’ labor or by increasing pupil-teacher ratio (Riep, 2014a).

⁵⁸ Bridge International Academies Website – History:

www.bridgeinternationalacademies.com/company/history/

⁵⁹ Bridge International Academies *Presskit 2013*

www.bridgeinternationalacademies.com/presskit2013/Bridge_International_Academies-Presskit-2013.pdf

⁶⁰ The Omega Schools chain has grown to 20 schools and 11,000 students in 3 years (Omega Schools website - www.omega-schools.com)

⁶¹ Empathy Learning Systems website: www.empathylearning.com

Another aspect strictly linked with standardization is the importance based on “brand reliability” (Tooley, 1999; Riep, 2014; Srivastava, 2016). As some schools have started internationalizing their operations, especially in developing countries, brands represent important factors for families to identify schools of (supposed) controlled quality education. Standardization is meant to control all aspects of the education process to reduce the risk of schools not delivering “results.” It is also meant to generate an identifiable brand and, by doing so, help families to overcome the usual information problems that they face when choosing a school for their children (Riep, 2014a). As argued by Tooley in his book “The Global Education Industry”:

“With the larger education companies it is clear that the brand name works as it does for other consumer goods and services, reassuring parents and students that high quality is being offered and maintained” (Tooley, 1999, p. 40).

Technology, both for instruction and for management, is a key tool for achieving this standardization which characterizes low-fee private schools and which is essential to making profit. This is said to counteract the fundamental shortcomings of schools in poor areas, to provide teachers, students and parents with additional tools, and to help raise the quality of education. Computer technology has been used by some schools often as a replacement for skilled teachers. It serves to upgrade teachers’ skills, teach children IT skills, assess and test students, assist teachers with their lessons and reduce their reliance on external teaching support. Technology not only serves as a pedagogical tool, but also generates savings on overheads by facilitating supervision and support to teachers, and centralizes and computerizes a large part of non-instructional activities (GCE, 2016, p. 29). This industry, with its links to multinational corporations and investors and the use of technology, has immediate “global scalability that can potentially redefine education in previously unimaginable ways” (Kamat et al., 2016).

The use of standardized lessons delivered through high-impact technology solutions also makes it possible to delivering English classes more extensively and more easily. Indeed, it should be noted that the greater integration of countries in the global economy has generated greater demand for English as a language in education. Since government schools are required to teach in the native language, they are perceived as an

impediment to success in the new economy. These economic, social and political transformations of the last two decades have led to the proliferation of English courses in low-fee private schools where, as the case of Bridge International Academies illustrates, 32% of schooling is in English in a year, as described on the company leaflet.⁶² Enabling and promoting the teaching and learning of English in low-fee private schools is the objective of many companies which form part of the Global Education Industry. Among others, Empathy Learning Systems Pvt. Ltd, founded by James Tooley, is a company that aims to provide a variety of services for low-fee private schools in India. It promotes the adoption of a specific methodology to teach English at pre-primary and primary levels so that “students are able to read, write and better understand the English language” (Empathy Learning Systems website).

The Omega Schools model in Ghana

Despite the rise in school attendance in Ghana, around 319,000 children were still out-of-school in 2014 (UIS database). While the government is expanding access, some parents are opting to pay for their children's education. The shift towards private basic schooling appears to be in part a response to perceptions of poor quality in public provision. The ‘government failure’ in public-education delivery resulted in an increase in private schooling attendance (Riep, 2014a). It is estimated that private schools make up a third of total schools. Among private schools, the low-fee sector has seen the most significant expansion (Härmä, 2011). Omega Schools is a chain of Low-fee Private Schools present in the country, co-founded in 2007 by James Tooley and Ken Donkoh, an education entrepreneur, and is indicative of the aggregation of actors and interests in the Global Education Industry. In Ghana, these schools are “registered as ‘for-profit institutions’, which is not a common practice in other ‘developing’ countries” (Riep, 2014b). In 2012, Pearson plc became a private equity investor and shareholder in this franchise, supplying most of the capital.

Omega Schools are famous for operating the “Pay-As-You-Learn” model whereby students pay about US\$0.65, an ‘all-inclusive’ fee for classroom services which incorporate lunch, textbooks, exam fees and uniforms as well as tuition. This system

⁶² Bridge International Academies website: www.bridgeinternationalacademies.com

enables students to opt in and out of their education on a day-to-day basis. According to observers working for the DFID, this model is considered successful “as it fits well within the earning pattern of the parents who are mostly informal workers, and don’t always get a regular salary”. Founders are aware that saving capacity is limited and people earn money on a daily basis rather than having a certain weekly, monthly or yearly income. Therefore, “just as ‘pay-as-you-go’ was an instant success for the mobile phone sector, it seems to work for Omega Schools”⁶³. According to Ken Donkoh, the co-founder of Omega Schools, the pay-as-you-learn model “drives us to be the best we can be. We have to be accountable to the parents on a daily basis. If we don’t do a good job today, don’t expect the children to come the next day. I love the discipline this brings to everybody – teachers and the management on their toes”⁶⁴.

In order to increase profit margins, these chains of schools benefit from economies of scale, producing high volumes of services at very low cost.

“We build schools and the same week we open the school it becomes sustainable because it fills up with students. With 500 fee-paying students it’s able to cover the costs: the teacher salaries, the costs of running the school and it turns up a profit. This means that each school is self-sustainable and can contribute a surplus to the head of the company, which can then pool the money together and build new schools” (Interview to Donkoh - Source: Riep, 2014).

However, the main source of cost-cutting comes from low teacher salaries. Omega Schools hire unqualified teachers with no previous training who are provided with three weeks of pre-service training on how to deliver standardized lessons. Teachers earn about 20% of their public sector counterparts. This strategy of reducing costs is justified by the objective of making schools ‘low-fee’ and affordable for poor families. However, it is estimated that the cost of sending one child to the low-fee Omega chain of schools in Ghana represents 25-40% of annual household income for the poorest families. Therefore, despite the fact that Omega Schools is regarded as a pioneer model to be

⁶³ Goldstein N. (21 May 2013), *Ghanaian families pay for a private education*, available at: <https://dfid.blog.gov.uk/2013/05/21/ghanaian-families-pay-for-a-private-education>

⁶⁴ Ibid.

emulated, and has attracted many investors, its model is deemed deeply problematic in terms of access, quality and equity in education (Riep, 2015). Notwithstanding these controversies, Omega Schools is making plans to expand its franchise beyond Ghana and into West African markets including Sierra Leone, Liberia, Nigeria and the Gambia, with plans to “grow to as many as 340 schools with 200,000 students by 2020” (Donkoh, interview 2012 - Source: Riep, 2014).

Low-fee private schools: an assessment

Since it is difficult to determine the real extent of this phenomenon – these schools are often unregistered – there are different opinions regarding the importance that LFPSs are gaining in developing countries. Promoters tend to exaggerate the dimensions and the greater quality that these schools achieve in comparison to public schools. Critical literature, on the contrary, questions the real scale of this phenomenon. Considerations relative to the greater quality of LFPSs are also highly contested, and have generated one of the most controversial debates in the education development field in the last few years. A rigorous review funded by the UK Department for International Development (DFID) on the impact of private schools in developing countries recently concluded that evidence on the potential contribution of LFPSs to achieving quality basic education for all is still inconclusive in many aspects (see Ashley et al., 2014).

The section below provides an overall assessment of low-fee private schools based on factors of quality, affordability, accessibility, efficiency and innovation, school choice and competition as explored by the major experts in this field.

Quality

With particular attention to issues of *quality*, advocates of low-fee private schools argue that they can deliver better quality education than government schools and that they can help tackle the quality crisis which affects public schools. The relative malfunctioning of the state sector in many countries, where expanded access to schooling since the 1990s has not resulted in quality education, has been widely noted and generally accepted as the impetus for the growth of these schools. However, “the question of

whether the low-fee private sector is uniformly of superior quality in absolute terms as a whole is fraught with debate” (Srivastava, 2013).

First of all, this has to do with considerations regarding *what is meant by quality* in education, whether it is limited to issues of learning achievement, or also comprehends schooling experiences, considerations on social justice, equity, human rights and social cohesion. Having said this, most of the discussion on quality has focused on learning outcomes and results, which are relatively easy patterns to detect and to assess. The study conducted by the DFID has sought to illuminate this issue concluding that there is “moderate evidence” of perceived better quality education in private schools than in public ones (Ashley et al., 2014).

Moreover, private schools are mostly attended by children with relatively higher socio-economic status, particularly those who are more likely to attend fee-paying schools. Most of these children have “literate and motivated parents who are better able to support learning, and good nutrition, which is known to lead to better educational outcomes” (GCE, 2016). The DFID rigorous review also found that while public education is rightly criticized for dismal educational outcomes, it is also acknowledged that low-fee private schools perform poorly: “while private appears better than government, in reality it is more accurately ‘less bad’” (GCE, 2015 n. 46).

It should also be noted that quality assessment is further complicated by the difficulty in recognizing and registering some low-fee private schools: “many low-fee private schools operate through informal arrangements with other private schools or with the state, or usurp the process entirely” (Srivastava, 2013). Therefore, the assessment of the *quality* of schools that do not operate under government regulation is difficult to evaluate and this private system may undermine the formal regulatory framework, weakening the recognition system as an enforcement mechanism to maintain basic quality standards.

Another important factor which is critical in determining the quality of education is related to the presence of trained, qualified and well-supported teachers. As aforementioned, low-fee private schools often rely on unqualified and untrained teachers, frequently on short contracts and extremely low wages. Salaries in low-fee private schools are mostly below the minimum wage or even the international poverty

threshold. The standardized schooling model which relies on poorly qualified teachers may affect the quality of education provided.

Accessing quality education from an integrated social justice approach would have to ensure that not only are children from disadvantaged backgrounds are provided with equitable basic resources, of which teachers are a key component, but also that teachers' basic rights of fair wages are protected. Education quality discourse necessarily needs to be integrated with context-specific social justice approaches (Tikly, 2011). The focus on *schooling processes* and *social outcomes* has largely been missing from such analyses, as have the long-term implications and impacts of low-fee private schooling in the context of unfair provision to the disadvantaged (Srivastava, 2013).

Affordability

Another feature that is deemed crucial by promoters of low-fee private schools is that they are considered *affordable* even for the poorest families. Studies from many countries, however, show that for most low-fee private schools the term of 'low-fee' is inaccurate (Riep, 2014a). Sending one child to school would cost between the 20% (Nigeria) and 40% (Ghana) of the annual minimum wage, much higher than the figures suggested by Srivastava (2007b) according to which low-fee private schools are those charging a monthly fee about one day's earning of a daily-wage laborer at the primary and junior levels. Fees of this level do not appear therefore affordable for the poorest families. As also highlighted in a study conducted in India (Härmä, 2009), there is an inverse relationship between poverty and the ability to access LFP schools with those in the poorest households significantly more likely to access government schools (Figure 10).

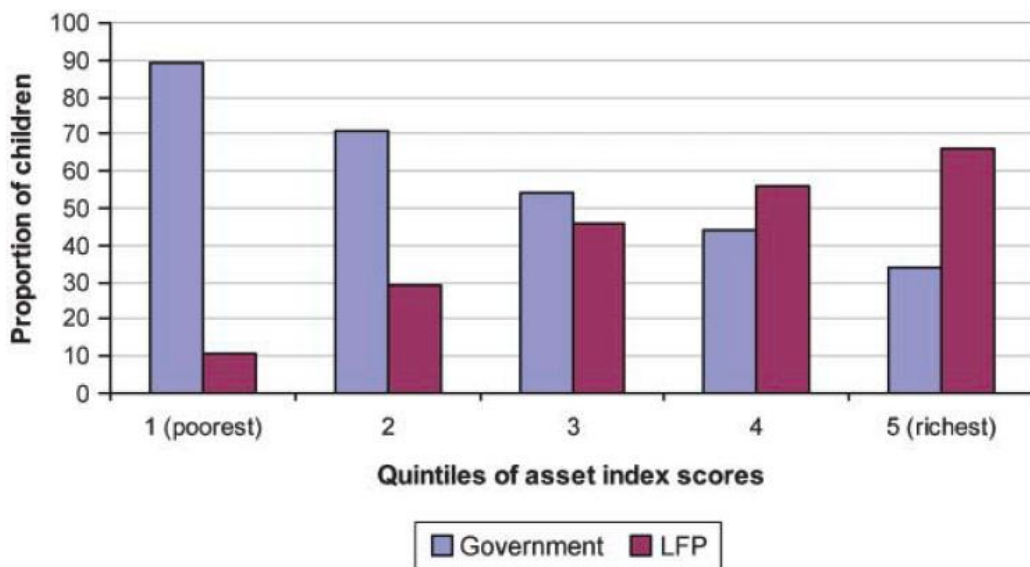


Figure 10 – School choice per child by quintiles of asset index scores, India
(Source: Härmä, 2009)

As another study carried out in Ghana shows, “this ‘low-fee’ private school model is still far out of reach for the ‘last 10%’ who still remain out of school in Ghana” (Riep, 2014a). These schools cannot therefore be considered able to “serve the poor and the poorest if they depend on revenue from the communities they serve” (Lewin, 2007). Indeed, the conditions of poverty are often dynamic, relational, multi-dimensional, and characterized by multiple deprivations, where economic circumstances and household incomes are just one factor of disadvantage. In addition, while the concept of ‘affordability’ focuses on the immediate economic ability of households to access to low-fee private schools, it is not sufficiently concerned with how long they may be able to access them. (Srivastava, 2013).

Another point worth of attention is that poor people are supposedly contributing to public education already through taxation. Therefore, any additional fee for private schools would represent a “double charge on the poorest, taking more money out of the pockets of those least able to pay” (GCE, 2016). Fees to attend low-fee private schools would force parents to make serious sacrifices, thus reducing disposable income to spend on essentials such as food, medicine, clothing, shelter and clean water. As a concerned mother of an Omega student said “Every Cedi I spend on school fees, takes

away from the little money I have to feed my family. This is the struggle we face everyday” (Riep, 2014a). The 2009 Education for All Global Monitoring Report also warns that when poor households pay for education, they divert income from other areas (UNESCO, 2009b). The ability to pay in order to attend low-fee private schools may result in more social differentiation, inequality and polarization than already currently exists in ‘developing’ contexts where these low-fee chains are spreading (Rolleston and Adefeso-Olateju, 2014).

It is surprising how international aid agencies such as the World Bank, which together with UNICEF championed the School Fee Abolition Initiative in the early 2000s, now support the spread of this particular type of private school. Supporters ignore decades of evidence that the abolition of fees has implied for many countries, where opportunities of access have expanded and the numbers of out-of school children have fallen (GCE, 2016). This evidence undermines the vision that considers low-fee private schools as a strategy to reach the poorest in order to achieve universal access.

Do low-fee private schools allow greater access?

In contrast to the assumption that low-fee private schools expand *access* to the most excluded people is the evidence that shows that these schools are not normally targeting underserved places. As illustrated in the second chapter, private schools tend to appear in urban or peri-urban areas where there is a high demand for education and where people can afford payment. Even when these schools are the only option available, fees mean that many parents must choose which of their children get an education with boys more likely to be selected than girls. Fees and selection processes appear to increase inequity and discrimination in education, particularly with regard to girls and marginalized groups. According to Härmä (2010), low-fee private schools leave “behind those of low caste or minority religion, the landless, girls, and children born later in families and children of larger families. [...] Marketised options are neither sustainable in the context of remote rural villages, nor are they, most importantly, socially equitable” (2010, p.38). Moreover, the evidence also suggests that low-fee private schools draw enrolments from those already in school, thus not contributing to the expansion of access to the out-of-school children (GCE, 2016). As Riep (2014) argues,

“fee-paying private schools ... are more elective for those who can already afford to pay their way into public or private school, rather than being a system for expanding initial access to the most marginalized students who remain excluded from any type of schooling”.

Efficiency and innovation

The claim that low-fee private schools are more *efficient and innovative* is also widely discussed and contested. Indeed, there is evidence that these schools are subject to frequent closures, openings and re-openings, with serious impacts on academic performance. Moreover, the standardization model that many of these schools follow does not result in greater efficiency. In particular, the ‘pay-as-you-learn’ model, based on the day-to-day payment and attendance, is extremely worrying since it may jeopardize “learning continuity by encouraging families to opt in and out on a day-to-day basis” (GCE, 2016).

School choice and competition

Finally, *school choice and competition* are considered key features by advocates of low-fee private schools as they are supposed to lead to better standards across the education system. Even in this case, evidence is limited. Parents appear to make choices based on inaccurate information based on proxies of education quality such as teacher engagement and class sizes. Moreover, school choice appears to be mostly influenced by the “perceived social status, prestige, gender norms, parental aspirations, or concerns with social closure” (Srivastava, 2013). When parents can choose, the private sector is not always the preferred choice. Studies in Kenya and India show that when public systems are available, parents tend to prefer to send their children to public schools. The choice of private schools is mainly due to the lack of access to an efficient public sector alternative. Therefore, “choosing private education does not necessarily reveal [parents’] true preferences” for better quality education (GCE, 2016).

It is evident that discussion about the positive and negative elements of the low-fee private sector needs to be assessed case by case and compared with concrete examples. Public schools should consider the growth of low-fee private schools as a clear signal of the need for better quality education in public schooling systems and may to some extent draw from experiences of innovation and progress when schools operate within low-income communities. However, there is a need for a *nuanced interpretation* when speaking of relative quality in terms of achievement and efficiency to avoid blanket assessments about the superiority of the low-fee private sector over the state sector, or vice versa. “The question then becomes not whether low-fee private schools are uniformly better, but in *what instances, under which circumstances, and owing to which background characteristics do students in different school types achieve higher results?*” (Srivastava, 2013, p. 25).

The case of Uganda Bridge International Academies

As illustrated in the section above, numerous academics, researchers and human rights activists have expressed concern about the harmful impact that the spread of LFPSs may have on issues of social cohesion and social justice.⁶⁵ In the last few years, UN human rights treaty bodies have repeatedly condemned the support of international aid agencies to LFPSs.⁶⁶ These have led to an unprecedented decision taken by the Government of Uganda, where the chain of low-fee private schools Bridge International Academies is running 63 nursery and primary schools with 12,000 pupils, to suspend the opening of new Bridge schools and to “close all the school sites under the management of Uganda Bridge International Academies”⁶⁷. In Kenya, where BIA schools are also present,

⁶⁵ See in particular Macpherson et al. (2014) and Srivastava (2013).

⁶⁶ The full list of UN treaty bodies resolutions and reports is available at this link: <http://globalinitiative-escr.org/advocacy/privatization-in-education-research-initiative/>

⁶⁷ Statement by the Ugandan Minister of Education and Sports, Hon Janet Museveni (9 August 2016), Statement on the operations of the Uganda Bridge International Academies by Uganda Parliament: <http://bit.ly/2baTCVm>

See also Atuhaire (26 Oct. 2016) at: www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-37609936

authorities suspended the opening of new schools and moved to close those already present in the Busia county.⁶⁸

The largest and most controversial chain of commercial private schools worldwide was reported for not respecting national standards, in particular that “material used could not promote teacher pupil interaction” and that “poor hygiene and sanitation [...] put the life and safety of the school children in danger”⁶⁹. Before the decision of the Ministry, Bridge International Academies had faced a series of accusations, whereby it was demonstrated that they charged fees that were unaffordable to the poorest and that there was no solid evidence regarding the quality of the education provided. The decision of the Ugandan Government is relevant for the other countries such as Kenya, Nigeria, Liberia and India where the company has already established or will soon be establishing low-fee private schools.

Within the international community, more and more governments, international organizations, and donor countries see LFPSs as a solution for the achievement of universal primary education for all and have integrated this type of school in Public-Private Partnership (PPP) frameworks.

3.3 The case of PPPs in education: the ambiguity of a concept

The increasing variety of actors interacting in the field of education, and the respective complexity of motives, rationales and values, has given rise to an increasing reference to *partnerships* as innovative forms of educational arrangements. The term ‘public private partnerships’ (PPPs) has a variety of meanings and is portrayed as including many different policy tools and mechanisms of governance. Public private partnerships have been defined as “cooperation of some sort of durability between public and private actors, in which they jointly develop products and services and share risks, costs and resources which are connected with these products” (Hodge, Greave and Boardman, 2010, p. 4). In the field of education, PPPs include more and more often the traditional

⁶⁸ More information available at the following blog post by the Global Initiative for Economic, Social and Cultural Rights: <http://globalinitiative-escr.org/information-statement-on-going-cases-involving-bridge-international-academies-ltd/>

⁶⁹ Ibid.

features of public education systems – policymaking, education provision, inspection, and school management (Ball, 2007; Robertson and Verger, 2012).

The increasing use of PPPs is based on the assumption that public policy making is now both a private and public sector activity. Policies on public education, its assessment, financing, and delivery are therefore being decided by both state and non-state actors, often within transnational public-private arrangements (Menashy, 2016). According to advocates of PPPs, these arrangements are fundamental to the new architecture of governance and are considered a key feature of Third Way political rhetoric (Ball, 2007, p. 116). However, important distinctions exist among different categories of actors and the PPP mechanisms they sponsor, which need to be taken into account.

Defining Public-Private Partnerships

Defining and analyzing the distinction between public and private roles in education is an indispensable starting point for any discussion about PPPs, yet also one of the most controversial, as illustrated in the preceding sections. Indeed, the distinction between public and private in education is not clear-cut. If many educators and researchers consider that educational systems are supposedly public, precisely because of the role they play in contributing to the public good, it is also acknowledged that private contributions have long been playing an important role in their development. This debate is further complicated by the ‘peculiar nature’ of education, as described by Levin (2000), since educational outcomes serve private as well as public interests. Looking beyond the distinction between the public and the private, the notion that there is a clearly defined group of private actors who share similar interests than can be characterized in opposition to the States seems far too simplistic. Inside the category of private in education, for example, actors may include households and students (paying fees, demanding quality), not-for-profit organizations, citizen groups, religious bodies and other organizations dependent on public funding; as well as for profit business, each with different motives and relationships with the State and the market (Robertson et al. 2012; Miraftab, 2004).

These important distinctions have given rise to different understandings on the meaning of *public private partnerships* in research literature and within the international development discourse. According to some authors, *public private partnerships* represent specific arrangements between public sector entities and private sector (business) entities. Hence the need to introduce the term *multi-stakeholder partnerships* in order to extend the notion of public-private partnerships to include non-governmental organizations, community groups and civil society actors (Draxler, 2012). According to Draxler (2008), “the newer term multi-stakeholder partnerships” has been adopted, for instance, by UNESCO to emphasize potential for success in achieving education for all precisely because it encompasses “a large range of stakeholders and are thus likely to reflect the interest and needs of the broadest spectrum of them”. Multi-stakeholder partnerships have been defined as “the pooling and managing of resources, as well as the mobilization of competencies and commitments by public, business and civil society partners to contribute to expansion and quality of education” (Draxler, 2008).

A wider interpretation, however, considers PPPs as partnerships between business and the public sector, which could also involve NGOs, civil society members or donor agencies (Ginsburg, 2012). The term “public private partnership” has therefore been referred to as a “semantic umbrella” that comprehends considerable differences in expectations about lead actors, basic mechanisms and motivations (Robertson et al., 2012). Economists working within international organizations have preferred a narrower definition of PPPs, basically focused on a contract made by a government with a private service provider to acquire services (Patrinos et al, 2009). This type of definition is adopted by the World Bank and by the OECD, whose use of the term PPPs is largely focused on agreements between government and the private sector for the delivery of education services. A softer definition but at the same time one that is broader in scope, often adopted by the United Nations, considers PPPs as “joint initiatives between private, philanthropic and public sector actors aimed at achieving the public good” (Robertson et al. 2012). As Robertson points out, the predominance of a narrower or softer/broader approach to the term *public private partnerships* strongly varies among the diverse actors involved and depends on the power relations, on the motivations and on the scale at which the partnerships operate (Robertson et al. 2012).

The phenomenon of public-private partnerships is quite diverse and may be considered from different angles and at different levels. It represents a “resurgent, hybrid mode of educational governance that operates across scales, from the community to the global” (Robertson et al. 2012, p. 2). Ginsburg (2012) usefully attempts to summarize the types and levels of organizations that could participate in public-private partnerships, taking into account both the type of organizations (public, private for-profit, and private not-for-profit) as well as the level of organization (local/community, national, and international). Indeed, PPPs may be established as a result of arrangements undertaken at a national level or may be established through global initiatives and mechanisms. In this respect, UNESCO, the UN Global Compact and the GPE, some bilateral aid agencies such as DfID, USAID and multilateral agencies such as WTO, the World Bank and its related IFC encourage the development of PPPs in the field of education, although with different interpretations of how the partnership is composed and for what purposes. PPPs may also be established as a result of advocacy by international nongovernmental and civil society organizations. In addition, corporate actors are increasingly influential at the global and national level for the establishment of PPPs.

Lastly, it should be underlined that the term *partnerships* itself is not exempt from ambiguity (Ball, 2007; Draxler, 2012; Wettenhall, 2003). It has been argued that, by suggesting relations apparently founded on “warm mutuality” and “feel-good factors”, the term partnerships may hide issues regarding which of the partners, is exerting more power or authority (Ginsburg, 2012). Partnership has been emerging as a major reference point in discourse about education and development since the 1990s.⁷⁰ However, the way this term is used is sometimes dubious, and the belief that what it refers to is “a good thing” seems much more a matter of faith than of science (Wettenhall, 2003).

⁷⁰ Partnerships were considered one of the priority actions within the Frameworks for Action adopted in Jomtien at the World Conference Education For All *Meeting Basic Learning Needs* (1990) and in Dakar at the World Education Forum *Education for All: Meeting our Collective Commitments* (2000). Within the process of formulation of the post-2015 development agenda, the UN system referred to a global partnership for development (High Level Panel, *A New Global Partnership*; Un System Task Team on the Post-2015 Development Agenda, *A Renewed Global Partnership for Development*). The 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda *Transforming Our World* expressly envisages the constitution of a “Global Partnership for Sustainable Development” to ensure the implementation of the new agenda (Goal 17).

Changes in PPPs: growing corporate engagement

Although the concept and practice of PPPs are not new (Ginsburg, 2012), the recent use of “the term PPPs has been associated with a sharp resurgence of interest in, and participation of, new kinds of private actors in educational governance” (Robertson et al. 2012, p. 5). PPPs started to be used by important education players to advocate new or additional roles for private actors in sectors normally considered as ‘public’ (Verger, 2012; Robertson et al. 2012). These particular government arrangements are seen by some observers “as a logical response to structural changes in state-market-society relations that have occurred since 1980s. Globalization, liberalization ... have resulted in the rolling back of certain state functions and capacities, the massive growth in the number and global reach of corporations, and the emergence of new policy actors” (Utting and Zammit, 2009). Partnerships were considered as a compromise between the State and the market, “a corrective to *too much* state, on the one hand, and *too little* state, on the other” (Robertson and Verger, 2012). The so-called public-private partnerships in education became a “programmatic idea”⁷¹ which acquired centrality in the agendas of the most important multilateral, regional, and bilateral aid agencies specializing in education including the UN system, the World Bank, the OECD, DfID, USAID (Verger, 2012).

This increasing use of PPPs may be motivated by implications/promises of reductions and greater efficiency in public expenditure in order “to maximize the potential for expanding equitable access to schooling and for improving education outcomes, especially for marginalized groups” (Patrinos, et al. 2009). PPPs are considered as new ways of financing education that combine the best of the public and the private with the objective of resolving the problems of access, quality and equity of education systems (King, 2009; LaRocque, 2008). These governance arrangements are considered suitable for achieving the goals envisaged by international development and education agendas as well as for responding to the growing demand for education at all levels (Verger, 2012; Robertson and Verger, 2012).

⁷¹ A technical idea that provides the interpretation of a policy problem and prescribes a precise course of action to solve it (Campbell quoted in Verger, 2012).

More specifically, the new use of *partnership* needs to be traced back to the early 1990s, as a response to the damage done by forms of privatization during the 1970s and 1980s. Experts that were strategically placed in influential international organizations are considered responsible for the transposition of the PPPs idea to the education development domain and started to see partnerships in education as an evolution of the privatization agenda (Verger, 2012). In 2001, the International Finance Corporation launched a handbook on PPPs and education⁷² the main authors of which were Norman LaRocque, then Director of Corporate Finance at Anderson Consulting Company in New Zealand, James Tooley, Professor of Education Policy in the UK, Michael Latham, Education Advisor to CfBT Education Services, and Harry Patrinos, Senior Education Economist at the World Bank. These experts have been directly involved in the global advancement of the PPPs agenda in education. The debate on the relations and respective roles of public and private actors in education was further intensified in light of the global economic crisis from 2008 onwards (Rose, 2010). Discussions moved from a question of public versus private, to rather identify how the existing private sector may be brought into the national system to make the overall system more effective. The network of education experts came together in the World Bank Economics of Education Thematic Group and started a research and deliberation line on private and alternative forms of education provision which led to the publication of the well-known World Bank report *The Role and Impact of PPPs in Education*, released in 2009 where participation of corporate actors was openly recognized. Public-private partnerships have been considered as a way in which the public and private sectors could “join together to complement each other’s strengths in providing education services while helping developing countries to meet the Millinnium Development Goal for education and to improve learning outcomes in general” (Barrera-Osorio et al., 2012). In line with the trends of privatization and of marketization, these partnerships have been progressively predicting the involvement of corporate, for-profit organizations. It has been argued that a specialist, increasingly corporate, industry has sprung up around PPPs, particularly in those developed economies that have taken PPPs furthest (Robertson and Verger, 2012). Partnerships are seen as an expression of economic liberalism and have been increasingly promoted by corporate organizations as

⁷² IFC. 2001. *Handbook on PPPs and Education*, IFC: Washington.

new policy alternatives in developing contexts (Rose, 2010; Robertson and Verger, 2012). Indeed, “partnerships” is one of the key words used by education businesses to advertise themselves. It is argued that this is also a way for corporate actors to access the public sector (Ball, 2007).

As already discussed, these particular forms of PPPs are increasingly sustained by the World Bank and the IFC. Moreover, foundations and venture philanthropists are playing a crucial role in the promotion of these arrangements also within the UN system (Hewlett foundation, Gates Foundation, Microsoft, ..). According to a classification provided by Patrinos et al (2009), public private partnerships may refer to a contract between the public and the private sector under one of the following formats: delivery of education (charter schools), private operation of public schools (contract schools), and education vouchers (IFC, 2001). However, the limits to what forms of engagement with the private sector can be categorized as a PPP are not always clear. In fact, the examination of various documents shows that there is a continuum of PPP models which go from low to high partnerships. Indeed, this continuum is framed in an evolutionary way, departing from systems where all provision is strictly public, through a ‘nascent’ stage, in which private schools exist, but do not necessarily interact with the State, and finally reaching an ‘integral’ stage in which 100% of education is provided by the private sector under a voucher framework (see Figure 11).

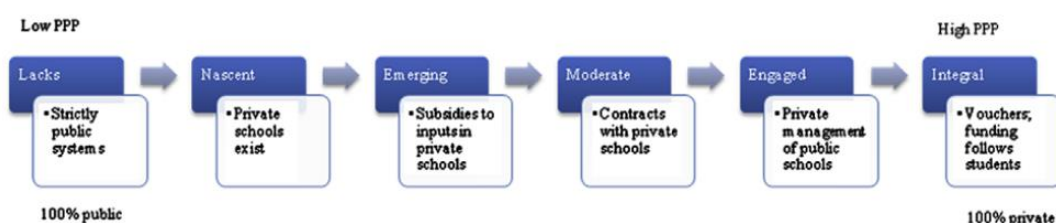


Figure 11 – The PPPs continuum (Source: Verger, 2012)

Moreover, PPPs have increasingly been used with low-fee private schools. Indeed, advocates of low-fee private schools are recommending that governments adopt voucher schemes or related demand-side interventions as a way of facilitating access to these types of schools, or at least of providing poor families with more school choices. The inclusion of low-fee private schools in PPP frameworks has been adopted on a large

scale in low-income countries. Among others, the case of Liberia is a case of public private partnership established by the government which also includes a corporate actor (British International Academies) for the provision of education in the country.⁷³ These arrangements are seen by some as essential in countries where public budgets are highly constrained. However, “they remain an enigma, and their status as a contemporary governance practice in education continues to be controversial” (Robertson and Verger, 2012).

An extreme case of growing market engagement: the case of “Partnership Schools for Liberia”

The Liberian education system has been considered “in a state of decay for the last three decades”⁷⁴ as a result of years of conflict and the recent Ebola epidemic. According to official data, the primary adjusted net enrolment ratio stood only at 38% in 2014 with 442,000 children out-of-school (UIS database). The government admitted that a long-term gradual plan was not going to solve the problems and therefore announced early 2016 its intention to entirely outsource the public pre-primary and primary school system to private actors, through a public-private partnership (PPP). The program is called *Partnership Schools for Liberia*. “We have tried everything to change education in Liberia. From kindergarten to universities, we cannot explain the impact of the investments made in the last decade. ... Learning outcomes are dismal, teacher quality is lacking. *Partnership Schools* offers a glimmer of hope for our children.”⁷⁵

⁷³ See the page regarding *Education Privatisation in Liberia* on the GIESCR website:

<http://globalinitiative-escr.org/advocacy/privatization-in-education-research-initiative/education-privatisation-in-liberia/>

Moreover, further information on the BBC website: <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-36074964>

⁷⁴ Updated information are retrieved from the page of the Global Initiative for Economic Social and Cultural Rights: <http://globalinitiative-escr.org/advocacy/privatization-in-education-research-initiative/education-privatisation-in-liberia/>

⁷⁵ Interview to Education Minister of Liberia, George Werner, on the following webpage:

<http://frontpageafricaonline.com/index.php/politics/378-privatising-education-in-liberia-us-56m-over-5-years-a-hefty-proposition>

Blog news by Darvas (2016, January 11) *School enrolment in Liberia is higher today than it was before the Ebola epidemic* <http://blogs.worldbank.org/education/school-enrolment-liberia-higher-today-it-was-ebola-epidemic>

Initially, most of the schools were to be handed over to a single private-for-profit commercial firm, Bridge International Academies, in a contract estimated at \$65 million over a five-year period. Following criticisms of the plan, the pilot program was modified with 92 schools now allocated to eight private providers, another 93 schools form the comparison group. Bridge was first allocated 50 schools which have now been reduced to 23 for an estimated 8,000 children. The remaining schools are operated by BRAC Liberia, Liberian Youth Network, More Than Me, Omega Schools, Rising Academies, Stella Maris and Street Child. The one-year pilot program was launched for the new school year on 5 September 2016. Unlike the company's schools in Kenya and Uganda, where families pay about \$6 per term for tuition, parents in Liberia will not pay for the schools. Education will be free, but the government will not be directly running the schools.

The aim is to eventually contract out all primary and early childhood education schools to private providers who meet the required standards over a 5 year period. If the pilot program has positive results for a second term running, the contract will be signed with the preferred provider (or providers if the scale is too great for one provider). Each year of continuation of the contract will be based on performance not dropping below set levels. The successful provider starts up in another 300 schools or a range of providers take on 100 schools each, adding 300 schools per year up to 2019. By that time, if the program is successful, all schools in Liberia will be managed under a PPP arrangement.

PPPs: some pros and cons

Public-private partnerships open up various kinds of interaction between the sectors, of people, ideas, language, methods, values and culture and contribute to the blurring of boundaries between concepts of the public and the private (Ball, 2007). Literature review on the positive and negative effects of PPPs however seems inconclusive since rigorous evidence on the impact of these programs is mixed and limited. Supporters of public-private partnerships consider that PPPs may serve as a means by which governments achieve educational policy goals. These arrangements may have positive outcomes, enhancing flexibility and fostering competition, allowing for increased risk

sharing between the government and private actors and cost-effectiveness. According to Patrinos et al (2009) and LaRocque (2008), PPPs may lead to improvements in both education access and quality, especially for populations and groups who are normally underserved by conventional methods of public service delivery. Remarkably, LaRocque (2008) suggests that a vision of education as ‘public’ or non-commercial in nature may limit the exploration of the potential improvements that PPPs may have on education and benefits arising from PPPs may be therefore reduced compared to other economic sectors (2008:101). Having said this, these authors also acknowledge that the quality of the design and implementation of PPP arrangements is essential to determine their positive or negative effects. Indeed, poorly designed and implemented PPPs may lead to both financial and policy risk for governments.

Others have argued that these governance arrangements may eventually lead to the erosion of the ‘public’ in education and to a weaker role of the State. PPP initiatives, which may apparently look neutral and normatively correct, may in fact lead to a diminished role of the State in all aspects of education, including financing, management and regulation. Moreover, most forms of PPPs in education are thought to be framed on market-based logics and forms of accounting, inspired by neo-liberal arguments for greater choice and efficiency in the education system. This may lead to an impoverished view of education as an economic activity, rather than a social one, wherein the learner/student is considered as a consumer rather than as a citizen (Robertson and Verger, 2012; Srivastava, 2010). It is suggested that within these partnerships, there is “an already established consensus that gets rid of politics, and replaces it with problems to be solved by mere technical expertise” (Friedrich, 2016). Within this kind of PPPs, the State is simply supposed to have a “guiding role” and steps back to be *just a partner* in the provision of education. As a result, the public sphere, which should be the place of contestation, for staging scenes of dissensus and confrontation, appears to be deprived of its fundamental democratic elements⁷⁶ (Friedrich, 2016). In this perspective, PPPs in education appear as political projects aimed at altering the current paradigm of education reform in low-income contexts. This programmatic idea generates a new interpretation of what the role of the State in education should be. On the other hand, “it attempts to move the focus of education

⁷⁶ Hannah Arendt (1958) defines the ‘public’ as a space of debate and contestation

reform further away from an ‘inputs’ rationale to a reform agenda with outputs, governance, and managerial solutions at its core” (Verger, 2012).

Public-private partnerships should not therefore be seen as simply technical tools. They are fundamentally about economic and social relations and involve questions of power, authority, legitimacy, accountability and equality, and not just market-based choices and efficiency (Jayasuriya, 2008). As stated by the UN Special Rapporteur on the Right to Education (A/70/342), governments “must be monitored and held responsible for their shortcomings in failing to fulfil their obligations for the realization of the right to free education and in failing to adhere to minimum educational standards of quality learning, even when outsourcing education to private actors”. However, the possibility that public private partnerships may question the requirements for accountability understood in public terms represents a serious risk (Minow, 2003). “Instead of using PPPs as a way to hold the State accountable to oppressive or exclusionary mechanisms in accessing essential services, the benefits are expressed as a clear customer focus for enhanced social services” (Srivastava, 2010). The potential for corruption in PPP schemes extends into the provision of education itself, as the lack of effective monitoring and financial reporting contributes to a level of toleration where abusive practices and profiteering go unchecked (Taylor, 2014). Emerging arrangements within the mechanisms of PPPs are thought to jeopardize public commitments to equality, fair procedures, and democracy. Some have argued that the term *partnership* may, to some extent, be synonymous with privatization, or used instead of it, thus masking arrangements that create the conditions for private actors to become more influential in education (Draxler, 2012; Srivastava, 2010; Wettenhall, 2003).

At the same time, partnerships may be seen as a potential field of innovation and experimentation between the private and public sector. While recognizing that some forms of partnerships may be dangerous in that they foster specific interests, it should also be acknowledged that others may encourage a relative coherence among diverse objectives (Ball, 2007). They bring about a form of values and organizational convergence and they re-shape the context in which public sector organizations work (Jessop, 2002). Indeed “States have a key role to play in promoting innovative capacities, technical competence and technology transfer ... often involving extensive

collaboration” (Jessop, 2002, p. 121). For this to be realized, overall policy and coordination frameworks as well as an effective regulatory framework need to be implemented (UN Special Rapporteur on the right to education, 2015b; Srivastava, 2010).

Many experts recognize that the private sector is expected to continue to be involved in education at different levels of policy-making, funding, delivery and regulation (Robertson and Verger, 2012, p. 21). Moreover, the opinion that the State needs to partner with the private sector in providing education has remained relatively untroubled. Therefore, if public and private are expected to continue interacting, what is needed is a qualitatively different understanding of the private and of the public in the governance of education as a public good.

CHAPTER 4

Reframing the concept of education as a public good

4.1 In search of a balance between two contrasting approaches to education

A substantial degree of ambiguity exists in the way that education is perceived as a private or public good. The way this issue is addressed has serious implications for the control and governance of education (Lubienski, 2003). As illustrated in Chapter 1, according to the economic classification of goods, education is considered an impure public good and is provided in a hybrid public-private model (Lubienski, 2003). Indeed, education is a particular kind of good which exhibits both public and private aspects. The effects produced by education are both individual and general and therefore justify personal and collective claims on its governance. Not only individuals have private benefits from being educated but, at the same time, thanks to its positive externalities (or “neighbors effect”), education is considered as having public good aspects as well: the provision of mass schooling is thought to be evident in indicators such as civic cohesion and crime rates, and for these reasons it is worthy of public debate and policy making. This two-fold classification of education, characterized by both public-good and private-good aspects, is also acknowledged by Levin (2000) who describes the “peculiar nature of education” as follows:

“[Education] addresses public interests by preparing the young to assume adult roles in which they can undertake civic responsibilities, embrace a common set of values, participate in a democratic polity with a given set of rules, and embrace the economic, political, and social life which constitute the foundation for the nation. All of this is necessary for an effectively, functioning democracy, economy, and society...At the same time, education must address the private interests of students and their families by providing a variety of forms of development which will enhance individual economic, social, cultural, and political benefits for the individual... Embedded in the same educational experience are outcomes that can contribute to the overall society as well as those which can provide private gains to the individual (2000, p.3).”

In this respect, the idea that private interests are antithetical to the ‘public good’ raises challenges, because educational outcomes serve private as well as public interests – and in many ways these outcomes are inextricably linked through gains in the productivity and civic efficacy of the individual learner, which in turn contribute to firms, societies, and states (Levin, 2000).

Schooling is the major mechanism for setting up a society that is educated to understand, accept, and function within a universally accepted set of institutional principles. A smoothly functioning society means that all or most of its members accept a shared understanding of the values and principles that underlie the legal, political, social, and economic foundations that constitute the society. Much of the educational process is oriented towards creating a common experience for all children and young people that enables them to understand these institutions and prepares them for effective participation. This goal is the reason for the universal aim of “education for democracy” (Levin, 2010). In short, a major function of the system of schooling is to reproduce the most basic functions and institutions of society from generation to generation through the common socialization. Moreover, in democratic societies schools are considered the major institutions responsible for giving all young people a fair chance in life. This mission entails adopting various approaches to the creation of equity in the allocation of resources and educational outcomes in order to compensate for initial economic differences among children at birth and in early childhood. Indeed, equity is one of the principles that underlie an approach to education seen as a public good. It “refers to the quest for fairness in access to educational opportunities, resources, and outcomes, by gender, social class, race, language origins, disability, and geographical location of students” (Levin, 2010). This is also essential to ensure that education is socially just. Given these public-good aspects of education, the State is considered as having a predominant role in the governance of education.

However, recent trends of privatization and marketization of education, characterized by policies promoting deregulation and liberalization within the system, economically based competition, as well as the emergence of private suppliers of education services, tend to give greater prominence to the private-good aspects of education (Kohlrausch and Leuze, 2007). As argued by Macpherson, Robertson and Walford (2014):

“Education as development thus essentially followed the same dual objectives – making citizens and making economies – as had informed the growth of Europe in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These two very different understandings of ‘education’ in education policy, the one broadly humanitarian, the other deeply economic, were to become the basis of a division that has persisted across the decades since, but where since the 1990s, a strong reframing of education by economists has become hegemonic, in part a result of processes broadly conceived of as ‘globalisation’”

Private benefits include those that are conferred on and limited to the individuals being educated and their families. Families usually favor specific approaches to the education of their children, and they prefer schools that reflect similar perspectives and ideals. Students who receive more and better schooling benefit from greater understanding of themselves and their society and are able to convert their skills into private gains of higher incomes, more satisfying jobs, favorable personal contacts, better health, and greater political and social understanding (Levin, 2010). These private benefits can be substantial for both educated individuals and their families. In this perspective, for the individual and the family, the solution is for the system to provide a diversity of educational choices, encouraging schools to match as closely as possible their private aspirations and capabilities. Freedom of choice puts a heavy emphasis on the private benefits of education and the liberty to ensure that families choose schools that are consistent with their parental ideas. Moreover, emphasis is placed on the greater efficiency of some schools in obtaining maximum educational results as compared to others. The efficiency frame rests on the acceptance of poor governance and weak institutions, with the State deemed as incapable of maximizing resources. In contrast, the private sector is considered to be more efficient and therefore better able to regulate these deficiencies. Indeed, advocates of choice believe that competition among schools will increase productive efficiency relative to the central administration. Purely market-based systems elevate the values of choice and of efficiency above all others (Levin, 2010).

These two different approaches to education, one that puts greater emphasis on the public-goods, and the other on private-goods aspects of education, could be summarized as follows:

	Public good approach	Market-based approach
Aim	Basic quality education for all	Measureable learning
Purposes of education	Public/societal benefits	Individual / corporate benefits
Function	“Education for democracy”	Education for competitiveness
Perspective	Students as ‘citizens’	Students as ‘consumers’
Dimension	Socio-political	Economic and technical
Values	Equity, social justice, equality	Efficiency, freedom of choice
Vision	Humanistic	Utilitarian / Human Capital
Governance	Primary responsibility of the State	Residual role of the State

Table 9 – Public good vs market-based approach (Source: Author)

If education is perceived as a private good, then markets are considered as offering the most appropriate model for production and distribution. Indeed, private goods typically involve benefits that accrue primarily to individuals and are therefore left to private control, exercised through market mechanisms. The promise of personal gain has been a driving force in the popular demand for education as a private good. Therefore, an individual seeking an education in order to translate that credential into socioeconomic rewards should have some significant degree of control over the type of education provided (Lubienski, 2003, p. 480). With this in mind, it can be said that marketization tends to give far greater prominence to the private-good aspects of education. Effects of marketization are seen not just in the emergence of different structures but in the shift of power to narrower segments of the public defined by individual private interests. It is argued that this shift has political implications, leading to the weakening of the role of the State in the governance of education, and to a reduction of the public-good aspects of education, making it excludable and rival, thus diminishing broader forms of control over schooling (Lubienski, 2003).

4.2 The effects of marketization on the concept of education as a public good

As already illustrated, the increased involvement of corporate actors in the field of education is a phenomenon that is spreading worldwide particularly in developing countries where it has expanded in the form of Low-fee Private Schools, implemented through partnerships between the State and for-profit actors. These arrangements represent relatively easy and ready-to-adopt solutions when considering to the complex problems that education systems are facing especially in developing countries (Burch, 2009). Market-based approaches tend to prefer simplistic linear solutions, taking advantage of the potential of their decontextualized multiplication effect – as the case of standardized education provided in low-fee private schools exemplifies (ref Chapter 3 the school or academies-in-a-box models). Some experts see corporate actors as able to meet the growing demand of education and to respond to the inability of national education systems to ensure basic quality education by increasing learning outcomes, and by maximizing efficiency while cutting costs (Tooley and Longfield, 2015). At the same time, the activity of traditional public actors has been increasingly characterized by the more utilitarian and individualistic vision that underlies the approach of private, for-profit actors. Indeed, processes of privatization not only refer to shifts in ownership and funding, but also to the way schools (private or public) themselves are managed, organized and for what purposes, what Ball and Youdell (2008) famously call ‘privatization *in* education’, or endogenous privatization (see Chapter 2).

The arguments against privatization and marketization have been widely discussed in literature. The conceptualization and implementation of education policies is deemed to be a complex process infused with political agendas, concerns with legitimacy, competing interests, and bargaining power by different actors. It is argued that institutions “are created to serve the interests of those with the bargaining power to devise new rules” (North, 1990). Numerous academics and human rights researchers have expressed concerns regarding the appropriateness of a growing involvement of private actors and market arrangements in the education sector at different levels. Some have deemed it as being in conflict with the recognition of education as a human right, which implies that the State should maintain the primary responsibility for education

financing, delivery, monitoring and regulation.⁷⁷ The greater participation of new/non-traditional actors operating outside a formal education scenario, characterized by scarce public resources, makes this sector potentially attractive to actors with commercial interests. Related to these concerns are issues of equity and social justice, in that market engagement could promote corporate or individual interests over public/societal benefits which may foster inequality and social stratification (Machperson et al, 2014). Indeed, the greater emphasis of market-based solutions of choice and competition may have the effect of reconfiguring social cohesion “and its correlative bases of political power” (Mazawi, 2013). “Corporatization redistributes economic control and cultural control from the public to private interests. These redistributions of power undermine public democracy, just social transformation and critical citizenship while exacerbating material and symbolic inequality” (Saltman, 2009). Moreover, profit engagement, leading to greater marketization in the field of education, raises important issues with regard to the role of the State in the governance of education and also with regard to the ultimate purposes of education. Since the main concern of business actors is profit making, this may have repercussions on the societal and civic objectives of education. More generally, marketization may result in the weakening of State action thus undermining public values or social cohesion and fostering fragmentation and loss of public institutions (Minow, 2003).

The following sections outline some of the potential issues related to marketization with particular regard to the purposes of education, to its implications on students and schooling, to inequality and its risks for democracy, and to the role of the State.

Privatizing the purposes of education

As discussed above, much of the tension over the organization of schools and the purposes of education can be understood by realizing that individual educational goals and aspirations of students and their families may be in conflict with societal goals of

⁷⁷ See in this respect the General Comment No. 13 on the Right to Education (art. 13 of the Covenant of Economic Social and Cultural Rights): “it is clear that article 13 regards **States as having principal responsibility for the direct provision** of education in most circumstances; States parties recognize, for example, that the “development of a system of schools at all levels shall be actively pursued” (art. 13 (2) (e))” (emphasis added).

equity and the integration of all young people into the most fundamental institutions of society (Levin, 2010). Indeed, the history of schooling has always been a quest for a compromise between two different understandings of the purposes of education. As aforementioned, schooling can be both a way to preserve and promote public aims, as well as a means to advance the interests of individual educational consumers in the pursuit of social access and social advantage (Labaree, 2011). As clearly illustrated by David Labaree (2011), this compromise has always been difficult to reach, if not impossible:

“[w]e want schools to express our highest ideals as a society and our greatest aspirations as individuals, but only as long as they remain ineffective in actually enabling us to achieve these goals, since we really do not want to acknowledge that these two aims are at odds with each other. We ask schools to promote equality while preserving privilege, so we perpetuate a system that is too busy balancing opposites to promote student learning. We focus on making the system inclusive at one level and exclusive at the next, in order to make sure that it meets demands for both access and advantage. As a result, the system continues to lure us to pursue the dream of fixing society by reforming schools while continually frustrating our ability to meet these goals. It locks us in a spiral of educational expansion and credential inflation that has come to deplete our resources and exhaust our vitality. And we cannot find a simple cure for this syndrome because we will not accept any remedy that would mean giving up one of our aims for education in favor of another. We want it both ways.”

Although the provision or production of education may not be necessarily privatized, the commercial/market approach to education makes the *purposes* of education increasingly pending towards individual private interests (Lubienski, 2003). This is particularly important since processes of privatization may be acknowledged not only in their administrative, economic or technical dimensions but also, and perhaps more importantly, in the reconfiguration of political arrangements and social matters which affect the underlying political values, understandings and ability of people to act in society.

In this respect, Biesta (2009) acknowledges that many contemporary discussions about education lack explicit attention to its ultimate purposes: “there is often implicit reliance on what appears as ‘common sense’, which often serves the interests of some groups (much) better than those of others”. This attention usually associated to the private benefits of education, is also referred to as the ‘qualification function’ of education, and is represented in the academic achievement in a small number of curricular domains (Biesta, 2009). The emphasis on the ‘qualification function’ is of course at the expense of the so-called ‘socialisation’ and ‘subjectification’ functions which have to do with the many ways in which, through education, people become members of a particular social, cultural and political order and at the same time develop their way of being “that hints at independence from such orders” (Biesta, 2009) – that is how people fulfill themselves both within a society and as free human-beings.

The predominance of private interests is also closely connected to the vocabulary that is being used to talk about educational processes and practices. As previously discussed, the rise of the concept of ‘learning’, resulting from the greater concern for quality education, mostly reduced to the assessment of learning outcomes, entails a shift from a focus on aims to a focus on mere processes. Indeed, ‘learning’ is conceived as a basically *individualistic* concept, whereas ‘education’ always implies a relationship. This ‘learnification of education’ (Biesta, 2009) has a continuously greater impact on educational policy and practice, making it more difficult to ask questions about content, purpose and direction of education. With an exaggerated focus on school choice, the marketization of education becomes a question of “market mechanisms and consumer sovereignty – rather than public debate and explicit priorities over the big questions about the purposes and design of schooling” (Minow, 2011, p. 845). In this perspective, the conflict between education purposes, and the different functions of education, representing both public-good and private good-aspects, may seem too difficult to resolve or even completely irresolvable. Yet, at least in democratic societies, “there ought to be an ongoing discussion about the aims and ends of (public) education – how hard such a discussion might be” (Biesta, 2009). This is particularly important given the multifaceted process of privatization, where the implications on political and socio-cultural dimensions are often undervalued.

The commodification of education

Strictly connected with the predominance of private interests in education, is the tendency of schools to act “as businesses” and to treat students as consumers (Lubienski, 2003, p. 497). The education market is considered as the sum of actions of all educational consumers as they pursue their individual interests through schooling and compete to acquire advantageous commodities, in this specific case “educational credentials” that can enhance their social opportunities in competition with others (Labaree, 2011). In this scenario, although education itself cannot be commodified, something is certainly being bought and sold on the educational market. Indeed, to create a market in education, the neoliberal approach implies establishes some forms of restrictions. Education is somehow sold, and therefore comes to represent a privilege, “something that other people cannot get, that is no longer common property”. The opening-up of the education sector to private, commercial interests recast therefore education as a consumer good (Macpherson et al., 2014). “[T]he marketing brochures and websites of private schools are a rich guide to contemporary ideologies in education: and these sites display all these forms of commodification” (Connell, 2013).

Marketization entails a view of education framed primarily in economic terms. Children are not seen as future critical citizens, but mostly as the next generation of ‘global economic citizens’, whose place in the changing world order will be secured primarily as workers to advance the domestic or international agendas of global competitiveness. In this perspective, “[p]arents become consumers; students become human capital with their education calculated in rates of return; administrators are expected to act like managers and entrepreneurs” (Burch, 2009, p. 12). Indeed, individuals are increasingly acting “as educational consumers, as opposed to their numerous other roles, such as citizens and taxpayers and friends and caring parents and spiritual beings” (Labaree, 2011, p. 390). One of the two objectives of education, that of forming critical, responsible and informed citizens, appears to be greatly undermined.

It is argued that the consumer orientation that characterizes marketization also has implications for the educational process where the focus appears to be moved from the core relationship between the teacher and the student, to a number of factors less related to the educational process (Karlsen, 2000). Neoliberal market ideologies rearticulate

what constitutes quality schooling, narrowing it down to the measurement and comparison of student performance in easily quantifiable academic features, particularly literacy and numeracy. The superficial performance approach to learning produced in this climate, as well as the focus on management and basic skills over pedagogy and student learning, are seen as undermining schools' efforts to produce high quality and productive learning environments (Keddie et al. 2011).

Moreover, it is argued that narrow pedagogy and curriculum, framed in a culture of performance and competition among schools, may also have the effect of undermining teacher professionalism, capabilities and autonomy. This can be acknowledged for instance in the repositioning of professional autonomy and employment conditions of educators, and their re-alignment along non-unionized, flexible, and politically weak labor markets. This process represents a shift in the meaning of schooling itself, which changes from being a driving force for nation-building to becoming a mere individualistic economic function (Mazawi, 2013). According to Ball (2007), within the "culture of performativity" the work of the teacher is organized around judgments, comparisons and displays. These pressures can create profound professional dilemmas and can end up redefining the profession in ways that are de-professionalizing.

"As public schools are privatized, they are subject to a market-based logic of achievement in which knowledge becomes a commodity to consume ... The over-emphasis on standards and standardization, testing, and "accountability", replicate a corporate logic in which measurable task performance and submission to authority become central. Intellectual curiosity, investigation, teacher autonomy, and critical thought (...) have no place in this view" (Saltman, 2009).

Moreover, narrow approaches to schooling may sideline important social and equity concerns. Such cultures compromise efforts in schools to respond to social change and the new equity challenges arising from such change; they also compromise the mandated social goals of schooling – especially the goals associated with preparing students to actively and critically engage with the unprecedented diversity and complexity of contemporary social reality (Keddie et al. 2011).

Inequalities putting healthy democratic systems at risk

It is argued that for commodification to work, exclusion is vital – there need to be visible losers (Connell, 2013). Neoliberalism in education is persistently deemed to draw attention to the underachievers, the ‘at risk’, the non-performers, the poor, the bad schools, the bad families, the undermotivated, the excluded, the failures. Losing has to be legitimated, it has to be made credible and not appear as a matter of unfair discrimination or bad luck. This system of winners and losers is required to marketize education and is fundamentally at odds with education itself (Connell, 2013, p. 282). It is founded on the existence of inequality and at the same time it aggravates existing disparities in education. Indeed “evidence shows that neoliberal policies reproduce race and class based hierarchies rather than replacing them” (Burch, 2009). Marketization raises issues of social justice in that “the most economically disadvantaged students are faring under emerging forms of privatization” (Burch, 2009, p. 15). By undermining equality and social justice, marketization puts the very functioning of healthy democratic systems at risk (Ball, 2007; Burch, 2009; Mazawi, 2013).

It is argued that “the corporate organization tends to be hierarchical if not authoritarian, sharing a form closer to the military than to that of participatory democracy” (Saltman, 2009). Moreover, with the tightening of media ownership, the commodification of mass communication, the public arena of reflection and debate is thought to have disappeared (Connell, 2013). Market-based solutions tend to erode the public forums in which decisions with societal consequences may be resolved. As argued in previous chapters, “[b]eyond the shifting of resources and authority... market-based education policies can have destabilizing effects on decision-making structures in education” (Burch, 2009). As neoliberal policies create more space for market principles, they can reduce the space for democratic processes in education policy. In fact, the greater involvement of private for-profit actors may have the effect of reshaping modes of political organizations and the correlative institutional modes of affiliation. These rearrangements have the potential to reconfigure the contours of the political community, the institutional articulations of citizenship and the ways it is obtained. (Mazawi, 2013).

In effect, education is seen as simply one more product like bread, cars, and television. By turning it over to the market through voucher and choice plans, it will be largely self-regulating. Thus, democracy is turned into consumption practices. In these plans, the ideal of the citizen is that of the purchaser. The ideological effects of this are momentous. Rather than democracy being a *political* concept, it is transformed into a wholly *economic* concept (Apple, 1998).

As a result, the very foundations of democracy, which require citizens who are free and able to exercise democratic values, may be called into question (Higgins and Knight Abowitz, 2011, p. 368). Indeed, the quest for privilege is deemed to undermine the equal citizenship required in education. It is argued that consumerism redefines individual and collective values so that “possessive individualism, acquisitiveness, and market-based forms of association replace civic values, collective political aspirations, and ethical pursuits” (Saltman, 2009). The corporatization of schools therefore appears as “part of a broader assault on public and critical education and the aspirations of a critical democracy” (Saltman, 2009).

Implications for the right to education

The above-mentioned issues have also been considered from a human rights perspective. In recent years, numerous human rights treaty bodies have expressed concern about the potential harmful impacts of privatization and commercialization of schooling on the fundamental principles and norms underpinning the right to education.⁷⁸ In his report on “protecting the right to education against commercialization”, the UN Special Rapporteur (2015a) has underlined that privatization “violates many of the legal and moral norms upon which the right to education is established” (p. 9). These include the principle of non-discrimination, equality of opportunity, social justice and equity. It is argued that unregulated private providers may be discriminatory on different bases and that inequalities of opportunities may be exacerbated “with economic condition, wealth and property becoming the most

⁷⁸ The full list of UN treaty bodies resolutions and reports is available at this link: <http://globalinitiative-escr.org/advocacy/privatization-in-education-research-initiative>

important criterion in access to education” (2015a: 58). Since the exclusion of certain groups increases inequality and threatens the principle of social justice, the report invites States to abolish for-profit education, at least at the school level, to regulate school fees and introduce minimum standards which involve the pursuit of the humanist mission of education, in contrast to the pursuit of mere material values as propagated by commercial systems (2015a: 81).

The Special Rapporteur also encourages States to preserve and strengthen education as a public good which requires substantial State involvement and investment enabling the general public to influence the education system (Lubienski, 2003). This assertion is the result of the greater concern that policies of privatization create a vacuum by reducing the role of the State with regard to certain functions that private firms can fill (Burch, 2009). Indeed, within market-based models, much more room is available for profit-oriented firms to do work typically performed by government employees. This has the potential to result in a diminished role for the State in terms of financing, management and regulation of the education system (Srivastava, 2010). Approaches based on school choice and of market economics therefore reposition the State and the political community, and their institutional underpinnings, in relation to each other (Mazawi, 2013). In this respect, the increasing diversification of the actors involved in education makes the respective roles and responsibilities of public and private actors increasingly difficult to determine, and also results in shifts in governance arrangements, with the State representing only one actor among many others:

“Private philanthropists, foundations, nonprofits, parent groups, for-profit businesses, teachers’ unions, and government institutions now are competing and sometimes collaborating in the creation of a brave new world of schooling. For better and for worse, the simple equation of public schools and government-run schools has been broken. For worse, because this frees the hands of those who would reshape the schools according to thinly veiled motives and prejudice. For better, because it forces us to articulate anew the civic substance of schooling.” (Higgins and Knight Abowitz, 2011, p. 375).

In this context, the traditional role and functions of the State at different levels of the education endeavor need to be reconsidered given that the traditional distinction between public and private in education is increasingly blurred. As privatization entails both economic and socio-political considerations, a meaningful understanding of the principle of education as a public good should be addressed not only from economic theory but also, and perhaps most importantly, within a political perspective which focuses on the institutional regulation of goods. This is necessary in order to interpret the principle of education as a public good in a way that allows the elaboration of policies that take into account the complexity of national education systems worldwide, not only to limit the adverse consequences of privatization and marketization more specifically, but also to limit the potential logics of uncontrolled capitalism in the face of the limitations of national education systems (Ball, 2007).

4.3 What is it that makes education a *public* good?

As illustrated in the previous chapters and sections, the distinction between public and private in education is increasingly blurred as public actors interact more and more frequently with non-state actors, which also contribute to the development of (public) education systems. This is acknowledged in the greater involvement of households in the funding of educational opportunities for their children, or in the higher complementation of public and private arrangements at all levels of education. Moreover, the consideration according to which public actors should promote the public interest, and private ones should promote the private interest has somehow collapsed since the State itself is directly involved in a process of privatization *in* education, wherein public actors themselves act as corporate/business organizations implementing education policies that put greater emphasis on individual achievement and progress, in contrast to a vision of education which first and foremost should produce public benefits. In this respect, it should be underlined that forms of privatization and of marketization are possible also thanks to the direct intervention of the State. Indeed, “neoliberalism has succeeded in changing the connection between politics and economy in much of the world. (...) [I]t has dismantled the Keynesian welfare state, the system of regulated capitalism and state-supplied services that were dominant in the generation

from 1945 to 1980. In the global periphery, neoliberalism has dismantled the social-democratic developmentalist state, and broken up the social alliances around it” (Connell, 2013).⁷⁹ It has been argued that the State “is a key institution in the making, maintenance and modification” of the sector – the State is a “key ally in market-making processes” (Verger et al., 2016, p. 13). Often referred to as “competition state” (Ball, 2007), its role is necessary in the creation of a space in which markets can prosper. States can promote pro-market regulation in different spheres. In this respect, it is not possible to account for the disappearance of currently existing neoliberalism without also addressing changes to the form and modalities of the State (Ball, 2012).

Therefore, a simple defense of the State, as a romantic ideal, is not useful to counterbalance the distortive effects of privatization in the field of education (Ball, 2007; Burch, 2009). The response to privatization “cannot be based on the simple assertion that everything we now have has to be defended” (Apple, 2006). Educational systems need to change since a simple return to the previous form and content of education does not represent a sufficient set of policies (Apple, 2006). Moreover, some public sector institutions were and are significantly ineffective, racist, sexist and class-biased. At the same time, it should be acknowledged that some education businesses do some things well, perhaps better than the public sector, and do enhance the lives and opportunities of people and that “there are certainly places where the market can help education” (Burch, 2009). This may involve an acceptance that some kinds of private sector participation are more defensible than others and that some public sector ‘work’ is not as defensible as all (Ball, 2007). As Robert Reich (2015) provocatively puts it, the issue is not to choose between the market and the State but to choose which type of market and which type of State. Indeed, it has been argued that the challenge is not merely a question of economics, but of democracy (Reich, 2015). It is not about the freedom of the market or the size of government, but how we determine what government is for and for whom. Since market alone cannot exist without an explicit state intervention, it is important to understand which rules are being implemented and which norms, values, and systems of power, these rules reflect. Indeed, the key concern

⁷⁹ The developmentalist (or developmental) State is characterized by having strong state intervention, as well as extensive regulation and planning.

should be on “what and who counts as the ‘public’ and whose voices are heard” (Apple, 2006, p. 119).

Indeed the public sphere is certainly ‘under attack’ as neoliberal claims and managerial approaches have decreased this “space of criticism” (Apple, 2006). Restructuring the *public* depends on a strong political will aiming to revisit those rules that have favored the expansion of market ideologies at the expense of equality and democracy in the public sphere. It should be emphasized that the public and the State represent distinct, but at the same time highly interconnected entities. According to Dewey (1927), “the public consists of all those who are affected by the indirect consequences of transactions to such an extent that it is deemed necessary to have those consequences systematically cared for” (p. 48). Since the notion of ‘public’ refers to something that is broader than the State or the government, the implications of considering education as a public good should be valid for both state and non-state actors. However, the way the public sphere should be reconstituted requires a radical change in the approach to education policy and practices (Burch, 2009; Apple, 2006).

Given that both public and private actors are called to contribute to the commitment to quality education for all, which is the aim of a public good approach, today more than ever, it is essential to identify what constitutes the ‘public’ in education and how governance arrangements should align according to this vision. As it has been affirmed, “[i]t may be more useful to consider what constitutes the publicness of schooling: how different aspects of schools align with public and private goods and interests and how those alignments are changing” (Lubienski, 2003). Since marketization poses not only an economic challenge, but also one of democracy, the perspective that should be adopted takes into consideration both economic and political factors. Indeed, critical studies of education policy and markets raise serious questions about who benefits, who bears the burden of the cost, how these patterns are rooted in societal and political factors, and at what cost to democracy (Burch, 2009). This is particularly important when education is considered as a public good since, as illustrated in Chapter 1, beyond economic factors related to economic theory, political considerations play an important role in the choice of solutions “to the problem of public goods” (Ver Eecke, 2008). A political perspective, therefore, enables us to identify the governance arrangements that are determinant for the achievement of the aims of a public goods approach and gives

more clarity with regard to the nature and role of the State in the complex governance of education systems which involves both public and private actors.

The following sections identify the criteria that stem from the consideration of education as a *public* good. Moving from the discussion by Higgins and Knight Abowitz (2011), not only do these criteria refer to ‘formal’ factors such as access and governance, which are however indispensable, but also take into consideration ‘functionalist’ considerations that refer to the nature of pedagogy and of curriculum. This has strong political implications and is essential to identifying the nature of the State and its role at all levels of the education endeavor in different contexts. In this way, the concept of education as a public good, from being considered as an underlying principle, takes the shape of a political project and a principle of governance which defines both the way in which education is organized and the purposes of the education system itself.

Formal conditions

First and foremost, the concept of education as a public good would enhance the development of a democratic system of governance that the State needs to guarantee. Indeed, the notions of *public* and of *democracy* have been considered as being highly interconnected. “Democracy, as the power of those who have no qualification for exercising power, rests on the notion of the common as a space in which the equality for all gets continuously verified in the face of the unequal conditions of living that constitute the wrong of this tension. (...) The privileged space for this to happen is in the common space of the public” (Rancière, 2004). And this space, where all actors are represented, should be ultimately guaranteed by the State.

In this respect, it should be noted that just as neoliberal policies create more space for market principles, they can reduce the space “for democratic processes in education policy and policies informed by public interest” (Burch, 2009, p. 14). Ideologies of neoliberalism have made education policy fit the requirements of the market. However, the governance of education should not be considered as another education market since “[t]he market place excludes politics and leaves decision-making to the outcome of the rivalry between different groups representing individual, short-term interests” (Tedesco,

1995, p. 108). Indeed, the difference between public policy, which should be a participated and democratic process, and private markets in education “is very important and worth defending” (Burch, 2009). The private sector, and businesses in particular, grounded in an ‘audit culture’ and commodification, accommodates sectorial interests and are “appropriately termed ‘corporate’ to capture this separate, organizational and financial entity, interest and accountability” (Ranson, 2008). As argued by Ranson (2003; 2008)

“[t]he neo-liberal regime of consumer choice and corporate control was designed, purportedly, to restore public trust by making services accountable and responsible to public choice conceived as consumer preference. Providing consumers with accounts of performance and service quality produced a regime of performativity that works from the outside in, through regulations, controls and pressures, but also from the inside out, colonizing lives and producing new subjectivities. ... Such a regime ... cannot realize its purposes of enhancing institutional achievement or strengthening public trust.”

The State therefore plays a fundamental role in ensuring that an effective democratic process is accomplished and that all actors take part in this process to an equal degree, by establishing the rules of operation of the education system and by ascertaining that they are transparent and respected by all actors. A reconstituted vision of the *public*, and a set of practices and structures that support it, would necessarily be based in a framework of public accountability that only the State can ensure.

“Achievement grows out of the internal goods of motivation to improve (that follows recognition and the mutual deliberation of purpose) rather than the external imposition of quantifiable targets, while public trust follows deliberation of common purpose out of difference and discord, rather than the forces of competition that only create a hierarchy of class advantage and exclusion.” (Ranson, 2003)

In this regard, the State should be democratic in its own way of functioning, allowing different stakeholders to have a say in the decision-making process. It is widely

acknowledged that “citizens, parents, parties and local representatives ask for more openness, more transparency and more involvement in the running of the institutions they finance” (Caillods, 1997). More generally, in the governance of education as a public good, democracy needs to be understood “as dynamic rather than static, as shot through with multiple power struggles, and as a quest and process, rather than an achieved state that must be fixed and held and protected” (Saltman, 2009, p. 37). It requires citizens capable of critique and contestation. Within such an approach, the democratic governance should be reflected at all levels of the educational endeavor. This can be achieved as long as both public and private actors are democratic in their way of functioning, and are responsible for building “alternative spaces in which critique is possible, practitioner knowledge can find expression and other trajectories for education are proposed”. It requires that education, provided by public or private actors alike, be characterized by ‘criteria of publicness’ such as “open admissions, staffing based on professional accomplishment, accountability to the community, commitment to student retention, and the promotion of student autonomy” (Feinberg quoted in Higgins and Knight Abowitz, 2011).

In this respect, the State needs to ensure that the democratic governance is valid throughout all phases of the educational endeavor, starting from the decision-making process, up to the provision, regulation and monitoring levels. For example, in public and private schools alike, these phases should be grounded on democratic governance that implies transparent communication, and the participation of social and cultural actors existing in a particular context that have a say in the formulation of a negotiated educational project. Indeed, placing the process of consultation at the center of educational reform strategies implies a different view of the place occupied by education in the process of social consensus. Based on the recognition of other points of view and on the negotiation of common working methods, this process can represent “a mechanism through which these conflicts and tensions may be resolved by means of dialogue and agreed action” (Tedesco, 1995, p. 108). This is an important condition, at least from a ‘formal’, political perspective, when education is considered as a public good. Moreover, the governance of education can only be democratic if there is correspondence with the characteristics of the local microcosm, with regard to the actors involved in the educational endeavor and with regard to the content and ways in which

education is implemented. This is why, following the classification by Higgins and Knight Abowitz (2011), ‘criteria of publicness’ should also refer to ‘functional’ factors, such as pedagogy and the curriculum, as it will be illustrated in the next session.

Functional conditions

Since the defining of curriculum and pedagogy represents both a technical and political issue, it should also be made the object of political considerations (Higgins and Knight Abowitz, 2011). In this respect, the ultimate responsibility for the definition of curriculum standards, and of strict quality assurance mechanisms, rests with the State. These conditions are essential for ensuring that quality education is made available for all. Quality investment in the training of teachers, the choice of appropriate teaching methodologies and a diversified educational offer are essential components for the realization of a quality education system. The political dimension of curriculum and pedagogy is inevitably connected with considerations of long-term and general interest in the choice of educational strategies. The greatest risk inherent in market mechanisms arises in particular from their inability to assume the long-term consequences of certain decisions due to their impossibility of “sacrificing immediate benefits” (Tedesco, 1995). This implies reconnecting the content and methods of education to the broader purposes of schooling. Indeed, “[i]n preparing a democratic educational plan for the future, the first aspect that should be discussed is ... the sense (or direction) of educational action” (Tedesco, 1995). The importance of the ‘qualification function’ of education should not be disregarded, especially in light of the economic crisis and of increasing levels of unemployment, hence the greater attention on the quality of education. Indeed, an important function of schooling is inevitably connected with the fulfillment of private interests. However, an overemphasis on the ‘qualification’ function may result in a somewhat restricted interpretation of the concept of *quality* education, understood almost exclusively in terms of easily measurable learning outcomes. As illustrated in the previous sections, this narrow focus on results, achieved through large-scale standardized testing, may result in narrowing the curriculum, teaching to the test, and focusing instruction on aspects of learning that undermine what is needed for better local living, thus neglecting other important social dimensions of learning. Social, civic

and political outcomes of educational processes can and must be assessed, even if they cannot necessarily be measured. (Tawil et al., 2012). In the design of curriculum and in the choice of methodologies, more emphasis should be placed on the so-called ‘socialisation’ and ‘subjectification’ functions of education (Biesta, 2009), related to “the goals associated with preparing students to actively and critically engage with the unprecedented diversity and complexity of contemporary social reality” (Keddie et al, 2011). Schools should be “places where knowledge, pedagogical innovation, and experiences are taken up in relation to broader political, ethical, cultural, and material struggles informing competing claims to truth” (Saltman, 2009, p. 38). Within this understanding, “schools should be sites of cultural production. Teachers as cultural producers are inevitably engaged in making meanings, values, ideologies, and identifications”. All these factors are essential to the building of the “civic substance of schooling” (Higgins and Knight Abowitz, 2011). The pedagogy should promote social coexistence and reflect the local environment adopting methodologies that enhance multilingualism and multiculturalism.

With respect to the growing trends of marketization of education, “critical pedagogy offers the capacity to use commercialism to criticize the broader structures of power informing its very presence in the school” (Saltman, 2009, p. 39). The curriculum should be “organized around the experience, culture and needs of the least advantaged members of the society. Socially just curriculum will draw extensively on indigenous knowledge, working-class experience, women’s experience, immigrant cultures, multiple languages, and so on; aiming for richness rather than testability” (Connell, 2012). This is how the abstract idea of “diversity” becomes a concrete matter of experience, and the possibilities of mutual aid become shared learning and creative experiences. Education therefore becomes first and foremost a cultural matter rather than a commercial affair (Connell, 2012). This can be achieved predominantly in a democratic system, which puts greater emphasis on the public good aspects of education. “Neither market forces, nor traditional, authoritarian planning systems are able to guarantee that these dimensions will be taken into account in educational decisions” (Tedesco, 1995). The democratic participation of all actors, which reflects on the content and the methods of teaching and learning, can only be ensured by a democratic State.

4.4 Revisiting the role of the State

As illustrated in previous sections, considering education as a public good implies that the State maintains some form of intervention in the educational process in order to ensure basic quality education for all. Indeed, considering education as a public good is based on both economic as well as political considerations. From an economic perspective education is considered an *impure* public good, the benefits of which extend beyond the individual and therefore require some sort of intervention on the part of the State. Moreover, according to political arguments, which focus on the institutional regulation of goods, the State continues to play an indispensable role as the ultimate guarantor of the public sphere, where democratic processes can be fulfilled. However, concrete implications of the principle of education as a public good with regard to the role of the State vary considerably depending on contexts.

First and foremost, it is necessary to determine whether a public-good approach is possible in non-democratic societies. If that is the case, what are the minimal conditions for the role of the State within such an approach? What if the State is the only actor in policy formulation, funding, delivery, monitoring and regulation of education? Is it possible to adopt a public-good approach within authoritarian regimes? Inevitably, the implications of the concept of education as a public good vary according to the level of democracy or to the political regimes. For instance, in non-democratic countries, the State is predominantly the only actor which provides, funds, regulates and monitors the system.

Defining the roles of the State

It can be argued that a public-good approach may have different implications for countries according to the level of democracy of a specific context and to the range of involvement of non-state actors. Education can be considered as a public good as long as the State officially fulfills these functions and adopts and implements education policies. This represents the minimal conditions for ensuring that all children have access to free education and that an education system is put in place. However, it should be underlined that an approach to education seen as a public good also aims to achieve

quality education for all. This condition would hardly be realized in such contexts where an effective democratic functioning is challenged or completely non-existent, and where voices other than the State are not heard. In such contexts, however, equity concerns would somehow be addressed since the State would ensure that education is provided *for all*. Still, this would not be to the extent of including *quality* considerations, which require the system to be democratic within an integrated approach to education.

Moreover, even within systems that are (at least officially) democratic, the role of the State is changing due to the greater involvement of private actors at all levels of the education endeavor. As illustrated in previous chapters, private actors are increasingly being involved in the provision, funding, monitoring and policy-making of education. Therefore, in the light of this changing context, what are the implications of the concept of education as a public good for the role of the State? What should be expected from the State in order to achieve free quality education for all? Is it about the key role of the State in policy formulation, financing, delivery, monitoring, regulation, or are some of these functions more central than others in ensuring education as a public good?

<p>Primary role of the State in ensuring free quality basic education for all. Funding, provision, monitoring, and regulation of the system.</p> <p>The State has a crucial role in direct provision and funding of educational opportunities.</p>	Level of democracy - HIGH	<p>Primary role of the State in the <i>regulation</i> and <i>monitoring</i> of the system in order to guarantee free quality basic education for all, given the greater variety of actors involved.</p> <p>States also need ensure minimum levels of funding and provision in order to protect equity and quality education for all.</p>
LOW - Level of private involvement		Level of private involvement - HIGH
<p>Primary (often unique) role of the State in ensuring free basic education for <i>all</i> through funding, provision, monitoring, regulation of the system.</p> <p><u>Criticism</u>: difficulties of achieving <i>quality</i> education for all, giving the lack of a full democratic functioning system</p>	LOW - Level of democracy	<p>Need to strengthen the different functions of the State, above all the <i>regulatory and monitoring</i> function given the increasing involvement of non-state actors. The role of the State is also fundamental with regard to <i>funding</i> and <i>provision</i>.</p> <p>At the same time, need to strengthen the functioning of democratic institutions in order to achieve <i>quality</i> education.</p>

Figure 12 – Role of the State according to combinations of lower and higher levels of democracy and of private actors’ involvement (Source: Author)

As illustrated in the previous sections, the concept of education as a public good implies that the government (or the State) guarantees free quality education for all, at least during the compulsory years. This represents the underlying principle assumed by international organizations such as UNESCO primarily concerned with the achievement of educational goals worldwide, and by human rights activists, researchers and academics. As envisaged by the Incheon Declaration and Framework for Action, adopted in 2015 at the World Education Forum (Incheon, Republic of Korea) States are committed to “increase public spending on education in accordance with country context, and urge adherence to the international and regional benchmarks of allocating efficiently at least 4 - 6% of Gross Domestic Product and/or at least 15 - 20% of total public expenditure to education” (UNESCO, 2015a). The Framework for Action affirms

that “Governments have the primary responsibility to deliver on the right to education, and a central role as custodians of efficient, equitable and effective management and financing of public education” (UNESCO, 2015a, p. 78). The Education Commission also compels States to mobilize more domestic resources for education and to improve funding mechanisms through increased tax revenues and resource reallocation (Education Commission, 2016).

Undoubtedly, the position according to which the State remains crucial with regard to the adoption and funding of educational solutions is mainly adopted by international organizations such as UNESCO, human rights activists and the research community. The primary concern is that privatization and marketization may generate inequalities and social stratification and therefore the State should be the ultimate guarantor of the system. Not only is this position prevalent among the research and academic community, but has also been acknowledged in a policy paper by economists of the International Monetary Fund (Ostry et al., 2016). Indeed it is stated that “the IMF recognizes that full capital flow liberalization is not always an appropriate end-goal, and that further liberalization is more beneficial and less risky if countries have reached certain thresholds of financial and institutional development”. Increased spending on education and training is considered as an appropriate “predistribution policy”, suitable for mitigating some impacts of the economic damage coming from inequality. Of course, the perspective adopted by the IMF on issues of inequality is based on an economic approach that considers the adverse effects of inequality on the level and durability of growth. Nevertheless, it is important to underline at this point that concepts of neoliberalism are evolving and do not constitute a single block. Even within the IMF there are concerns that a reduced size of the State may engender inequalities.

Having said this, it should be emphasized that given the expanding demand for education at all levels and the need to ensure *free* and *quality* education, States cannot be self-sufficient in the funding and management of the education system (Rizvi, 2016). As aforementioned, however, the current situation presents the serious risk that easy-to-consume, replicable and marketable solutions may take the upper hand over more elaborate and sophisticated mechanisms of reform that may imply a much deeper understanding of the historical, anthropological and cultural conditions that characterize a specific educational context and that therefore call for a revision of the aims and of the

ways these institutions function. It is argued that, given private-sector development, market arrangements may diminish the role of the State with regard to its functions as a financier, manager and regulator (Srivastava, 2010). In line with this, Roger Wettenhall (2003) identifies five main roles involved in the management of public affairs that refer to producer, owner, provider, regulator, and facilitator. He argues that each of them “could be performed by either the state, the market or civil society, and that many different state/market/civil society combinations are possible” (p. 82). These authors warn against the dangerous impact to the public interest with regard to the diminished or displaced role of the State within these new arrangements.

Therefore, over and above the need to ensure minimum conditions in terms of funding, as envisaged by the Incheon Declaration and in the Framework for Action, new and innovative financial mechanisms need to be identified (UNESCO, 2015a; Education Commission, 2016). A more detailed discussion on the necessity and ways in which States could be supported in the development of education systems will be dealt with in the next section. Here, it is important to underline what should be the role of the State with regard to the changing educational landscape, characterized by greater private involvement. Indeed, the State should maintain an important function with regard to the *funding* and *provision* of education opportunities. This is even more important in those contexts where inequality is staggering and calls for a greater intervention especially in those areas where children are more at risk of exclusion or discrimination. In this respect, international cooperation in education should also support States to develop a public education system in order to ensure free and quality basic education for all. At the same time, and perhaps even more importantly nowadays, the role of the State should be strengthened particularly with regard to its *regulatory* and *monitoring* functions, which are more and more fundamental in a context of greater participation of private actors at all levels of the education endeavor. Indeed, as remarked by Walford (2001):

Privatisation cannot be labeled “good” or “bad” ... What is important is the ways in which the state and others have acted to structure the privatization process and the ways in which schools can subsequently operate (p. 179).

In this perspective, the principle of education as a public good implies that the State strengthens above all its *regulatory* function, especially at the basic and compulsory level, in order to guarantee the conditions under which *free* and *quality* education for all can be ensured. While in “richer countries, governments have entered into elaborate funding and monitoring arrangements with private actors... in poorer countries, the private sector is loosely regulated” (UNESCO, 2016a). It is increasingly important in the current context that the State guarantees the opportunities of quality education for all and at the same time assures the principles that should inspire all education policy. The nature of the public may be reinterpreted, in that, the State’s primary responsibility is to strengthen and guarantee the framework in which education is provided. This framework should be inspired by principles of equity, equality of opportunities, social cohesion, social justice, and human rights. At the same time, the State needs to ensure that a diversified educational offer is available, in order to guarantee freedom of choice, which would be grounded on the principle of ‘diversity’ rather than competition. As argued by Whitty and Power (2000):

“We need to ask how we can use the positive aspects of choice and autonomy to facilitate the development of new forms of community empowerment rather than exacerbating social differentiation.”

This regulatory function is essential for ensuring that education is considered as a public good, and should therefore be carefully developed and implemented. However, it should not be limited to merely preserving the institutional framework for the operation of private actors, providing regulations simply on curriculum objectives, completion, or admission tests, and health or safety (Heyneman and Stern, 2014). While ensuring some levels of flexibility and autonomy, the State should also regulate teacher certification and pedagogy as well as school fees, and define curriculum standards and quality assurance mechanisms in order to guarantee both equity and quality in education.

Together with strengthening the State’s *regulatory* function, is the need to ensure that a *monitoring* mechanisms is implemented in a consultative and inclusive process ensuring transparency and accountability. Indeed, public authorities are increasingly required to be accountable to a democratically accountable government (Ranson, 2008).

A reconstituted vision of the public and a set of practices and structures that support it should be grounded in the following principles:

Trust and achievement can only emerge in a framework of public accountability that enables different accounts of public purpose and practice to be deliberated in a democratic public sphere: constituted to include difference, enable participation, voice and dissent, through to collective judgment and decision, that is in turn accountable to the public (Apple, 2006).

Taking into account the contribution by Bergan (2009), the following table aims to provide a synthetic presentation of how the role of the State could be represented in a context characterized by greater non-state actors' involvement:

Type of role	Level of responsibility	Description of the role
Regulation	Exclusive responsibility	Ensuring the framework of education, including the structure, the institutional framework, the framework of quality assurance and authoritative information. To implement efficient mechanisms to compensate for differences, particularly important in countries experiencing powerful social imbalances. This function cannot be left to others.
Monitoring	Main responsibility	Devise and implement mechanisms for the evaluation of results obtained in the pursuit of those objectives, allowing a progressive degree of autonomy to institutions and local bodies in deciding by which methods these results are to be obtained.
Policy-making	Main responsibility	To determine objectives and priorities through mechanisms of democratic discussion
Provision	Important responsibility	Public authorities should be heavily involved in the actual running of education institutions and programs, to contribute to good educational opportunities at reasonable conditions.

Funding	Important responsibility	Public funds can and should be supplemented by money from other sources, but these alternative funding sources should never be a pretext for public authorities not to provide substantial public resources.
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Table 10 – Roles and levels of responsibility of the State in education

(Adapted from: Bergan et al., 2009)

It should be noted that the table above may be valid only for levels of compulsory education since the role of the State varies depending on different levels of education

This section has illustrated how the role of the State should be reinterpreted in the governance of education as a public good. Despite the growing trends of education privatization, the State maintains a fundamental role in achieving *free* and *quality* education for all. Indeed, the State is the only actor that can ensure that due account is taken of the general interest and of the long term vision. However, as already argued by Tedesco (1995) two decades ago, the State

“cannot fulfill this role by resorting to the same mechanisms as in the past, that is to say, by assuming the main responsibility for defining policies and implementing them. In this new context, the strategic role of the State should be to organize consultation, to place all of the necessary information on the discussion table, to evaluate results, to act wherever necessary and to guarantee respect for rules of the game that are accepted by all”.

In the field of education, there is a need for more State, but of a different quality. That is to say, a State that is able, and willing “to explore alternative transformative projects in which neoliberalism (...) is one subordinate element among others” (Jessop, 2013); one that is willing to invest in an educational proposal that is inevitably also a political project grounded on a cultural perspective where values of equity and equality of opportunity are not framed merely within economics but within a humanistic vision of education which considers education as an opportunity for human beings to freely develop their full potential and to contribute to the democratic development and

improvement of society (Dewey, 1916) – what Biesta (2009) calls the ‘socialisation’ and ‘subjectification’ function of education. A revisited but important role of the State is therefore necessary in ensuring education as a public good, irrespectively of the diversity of the stakeholders involved.

Strengthening the role of the (Network) State

The global education commitment, which was renewed in 2015 in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – SDG4 on Education, represents for many countries and for the international community both an extraordinary opportunity and a significant challenge. Despite substantial efforts made by many countries and donors, over the last five years the number of out-of-school children has remained unvaried (UIS and GEMR, 2016). It is estimated that in 2014, 9% of children worldwide, corresponding to 61 million children, still did not have access to primary education. More than half of these children live in sub-Saharan Africa (34 million), followed by Southern Asia (11 million) (UIS and UNESCO, 2016). The figures referring to out-of-school children and teenagers are even more staggering if we consider the commitment envisaged in the new sustainable development goal for education, target 4.1, which commits governments to “ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary *and* secondary education”⁸⁰ (emphasis added). Despite this ambitious commitment, according to recent data of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics, about 263 million children and teenagers are out of school: 61 million are of primary school age, 60 million of lower secondary and 142 million of upper secondary (UNESCO, 2016a). It has been argued that the goal of the new education target looks unrealistic, especially with regard to of upper secondary education for all (UNESCO, 2015d). It is estimated that to achieve this goal by 2030, US\$39 billion will be needed every year to fill the funding gap in low and lower-middle income countries (UIS and UNESCO, 2016). At current progress rates, however, countries worldwide will ensure universal primary education only by 2042; lower secondary education by 2059, and upper secondary education only by 2084 (UNESCO, 2016a).

⁸⁰ SDG4, Target 4.1: By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes (United Nations, 2015)

Moreover, according to the International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity by 2030 half a generation, or 800 million out of 1.6 billion children will not have the skills to enter the world of work, the majority of which will live in low- and middle-income countries, where it is estimated that only one in 10 young people will have the basic skills needed for a successful future (Education Commission, 2016). Domestic resources will be necessary to deal with this funding gap and in many countries “annual total expenditure would need to more than double from current levels, and some countries would need to increase expenditure considerably more than that” (UNESCO, 2015d, p. 294). Moreover, mobilization of domestic resources will have to be complemented by strong measures against phenomena of corruption and of inefficient spending of public money (UNESCO, 2015d). As indicated by the Education Commission, attention to performance, innovation and inclusion should also drive the increase in public national resources.

However, domestic resources alone will not be sufficient to reach the basic education target by 2030. It is estimated that, with regard to basic education, annual external financing should be around \$US22 billion from 2015 to 2030. It is also estimated that this funding gap will widen further (UNESCO, 2015d) and, according to recent trends of aid flows, the total aid to education will level off in the coming years, with poor countries being mostly affected (GCE, 2013). In particular, the share of aid allocated to education among multilateral organizations such as the World Bank, the African Development Fund and Asian Development Bank has decreased over the last ten years. Aid allocated to the education sector represented 10% in 2002-2004 biennium while only 7% in the 2012-2014.⁸¹ Within this context, for the education 4.1 target to be achieved by 2030, education as a sector has to be prioritized both within domestic public expenditure as well as within external aid allocation. At the same time, it has been argued that new financing mechanisms need to be identified (UNESCO, 2015d). Here, the role of non-state actors such as NGOs and the private sector could be of help as long as the State ensures that the concept of education as a public good is not undermined.

⁸¹ Data presented by The International Commission on Financing Global Education Opportunity during the Webinar #5, held on 2 August 2016.

In view of this, the idea that education should be funded and managed entirely by the State is neither feasible nor desirable (Rizvi, 2016). While it is widely agreed that the primary responsibility for funding, delivering and monitoring education, lies at the national level,⁸² it is also increasingly acknowledged that States operate within networks. The way of functioning of the traditional Welfare State is increasingly called into question by the emergence of new governance arrangements and mechanisms at local, regional and global levels. It has been argued that we are witnessing the emergence of a new form of Network State (Carnoy and Castells, 2001):

“It is a state made of shared institutions, and enacted by bargaining and interactive iteration all along the chain of decision making: national governments, co-national governments, supra-national bodies, international institutions, governments of nationalities, regional governments, local governments, and NGOs (...). Decision-making and representation take place all along the chain, not necessarily in the hierarchical, pre-scripted order. This new state functions as a network, in which all nodes interact, and are equally necessary for the performance of the state’s functions. The state of the Information Age is a Network State” (p. 14).

As illustrated in the previous section, it is crucial to underline that the State, even within the network arrangements, should be at the very center and therefore should have greater responsibilities than the other actors involved in the network. In the field of education, States should maintain a fundamental responsibility in that they are the ultimate guarantors of the public sphere. Since education affects the future generations, their role is even more important in this field than in other sectors. In this respect, given that States may not be self-sufficient/autonomous in the achievement of specific educational goals, such as the Education 2030 Target 4.1, the existence, and the development of networks at the local, national and international levels, may give them the opportunity to put forward an alternative educational proposal that builds on the concept of education as a public good, in contrast to a vision of education yielding exclusively private benefits. In order to strengthen their role, instead of weakening it,

⁸² Incheon Declaration and Education 2030 Framework for Action. *Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all* (UNESCO, 2015a).

States would need to develop rules and systems and count on types of collaboration that can ensure that education is equitable, inclusive and of good quality for all and free at least at the compulsory level. Within these arrangements, they would have the opportunity to acquire the necessary capacity to develop a public education system grounded on the principle of education as a public good. This may be attainable not only through national political will and possibilities, but also with the support of international organizations such as UNESCO, leading the Education 2030 global agenda, which is inspired by the principles of international cooperation and solidarity. Indeed, within the Incheon Declaration it is affirmed that the commitment towards Education 2030 represents a collective, shared responsibility.⁸³

Partnerships: for cooperation, not “for profit”

One possible innovative solution which could be developed within the education system to meet the current challenges of financing, quality and equity is the formation of partnerships between state and non-state actors. Given the right conditions, such partnerships may provide adequate opportunities both to complement the current functions and role of the Network State and to develop stronger education systems especially in those contexts where the capacity and the financial opportunities of States need to be improved and supported. A vision of partnership inspired by the words of Jacques Delors who in 1996 suggested that international cooperation should be seen in the context of partnership rather than aid:

“experience militates in favour of partnerships, globalization makes it inescapable, and there are some encouraging examples such as the successful co-operation and exchanges within regional groupings. (...) Another justification for partnership is that it can lead to a ‘win-win situation’: whilst industrialized countries can assist developing countries by the input of their successful experiences, their technologies and financial and material resources, they can learn from the developing countries ways of passing on their cultural heritage, approaches to the socialization of children and, more fundamentally, different cultures and ways of life” (1996, p. 34).

⁸³ Incheon Declaration. Par. 5 (UNESCO, 2015a)

It has been argued that the changing relations between state and non-state actors should be considered “as a new chapter in a long-running story of shifting relationships connecting public and private institutions, functions and identities. New shifts should be subject to overarching public rules and goals governing their development. In this light, public and private institutions can and should be viewed as partners, serving larger and multiple public ends” (Minow, 2003, p. 1236). The involvement of non-state actors should be framed according to the notion of education as a public good, which implies that all actors, within their own possibilities and responsibilities, are committed to the democratic governance of education in order to foster the implementation of quality educational practices and methodologies that take into consideration the social and cultural diversity of different contexts. The State, with the support of international organizations, where necessary, may consider the establishment of partnerships as an opportunity to increase the availability of funds and provisions in order to develop a strong educational system of good quality, available to all.

According to the UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report (2016a), “[t]he ambition of the SDGs requires partnerships if it is to be achieved”. Indeed, there is growing recognition that all actors need to plan together, act together and commit to equity and sustainability. Within partnership arrangements, potential roles should be specifically designed for civil society, the private sector and other non-state actors in the financing and implementation in a framework of mutual accountability. As recalled in the GEM Report, some factors, including securing high level leadership, context-specific and country-led partnerships, clarity of role and responsibilities, focus on financing, results and accountability, are determinant in making development partnerships effective (UNESCO, 2016a). The Education Commission also considers partnerships with non-state actors as a tool for innovation in order to build successful education systems: “there is great potential for a diverse set of organizations from every sector to help expand and improve education if partnered and regulated effectively by governments” (Education Commission, 2016). The commission urges governments “to strengthen their capacity to harness the potential of all partners. In particular, this should include improving the regulation of non-state providers of education in order to enhance their contributions and protect rights”.

These partnerships may be established at the local level, and may enhance community participation. Indeed, in the current context of educational governance the participation of facilitating partners is required: “civic associations, community organizing groups, deliberative democracy organizations, and others must play a role in the public work described. School administrators, school board members, and teachers have neither the time nor the training to handle this work alone, and it requires the energy and multiple perspectives that ‘the people’ can provide. (...) These resources represent an array of new knowledge, energy, and networks that school leaders of all kinds can tap into in order to help schools to be truly ‘public’.” (Knight Abowitz, 2011). Indeed, “[l]ocal community participation in assessing needs by means of a dialogue with the public authorities and groups concerned in society is a first, essential stage in broadening access to education and improving its quality. (...) When communities assume greater responsibility for their own development, they learn to appreciate the role of education both as a way of achieving societal objectives and as a desirable improvement of the quality of life.” (Delors, 1996, p. 29). With regard to this, it is widely acknowledged that the work of many civil society organizations and grass-roots initiatives by non-governmental organizations, of social and cultural actors at the local and national level, may actually result in an increase in awareness about certain educational issues, thus promoting community engagement and educational quality. Greater access of social and cultural actors to information and decision-making may encourage greater relevance of education pedagogy and curriculum to local needs. Partnerships with local communities and civil society may enhance the transparency and therefore the evaluation of the education system, thus sustaining the quality of the work and the accountability of public authorities against the risk of corruption and inefficiency (UNESCO, 2015d).

Partnerships among countries and other international, multilateral organizations may also represent useful arrangements for financial and technical support to the development of public education systems. In this respect, the Global Partnership for Education (GPE), formerly known as the *Education for All - Fast Track Initiative*, launched in 2002 to accelerate progress towards the goal of universal completion of quality primary education by 2015, aims at intensifying support to governments in order to strengthen public education systems in developing countries which are partners of the

GPE. This partnership brings together donor countries, developing countries as well as regional, bilateral, and multilateral agencies and organizations and a wide range of national, regional, and global civil society networks, teacher associations, foundations, and corporations. The Global Partnership operates both globally and locally. Globally, the partnership “engages with the education community worldwide as a convener and consensus-broker and as an advocate for key priorities on the path to achieving universal high-quality basic education”. Through the Global Partnership Fund it supports the funding for basic education. Locally, the GPE supplies technical and financial assistance to developing countries. In contrast to recent trends which have witnessed the decline of ODA in education in the last decades, the GPE is creating the opportunities and capacities for developing-country partners to improve their public education systems. Indeed, it is estimated that, on average, the domestic expenditure on education as a share of GDP in developing-country partners was 10 percent greater after the countries joined the partnership (GPE, 2013).

The Global Education Monitoring Report (UNESCO, 2016a) also identifies the Education 2030 coordination structures as ‘Global Multistakeholder Partnerships in Education’, given their crucial role in coordinating the activities towards the achievement of SDG 4. In particular, the Steering Committee is expected to bring coherence in the Education 2030 activities since it is expected to be the main mechanism in supporting countries, reviewing progress and encouraging harmonization and coordination of partner activities.

A particular note should be made regarding the arrangements increasingly referred to as Public Private Partnerships (PPPs). As above discussed, it is argued that these partnerships very often contemplate the involvement of private, corporate for-profit actors which directly or indirectly enhance a vision of education as a private, consumable, marketable good. Therefore, instead of constituting stimulating governance arrangements, partnerships of this kind may weaken the role of the State as a guarantor of the public sphere. It follows that with regard to PPPs, “[t]he original sense of partnership (...) needs to be the standard of measurement. This assumption needs to be tested against reality in each case.” (Draxler, 2012, p. 46). Knowing that PPPs cannot be treated as a homogeneous phenomenon, there is a need to assess, case by case, how these partnerships function, how they are structured, and what implications they have

for neoliberal globalization and democratization (Ginsburg, 2012, p. 75). As clearly suggested by Draxler (2012), “PPPs can provide an exciting laboratory to test new tools and pedagogy, to implement management reform, to diversify the types of education on offer, and to involve new partners. But proper planning, clarity about purpose, ensuring equity, care for cost-benefit and scalability, democratic process, evaluation and sustainability remain the foundation stones of any serious education initiative” (2012, p. 58). Indeed, however limited favoring public-private partnerships may be, the trend is undeniable. Skeptics should not simply decry this reality, but deal with it by demanding public accountability (Minow, 2003).

This chapter has explored the policy implications of considering education as a public good with regard to the role of the State. In a context characterized by greater complexity and growing involvement of for-profit actors, strengthening the role of the State in the provision and funding of education remains essential, and enhancing its regulatory and monitoring function is all the more important for ensuring *free* and *quality* education for all children.

The State remains therefore crucial in providing the minimum, and essential, conditions that may enhance the development of more participated institutions able to address change. Indeed, an appropriate political environment where systems of accountability and spaces of participation are secured is necessary for strengthening democratic educational institutions.

However, to address the long-standing crisis in education systems, there is need for a shift in culture, a transformative change in order to significantly revisit and reshape the way of functioning of public institutions themselves. The next chapter explores the implications of considering education as a *common* good for the democratic and inclusive governance of education.

CHAPTER 5

Education as a common good

The revisited concept of education as a public good represents an essential principle for the democratic governance of education in a context characterized by greater privatization and marketization of education. The State should strengthen its responsibilities as the ultimate guarantor of the framework in which education policies and practices are developed, maintaining a fundamental role at all levels of the education endeavor, especially with regard to its regulatory function. These represent the essential conditions for the development of a democratic system wherein participation is possible and the right to education can be protected, respected and fulfilled. The concept of education as a public good therefore calls for the strengthening of public democratic institutions in order to favor the many, not the few (Reich, 2015). This is particularly important given the serious challenges that market arrangements in education pose to the principles of inclusion, equity and social justice. Indeed, reviving democratic involvement and public accountability may serve as a counter-balance to the influence of the market as well as to the limits of strong central and bureaucratic States “whose shortcomings have helped to legitimate the tendency to treat education as a private good rather than a public responsibility” (Whitty and Power, 2000).

The existence of a democratic system guaranteed by the State represents therefore the prerequisite for any action taken in view of the development of more inclusive and participatory institutions. However, changes in the way of functioning of institutions themselves need to be significant and “cannot be reduced to mere adjustments in a machine which has lost sight of its own purpose” (Tedesco, 1995). A more inclusive way of functioning of public institutions requires a “shift in culture”, combining top-down and bottom-up approaches (UNESCO, 2016a). As illustrated in previous sections, market-based approaches tend to provide easy responses to overcome the difficulties in education systems, by applying linear and standard solutions. Alternative models that are also practicable and sustainable are, on the contrary, considered as being much more complex and difficult to identify and to implement. As argued by Tedesco:

“Revolutionaries tend to be more lucid when putting forward diagnoses that justify change, but much less effective when it comes to presenting viable alternatives” (1995: 107).

It is therefore necessary to identify new approaches likely to integrate the notion of education as a public good with the fundamental social and cultural components of education in order to enhance a transformative and alternative system of governance that promotes education not only as an economic tool for individual progress, but above all as a collective endeavor for the fulfillment of human-beings and of their communities. The institutional and hierarchical relations typical of the ‘public’ should deal with the need of greater participation in common decisions, with “the relationships that exist among the members of a society tied together in a collective endeavor” being emphasized (UNESCO, 2015c).

In this perspective, the concept of common goods may represent a useful framework for the development of innovative approaches to educational governance in a democratic system. Indeed, the concept of common goods is increasingly adopted in philosophical-political spheres since its theoretical foundations are grounded in the alternative practices which oppose the spread of market policies that have been occurring both in the private and in the public domain. While reaffirming the primary responsibility of the State in the governance of education, understanding education as a common good also requires that the process of producing and benefitting from education is intrinsically shared. The frameworks of public goods and common goods may therefore be seen as a sort of *continuum* in line with the aim of recuperating the role of the State, not merely seen as a State constituted by separate individuals, but as a ‘State-community’ which identifies itself in its citizens and in the fulfillment of popular sovereignty (Marella, 2014).

The notion of common goods suggests that education incorporates common understandings of its value, grounded in specific cultural and social backgrounds. This concept calls for the development of political institutions that enable citizens to have greater voice in the decisions that affect their well-being and for greater cooperation both within and beyond the education sector in order to innovate and rethink education

systems substantially. This perspective is particularly relevant when addressing the challenges of the new agenda for sustainable development, especially with regard to the ambitious education goal and targets.

The multiplication of legal categories may be seen as a cause of concern for those who would support the need to keep referring to the consolidated categories of the *public* and *private*, which are presumed capable of giving answers to the governance of all kinds of goods. The reality of the nation-state should not be abandoned, but at the same time it is necessary to consider the possibility of creating new public institutions able to deal with change and renew themselves. Opening new avenues in the field of legal regulation means essentially facilitating a necessary cultural, ethical and political change (Viola, 2016).

5.1 The origins of the concepts of commons and of common goods

First and foremost, it is necessary to retrace the origins of the concept of commons and of common goods. From the economic definition provided within neoclassical economic theory, according to which these goods are characterized by the properties of rivalry and non-excludability, this concept has been applied to a variety of fields over the last few decades. As it will be illustrated in the next sections, in philosophical and political spheres the concept of the *commons* has progressively replaced that of *common goods* in order to stand back from the neoclassical economic theory to indicate a form of institutional organization, a political space of participation that has been applied particularly to the governance of natural material resources (such as forests, fisheries, irrigation systems), as well as immaterial resources (such as knowledge and the web). Having said this, a historical overview of these two concepts will be essential in order to establish which of the two, between *common goods* and *commons*, may be more appropriate to apply to the field of education.

Historical background

First and foremost, it is necessary to specify that the issue of common goods should not be confused with that of *the* common good. The latter concerns the purposes and

objectives for which a political society constitutes itself and differentiates from the mere *de facto* coexistence. It denotes what is good in political and ethical terms. This way of speaking dates back to Aristotle and inspired more or less all of Western philosophy. In this sense, the common good is not susceptible to ownership, but instead it represents a norm or rule which unifies a political community.

The use of “*common*” as an adjective dates back to Roman law which designated a certain number of things as common (*res communes*): namely air, running water, the sea and its shores. These resources are considered as common by nature: that is, they cannot be owned and are for use by all. The concept of ‘common property’ goes back to the thesis of Plato on the community property outlined in his dialogue *Republic*. This line of thought has influenced the work of Cicero and of Latin philosophical theories, as well as the natural law theories of Rousseau and Kant and the utopian socialism of mid-nineteenth century. According to this theoretical line, the world is considered to be of common property for all men to enjoy. It is considered that the institute of private property (*divisio rerum*) originates on the basis of this primitive situation of community property (Coccoli, 2014).

However, it was not until the second half of the twentieth century that the issue of common goods, classified in standard economics also as common-pool resources or common property resources, became generally considered among scholars. The more recent resurgence of the issue around the *commons* is the result of several threats which have been increasing since the late 1960s and which include ecological challenges caused by the growth of industry, cities and population as well as natural degradation via the direct destruction of resources and sites and also via pollution. These challenges were dealt with by Garrett Hardin, an American ecologist and philosopher, in 1968 in an article entitled *The Tragedy of the Commons* which appeared in the authoritative American journal *Science*. The author discussed the challenges of overpopulation in relation to the scarcity of resources of the planet. According to Hardin, the “tragedy of the commons” denotes a situation where an individual, acting independently and rationally according to its own self-interest, behaves against the best interests of the whole community by depleting some common resources.

In *The Tragedy of the Commons*, Hardin provides the example of a pasture shared in common by self-interested herders and demonstrates how this common resource would head towards inevitable ruin and degradation because of the individual actions of the herders (Locher, 2013). The tragedy is expressed in Hardin's (1968:1244) famous lines:

“Ruin is the destination toward which all men rush, each pursuing his own best interest in a society that believes in the freedom of the commons. Freedom in a commons brings ruin to all.”

According to Hardin, it is only possible to avoid this tragedy in one of two ways: private ownership or direct administration imposed from outside, typically the State (Hardin, 1968). “The tragedy of the commons”, which denoted a quite intuitive and simple solution, became the starting point of any debate on the *commons*, a true intellectual challenge (Coccoli, 2013). Indeed, “Hardin's either-or solution played a not insignificant part in the success of his argument, which [has been] put forward by enthusiasts both for the free market and for state intervention” (Locher, 2016).

However, there are some factors that make his simple message more complex and doubtful. In particular, it was argued that the choice of the term *commons* was used inappropriately and confusedly since common ownership did not directly apply to the case formulated by Hardin, whose analysis more generally referred to a situation of ‘lack of governance’ (Locher, 2016). In order to describe the behavior of farmers, Hardin drew on an anthropology which ascribed to the game theory according to which society is reduced to the interaction of rival calculating individuals. The tragedy of the commons was framed within a ‘*rational choice paradigm*’, “a general approach to human action based on an individualistic social cosmology” (Locher, 2016). This discourse, produced a radical pessimism about the capacity of human groups to act collectively because of ‘free riding’⁸⁴ (Locher, 2013).

However, during the 1970s, the ‘Tragedy’ was countered by discourses that argued in favor of the legitimacy and effectiveness of community governance of resources and environments. For the purposes of this analysis, it is sufficient to recall briefly what

⁸⁴ Economic theory according to which individuals act independently for their own sake and personal return

Locher (2016) extensively illustrates in his article regarding the historical roots of the commons paradigm.⁸⁵ Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, international studies supported and financed mainly by the USAID aimed at demonstrating the appropriateness and sustainability of the *commons* paradigm. American anthropologists made a major contribution to showing that the *commons* could represent suitable and effective frameworks for governance in specific environmental, demographic and agricultural contexts. The possibility of developing local forms of cooperation inspired by indigenous institutions and other socio-cultural practices that favor effective and sustainable governance were subject to intense discussion at the World Bank, UNESCO and the FAO. As argued by Locher, the commons paradigm

“emerged from the crisis of the State and modernism as pillars of development. In the free-market-dominated 1980s, it offered another way forward. Drawing on the experience of the 1970s, it proposed making communities the main players in their own development. Poles apart from the modernist project, it identified in the accumulated wealth of social structures, vernacular practices and indigenous expertise the resources that could be mobilized, strengthened and restored” (2016:327).

It is in line with these studies that in 1990 Elinor Ostrom, 2009 winner of the Nobel Memorial Prize in economics, formulated an innovative hypothesis on how to avoid the “tragedy of the commons”. In her book *Governing the commons* she demonstrated the baselessness of some of the implicit assumptions of the model developed by Hardin, based on her investigations on how communities succeeded or failed at managing the *commons*. Her critiques to Hardin’s model are summarized as follows:

“Hardin’s vivid narrative contains a number of contentions that commons scholars have repeatedly found to be mistaken: (1) he was actually discussing open access rather than managed commons; (2) he assumed little or no communication; (3) he postulated that people act only in their immediate self-interest (rather than

⁸⁵ The reviving of the discourse around commons started after the crisis in the Sahel region. For a detailed and exhaustive analysis on the roots of the commons paradigm see: Locher, F. 2016. *Third World Pastures: The Historical Roots of the Commons Paradigm (1965-1990)*, *Quaderni Storici*, 2016/1, April 2016, pp. 303-333.

assuming that some individuals take joint benefits into account, at least to some extent); (4) he offered only two solutions to correct the tragedy – privatization or government intervention” (Hess and Ostrom, 2006: 11).

Ostrom asserted that human beings do not always respond to egoistic and self-interest logics and that there may exist some forms of cooperation that could serve as societal regulation in order to avoid the overconsumption of a specific good or resource. At the same time, these forms of cooperation would also make it possible to enlarge the community of beneficiaries (Ostrom, 1990). Through field research and practical observations conducted by a team of researchers guided by herself and her husband Vincent Ostrom, she acknowledged how conditions of sustainability may be determined by communities themselves managing the resources that they hold in common. In this respect, Ostrom rejects the overly-schematic opposition between the State and the market, sustaining the existence of forms of governance and ownership that are different from public and private. In this perspective, unlike the notions of *public* and *private*, the *common* doesn't necessarily designate a system of ownership and belonging, but rather a method of governance and of consumption (Nivarra, 2012).

Diverse applications of the terms common goods and commons

According to economic theory, common goods – also called common-pool resources, common property resources, or commons – have been defined as those goods that are non-excludable and rival. Examples include irrigation systems or fishing grounds, that is, goods that benefit a group of people, but which provide diminished benefits to everyone if each individual pursues his or her own self-interest. The value of a common-pool resource can be reduced through over-use because the supply of the resource is not unlimited, and using more than can be replenished can result in scarcity. Having said this, a classification of common goods appears as a challenge since this term may be referred to categories that are highly heterogeneous. Natural, environmental, ecological, social and cultural goods, and more generally material and immaterial goods, have all in some way been associated with the category of common

goods, or the commons (Viola, 2016; De Toffol and Valastro, 2012). What is it, however, that these goods have in common?

According to some authors, the traditional interpretation of the economic property of ‘rivalry’ does not appear suitable to apply to cultural and immaterial goods such as knowledge, since one’s consumption does not concretely diminish that of others. On the contrary, the more these cultural goods are ‘consumed’, the more the advantage for others increases. Viola (2016) therefore proposes a different interpretation of the property of ‘rivalry’ which is reformulated in terms of the *perishability* of a certain good. The more perishable a good is, the more it tends to become rivalrous, as the increase in consumption leads to the eventual depletion of that resource. This condition can be certainly valid for natural goods. Cultural goods, such as arts or knowledge, on the contrary, ‘perish’ if they are not consumed. The less they are ‘consumed’, the more they risk extinction. According to this interpretation, common goods are normatively non-excludable and factually perishable and therefore require common governance for their care and their maintenance. This assumption can therefore be valid in the case of both natural and cultural resources. These goods can be considered as ‘common’ in reason of the interdependency they create between those who ‘consume’ them. Based on these (revisited) properties, the category of common goods appears somehow as unitary and differentiates itself from the economic classification of goods based on the “non-excludability/rivalry” property pair.⁸⁶

The need to identify a stand-alone category for this kind of goods that goes beyond the economic classification is also addressed by numerous experts and scholars that purposely use the term *commons* to imply a methodological break with the logic underlying the classification of goods (Dardot, 2016). A *common* is first and foremost an institutional affair and more specifically an institutional space defined by collectively developed practical rules. What is most important is the scope of institutional activity, and not the technical characteristics of things and goods. This approach is partly the result of the influential work conducted by Hardt and Negri (2009) who have used the

⁸⁶ The reformulation of the *rivalry* property as *perishability* is proposed by Francesco Viola, Professor emeritus of Philosophy of Law at the University of Palermo, Italy (Viola, 2016).

idea of the *common* to mean, by this, a political and social activity not merely the management of natural resources that economic regimes seek to appropriate.⁸⁷

The contemporary issue of the commons represents an evolution of the concept of common goods as classified in economic theory. These contributions have resulted in the broadening of application of the term *commons* to a variety of fields – such as university, labor, and information – that were not included in the traditional definition (Coccoli, 2013). Indeed, the origins of contemporary debates around the issue of the *commons* are rooted in changes in development policies and doctrines: “[t]he commons movement became a key ingredient in civil society initiatives to invent future trajectories of civilization that will be sustainable, fair and democratic. Its supporters see this type of social organization as “a possible response to the challenges raised by environmental crisis, the limits of political representation, and the rapid expansion of knowledge capitalism” (Locher, 2016).

What is worth underlining here, is that from the “technical”, specialized and scientific definition that Elinor Ostrom gave of the *common pool resources* or *commons* in her book *Governing the commons*, the debate on commons and on common goods, especially in the political, philosophical and legal spheres, has evolved in the sense of a de-technification of the concept. If this shift has corresponded on the one hand to a loss in terms of precision, on the other it has made it possible to apply this concept also to a variety of realities, such as education, that would have hardly come under the “standard” economic definition of *common-pool resources* (Coccoli, 2013).

The apparent vagueness of the definition of these concepts, which may be seen as a limit, constitutes in reality their strength. The semantic fuzziness has made it possible for these concepts to play a crucial role in the aggregation of social demands under a common prospect. It is argued that common goods exemplify what Lévi-Strauss called “significant flottant”, the meaning of which, although imprecise, enables a concept to function as a point of attraction of different meanings (Coccoli, 2013). The theoretical

⁸⁷ “This common is not only the earth we share but also the languages we create, the social practices we establish, the modes of sociality that define our relationships, and so forth. This form of the common does not lend itself to a logic of scarcity as does the first” (2009: 139). It should be made clear that the *Common* by Hardt and Negri (2009) does not correspond to the traditional concept of common goods as natural resources managed by a community, but gets enriched by another meaning related to the transformation of the economic (capitalistic) system (Coccoli, 2013).

deficit seems therefore to be compensated by the legal and political fertility of this term, and by its ability to catalyze different energies and social forces (Coccoli, 2013).

Having said this, it is also important to clarify that despite the high degree of ‘flexibility’, the term common goods holds a minimum semantic core that can be traced as common in all socio-political claims. Lorenzo Coccoli (2013) interestingly summarizes the main characteristics forming this minimum semantic core that can be identified in the following features: (1) the opposition of the concept of common goods to the processes of privatization and marketization, and more generally to the dynamics of neoliberalism; (2) the re-composition of networks of social solidarity within communities, and (3) the development of instruments of participatory democracy.

The concept of common goods

Before introducing the discussion on education, I consider it necessary to underline at this point a slight but crucial distinction between the use of the concept of *commons* and of *common goods* for the purposes of this analysis. As aforementioned, the English term *commons* has progressively been used to refer to an institutional political space and has been largely applied to the governance of natural or immaterial resources, such as the environment or knowledge⁸⁸ where common governance may be a reality. The term *commons* seems hardly applicable to goods or services such as education (or health) which necessarily require public institutions to play a predominant role in their regulation, monitoring, funding and provision.

Considering the broadened application of the concept of common goods and the identification of a stand-alone category which goes beyond economic theory, the term ‘common goods’ seems more appropriate for the governance of services, or goods, that need to be provided and concretely managed. However, the way this concept is defined and used in this analysis should not be confused with the concept as it is framed within the economic theory that presupposes rational-optimizing actors – according to a simplistic and rarely operative anthropology (Locher, 2016). The concept of common goods is seen rather in a recently developed legal and political framework which,

⁸⁸ See, for instance: Hess, C. and Ostrom, E. 2006. *Understanding Knowledge as a Commons: From Theory to Practice*. The MIT Press - <https://mitpress.mit.edu/books/understanding-knowledge-commons>

although not as radically as the concept of the *commons*, does add something relevant to the discussion on the governance of education conducted so far in terms of vision, popular participation and democratic processes. This is why I consider that the term *common good* is preferable to that of *commons* when referring to education.

In this perspective, common goods can be defined as those goods that exist only when there are common actions in their production and in their consumption. The benefits and burdens for the realization of these goods are intrinsically *shared* among all participants – not opposed (as for *private* goods), or ‘irrespectively’ (as for *public* goods) (Viola, 2016). Indeed, “common” means *com-muniis*, that is the equal sharing of duties and responsibilities, and is contrary to “immune”, *in-muniis*, without duties (Viola, 2016). Goods of this kind are grounded in a strong conception of the community, opposed to an individualistic one, and are identified as the typical model of political cooperation. For instance, Charles Taylor has distinguished between “decomposable” and “convergent” goods as opposed to “common” goods. The author asserts that public goods are essentially conceived as decomposable goods in the ordinary understanding within welfarism (Taylor, 1995). Public goods are considered individual goods since they “cannot be procured for one person without being secured for a whole group. But the goods it produces are surely those of individuals” (p. 55). In this perspective, the production and consumption process of public goods is directly characterized by an individualistic and utilitarian approach which conceives the specific goods as decomposable and instrumentally valuable. Moreover, there may also be public goods which are “convergent”, which are produced by a cooperative action but are then enjoyed individually. On the contrary, within common goods, the shared action is intrinsic, as well as instrumental, both to the good itself and to its benefits acquired in the course of that shared action. Goods of this kind are therefore inherently common in their ‘production’ and in their benefits (Deneulin and Townsend, 2007).

Common goods should inevitably be considered as *relational* goods because they can be achieved and can be enjoyed only with others (Viola, 2016; Arena and Iaione, 2012; Donati and Solci, 2011). Moreover, common goods determine the ways in which the relations of persons with goods define and model fundamental rights themselves. The nature of common goods not only contributes to the identification of some fundamental rights, but also requires a necessary link between common fruition and common

governance. This gives personal rights not only an individualistic and subjective meaning, but implies a relational conception of human rights, in terms of their entitlement and pursuit, both regarding the relationships between persons, and with regard to the relationship between persons and goods, which necessarily depend on the existence of certain goods and on their specific configuration, (Viola, 2016).

Moreover, it has been argued that this category has also a functionalist nature in that resources become ‘common goods’ once they appear fundamental to the realization of a particular social goal that is coherent with political-democratic instances of a certain community (De Toffol and Valastro, 2012). The processes of privatization of the last decades and the progressive dismantling of the Welfare State have increased the interest in this category of goods and in their defense. Their nature makes it necessary to overcome the logics of property. The formal classification of public or private becomes irrelevant because it is exclusive, whereas a logic of *accessibility* and *inclusion* that characterizes common goods is preferable. Hence the need to ensure methods of participated management of these resources that, when not expressed as forms of common ownership, have at least to be expressed in forms of control and be protected on behalf of the community through forms of participation that acknowledge the right of people to act in order to safeguard, protect and guarantee these goods (De Toffol, Valastro, 2012).

5.2 The concept of education as a common good⁸⁹

The problem of giving legal form to the category of common goods largely depends on the dominant paradigm which considers as ‘natural’ the power of the State, or of the market, on external goods. However, if we tried leaving this cultural preconditioning aside for a moment, common goods would lose their characteristic of exception and, the power of the State, or of the market, would need adequate justification. This is also the case with education which, when considered as a natural process, should take place irrespectively of any institutionalized intervention (see the visions of Ivan Illich, Paul Goodman or Paulo Freire). Without taking into account any conception of institutional

⁸⁹ This perspective builds on the foundational publication realized by UNESCO: UNESCO. 2015. *Rethinking Education: Towards a global common good?* Paris, UNESCO

absence and bearing in mind the characteristics and challenges of current realities and institutions, the concept of common goods may represent an interesting perspective to adopt when looking at different aspects of the 'good' education, even with regard to basic and compulsory levels. This is all the more urgent especially when considering the crisis of welfare states in many countries worldwide, the blurring of boundaries between the public and the private, and the emergence of mixed, hybrid, forms promoting conceptions of education as a marketable, private good.

Considering education both as a public *and* as a common good may provide the elements on which to build alternative and more inclusive approaches to schooling and to development more in general, in order to counter merely economic and utilitarian solutions which may contribute to the spreading of inequalities worldwide. It is about responding to the failures of governments to deliver quality education not by relying on market-based approaches to schooling, or returning to the ways of functioning of highly centralized bureaucratic states, but by envisaging new and innovative public institutions that can improve quality and efficiency thanks to the empowerment and the greater cooperation with the forces present in society. This may be practicable in contexts with different characteristics, but requires minimum democratic conditions since it builds on the free, and responsible, participation of the diverse forces existing in society. These may be present in several degrees and may have different forms, but the objective and the method of work remain similar.

If compared to the current ways of functioning of the welfare systems, however, the principle of education as a common good does not propose easy paths. It calls for a revisiting of existing societal equilibriums in order to reactivate capacities, to innovate and rethink welfare systems substantially. It introduces challenging elements with regard to highly consolidated operational habits (Brunod et al., 2016). Indeed, communality may result in the most profound conflict whose composition remains always temporary. A society, however, may be able to cope with confrontation and conflict, and therefore be enriched by the pluralism of positions, as long as it is able to practice cooperation in common decisions, while preserving what cannot be negotiated (Viola, 2012). For these reasons, the possibility of considering education as a common good depends on a strong political commitment, willing to call into question current

cultural orientations and institutions in order to promote innovation and social change based on the values of human dignity and freedom.

The concept of education as a public and common good: a continuum

As illustrated in previous sections, considering education as a public good implies that the State maintains and strengthens, above all, the responsibility for ensuring the regulatory framework within which education is provided, funded and monitored. In this perspective, the concept of education as a public good enhances the development of democratic processes where the participation of all actors of society in the formulation of policies and practices is foreseen in order to achieve the aims of a public good approach to education: that of achieving free and quality education for all. Within a public good approach the point of view remains essentially focused on public institutions that should provide the regulatory framework for the development of democratic educational systems.

In order to bring about a significant change to the way of functioning of public institutions themselves, however, it is necessary that a “shift in culture” occurs that considers more profoundly the relevance of contexts and the neglected social and cultural dimensions of education in order to promote a greater complementation of both top-down and bottom-up approaches (UNESCO, 2016a). In fact, the need to reconnect public institutions with ‘the people’ has been widely manifested in many countries worldwide. Critiques towards the vertical and hierarchical, and often not transparent, ways of functioning of governments is the product of the delusions produced by a politics and governance that leave the principle of ‘popular sovereignty’ often unmet (Valastro, 2010). It is precisely at this point that the concept of education as a common good comes into play with its significant political and cultural background which considers democracy and the principle of participation as inextricably linked. In the field of education, considering education as a common good implies that education is a collective shared endeavor, both in its production and in its benefits. It implies that students themselves, and all actors in society more in general, are considered as directly responsible for the development of the educational project of a given community. This is in line with the fulfillment of the right to education as framed in a relational approach,

which should be seen as the responsibility of the community as a whole, not only of public institutions (Meyer-Bisch et al, 2016).

Of course, the democratic participation of all actors in the educational endeavor can be possible only in a framework of governance that is guaranteed by the State. That is why the concepts of education as a public and common good can be seen in a sort of continuum and do not exclude each other. Indeed, it should be emphasized that the principle of the common goods as applied to education does not diminish the importance of the role of the State in education. It rather implies a strengthening of its function of regulation while calling for a revisiting of the institution itself. In this respect, the importance of conceiving education as a public good should not be disregarded, especially in those contexts where educational systems are not fully realized or developed.

As mentioned earlier, goods exhibit the aspects of a private, public, and therefore of a common good, simultaneously. As a public good, the regulation, monitoring and assessment of the educational system remain primarily the responsibility of the State. At the same time, education is a social and cultural matter; it is the process through which human-beings fully develop. The concept of the common is greater than the notion of the private and public. It encompasses them in an attempt to introduce a different perspective on how education systems should be organized and for what purposes. It is the adoption of a necessary cultural change. In this perspective, education as a public good appears more as a static, but essential concept since it is the expression of a legislative function which normally takes place once in a while. The concept of common good is instead dynamic and contingent. A common good is considered such when diverse actors recognize that they have a responsibility, decide to deal with it and, therefore, to cooperate.

Beyond utilitarianism and individualism

Overcoming the utilitarian tradition of “decomposable goods” (Taylor, 1995), the notion of common goods suggests that education incorporates common understandings of its value, grounded in specific cultural and social backgrounds. From a ‘common good’ perspective, “it is not only the ‘good life’ of individuals which matters but also

the goodness of the life that humans hold in common” (Deneulin and Townsend, 2007). As mentioned earlier, common goods are relational goods since they can be realized only within a relational process. This vision highlights the collective dimension and the purposes of education as a common societal endeavor, based on the acknowledgment that relationships are the foundation of each process of ‘production’ or ‘fruition’ of common goods. Stressing the importance of relationships is all the more necessary with regard to current socio-economic realities, where the representation of the *homo oeconomicus* has prevailed over a vision that conceives the human-being inserted in a community/society (Franzini, 2012). This cultural orientation, also reflected in neo-classical economics, is at the origin of individual behaviors which are oriented towards individual success, or enrichment. In this respect, the theory of common goods aims to promote an alternative vision of human well-being, stressing people’s altruistic and cooperative behaviors. The crisis of the economic systems highlights the limits of the economic approach that has characterized the last decades and allows for the exploration of different visions on which to found economic and social dynamics.

Education as a common good calls into question the current utilitarian model which conceives education as a mere individual socio-economic investment. It favors a humanistic approach which places the person and his/her connections with the community at the center. It implies the enhancement of the cultural, social and relational dimensions of each educational process. Inspired by a sense of dignity and genuine solidarity among human beings, the participatory process should promote the expression of the diversity of contexts, worldviews and knowledge systems. At different levels of the education system, it would imply that different forms of education, be they formal or non-formal, could nurture each other in a reciprocal process, giving voice and representation to the different groups present in society. It is about the opportunity of making education more relevant to the specificities of different realities in a creative and inclusive process of empowerment. In this perspective, education is the result of a process of co-production between the public and all the other components of society. Even before it is taken by institutions, which tend to retain the existing state, this opportunity should be seized by society. The task is to introduce and extend practices of innovation able to generate new scenarios and new forms of social cooperation and coexistence. Education as a common good could become an effective democratic

exercise, through which the actors negotiate and restructure the institutional framework in which they are involved (Nicolas-Le Strat, 2015).

Community participation

As aforementioned, overcoming the classical dichotomy between the public and the private, common goods are defined by their management arrangements and by their methods of governance. At the different levels of the educational process, the participatory process which characterizes the common-good approach to education should be based on the sharing of values and objectives, aiming to promote processes of co-participation and integration of responsibilities and resources, both human and economic, as well as of risks and benefits. In this perspective, the nature of the actors does not change; they remain ‘public’ and ‘private’. What changes is the object and the method of work. Private actors would not result as mere service lenders, students and families would no longer be considered as ‘consumers’ or merely ‘users’, but would be qualified as active components in the processes of policy development and implementation. The underlying perspective is grounded on the belief that everyone is entitled to contribute and have a say regarding education seen as a common good – students, families, teachers, educators, civil society, researchers or the private sector. Indeed, the quest for *the* common good, which is the aim of any democratic society, is considered not only a prerequisite of institutional public authorities, but begins within society itself (Viola, 2016).

At the same time, the process of participation which characterizes the approach to education as a common good “is a common good in itself. The shared action is intrinsic, as well as instrumental, to the good itself, with benefits derived also in the course of shared action” (UNESCO, 2015c). This concept necessarily promotes a greater consideration of the importance of the local contexts and of the different forces that are already present within a given society which are directly involved in the governance of education at different levels.

It is about the adoption of new forms of direct participation based on the concept of subsidiarity, an organizational criterion of institutional bodies inspired by the principles of cooperation and solidarity. Indeed, subsidiarity normally has a twofold meaning:

vertical and horizontal. In the first sense it refers to multilevel government, that is the allocation of responsibilities to minor local bodies, and progressively to the major regional, national institutional bodies on the basis of capacity, efficiency and effectiveness. In the second sense, it refers to forms of cooperation between the public and private, according to which the public facilitates the activities of the private for the general interest (De Toffol and Valastro, 2012). Within such perspective, the public institution places itself as close as possible to the citizens, promoting their participation in common decisions. In this way, the principle of subsidiarity has to be reconceived and “its connotation of a vertical dynamic of influence is expanded to include horizontal and ‘transversal’ exercises of authority and efficacy, characterized by power sharing” (Cahill, 2005). Based on a cooperative alliance between public and private actors, and on the sharing of resources in the general interest, the principle of subsidiarity would allow the improvement of community well-being with respect for the freedom and dignity of all people.

As illustrated above, this participation and co-construction cannot obviously replace the welfare system guaranteed by the State. It can, however, integrate it, concur with it both practically and ideally, with the circulation and sharing of resources that would otherwise be totally privatized, or unused (Brunod et al., 2016). The integration of resources and responsibilities of both public and private actors is already a common practice in the production of health and social services where all actors, especially those of the so-called ‘third sector’, are more and more involved in forms of partnerships with governments to assure the provision of specific services and their common governance.

Considering education as a common good implies that all actors with a stake in education take part in the process of production of education services. Indeed, education takes place not only in schools but also within families, communities, and societies. For instance, in analyzing the ‘production’ process of public education, Porter (2012) observes that students and families bring an essential contribution. Co-production implies that students are not merely users but acquire an active role in ‘co-producing’ education (Porter, 2012). Indeed, inputs from the students are essential for the creating of education opportunities of good quality since there can be no learning without their active, willing participation. Moreover, significant inputs are provided from outside the classroom by parents, peers, community organizations and others. If these inputs are

few or omitted, education services may still be created but will have very different qualities and quantities. A democratically functioning system would therefore create the opportunities which encourage a more varied family and community participation in order to improve the quality of public institutions (Porter, 2012).

More in general, the participation of community to the educational process may contribute to the identification of local education issues and to develop strategies to resolve barriers that impede access and retention and compromise quality. Civic participation in the life of local schools also helps to ensure the relevance of the curriculum and its delivery. It can also be an effective component in monitoring the process and outcomes of education at multiple levels. In resource-constrained settings, community participation can also serve as an effective means for mobilizing and maximizing the resources needed to move towards a high-quality system of education (Uemura, 1999). Community participation in education is seen as a way to improve monitoring and accountability of schools to the community they serve. For instance, “in places where teacher absenteeism and poor performance are critical issues, parents can be part of the system of monitoring and supervising teachers, ensuring that teachers arrive at classrooms on time and perform effectively in the classrooms” (Uemura, 1999, p. 4). As a result, community participation may contribute to the improvement of equitable access, quality and performance of schooling.

In particular, community partnerships in education have been extensively analyzed by Bray (1999) as a form of direct participation and also expressly envisaged by international declarations in education. For instance, the need to strengthen the role of communities and to form “new and revitalized partnerships” corresponded to the ‘expanded vision’ held by signatories to the World Declaration on Education for All in 1990. Moreover, partnerships with non-state actors, including communities, have also been considered as a fundamental ‘implementation modality’ in the Framework for Action adopted in 2015 at the World Education Forum, for the achievement of the new Education 2030 Agenda.

As aforementioned, partnerships can have multiple meanings and implications, which lead to fuzzy conceptualization and imperfect implementation. Nevertheless, partnerships between governments and communities remain the key ingredient in

responding to democratic deficits and public financial constraints, and the emphasis on partnerships “has been proven wise and generally appropriate” (Bray, 1999).

The commitment towards the creation of greater and more active partnerships was expressly envisaged in the World Declaration on Education for All in 1990, later echoed in the Delhi Declaration (UNESCO, 1994), and also in 1996 during the mid-decade review in Amman, Jordan. The need to declare the importance of partnerships resulted from the acknowledgment that the role of the State in education systems was changing and its central function seriously being questioned. “For governments in low-income countries, the possibility of greater contributions to education by the private sector held out the prospect of increased sharing of the heavy load of operating education systems” (Bray, 1999). The Delhi Declaration (clause 2.8) included the statement that:

“education is, and must be, a societal responsibility, encompassing governments, families, communities and non-governmental organizations alike; it requires the commitment and participation of all, in a grand alliance that transcends diverse opinions and political positions.”

Community partnerships were seen as a strategic tool which impact on innovation in a number of domains, by giving particular attention to recruitment and relations, equity tensions and political dimensions. As reported in a discussion which took place at the World Conference on Education for All (Fordham, 1992):

“Developing strong partnerships with parents and communities means a new way of working for governments, for service agencies and for educations. Above all, it means listening to the needs of local communities and addressing their local agendas. It means becoming familiar with the people and their religious beliefs, their costumes and even their food taboos”.

In a context dominated by market-economics, partnerships between governments and communities can be crucial to leverage forces that would be ‘unused’ or misused. Indeed, crisis in education systems often emerge not “due to lack of material and human

resources, but primarily from how these resources have been managed or mismanaged at the detriment of the larger members of community” (Abbass, 2012).

Participation of communities may contribute to the harmonization of education activities, a more effective utilization of resources, and mobilization of additional financial and human resources where necessary. Partnerships represent one of the forms of more stable participation which ranges from weak to strong levels (Shaeffer, 1994). Reimers (1997) later identified a more complex matrix combining both forms of participation and education functions:

Community role/ Education functions	Use of service	Contribution of resources	Attendance at meetings	Consultation on issues	Involvement in delivery	Delegated powers and decision-making	'Real' powers and decision-making at every stage
Designing policy							
Mobilizing resources							
Curriculum development							
Teacher hiring and firing							
Supervision							
Payment of salaries							
Teacher training							
Textbook design							
Textbook distribution							
Certification							
Building and maintenance							

Table 11 – Matrix of dimensions and degrees of participation in education (Source: Bray, 1999)

It is argued that communities may play a significant role both in the governance of education systems, through participation on school boards, or in the organization of education committees or parents’ associations, as well as in fund-raising and finance control. Although it may be unrealistic to expect communities who have traditionally lacked a voice in the handling of school affairs to play a significant role in school organization, transferring some of these functions to communities may have an impact on their sense of efficacy, “and gradually change the skills and attitudes of parents, teachers and administrators” (Bray, 1999).

Bray (1999) identifies general principles that should inspire all community partnership. These refer to the need for mutual trust between the government and communities; the efforts to undertake a long-term commitment; the need of clear and mutually accepted roles; a focus on both big and small pictures, which requires governments able to understand the smaller pictures on which communities mainly focus, and on the other hand requires communities able to understand the bigger picture

on which governments mainly act; the need of ‘nurturing’ which “requires recognition of the diversity of cultures, languages, customs and resources”; a focus on relationships between individuals as well as institutions; an involvement that is greater than mere contribution in finance.

In this perspective, community partnerships may provide an appropriate balance between an excessively bureaucratic and inflexible government and the risk of inequalities and fragmentation deriving from State absence and greater participation of private (for-profit) actors. The precise nature of this balance of course varies in different situations and ‘historical legacies’ should be taken into consideration (Bray, 1999).

The experiences of these arrangements have been extensively documented, suggesting the possibility that partnerships are achievable if community mobilization happens in the true sense of the term. It has also come to light that whenever community participation has been mandated from the top, problems related to modalities of implementation have surfaced (Oxfam India, 2014). As also acknowledged by Apple and Beane (1995) in their book *Democratic Schools*, successful partnerships require “the conscious building of coalitions within the school and between the school and constituencies outside it. In none of the cases was the impetus generated from the ‘top.’ Instead, bottom-up movements – groups of teachers, the community, social activists, and so on – provided the driving force for change”.

Although partnerships with communities represent important tools for contributing to the improvement of education systems in ways that are culturally and socially sensitive (adapted), civil society and other non-state actors also play a crucial role in the advancement of education systems. The role of civil society organizations as partners of governments in the production and governance of education deserves specific attention. Indeed, they received particular prominence both at the Jomtien World Conference in 1990 and at Incheon in 2015. Their role has developed considerably in the last two decades and many partnerships between governments and NGOs achieve results which would otherwise have been impossible. As envisaged in the Framework for Action for Education 2030, civil society organizations:

“promote social mobilization and raise public awareness, enabling the voices of citizens (particularly those who face discrimination) to be heard in policy development;

develop innovative and complementary approaches that help advance the right to education, especially for the most excluded groups;

document and share evidence from practice, from citizens’ assessments and from research to inform structured policy dialogue, holding governments accountable for delivery, tracking progress, undertaking evidence-based advocacy, scrutinizing spending and ensuring transparency in education governance and budgeting.”
(UNESCO, 2015a: 80).

In addition to civil society organizations, which fulfill a distinctive role in the protection of communities, the private sector is also considered as playing a fundamental role in education (Education Commission, UNESCO, World Bank). The adoption of an approach to education seen as a common good, however, implies that a paradigm change occurs also in the way in which economic actors and relations are conceived. It is argued that purely economic actors should recall the very origins of economic doctrines, which center around relationships between people, rediscovering ethical principles and virtues that may guide innovative approaches to a ‘humanistic economy’, instead of being purely economic transaction (Bruni, 2012). Indeed, although market mechanisms may seem more effective and efficient in increasing educational opportunities and funding (see Chapter 3 and 4), their solutions remain highly standardized and not necessarily linked to the local contexts, often leading to forms of exclusion and discrimination. Instead of promoting competition as a tool for greater efficiency and effectiveness, economic actors should also encourage forms of cooperation. Indeed, it is widely acknowledged in several domains, from natural to social sciences, that cooperation is often more convenient than competition. The aim here is not to condemn or totally dismiss all forms of competition, but rather to ascribe them to a broader framework of cooperation grounded on values of solidarity, equity, social justice, shared responsibility and mutual accountability. In this respect, direct or indirect forms of privatization, leading to the exclusion or externalization of functions

based on mere economic competition or efficiency logics, or for the sake of profit, would hardly result compatible with the conception of education as a common good.

Of course, “the call for people’s mobilization must not be a justification for the state to abdicate its responsibilities” (UNDP, 1997). The State should maintain a key role in protecting the interest of the poor and this is certainly one of the implications when considering education primarily as a *public* good. The State could renew itself by strengthening its essential functions and responsibilities of regulation, control and promotion of innovation in education (Arena and Iaione, 2012). It remains institutionally responsible for the planning, designing and realization of the educational system, operating both in a ‘vertical’ position (as primary responsible) and in a ‘horizontal’ position (as one of the actors involved in the process). These forms of cooperation, based on mutual trust, reliability, and willingness to change, would allow the realization of the best combination of efficiency, inclusiveness, and equity in the governance of education. To achieve this, it is necessary for the organizational functioning to be transparent, and for assessment and punctual reporting to be implemented. The ultimate responsibility remains in the hands of the State which is accountable for the spending and for the use of public resources. Indeed, the concept of common goods suggests that the actors involved in the process realize experiences of cooperation aimed at integrating, or transforming the public – which often suffers for lack of resources or capacity constraints – rather than undermining it.

Towards participatory democracy

It is argued that the highest form of direct community and citizen participation undoubtedly takes place at the level of decision-making: problem identification, feasibility-study, planning, implementation, and evaluation (Shaeffer, 2004; Reimers, 1997). In this light, a change is also needed in the way in which public and governmental power is exerted. In a welfare society, the function of the government goes beyond the hierarchical logics and characterizes itself by openness, participation and responsibility of the governance. It is an enlarged function of governance which aims to coordinate and integrate a plurality of actors, values, rationalities and different cultures while respecting their specificities and autonomy. A form of governance which

favors consensual and negotiated relationships, opposed to the traditional vertical and hierarchical one.

Indeed, “placing common goods beyond the public or private dichotomy implies conceiving and aspiring towards new forms and institutions of participatory democracy” (UNESCO, 2015c). The concept of common goods encourages the review of “the old top-down, orderly, and hierarchical categories of social structure and social authority” (Cahill, 2005). Democracy could become truly inclusive because it would not only be based on voting but would be guaranteed by the active participation of all components of society as well. This is necessary to move from *formal* democracy, which is mainly an ‘aggregative technique’ and limits itself to representation, to *participatory* democracy, which is the most effective way for society to put forward its visions of well-being (Viola, 2012). The involvement of communities, civil society and other non-state actors in the building and implementation of public policies represents one of the fundamental features of the discussion on institutional democratization and quality of decisional processes.

This model of participatory democracy which is essential within an approach to education seen as a common good is based on cooperation and not on the delegation of power, or the exclusive exercise thereof. Moreover, the objective of participation is not the claim for power in itself, but rather the constant relationship between public, civic and private actors that should characterize the entire decision-making process (policy design, analysis and implementation). In institutional and political terms, participatory democracy needs to translate into organizational and procedural rules, in order to guarantee the fairness and effectiveness of participatory process and the fulfilling of the right of all actors to participate in political processes (De Toffol and Valastro, 2012). Moreover, participation has to be necessarily collective if it is to influence policy processes (Chollet, 2010). The essential connection between collective action and power was also acknowledged by Hannah Arendt in *The Human Condition* (1958) where she defined power as the capacity to act in common and to start new actions.

The concept of education as a common good encourages democratization of the decision-making process, both in the governance of structures and processes of schools, as well as in the design and formulation of curriculum and pedagogy, which should be

made accessible to community groups. Committees, councils, and other decision-making groups include not only professional educators, but also young people, their parents, and other members of the school community (Apple and Beane, 1995).

It is argued that this kind of democratic planning, at both the school and the classroom levels, does not represent “the ‘engineering of consent’ toward predetermined decisions that has too often created the illusion of democracy, but a genuine attempt to honor the right of people to participate in making decisions that affect their lives” (Apple and Beane, 1995). This set of commitments has been demonstrated to work in powerful ways. In Brazil, for instance, the Citizen School and “participatory budgeting” have provided exceptional models of how democratic education can change the lives of students, teachers, and entire communities (Apple and Beane, 2007). This set of policies and the accompanying processes of implementation are constitutive parts of a clear and explicit project aimed at constructing not only a better school for the excluded, but also a larger project of radical democracy. A common-good approach to education enables the creation and development of educational transformations coming from the ‘periphery’ and not from those who “arrogate the ‘center’ to themselves” (Gandin and Apple, 2002).

The existence of participatory institutions is also considered important for the improvement of public institutions accountability. Indeed, the call for parents and community members to take part in school governance is seen as a way to increase the accountability of public services. The UNESCO Global Education Monitoring Report team acknowledges that “strengthening participatory accountability is considered an effective strategy for building equitable education systems and providing quality education” (UNESCO, 2016d). Participatory accountability emphasizes the importance of participation of parents and of the community in the education process. Schools are accountable to families not through the mechanisms of choice, but through families having a voice and opportunities for dialogue on school governing bodies.

Those in favor of participation, however, also acknowledge that exercising democracy involves tensions and contradictions. Democratic participation in decision-making, for example, opens the way for antidemocratic ideas such as the continuing demands for censorship of materials, the use of public tax vouchers for private school

tuition, and the maintenance of historical inequities in school life. Furthermore, there is always the possibility of the illusion of democracy, in which authorities may invite participation so as to “engineer consent” for predetermined decisions (Graebner, 1988). These elements point to the fact that creating democracy is always a struggle.

The identification of solutions which are context sensitive and which contribute to the democratization of the system are therefore far from simple. Indeed, “democracy is a dynamic concept that requires continuous examination in light of changing times” (Apple and Beane, 1995). Having said this, beyond these contradictions lies the possibility for all actors in society “to work together in creating more democratic schools that serve the common good of the whole community” (Apple and Beane, 2007). Empowering communities to make important decisions about the institutions in which they live and work is probably the most effective way to make educational opportunities and governance more sustainable and equitable.

An integrated and inter-sectorial approach

Education as a common good promotes active citizenship, equality and community reinforcement and empowerment, which in turn represent preconditions for effective participation in the democratic process. Therefore, in order for processes in education to be truly participatory it is essential that all actors become aware of their role as citizens and therefore assume responsibility for their actions. Responsibility is defined as the ability to become aware of certain values and to ensure a response adapted to a known, foreseen and possible risk (Meyer Bisch et al., 2016).

The “social connection model” of responsibility developed by Marion Young (2005) is strictly connected with the recognition of education as a collective endeavor. According to Young, all moral agents, both individual and institutional, have the responsibility with regard to eliminating injustices which arise from inequality and disparities. Of course, she emphasizes that those who are “institutionally and materially situated in ways that enable them to have a greater effect on the poor and vulnerable have also greater obligations and responsibilities”. This is why the concept of education as a public good should remain a valid framework according to which the role of the State is assured as the ultimate guarantor of the public sphere. At the same time, it is

acknowledged that education is a collective and social responsibility which involves all actors, although at different levels.

The development of awareness and the assumption of responsibilities however require an integrated and inter-sectorial approach based on the principle of lifelong learning. Indeed, the common-good approach to education requires that all actors have “a right to fully informed and critical participation in creating school policies and programs for themselves and young people” (Apple and Beane, 2007). This requires that students, families, communities, and other actors are prepared and acquire the capabilities to take part freely and responsibly in the educational process. Therefore, an integrated approach to education is necessary for building awareness and willingness to participate.

Not only should children and young people have access to an education system of good quality, but also adults throughout life should be able to acquire or strengthen their capabilities in order to act as aware and, therefore, responsible citizens. Appropriate educational solutions should therefore be designed and made available for different groups in society. Among the many experiences, the creation of Community Learning Centers in some countries in the Asia-Pacific region represents a possibility to provide equal access to education for different groups of learners, to acquire the competencies through literacy programs, post-literacy programs, basic education, continuing education as well as vocational and like skills training. These centers enable people to gain better access to learning in order to safeguard principles of autonomy (UNESCO, 2016c).

An integrated approach, “based on renewed ethical and moral foundations”, should also take into consideration the diversity of cultures and systems of knowledge, and therefore consider the involvement and support of all communities, minorities, indigenous, each with their different knowledge systems (UNESCO, 2015c). Integrating formal, non-formal and informal education is an essential element for the development of an inclusive educational project aiming at the strengthening of democracy.

Giving the people the possibility to free and responsible participation is essential for the effective exercise of popular sovereignty, which should be the ultimate goal of a true democracy. Popular sovereignty not only comprises formal procedures of political

participation but expresses itself also in a daily culture of democracy. In this regard, the sovereignty of the nation-state should be seen as conditioned by popular involvement, to be maintained, rebuilt, and developed through innovative ways of participation that are culturally adapted (Meyer-Bisch et al., 2016).

Considering education as a common good implies an integrated approach to education which may favor a transformation of public institutions themselves in order to overcome more hierarchical and utilitarian approaches, and build more democratic schooling systems. The concept of common goods highlights the collective and socio-cultural dimensions of education and favors the formulation of education policies and practices aimed at promoting freedom and strengthening capabilities. These are the conditions for ensuring that people can take responsibility for effective participation in political and civic life and therefore contribute to the strengthening of democratic institutions which in turn should favor the development of more inclusive and equitable educational opportunities.

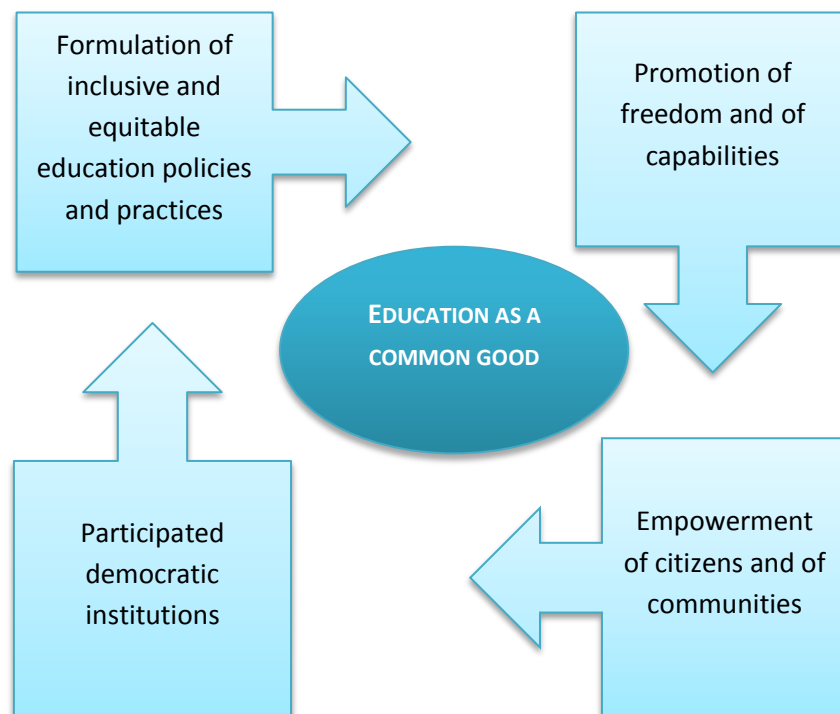


Figure 13 – Education as a common good implies an integrated approach (Source: Author)

Having said this, the education sector on its own cannot be counted on to optimally identify responses and provide solutions to wide-ranging challenges. The concept of education as a common good calls for greater cooperation both within and beyond the education sector in order to innovate and rethink education systems substantially. A multistakeholder collaborative approach should involve government, civil society and the private sector as well as other sectors such as health, social, financial and economic services. Indeed, education needs to work with other sectors to change daily and community behaviors (UNESCO, 2016a). Free participation of all actors, especially communities and families, in educational governance can truly take place only when stability, safety and security safeguards have been fulfilled. Moreover, there should be increasing interactions between all sectors also to develop innovative education systems that take full advantage of technological innovations while maintaining equity and ethics in education.

5.3 Going global: education as a global common good

It is widely acknowledged that nation-states are not self-sufficient with regard to many aspects of human life. The provision of numerous goods and services relies increasingly on the implementation of international policies able to address the needs of different peoples, particularly in the case of education. As aforementioned, the education sector received consistent attention at the international level with the recognition of education as a human right and as a main driver for socio-economic development. Moreover, the tremendous expansion of educational opportunities worldwide, together with the demographic growth, has created opportunities for non-state actors to get involved in the sector. As a result, “systems of norm-setting and regulation in the delivery of global goods such as education are becoming more complex” (UNESCO, 2015c). Beyond inter-governmental organizations, the involvement of non-state actors at the global level also includes international civil society organizations, transnational corporations, foundations and think tanks. These actors inevitably influence and orient, either directly or indirectly, national education policy formulation through the setting of global agendas, international aid assistance, loans provision, or capacity development. It is therefore evident that formulation of education policy is progressively shifting from the

State to the global level and that trends of globalization have made “the national characterization of public goods somewhat limited” (Menashy, 2009).

Some have suggested that the framework of *global public goods* may represent an attempt to capture these complex dynamics that have repercussions on the production of goods and thus may provide useful guidance for their governance. Mostly referred to by international organizations such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), or the World Bank, but also by the Education Commission (2016) the framework of global public goods is grounded on a revisited theory of public goods, in particular of the concept of *publicness*⁹⁰. This is based on the acknowledgment of a greater concern for the public sphere among the main actors concerned in policy issues – the State, the business, civil society organizations, and households – which has led to an ‘expansion of the public domain’ (Drache, 2001; Kaul and Mendoza, 2003).

It is in the perspective of rethinking the definition of public goods to make it more relevant to the changing global dynamics, that in 1999 the UNDP outlined a landmark publication by Kaul, Grunberg, and Stern. The authors recognize the need to reframe the role of the State both within its interaction with non-State actors but also in terms of its geographical and jurisdictional dimensions. Global public goods are therefore defined as public goods which are global in their benefits, be it by nature or by political choice (Kaul and Mendoza, 2003).

However, some authors have argued that the concept of education as a global public good may prove to be ineffective for the regulation of privatization policies (Menashy, 2009; Dardot and Laval, 2014; Coussy, 2005). According to Dardot and Laval (2014), “this theory would have the virtue to depoliticize the issue of public goods and neglect the conflicts among social and economic powers, assuming that they represent only technical or strategic problems”⁹¹. Menashy (2009) has argued that “global public goods policies potentially perpetuate the harmful facets of economic globalisation via the spread of capitalism”. Since this theory does not call into question the intrinsic characteristics of economic globalization, it may result ineffective to counterbalance the

⁹⁰ According to Kaul, Grunberg and Stern, the characterization of the *publicness* or *privateness* dimension of a certain good involves the general public and political process. The “triangle of publicness” includes *publicness* in decision-making, in consumption and in the distribution of benefits (Kaul and Mendoza, 2003).

⁹¹ Dardot and Laval (2014), p. 535 (translation by the author)

negative effects of the diffusion of globalization itself. In particular, northern bilateral agencies and international organizations will probably set the agenda for the production of global public goods, perpetuating a “subtle form of conditionality” (Carbone, 2007). The framework of global public goods would only replicate the state of international cooperation, characterized by oligopolistic competition, where the number of actors able to significantly influence strategic policies is very small (Coussy, 2005).

At this time of exacerbating conflicts and widening gaps of inequality worldwide, there is a need to strengthen a humanistic and universal perspective on education. The concept of *global common goods* implies a commitment to a community that is “both universal in scope and that takes the differences among peoples and cultures with the full seriousness they deserve” (Hollenbach, 2002). This is all the more necessary to provide constructive alternatives and creative responses to the challenges that arise from the crisis of the current economic model, in order to mitigate the perverse effects of globalization on social justice and equity. A humanistic approach that “should support the development of a person into a human being”⁹² and should inspire a democratic governance of education, at the national and global level, that enables us to think in terms of shared responsibility for our ‘common humanity’⁹³. In other words, the perspective is the realization of the human-being which entails everyone’s responsibility with regard to development of the people of one’s community, as well as of the people of the world. This requires new forms of international cooperation, grounded on a new culture of solidarity, able to address “globalization’s democratic deficit” (Nye, 2001).

The concept of education as a global common good

Recognizing that common goods may have international dimensions, this paper proposes the notion of education as a global common good as a useful framework for the governance of education in the global context. Indeed, education is a process which is intrinsic to the development of the human-being in every part of the world, and its fulfillment should be in the interest both of local/national well-being as well as of that of the global community. Moreover, especially in countries affected by conflict, in a

⁹² Jacques Maritain quoted in Elfert (2015a).

⁹³ Chief Emeka Anyaoku, Secretary-General of the Commonwealth, UNESCO, 1995, EDC-95/CONF.006/Annex I, p. 2

state of emergency, or in very poor conditions, where people's safety and survival represent the priority of any intervention, the responsibility with regard to education should be assumed by those actors who can take charge of it. This is why the responsibility has to be universal⁹⁴, if it is not to undermine the possibility that all children, no matter where, have the opportunity for education.

The notion of education as a global common good calls for the development of global political institutions and methods of governance that enable countries and their citizens to have a greater say in the decisions that affect their well-being. This is necessary to encourage the diversity of approaches while countering dominant development discourse, characterized by a more instrumental vision of education. Conceiving education as a global common good implies a renewed form of cooperation among political institutions involved in education policy formulation and practice at the global level, which should promote "participation of all peoples in a diverse, yet solidaristic and collaborative, world society" (Cahill, 2005).

The democratic governance of education at the global level can be fostered thanks to efforts of international organizations, both in their collaboration with nation-states, and within the partnerships realized in order to reach common objectives. Indeed, education has always been a fundamental domain of cooperation. International institutions have, however, different approaches to education, and this is reflected in the policies that they implement in several countries worldwide.⁹⁵ In this respect, it is important to highlight that privatization policies that lead to the consideration of education as an individual marketable, consumable good, are in sharp contradiction with the conception of education as a global common good. Cooperation, equity, and inclusion, opposed to individualism based on competition, are fundamental principles that characterize global common goods.

⁹⁴ The expression "Universal Responsibility" has been used by the Director of the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation in the editorial "La responsabilité est désormais partagée" in *Un seul monde*, n.1, February 2016.

www.eda.admin.ch/deza/fr/home/publications-services/publications/series-publications/un-seul-monde.html/content/publikationen/fr/deza/eine-welt/eine-welt-1-2016

⁹⁵ For a detailed analysis of the World Bank policies and strategies in education, see: Klees, Samoff and Stromquist (2012)

In this respect, the mandate of UNESCO is specifically that of implementing international cooperation in education, culture and science. Education is considered by the founders of UNESCO “a means to achieve the unity of ‘humanity’ and foster better understanding of different peoples, as a pre-condition for peace in a globalizing world” (Elfert, 2015a). UNESCO within its norm-setting role, as well as leading the coordination of the global agenda for education, is in a privileged position to guide the governance of education as a global common good. Notably, the mandate of this UN agency is “to give every man living his chance to help make humanity more conscious of its unity”⁹⁶. In this respect, the humanistic and universal vision can be realized in “making of education a universal message in order to try, not to unify this world, but to bring together the different parties in their diversity, which means to accept the difference and to respect the other” (Delors, 2004).

International organizations should support States in the implementation of education as a common good at the national level, allowing the participation and inclusion of different actors in a democratic process of policy formulation and implementation.

The Education 2030 Framework for Action

The Education 2030 Framework for Action, adopted in 2015 at the World Education Forum (Incheon, Republic of Korea), contains important elements that draw on the direction as framed by the concept of education as a common good. While recognizing that the State is the main duty bearer and “its role is essential in setting and regulating standards and norms”, it is also acknowledged that “[c]ivil society, teachers and educators, the private sector, communities, families, youth and children all have important roles in realizing the right to quality education.” (UNESCO 2015a:10). Among the several implementation modalities related to ‘Governance, accountability and partnerships’ of the new agenda, the participation of communities is considered as an essential tool to “boost transparency and to guarantee good governance in the education administration” (UNESCO 2015a:79).

⁹⁶ Georges Bidault quoted in Elfert (2015a)

Moreover, one of the indicative strategies to reach Target 4.1⁹⁷ considers the greater involvement of communities, including young people and parents, in the management of schools as essential to “[s]trengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of institutions, school leadership and governance” (UNESCO 2015a:34).

In line with the need to ensure an integrated and holistic approach to education, a necessary component of the approach to education seen as a common good, the indicative strategies related to the means of implementation related to Target 4.a⁹⁸ also suggests that “learning spaces and environments for non-formal and adult learning and education,... including networks of community learning centres and spaces” should be made widely available (UNESCO 2015a:66).

At the same time, international organizations should be democratic in their own ways of functioning if they are to promote democracy in the governance of education at the global level. Indeed, the mechanisms designed to monitor and steer the implementation of the global education agenda have represented an attempt to enhance democratic governance, as embodied in the principle of education as a global common good. The coordination mechanisms established by UNESCO reflect the variety of actors involved in education at the global level. Since 2012, the Steering Committees convened by UNESCO have notably represented the most important mechanisms for the provision of strategic guidance and support in the implementation of the education global agendas.

In particular, the new Global Education 2030 Steering Committee established by the Framework for Action (UNESCO, 2015a) is composed of 38 members representing a majority from Member States of all UNESCO regional groups, as well as co-convening agencies (UNICEF, UNDP, UNFPA, UNHCR, UNWOMEN, ILO, World Bank), Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development and Global Partnership for Education, regional organizations, teacher organizations and civil society networks. In addition, a rotating group of affiliated members is also established which includes representatives of the private sector, foundations, and youth and student organizations.

⁹⁷ Target 4.1: “By 2030, ensure that all girls and boys complete free, equitable and quality primary and secondary education leading to relevant and effective learning outcomes”

⁹⁸ Target 4.a: “Build and upgrade education facilities that are child, disability and gender sensitive and provide safe, non-violent, inclusive and effective learning environments for all”

The composition of the Steering Committee reflects the central role that Member States play in the formulation of strategies and recommendations to implement education policies at the global level.⁹⁹

The efforts towards more democratic processes which have developed in the last few years represent an important attempt to give voice to various actors and promote a common vision, and commitment, to education. It has been argued that there is still need for “increased transparency and commitment to democratic governance linked to decision making processes within the EFA architecture, to ensure that decisions resulting from such processes be fully respected”¹⁰⁰. This is necessary to guarantee that different voices, and representations of worldviews, of conceptions of development and of well-being, are seriously taken into account and can have an influence in the formulation of policies. Indeed, partnerships for the realization of the new global education agenda should be based on this humanistic, and universal, vision of education as a global common good, and all actors involved in the democratic governance of education at the global level should adopt this perspective.

⁹⁹ Moreover, Member States have played a central role also in the development and adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, taking distance from the top-down process that characterized the adoption of the Millennium Development goals Agenda.

¹⁰⁰ Collective Consultation of NGOs on Education for All. 2014. Final Declaration: *Realizing the Right to Education Beyond 2015*. Seventh Meeting of the CCNGO/EFA - Santiago, Chile, 21-23 May 2014.

CONCLUSION

The drafting of this dissertation comes at a crucial moment for the global education community. Over the last two decades, the access to education has expanded at all levels at unprecedented rates, especially at the primary level, resulting in the positive reduction of the number of out-of-school children and adolescents by almost half since 2000 (UNESCO, 2015b). This remarkable progress is due in part to the Education for All and Millennium Development Goals frameworks which have put greater emphasis on the need to ensure education for all, especially at the basic and compulsory levels.

However, despite this significant expansion of access to formal education, the target of universal primary education has not been reached. Too many children still remain out-of-school worldwide and the most disadvantaged continue to be the least likely to be able to access education. The situation is particularly alarming in countries at war and in fragile countries where the share of out-of-school children is most concentrated (UNESCO, 2016a). Moreover, there has been a “progressive acknowledgment of the alarming scale of quality deficit” which has led to a shift in global discussions from a traditional focus on access to a greater concern for the learning actually taking place (UNESCO, 2015b). As investigated throughout this dissertation, the growing demand for education, also resulting from the significant demographic changes occurring worldwide, has placed greater pressure on public financing, already constrained by the global economic and financial crisis of 2008 (UNESCO, 2015c). The trends of privatization and marketization are in part the result of the educational crisis affecting countries both in the global North and in the global South, and from the failure of governments to provide basic education of quality for all.

The global Education 2030 agenda adopted in 2015 “attends to the ‘unfinished business’ of the EFA agenda and the education-related MDGs, and addresses global and national education challenges” (UNESCO, 2015a). However, if past progress rates continue into the future (‘business as usual’), in low income countries universal primary education will be achieved only by 2088 (UNESCO, 2016a). The present crisis of educational systems should encourage the development of innovative solutions able to deal with growing complexity by developing new responses and approaches to public

policy. As the world moves towards the implementation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, a “fundamental change of mindsets [is] needed to trigger action for sustainable development” (UNESCO, 2015b, p. 11). The Incheon Declaration also calls for “bold and innovative actions, to reach [the education] ambitious goal by 2030” (UNESCO, 2015a:20).

This renewed global commitment may represent an opportunity for bringing about a comprehensive discussion to rethink educational governance substantially in order to address the challenges coming from the new global education scenario and to implement more effective and ethical international education policies. The challenges facing education systems worldwide may be seized as an opportunity to rethink the ways in which public institutions are organized and for what purposes. As argued in Hirsch (2016), there is a need for “(re)build[ing] those social institutions and processes that help solve our collective problems” (p. 113).

It is against this backdrop that the theoretical discussion of this study is conducted. The analysis and the re-contextualization of principles of governance appear essential in order to fully understand the policy implications resulting from the adoption of different frameworks and to identify potential strategies for innovative reforms. As illustrated in this dissertation, the choice between an approach to education considered as a public good or as private and marketable good is far from irrelevant and it often brings about contrasting imaginaries and priorities with implications for public policy that vary considerably. This choice should be made by governments. Given the ‘peculiar nature’ of education (Levin, 2000), serving both public and private interests and purposes, public institutions are asked to find the balance between these two apparently contrasting approaches so as not to undermine the fundamental principles of equity, social justice and equality of opportunity. This is something which cannot be left in the hands of individuals or households who also have to deal with private needs and aspirations.

In a context of greater privatization and marketization of education, the revisited concept of education as a public good, as explored in Chapter four of this dissertation, calls for the development of democratic institutions able to deal with confrontation and to favor participation in order to promote a comprehensive discussion on the

foundational elements of educational policy and practice. While reaffirming the importance of the role of the State in the provision and funding of education opportunities, the greater participation of non-state actors requires that the State strengthens above all its regulatory function in order to preserve the public sphere. Indeed, the public sphere is certainly ‘under attack’ as neoliberal claims and managerial approaches have decreased this “space of criticism” (Apple, 2006).

Despite the fact that neoliberalism has been one of the determinant forces which has contributed to the robust rates of economic growth in many countries, the model of development based on liberalization and on the predominance of market mechanisms has been deemed as the cause for the return of inequality to the levels existing one century ago (Mason, 2015). Indeed, significant inequalities persist throughout countries worldwide (UNESCO, 2015c). According to studies conducted by Oxfam, economic inequality is rising, with the “85 richest individuals in the world hav[ing] as much wealth as the poorest half of the global population” (Oxfam, 2014). Moreover, unsustainable patterns of consumption and production are causing ecological stress and degradation, with consequences for livelihood and stability in many countries (UNESCO, 2015c). For these reasons, the neoliberal model appears to have failed in providing sustainable solutions for social and human well-being (Mason, 2015). By undermining equality and social justice, marketization puts the very functioning of healthy democratic systems at risk (Ball, 2007; Burch, 2009; Mazawi, 2013).

However, restructuring the *public* depends on a strong political will which aims at revisiting those rules that have favored the expansion of market ideologies at the expense of equality and democracy. Since market alone cannot exist without an explicit State intervention, it is important to understand which rules are being implemented and which norms, values, and systems of power, these rules reflect. As argued by many scholars, the challenge is not merely about the choice between the State and the market, but an essential issue of democracy which concerns both the quality of the State and of the market (Rizvi, 2016; Reich, 2015; Apple, 2006; Hirsch, 2016).

With regard to education, the way the public sphere should be reconstituted requires a radical change in the approach to education policy and practices (Burch, 2009; Apple, 2006). A simple defense of the public sector is not useful to counterbalance the

distortive effects of privatization in the field of education (Ball, 2007; Burch, 2009). Indeed, the effects of economic market-driven approaches have had a significant impact on education, “since the point was reached when money, having become all-powerful, changed cultural and moral attitudes” (UNESCO, 1993, p.1)¹⁰¹. The response to privatization “cannot be based on the simple assertion that everything we now have has to be defended” (Apple, 2006). To address the long-standing crisis in education systems this study argues that there is need for a shift in culture, a transformative change in order to significantly revisit and reshape the way of functioning of public institutions themselves (UNESCO, 2016a; Apple and Beane 2007; Hursch, 2016; Tedesco, 1995).

For this change to be possible and practicable, minimum and enabling conditions are necessary. First and foremost, there should be democratically established public institutions and a political environment which favors both participation and accountability. This not only depends largely on agreement and a strong political will but, in order to introduce new approaches and perspectives able to deal with change and complexity, also on the need to have “accurate diagnoses concerning the current situation, a considerable amount of information concerning global trends and mechanisms for evaluating the actions undertaken, which can be used to introduce changes before results harden and become too difficult and too costly to modify” (Tedesco, 1995, p. 110).

The contribution of all actors is increasingly fundamental in order to promote the development of democratic institutions able to innovate and identify more structured responses to the crisis of educational systems. Indeed, it has been shown that the adoption of market mechanisms and the provision of standardized solutions to the problems facing education worldwide may lead to forms of exclusion and discrimination.

The arguments discussed in this thesis

It has been illustrated in this study that building constructive and sustainable alternatives requires education to be considered as *both* a public *and* a common good. Indeed, the concept of common goods may help to develop new approaches likely to

¹⁰¹ For more details regarding UNESCO’s humanism see: Elfert (2015a)

integrate the notion of education as a public good with the fundamental social and cultural components of education in order to enhance a transformative and alternative system of governance that promotes education not only as an economic tool for individual progress but above all as a collective endeavor for the fulfillment of human-beings and of their communities. In this light, it is suggested that a change is needed in the way in which public and governmental power is used for the promotion of a greater complementation of both top-down and bottom-up approaches (UNESCO, 2016a).

As illustrated in the last chapter, building on alternative practices which oppose the processes of privatization and marketization, the notion of common goods promotes the development of instruments of participatory democracy and puts greater emphasis on the networks of solidarity among citizens and groups. It is about suggesting a transformation of public institutions through greater participation of citizens in the introduction of viable policies and practices in order to overcome more utilitarian and individualistic approaches and build more democratic schooling systems. As argued by Hursch (2016), “we need to develop democratic processes that place educators, parents, and students in the center of decision making. Such changes will require more than protesting the neoliberal agenda; it will also necessitate developing new social structures” (p. 107).

Having said this, it has also been suggested that the principle of education as a common good does not propose easy solutions since it depends on a strong political commitment, willing to call into question current cultural orientations and institutions in order to promote innovation and social change based on the values of human dignity and freedom. More structured and innovative responses to the challenges facing educational systems need to be carefully designed and require trust in the democratic functioning of institutions. Indeed, unlike corporate reforms which tend to reduce the spaces of participation, new responses which build on the concept of education as a common good, and which can see people taking more responsibilities, need to be based both on trust and community, and this can be more easily achieved in those contexts where the principles of equality and equity are safeguarded (Hursch, 2016).

The role of civil society is increasingly crucial in the development of alternatives that take into consideration the diversity of contexts. The contribution of civil society

organizations at all levels of the education endeavor may help in the analysis of current realities and in the monitoring of education policies. Their role is essential in enabling the voices of all citizens to be heard and in influencing the functioning of public institutions. Strengthening partnerships with civil society organizations would mean that governments would have the possibility of developing public education systems that take into consideration both innovation and inclusion. Indeed, it is widely acknowledged that when the public sector accepts and integrates different contributions in order to innovate and invest in the quality of education, it is generally more preferred over the private sector.

It has also been argued that the concept of education as a common good should favor a humanistic vision of education and the enhancement of the cultural and social dimensions of each educational process. With regard to the private sector, this feature requires that corporate actors replace mere for-profit market logics with social objectives (Bruni, 2012). Private actors should be called on to manage educational services ethically and sensitively without profit representing the only motivation. It requires the establishment of forms of cooperation that replace the logics of economic competition. This does not mean prohibiting all kind of profits to private actors, but creating a system of accountability and control which ensures that profits are limited and reinvested in social actions. It is about rediscovering the ethical underpinnings of economic theory itself, grounded in social relationships more than in economic transactions and profit-making purposes (Bruni, 2012).

A shift in the relationships of current arrangements of power between the private corporate sector and public institutions is therefore required in order to develop forms of cooperation based on partnerships that favor the many, not the few. Indeed, when “genuinely based on exchange and mutual benefit”, partnerships may contribute to the development of a new form of cooperation (Delors, 1996, p. 183).

The private sector may have an important role in society as long as it is able to work with citizens and public institutions in the development of new ways to achieve shared societal goals. This is based on the acknowledgment that viable solutions are those which are culturally and socially fair. As illustrated in the third chapter, the closure of the for-profit chain of low-fee private schools in Uganda is a clear sign that when

education solutions are designed and developed without the direct involvement of citizens, teachers, parents and students, the final result is far from sustainable and acceptable both in economic and in socio-cultural terms.

It is necessary to acknowledge the positive contributions that private actors may provide, while also paying increasing attention on the limitations and challenges of private involvement in the education sector. As stated by Minow (2003), “the preconditions for a constitutional democracy are also its stated values; a population with the freedom and equality to pursue self-governance is both the end and the means of democratic political systems. Private actors could either undermine this alignment of ends and means or strengthen it and the values of pluralism and freedom it pursues” (Minow, 2003).

For structured and viable alternatives to be sustainable, it is also necessary that both the national and global levels are aligned to a vision of education seen as a public and common good. Indeed, it is widely acknowledged that there is a progressive shift in the locus of decision-making from the State to the global level with the constitution of complex global governance arrangements (UNESCO, 2015c). This study suggests that the concept of education as a global common good may call for the adoption of a cultural shift also regarding international cooperation in the field of education.

At this particular historical moment, international organizations such as UNESCO can play a leading role as public international institutions, representing most of the States of the world in fostering the establishment of mechanisms that can monitor and facilitate the implementation of policies that favor a humanistic approach and the democratic governance of education. Leading the global agenda for education, UNESCO is in a privileged position to facilitate international cooperation in education based on a vision of education seen as a common good. Indeed “the common good is a typical UNESCO concept as it has a long tradition in all cultures” (Elfert, 2015b).

Democratic governance at the global level can be strengthened by the participation of governments and other global actors able to identify, protect, and enhance different visions of development. Indeed, international civil society organizations, as well as popular movements, are playing an increasing influential role in global arenas. These

actors may be able to seize the voice of the most vulnerable and marginalized, boosting the values of social justice, equity, and solidarity among human-beings. Moreover, cooperation among universities and research centers worldwide could help identify new structures and arrangements necessary for the realization of these alternative visions in different contexts.

All these factors are necessary to define a societal project open to the contributions of all cultures, knowing that common development is the result of the cooperation among diverse worldviews, systems of knowledge and experiences. Achieving education as a global common good requires an effective and substantial democratic governance at the global level, based on the adoption of a different cultural perspective on issues that affect us all.

Directions for future research

The analysis conducted in this study has enabled the identification of other possible directions for future research which have not been dealt with in this dissertation.

First and foremost, this thesis is based on the critical analysis of principles of governance and has aimed at providing greater conceptual clarity which is fundamental for a better understanding of tensions and contradictions deriving from the use, or misuse, of different concepts and for identifying policy implications. A more concrete understanding of contexts and conditions that may encourage or discourage the adoption of specific frameworks would be relevant and would add significant elements to the discussion conducted here. For instance, a sociological field study, which would enable the analysis of the conditions that have contributed in a specific context to a revisiting of education policies based on participation and democratic decision-making, would represent a significant contribution to the advancement of the discussion on the possibilities for concrete and transformative changes in the governance of education.

Moreover, as illustrated in the introduction, the objective of this study was delimited to analyses of the primary education level. The entire work has aimed at revisiting the role of the State and at identifying possible new avenues for innovation and cooperation at this particular level. Understanding the policy implications of the concept of education as a public good for other levels would be relevant in order to deal with the

new global Education 2030 agenda which also puts greater emphasis on the secondary level and adopts a perspective based on lifelong learning. Since the role of the State is deemed as fundamental to achieving this renewed commitment, different studies on the policy implications of the principle of education as a public and common good at post-compulsory level would also be valuable for the identification of sustainable policy and practices.

Finally, since this study has offered a perspective on issues related to public and common goods basically at the national level, touching only marginally on global arrangements, a more detailed analysis of the concept of education as a global common good may provide important elements for the governance of education at the global level. A more complete understanding of the implications of the concept of education as a global common good for the functioning of international organizations and their visions of education would facilitate the development of innovative approaches to issues related to education from a global perspective.

Potential contributions

Given the complexity of the subject in question, this thesis may provide some more clarity with regard to the use and significance of important concepts that drive the formulation of educational policies. As discussed in the introduction, theoretical critical analysis contributes to a better understanding of the issues that are behind the adoption of specific concepts. This study can be included in the type of “research *of* policy” (Desjardins and Rubenson, 2009) which does not directly aim at offering concrete solutions for the formulation of policies, but at least clarifies the meanings and implications that may arise from the adoption of different policy frameworks.

It has been argued that there is an unprecedented need to strengthen the role of the State at this time of increasing involvement of non-state actors at all levels of the education endeavor. The analysis of the concept of education as a public good has tried to provide greater clarity on the roles and functions of public institutions, not only in the provision and funding of education opportunities, but also with regard to the regulatory and monitoring roles which become even more essential for the democratic governance of education systems. The State is determinant for the elaboration of alternative

frameworks that encourage cooperation among state and non-state actors, indicating a particular vision of education that is also a political project for a democratic society, in contrast to a vision of education serving individual economic interests.

In line with one of the roles of “research *of* policy”, this analysis has also tried to ‘expand theory and thinking’ by identifying new frameworks that may inspire the adoption of innovative visions more relevant to the diversity of contexts and needs of societies worldwide. Indeed, besides revisiting and reaffirming education as a public good, it is also argued that the concept of common goods may contribute to the advancement and rethinking of democratic public institutions. The effects of neoliberal policies driven merely by market approaches to education have to be softened and complemented by more structured responses that build on the forces of society and empower them to become actively involved in the process of education policy formulation and implementation. This is necessary in order to build systems that are sustainable and therefore inclusive and equitable.

In line with the extensive scholarly debate on the need to strengthen democratic schools, and to rethink the State in a context of privatization and marketization both *of* and *in* education (Ball and Youdell, 2008), this study has tried to provide greater conceptual clarity of different concepts and frameworks for the identification of innovative and democratic solutions based on a vision of education seen not merely as an economic tool, but mainly as the process through which human-beings and society fully develop.

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