INTRODUCTION

Reconfiguring Education Purposes, Policies and Practices during Post-socialist Transformations: setting the stage

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This volume revisits the book edited by David Phillips and Michael Kaser in 1992, entitled *Education and Economic Change in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union*. That book demonstrated 'the immensity of the tasks facing educational development' in the region and at the same time showed the 'extraordinary optimism and idealism of those charged with implementing change' (Kaser & Phillips, 1992, p. 13). Two and a half decades later, our volume reflects on how post-socialist countries [1] have engaged with what Kaser and Phillips called 'the flush of educational freedom' (p. 13), offering analyses of education policies and practices that the countries in this region have been developing and implementing since the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1991.

Unlike the original book, that largely focused on post-socialist Southeast and Central Europe (Poland, Hungary, Romania, Czechoslovakia, New Germany), the majority of chapters in this volume examine the countries of the former USSR (Armenia, Estonia, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Russia, Ukraine). The shift of the geographical focus eastwards could be explained by the fact that the editors at the time of publication of the original book had limited access to people and knowledge from the former Soviet countries, while information on the developments in Eastern Europe was more accessible. Since then, knowledge production in/about post-Soviet education has increased significantly, resulting in more active knowledge exchange and publication flows in and out of this part of the post-socialist region (Chankseliani, 2017). At the same time, it is possible that the theme of comparing *post-socialist* education transformations may have

become less relevant for some researchers in Southeast/Central Europe who have been increasingly more preoccupied with comparing education dynamics in and across the European Union (EU) rather than within the post-socialist region, especially following their countries' accession to the EU in 2004 and 2010.[2] As Hann et al (2002) noted, sooner or later, 'the category of postsocialism is likely to break apart and disappear' as the term itself is often perceived to signify 'a constricting, even insulting label, something imposed from outside that seems to imply constraints on the freedom of people in these countries to determine their own futures' (p. 13).

Indeed, we are acutely aware of the limitations of the term 'post-socialism' and note the additional constraints it entails, including the risks of homogenising the geopolitical, historical, and cultural diversity of the region, universalising the variety of post-socialist conditions, or rendering invisible the unique histories and future imaginaries of education in different countries of Southeast/Central Europe and the former Soviet Union (see Tlostanova, 2012; Silova et al, 2017). Yet, we deliberately chose to use this term for the purposes of our volume because it offers, despite its limitations, a productive lens to interpret the complex dynamics and shifting nature of education transformations in the region. In this context, the term 'post-socialist' goes beyond the geographical boundaries of the countries in Southeast/Central Europe and the former Soviet Union; rather, it captures the region as both a geopolitical and epistemological construct. Rooted in the historical legacies of the Cold War, the term 'post-socialist' as a geopolitical construct serves as a reminder of the artificial division of the world (or the so-called three worlds ideology'), signalling the ambiguities of geopolitical boundaries and revealing the coexistence of 'multiple postsocialist spaces, places, and times' as well as their relatedness based on various political, geographical, economic or historical commonalities (Silova et al, 2017, p. 76). As an epistemological construct echoing the notion of the 'south' in 'Southern Theory', the term 'post-socialist' reminds us about the persisting socialist legacies in culture, subjectivity and knowledge, while pointing to the potential of the region to serve as 'a source of unique but often un- or misrecognized knowledge developed through layered and localized experiences of socialism and coloniality' (Silova et al, 2017, p. 77). As such, the term 'post-socialism' marks an intellectual space that has the potential to disrupt the hegemony of dominant globalisation narratives, while enabling us to see, experience and interpret ongoing post-socialist education transformations through the lens of pluralities.

Broadly speaking, our book aims to explore three interrelated questions. First, it seeks to capture complex reconfigurations of education purposes during post-socialist transformations, noting the emergence of neoliberal education imaginaries in post-socialist spaces and their effects on policy discussions about education quality and equity across the region. Second, the book examines the ongoing tensions inherent in post-socialist transformations, suggesting that beneath the surface of dominant neoliberal

narratives there are always powerful countercurrents – ranging from the persisting socialist legacies to re-emerging premodern imaginaries to other alternative conceptualisations of education futures. Although often invisible in mainstream education policy and practice, a more careful examination of these countercurrents helps us understand the diverse trajectories of post-socialist education transformations. And finally, the book engages with the question of 'comparison', prompting both the contributing authors and our readers to reflect on how research on post-socialist education transformations can contribute to rethinking comparative methods in education across space and time.

Reconfigurations of Education Purposes during Post-socialist Transformations

Changing education institutions is hard; changing education institutions to change society is even harder. Educators work at the same time to reproduce society, to transmit knowledge and culture, and also to improve society, to enable students to have more choices and be freer than their parents. The conceptualisation of the relationships between education and societal change usually involves viewing education as an image/reflection of society (Durkheim, 1897) that 'perpetuate[s] and reinforce[s] this homogeneity by fixing in the mind of the child ... the essential similarities that social life demands' (Durkheim, 1972, p. 203), and/or as a driver of change (Baker, 2014; Carnoy & Samoff, 1990). The history of education can be interpreted as the struggle between these two missions: the mission that seeks to conserve society, its traditions, knowledge, institutions and structures, and one that seeks to transform it.

The struggle between these two missions has been highly pronounced during the post-socialist education transformations. However, the notorious resistance to change has been under-investigated in the comparative and international education literature on post-Soviet countries (Chankseliani, 2017).

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, post-socialist countries of Eastern Europe, Russia, the Caucasus and Central Asia have faced simultaneous demands of political and economic transformations, usually formulated as a strategic move away from the socialist past and towards a (Western) European future. Education has been both a driver and a reflection of such transformations, playing a central role in the discussions of policy futures associated with Europeanisation, democratisation and market-orientated globalisation. At the same time, national education systems and practices have shown considerable path dependence, with teachers continuing to teach and leaders continuing to lead the same way they used to do in the Soviet times. Further complicating the nature of post-socialist transformations, education policy imaginaries and school practices in some

countries have invoked ideas that reach back into pre-socialist (and perhaps pre-modern) times.

In this context, how have the purposes of education been (re)conceptualised during the period of post-socialist transformations? Most of the chapters in this volume grapple with this question, illustrating how education purposes have been reshaped by the changing nature of societies, their socioeconomic, political and cultural heritage, as well as their visions for the future. According to Nicholas De Witt (1961), the purpose of Soviet education was to serve the collectivist state, not the individual. The collectivist state commonly identified itself with the common good and always aimed at subordinating individuals' rights and choices as well as their training to its own needs. 'It is only within the confines of choice determined by the state that the individual may develop his personal abilities', wrote De Witt (1961, p. 5). This included 'remould[ing] the character of the individual and [inculcating] a uniform pattern of prescribed beliefs, attitudes, sentiments, and values consonant with communist ideology' (De Witt, 1961, p. 5).

The quality of education during the Soviet period was defined in practical, applied terms, and vocational occupations used to be highly valued and children were taught that only through work for the general good could they attain happiness (Zajda, 1980). A survey of upper-secondary school students in 1974 showed that 'labour, serving the society, and contributing to the happiness of others were for them the most important social and moral values which determined the purpose and meaning of life' (Zajda, 1980, p. 125). A central aim of the Soviet school system was the development of communist morality, emphasising such traits as a sense of good and bad behaviour; truthfulness, honesty, kindness; atheism; self-discipline; diligence in work and care of possessions; friendship with classmates; love of one's own locality and the Motherland (Bronfenbrenner, 1971; Higgins, 1995; Kliucharev & Muckle, 2005). The USSR designed and implemented a number of educational reforms in the period from the late 1950s to the late 1970s. However, continuity in education policy direction was retained to some degree (Tomiak, 1986; Grant, 1992; Chankseliani, 2017).

The purposes of education have been (re)conceptualised with the arrival of the capitalist market economy and the departure from the exclusive focus on the needs of the communist state. While the economic and political purposes of education continue to be highly relevant, the social and moral purposes that used to be at the core of the Soviet system of education have become less visible. Instead, most governments in the region have prioritised the political and economic purposes of education. The political purposes of education mostly serve the interests of nation (re)building, including but not limited to national unification, regional influence (soft power), and international legitimacy. In some cases, these also include European integration and international legitimisation (see more on these below). Meanwhile, the economic purposes of education have been viewed largely

within the human capital framework. This includes accounts of the acquisition of skills and knowledge in order to increase the productivity and competitiveness of individuals and nation-states, ultimately leading to economic modernisation and the creation of a knowledge economy. Within the human capital framework, the social and moral purposes of education are typically overlooked (Mercer et al, 2010). Many post-socialist countries appear to have prioritised – at least in policy discourse – purely pragmatic ideas about developing human capital, establishing particular expectations for post-socialist education transformations.

Given the prevalent focus on the political and economic purposes of education, it is not surprising that issues of education quality – rather than issues of equality/equity – have received predominant attention in policy and school practice accounts as well as in the academic literature. Reflecting the state of the art, education quality appears to be the common ground that unites most of the chapters included in this volume. Predominantly, education quality is conceptualised in terms of the ability of the system to achieve the predefined purposes of education.

In the Soviet Union, where education was viewed as a public good to meet the social, moral and economic needs of the society, as well as the political aims of the ruling class, education quality was a state responsibility. Education was entirely funded and managed by the state and all efforts were made to unify educational systems in 15 constituent republics, as explained by Khavenson in this volume and Mitter (1992) in the original book by Phillips and Kaser (1992). However, the narrowing down of educational purposes to the economic and political dimensions in the post-Soviet context brought about new conceptualisations of education quality, as illustrated in the chapter on Russia, China and Brazil in the current volume (Minina et al), as well as in that on Armenia and Ukraine (Milovanovich & Lapham). In particular, Minina et al argue that quality was 're-interpreted in the neoliberal paradigm', becoming a major policy issue broken down into different stakeholder-, context-, input-, process-, output-, outcome- and performance-specific concepts and indicators.

Changes in understanding education quality were accompanied by changes in measuring quality through new mechanisms of evaluation and accountability (Minina et al in this volume). Arguably, in the early 1990s, the 'quality revolution' declared by the Russian government was driven by the transition from quality-control to quality-assurance paradigms (Minina, 2017). There were three new phenomena introduced in the discourses on quality in Russia: external quality assessment, stakeholder quality criteria, and a national system of quality assurance. Education stakeholders such as students, parents, employers and civil society were reconceptualised as consumers of education. Thus, the system was now viewed not as accountable to the state, as in the former socialist countries, but as accountable to the stakeholders, leading to re-defining education as a private rather than a public good.

Translating Economic Purposes of Education into Policies

Education reforms directed at the development of knowledge economies prioritised the role of the market over the state and took a clear neoliberal turn in many countries as part of their transition to a free market economy (Lauder, 2006; Amsler, 2008; Chankseliani, 2014). Traditionally, there have been three major neoliberal arguments – related to efficiency and effectiveness, fiscal constraints, and equality – rationalising the increase of the market role in education. The efficiency and effectiveness argument relates to the idea that publicly financed education is of poor quality and low internal efficiency (Colclough, 1997), demonstrated by teacher absenteeism and poor school infrastructure, among other things. The proponents of education system privatisation, which is a central 'ideological imperative' of neoliberalism (Zajda, 1980), argue that it increases efficiency gains, as public schools are competing with private schools and try to change their institutional structure. Chubb and Moe (1990), for example, maintain that private schools are more autonomous as they are controlled by the market and less political; therefore, their structure is less bureaucratic and student achievement is higher. The latter argument has been often used together with the democratic notion of free choice. The fiscal constraint argument explains that governments in developing countries do not have enough resources available from traditional revenue instruments (Colclough, 1997). Finally, the equality argument revolves around the idea that the state misallocates resources; some people are altogether denied access and others, mostly rich, benefit from it (Colclough, 1997). Also, the public sector cannot put things right as the interest groups on whom governments depend are richer and therefore the resource allocation will always be inequitable (Colclough, 1997). Those who promote market solutions maintain that marketisation allows families from lower socioeconomic backgrounds to select better schools outside their area of residence, and can ensure the provision of better-quality education to the poor (Kwong, 2000; Tooley et al, 2009).

A deliberate marriage between the neoliberal paradigm and democratic ideals may explain the expansion of marketisation policies across the globe and in the former socialist countries in particular. In the post-socialist space, however, marketisation policies (and neoliberal policies more broadly) have raised strong scepticism and critique among researchers and education stakeholders (see Lapham et al, 2014; Silova et al, 2014). In particular, marketisation of education systems in the post-socialist region has been associated with optimisation and reorganisation of public educational institutions, the emergence of private providers, as well as voucher financing of schools and universities (Silova & Steiner-Khamsi, 2008; Chankseliani, 2014). The first two types of reforms resulted in considerable changes in institutional landscapes. The educational institution optimisation that took place in a number of post-Soviet countries led to a shut-down or consolidation of compulsory and post-compulsory education institutions (see Chankseliani, 2014; Milovanovich & Lapham in this volume). Academic and

research institutions were also affected by the processes of institutional reorganisation. Academies of Science were disestablished in many countries, and research institutes that used to be part of Academies of Science were merged with higher education institutions. Estonia was one of the first countries in the region to implement this reform (Valk, 2008). This process, as explained by Tamtik and Sabzalieva in their discussion of education reforms in Estonia and Kazakhstan in this volume, was guided by European experiences of institutional autonomy, the credit system, and accreditation involving external experts. The process of institutional reorganisation was driven by the goal of establishing the knowledge economy through research-based knowledge production and increasing global competitiveness by connecting research and teaching at higher education institutions.

At the same time, a number of new educational institutions emerged, many of these private. Private higher education institutions and fee-paying sectors in public universities were established to meet the increasing demand for university education (Chankseliani, 2013). Public higher education institutions opened their doors to fee-paying students who did not have sufficient academic preparation to enrol in publicly funded places at public universities. The emergence of private schools was rather driven by the demand for a different type of schooling than the unmet demand for schooling as often happens in other developing countries of Asia and Africa. Private schooling has been complementing rather than substituting public schooling in the post-Soviet context (Chankseliani, 2014). However, not all new educational institutions were private – for instance, the Nazarbayev Intellectual Schools and Nazarbayev University in Kazakhstan operate as public education institutions. The latter is described as being 'at the vanguard of the country's effort to put its university system on a global footing in terms of quality and delivery' (Nazarbayev University, 2013, p. 6). The reader will find more on this in Tamtik and Sabzalieva's chapter in this volume.

Linked with the optimisation of school systems is the per capita or the so-called voucher financing of education. Voucher financing is recognised as 'the most prominent market reform in education' (Levin & Belfield, 2003, p. 185) as it allows students and parents to choose providers and often diverts public resources in support of private provision, allegedly promoting competition, choice and efficiency. For example, Janashia's chapter in this volume explains how Latvia and Georgia introduced per capita funding when they had governments with strong neoliberal orientation – since the mid-1990s in Latvia and almost a decade later in Georgia. Janashia's chapter discusses these two different market-based models of per capita financing, one of which (Georgia) was rather more extreme than the other (Latvia). The chapter also shows the role of international organisations versus local actors in introducing these systems in the two former socialist contexts.

Educational research promoting the marketisation agenda often ignores the evidence that choice is available only to those parents who can afford to

make choices; the disadvantaged do not have choices (Whitty et al, 1998; Lauder & Hughes, 1999; Reay & Lucey, 2003). There are equity implications related to the private choice of disadvantaged families. Belfield and Levin (2002) demonstrate that richer and more educated families gain more benefits from privatisation than poor and less educated families. Research also shows that parents with higher socioeconomic status (SES) have all the necessary resources to fully use the choice option, whereas the lower SES parents do not have the same resources in terms of information, additional resources to meet the tuition costs, or transportation (Goldhaber, 1999; Carnoy, 2000; McEwan & Carnoy, 2000; Levin & Belfield, 2003). Thus, individuals may need equal access opportunity to different levels of education rather than the much-promoted free choice which they may not be able to utilise.

Linked with the strengthening of the idea(l)s of marketisation is the observation that during the post-socialist transformations, individualisation and competition have become much more pronounced than the equal treatment of all and the related one-size-fits-all approaches, which used to be more prominent during the socialist period. This has been demonstrated at different levels, including curriculum reform. Khavenson writes in her chapter in this volume that her research participants in Estonia and Latvia often talked about the concepts that had been brought about by the education reform, such as individualisation. The interviews in both Baltic countries showed that teachers pay considerable attention to individual students' performance in specific subjects; they are ready to give different tasks to different students and to assess students' progress individually, increasing student motivation to solve different numbers of items on the same test. According to the evidence analysed in Khavenson's chapter, the one-size-fits-all approach was associated with Soviet education, and post-Soviet Russian-medium schools in Estonia and Latvia no longer rely on it.

Finally, per capita funding is often discussed in the context of educational decentralisation, especially in the former socialist countries. Similar to Latvia, municipalities in Armenia and Ukraine were put in a position to take responsibility for school budgets. As Milovanovich and Lapham explain in this volume, this was a way to remove costly services from the national balance sheets in Armenia and Ukraine. Strongly encouraged (and sometimes imposed) by international development agencies, decentralisation in these two countries also resulted in reductions in the numbers of teachers and cuts in extra-curricular activities. Large disparities emerged by region and by school. In Armenia, for example, a 43% difference in funding allocation was discovered between two schools in comparable locations. Such situations may be bordering on corruption. When education is severely underfunded and its purpose is viewed as serving the needs of the society, there may be incentives for schools and parents to come up with new shadow solutions mostly involving informal payments, such as private tutoring with school teachers and informal payments to support schools. In

their chaper in this volume, Milovanovich and Lapham describe the cases of Armenia and Ukraine in great detail to show how these informal remedial solutions lead to the favourable treatment of individuals who take up private tutoring with their school teachers or whose parents make informal contributions to schools; they also show that these informal remedial practices are usually rather efficient at the school level, but far from providing equal treatment or outcomes to education recipients, or ensuring system-level efficiency.

Translating Political Purposes of Education into Policies and Practices

While pursuing the economic purposes of education, the post-socialist states have continued to use education as a tool for setting political agendas that revolve around the ideas of nation (re)building and unification, as well as expanding regional influence. In some cases, nation (re)building has also involved efforts for pursuing European integration and achieving international legitimacy.

European integration has been a powerful driver for education reforms in many post-socialist countries, specifically those countries that have aspired to join the EU. In the Baltic States, for example, pressures to adopt European values were particularly strong, as 'being left out wasn't politically acceptable' (Valk, 2008, p. 3). Responding to political conditionalities associated with the EU accession processes, these countries substantially changed their national curricula to align them with European quality standards. Focusing on education reforms in Russian language schools in Estonia and Latvia, for example, Khavenson describes this process in her chapter in this volume and compares student achievement results in the Baltic States with those in Russia where schools have continued to teach in the traditional, Soviet way until very recently, when new reforms were introduced in 2010 and implemented in 2012.

European integration was a strategic component of higher education development as well. In particular, the Bologna Process provided an opportunity of integrating local higher education systems with the European Higher Education Area by introducing the three-cycle system (bachelor/master/doctorate), developing quality assurance, and simplifying recognition of qualifications and periods of study. Out of 29 post-socialist countries, all except four Central Asian countries (Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) and Kosovo are not part of the Bologna Process. Those closer to Western Europe were the first to join in 1999, and among these were the Baltic States. Kazakhstan, that is geographically farther away, joined only in 2010.

The Bologna Process has directly influenced higher education reforms in many post-socialist states. For example, in their chaper in this volume, Tamtik and Sabzalieva outline three goals of the Estonian Higher Education

Strategy 2006-2015, which reflects aspirations for Europeanisation and internationalisation more broadly: strengthening the international dimension of higher education institutions and participating as an equal partner in regional and Europe-wide academic cooperation; introducing higher education quality assurance on a level comparable to the Nordic countries and the EU; and ensuring the appropriate funding base for higher education. Furthermore, Tamtik and Sabzalieva show how flagship universities in Estonia and Kazakhstan have sought international legitimacy by striving to establish themselves as global players, thus (re)building identities that are pivotal for obtaining international recognition. While Estonia is attempting to do this by drawing on European values such as academic freedom and institutional autonomy, Kazakhstan is advocating for new standards to build on its hybrid identities of Kazakh (linked to a political entity), Kazakhstani (focusing on its multi-ethnic and Eurasian elements), and transnational (emphasising global image and reputation) (Laruelle, 2014). This hybridity is epitomised through Kazakhstan's self-representation as a symbolic bridge between the East and the West (Marat, 2009) in order perhaps to introduce independent Kazakhstan to the world through education (e.g. Nazarbayev University).

At the same time, post-socialist states have invested in their national unification agendas. Education has been viewed as 'the main vehicle of the state to consolidate the nation' by 'resuscitat[ing] languages and cultures that have played a subordinate role under the past communist regime' (Janmaat, 2008, pp. 1-2). Khavenson's chapter looks at the Baltic States that implemented reforms aiming at the 'de-ideologisation' of curriculum, revising textbooks and teaching materials, and retraining teachers in schools with the national language of instruction.

As shown in Khavenson's and Goodman and Karabassova's chapters, the language of instruction has been a core aspect of educational reforms aiming to serve nation-building agendas. Because of their ethnic and linguistic heterogeneity, which was largely due to the Soviet policies of 'silent Russification' (Anweiler, 1992, p. 31), some former Soviet countries have had particularly complicated experiences using education for nation (re)building. In Latvia and Estonia, for example, the USSR made increasing efforts popularise Russian, leading to a dramatic decline in the number of schools with indigenous languages of instruction (Anweiler, 1992). As explained by Khavenson, the situation changed after the dissolution of the USSR. Similar to the Estonian case, the Latvian language was adopted as the medium of instruction in all schools and as 'the language of unification' based on the new national standard, which was approved in 1998.

In both Ukraine and Kazakhstan, keeping Russian as a language of instruction for ethnic minorities has allowed the governments to acknowledge the importance of national cohesion. Both countries prioritised their national languages – Ukrainian and Kazakh, respectively, followed by foreign (non-Russian) languages. Kazakhstan has committed to having 20% of the

population speaking English by 2020. While Russian is one of the three languages promoted by the government of Kazakhstan as a part of the trilingual education policy that aims to elevate the use of Kazakh, Russian and English among the country's population, it is at the bottom of the language priority list in Ukraine (Goodman & Karabassova in this volume). As explained by Anweiler (1992) in the original volume in this series (by Phillips & Kaser, 1992), in many former Soviet countries, English is becoming more popular at the expense of Russian, signalling 'the restitution of the traditional affiliation of the majority to the Latin heritage of Europe' (p. 31).

In their chapter in this volume, Goodman and Karabassova explain how Kazakhstan has been developing the policies and practices of trilingual education, while making significant investments in teaching in English to support the state programme of industrial innovation development and to enhance global competitiveness. Despite the concerns from Kazakhstani educators that the trilingual education policy with a focus on English may diminish the role of the Kazakh language (Goodman & Karabassova), the so-called Trinity of Languages project has been implemented in about 82 schools and 42 higher education institutions across the country. Teaching is undertaken in Kazakh and English, while Russian is taught as a separate language subject. Starting from 2017-2018, all preschools have introduced elements of trilingualism and all first graders are expected to shift to the trilingual education model.

Although the new language policies may be serving the purpose of national unification and European integration, there is insufficient evidence that the trilingual policy, for instance, helps individuals (and the country) to become more academically competitive and linguistically proficient. Based on the findings from existing research, Goodman and Karabassova show that the trilingual policies and practices in Kazakhstan are somewhat problematic as trilingual schools do not currently lead to the multilingual proficiency of their graduates. There are also concerns among Kazakhstani educators that knowledge of academic subjects may suffer when the language of instruction is the central priority. Meanwhile, Khavenson argues that the introduction of bilingual education policies in the Baltic States has not undermined the quality of education among students in Russian language schools. In fact, she argues that language reforms in Estonia and Latvia, which were accompanied by some broader changes in teaching pedagogy, have resulted in higher student achievement outcomes compared with those in Russia where reforms have been delayed.

Finally, education has been used for the purpose of retaining regional influence or what some would call soft power interests. This has been done in the context of the internationalisation of education, which has been gaining momentum in the former socialist countries. On the one hand, we have an old player, Russia, that is expanding its soft power by providing education (often fully funded) to students from former Soviet countries (Malinovskiy &

Chankseliani, forthcoming). On the other hand, there are a number of cases of rapid internationalisation for the purposes of gaining international legitimacy (with political and economic interests in mind) and/or attracting foreign capital in the form of foreign students or international branch campuses (Goodman & Karabassova, this volume). In this context, the economic rationale of attracting foreign students is quite strong.

Furthermore, 'research-based knowledge production as part of the idea of the knowledge economy', as Tamtik and Sabzalieva put it in this volume, is rather popular in countries as diverse as Estonia and Kazakhstan. These two countries have put in place a variety of internationalisation reforms in order to expand research-based knowledge production and subsequently enhance the trustworthiness of their systems, leading to strengthening their international legitimacy (Tamtik & Sabzalieva). Yet, their success in establishing and maintaining international legitimacy is seriously obstructed by the uneven power dynamics in the global higher education market, especially by the global hegemony of a small number of countries and universities in North America and Western Europe.

The discourse on building international legitimacy is also linked with the idea of modernisation that has been profoundly embedded in policy narratives across the region. Modernisation is an 'ambivalent and questionable' term (Sakwa, 2013), which in the post-socialist context includes a variety of initiatives involving foreign countries and international actors such as China's University Alliance of the New Silk Road or the Commonwealth of Independent States' University Network. Most commonly, the idea of modernisation in the post-socialist contexts invokes references to market economies and global competitiveness, although with significant variations across the region. As Tamtik and Sabzalieva explain, strategic documents in Kazakhstan and Estonia underscore market economy values and see education as a tool for modernisation. They note, for example, that Kazakhstan's 2011-2020 State Program of Education Development incorporates policies on education at all levels under the overarching goal of increasing competitiveness (Government of Kazakhstan, 2010). Similar to the Estonian Higher Education Strategy, the strategic priority for higher education reform in Kazakhstan has been improving quality and integrating into the European Higher Education Area (Government of Kazakhstan, 2010). The focus on quality improvement has also been the main driver of educational modernisation in Russia, as discussed by Minina et al in this volume.

Taken together, the chapters in this volume point out – whether explicitly or implicitly – that there is a symbiotic relationship between the economic and political purposes of education, both aiming to reconfigure education in post-socialist spaces along Western neoliberal lines. Meanwhile, the emphasis on social and moral dimensions of education appears to have visibly decreased, leading to growing concerns over declining education equity and persisting corruption in education.

Ongoing Tensions over Education Purposes: examining policy undercurrents

Although the emergence of Western neoliberal imaginaries is clearly visible in education policy narratives in many post-socialist contexts, there are also multiple tensions, complexities and contradictions associated with the ongoing reconfigurations of education purposes and values, as well as with their subsequent translations into education policy and practice. In particular, some chapters in this volume discuss the enduring socialist legacies and their unexpected interactions with neoliberal reforms; others examine powerful reinterpretations of global norms to suit local education purposes; and yet others point to the re-emergence of premodern imaginaries and other alternative conceptualisations of education futures. Collectively, they reveal an uneven terrain of education policy landscape in post-socialist spaces, where multiple and often contradictory education visions coexist side by side. In other words, these chapters collectively illustrate that there is little evidence of educational convergence towards neoliberal educational goals when looking beyond policy rhetoric and digging deeper into local educational contexts.

From this perspective, several chapters in this book contribute to existing research on globalisation and education policy borrowing. Commenting on the arrival of neoliberal 'education reform packages' in post-socialist spaces (Silova & Steiner-Khamsi, 2008), they vividly highlight how national governments often adopt the language of global reforms, including such buzzwords as quality assurance, standardisation, or performance outcomes, but they imbue these global buzzwords with distinctly local meanings (Anderson-Levitt, 2003; Steiner-Khamsi, 2004). For example, Minina et al examine three country cases – Russia, China and Brazil – which have faced a global wave of quality assurance reforms transmitted through policy borrowing, which was facilitated by educational lenders as well as national and transnational expert networks. Based on the comparison of three cases, the authors argue that global reforms may travel across different national contexts without necessarily diffusing the ideologies of the institutions that invented them (as illustrated by the case of Brazil) or that borrowing the neoliberal script is often used to mask national reforms rooted in political projects that have nothing to do with globally travelling reforms per se (as in the case of Russia and China). For example, the notion of 'educational quality' in official policy discourses in Russia and China was framed as both a source of and a solution to educational problems, leading to the reconceptualisation of educational quality as a tool for educational governance and a means of reform legitimisation. Interestingly, both Russian and Chinese governments have continued to exercise strict control over the content of 'education quality', thus using the concept for political ends.

Further complicating the adoption of global norms is Janashia's chapter on the introduction of per capita student financing reforms in Latvia and Georgia. This chapter provides a gateway to understanding different

rationales and policy adoption strategies of policy actors in Georgia and Latvia who introduced a similar approach of calculating the general education finances on a per capita basis. However, a more nuanced examination of these reforms in their national contexts shows that as the policy problems differed in these countries, so did the implementation of policy solutions. In Georgia, the per capita funding was an integral part of the large-scale education reform package that promised an increase in the transparency, effectiveness and fair distribution of funds through the introduction of a market-based school funding system. In Latvia, the introduction of a per capita funding system served a more ceremonial purpose of securing international donor funding during a time of financial crisis. In particular, per capita student funding was introduced to avoid school optimisation – that is, the merging and closure of small rural schools – another neoliberal reform imposed by international development agencies in Latvia. In both cases, while introducing seemingly identical reform packages, Georgian and Latvian policymakers used different rationales for reform implementation and eventually transformed these reforms in a way that bears little resemblance to the initially imported reform. Despite differences in reform topics and geographical contexts, the 'lessons learned' from the comparative study of per capita student finance reforms in Latvia and Georgia and the case study of quality assurance in Russia, China and Brazil reveal striking parallels. Both highlight the existence of glaring disconnects between the 'original' versions of Western neoliberal reforms and their reconfigurations in various post-socialist contexts.

Similarly, several chapters in this volume delve deep into examining how borrowing of global education reforms brings to light the prevailing tensions between socialist legacies and travelling neoliberal policies. For example, Goodman and Karabassova acknowledge that one of the main rationales for language-in-education policies in Ukraine and Kazakhstan – both aiming to introduce English alongside titular languages in their education systems – was a move away from a Soviet past (associated with the hegemony of the Russian language) and towards a more Western future (associated with strengthening English and titular languages). However, the ways in which each country has navigated the past and the future vis-à-vis language policy are strikingly different not only from each other, but also from Western expectations for both English and additional languages in the respective contexts. Again, reform articulation and implementation in these two cases were driven not by any international 'best practices' but rather by local power dynamics and national language policy priorities.

Focusing on the development of civic education reform in Serbia, Djerasimovic (in this volume) offers another powerful example of educational transfer, one which did not fully reflect 'European' or English citizenship education discourses. Although striving to re-integrate into the international educational community through the adoption of a policy overtly dedicated to active, democratic citizenship, Serbian policymakers insisted on an in-depth

engagement with civic education concepts to articulate reforms that would preserve education's function as a public good in the broader context of neoliberal reforms. Echoing socialist education values, Serbian policymakers purposefully and overtly chose to emphasise (psycho-)social dimensions of civic education – including intercultural socialisation, recognition of the other, tolerance of difference, peaceful and constructive conflict resolution, conflict mediation, and non-violent communication – which differed sharply from the conceptualisation of the abstract universalism of active citizenship in the English and the European educational space. More importantly, Serbian policymakers were able to avoid references to the economic discourses, which feature so prominently in a transnational education context. This chapter thus convincingly challenges the widely accepted thesis that a single (neoliberal) policy discourse travels across national and transnational spaces, pointing instead to the influence of local actors who draw broadly on experiences, ideas and inspirations beyond the ideological geopolitical divisions, thus effectively complicating the existing conceptual polarities of global/local, West/East or North/South.

Finally, a chapter by Palandjian et al further complicates our understanding of post-socialist education transformations by illuminating the ambivalent and ambiguous narratives of post-socialist constructions of nation and gender, which reflect multi-layered and sometimes contradictory histories of the region. By focusing on feminist discourse analysis of early literacy textbooks in Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Latvia, they argue that post-socialist transformation processes have been accompanied by *gendered* nationalism, often deeming women unqualified to participate in the new nation-building projects. In this context, socialist legacies have continued to coexist with (Western) neoliberal imaginaries, reproducing modernity's patriarchal gender norms that assign men to nation/culture and women to nature. Yet, beneath modernity's dominant narrative there exist countercurrents that seek to undermine it, often leading to ambivalence and ambiguity about how nation and gender are understood and imagined in post-socialist contexts. As the chapter vividly illustrates, these counter-narratives draw on pre-Soviet (and premodern) imaginaries that reach back into indigenous traditions and nature-centred spiritualities, offering more complex symbolic representations of women and men, as well as girls and boys, and thus challenging modernity's gendered rhetoric. Echoing world views from paganism in Armenia and Latvia to Tengrism in Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, some textbooks intimate the existence of a plurality of divine beings, including female deities and spirits. Here, (powerful) women reign as goddesses of Sun and Fortune, or appear as Mother Nature ruling over the earth, thus contradicting modernity's portrayals of women as irrational, weak or backward. By locating women in premodern nature, such images and texts inevitably create associations of women (re)gaining power by transcending the perceived boundaries between women and men, space and time, animals and humans.

Broadly spanning different post-socialist spaces and education areas, the chapters in this volume powerfully remind us that perhaps there is much more to the post-socialist education transformations than immediately meets the eye. Collectively, the authors invite us to look beyond the neoliberal rhetoric that appears to have engulfed the post-socialist region since the early 1990s. While acknowledging a strong push for Western (neoliberal) reforms and their undeniable influence on national policy rhetoric – ranging from 'democracy' and 'market economy' to 'education competitiveness' and 'quality assurance' – they convincingly challenge the perceived hegemony of Western policy rhetoric and instead illuminate local reconfigurations of education reforms in various post-socialist spaces. As a result, we gain a much more complicated understanding of post-socialist education transformations, highlighting ongoing ambiguities and existing contestations over education reform trajectories, while offering alternative insights and interpretations of possible post-socialist education futures.

Notes

[1] For the purposes of our analysis, post-socialist countries include the 15 former Soviet states of Caucasus (Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia), Central Asia (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan), Eastern Europe (Belarus, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Moldova, Ukraine) and Russia; as well as 10 post-socialist states in south-eastern Europe (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Kosovo, Macedonia, Montenegro, Romania, Serbia, Slovenia) and four states in Central Europe (the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia).

[2] In 2004, eight Central and Eastern European countries joined the EU – namely, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia. Bulgaria and Romania joined the EU in 2007, followed by Croatia in 2013.

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