

## **School choice as the problem of educational governance in a pluralistic frame**

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*Abstract.* The aim of this article is to indicate critical aspects related to contemporary educational governance in a pluralistic frame. The problem of educational governance is shown from the angle of school choice, i.e. choice as a response to differentiated social pluralism, and choice as a move toward democratic governance, to stress the era of active citizenship and a post-dichotomised, network-based providers' model. Using three ideal-typical educational governance models, the article illustrates how the role of choice, the meaning of education, and the education system's ability to contribute to the public good has been changed. The conceptual model of integrative choice and reflexive educational governance is proposed by combining deliberative forums and the mechanism design approach.

*Keywords:* Educational governance, school choice, contemporary society, public good, the meaning of education

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## **Introduction**

Contemporary society is heterogeneous and ambiguous. The old categories (the public versus private dichotomy in state governance or the catchment area-based versus choice models in the school choice problem, to mention some) on which the bases of institutional settings of welfare states were built are neither very helpful nor revealing in the era of complex problems. Instead, there are different institutional configurations i.e. specific combinations of institutional attributes, which illustrate the contemporary public-service models, including education.

Heterogeneity can be a threat (as in segregation) and an opportunity (in responsiveness). More specifically, in the context of public service, in a heterogeneous society where there is enormous variation in needs and preferences, public services must be equipped to respond, which makes the task of governing more difficult. While searching for extra resources, the role of the state shifts from that of ‘governing’ through direct forms of control, to that of ‘governance’, in which the state must collaborate with a wide range of actors in networks that cut across the public, private and voluntary sectors, and operate across different levels of decision making (Newman *et al.*, 2004).

The content of public services emerges from institutional design, thus, while changing the design of public services – from traditional government to network-based governing – the influences on meaning have to be kept in mind. According to Newman and Clarke (2009), here the word ‘publicness’ - a way of talking about the combinations of things, ideas, issues, people, relationships, practices and sites, that have been made public – is key to understanding these processes. In the context of education, and particularly basic education, which is the focus of this article, the dominance of the instrumental approach to education at the expense of social has proven worrying to scholars (Ball, 1997) as this trend challenges the question of the ability of school systems to prepare children for integration into social life despite their socioeconomic background.

Taking into account the aforementioned shift of institutional settings and consequent influences on content to tackle contemporary complex problems, the aim of this article is to investigate the main implications these changes have on educational governance. Thus the research question of this article is: what is the appropriate model for educational governance

in a pluralistic frame like, as the classical model is argued to be inadequate and market-based solutions bring along inequalities? The article critically examines educational governance through three ideal-typical governance models, and shows, first, what role choice has in contemporary educational governance; second, what happens to the meaning of education in these different models, and why; and third, whether, and if so, then why these models fail, analysed in terms of the problem of public good.

The article is organized as follows. Section one gives an overview of the theoretical approaches to the paradigmatic shift of government to governance, stressing the theoretical roots of these developments and the consequences that this shift has on public policy and public service. The second section describes the problem of school choice while looking for integrative school choice opportunities. It is argued that in the era of a paradigmatic shift from government to governance and active citizenship, where choice is, among other things, about the capacity for self-direction exercised by a self-possessed individual in personal, economic and political arrangements, the question of 'why choice' is inappropriate. Section three focuses on educational governance and shows which the main aftermaths of this paradigmatic shift in education are, and what role school choice has within it. The conceptual model of integrative choice model within contemporary complexity and plurality is thus proposed, followed by short concluding remarks.

### **From government to governance - theoretical approaches: Classical, NPM and New Governance models**

The article is therefore after an integrative choice model, which deals with contemporary complexity and plurality. The question is related to the paradigmatic shift of public service models and indicates the new demands of government models to succeed with contemporary 'wicked problems' for which neither the classical hierarchical command-and-control type of government, nor the market-based solutions provided by NPM, are adequate. In this section the main theoretical roots and characteristics of different governance models will be analysed to determine the critical aspects of success of governing.

*Theoretical roots*

In this article, the concept of governance is understood as the coordination of hierarchies, the market, and networks, and is much inspired by Rhodes's (1997) definition, according to which governance refers to self-organizing, inter-organizational networks characterized by interdependence, resource-exchange, rules of the game, and significant autonomy from the state. The focus is not (only) on network management, but rather on a broader process of managing the rules by which public policy is formulated and implemented. The latter phenomenon is often termed meta-governance as network management and governing outputs and outcomes (Sorensen and Torfing, 2007), stressing the importance and ability to shape institutional rules to facilitate and balance interest-formation processes.

Defining the purpose of governance as managing the changing balance between state and civil society has institutional theoretic roots (Rhodes, 2007). Governance theory is mainly occupied with institutional change (and here institution is understood broadly), and it involves human agency. Thus, it is introducing an element of change which is often lacking in institutionalism (Kjaer, 2004); and so, governance is about affecting the frameworks within which citizens and officials act and politics occurs, and which shape the identities and institutions of civil society (March and Olsen, 1996).

However, while talking about institutionalism, it is important to stress which kind, as there are various versions of 'new' institutionalisms – historical, rational choice, sociological, constructivist, and so on. Arguably, the main contradiction is rooted in assumptions related to preferences about whether these are exogenous or endogenous (Kjaer, 2004). The rational choice institutionalists assume that preferences are given, and people know what they want, i.e. given alternative actions, they decide which action to take according to the expected utilities of these actions, and act accordingly. For sociological institutionalists, preferences are endogenous, individuals having been socialized into having certain values and norms that determine behaviour. The individual evaluates a situation and acts according to what is most appropriate in that situation. However, Ostrom (1990) has shown that these approaches need not be antagonistic; we are all influenced by our context, and continually determine appropriate behaviour in particular situations. But these context-specific norms and values do not give concrete answers, but rather divide these into excluded and appropriate

responses. The final decision on action should still be made according to the logic of consequentialism. Thus the theory of governance has a strong institutional rooting, but argues to include both the rational and the sociological approach. Which approach dominates is a question of the particular problem and time. Accepting the abovementioned sociological argument, the governance theory stresses the components of identity development, the enforcement of democratic ability, the interpretation of history – to learn from it – and the reflexivity of the public system as important aspects of contemporary governance (Kjaer, 2004). Seen this way, the importance of understanding the basic logic and rationale of previous phases of governance – here termed Classical governing and NPM – becomes clear, as these were not eras of other times with other people, but rather phases which recursively shape today's governing and from which we have lessons to learn.

#### *Classical governing*

What then is so inadequate about the classical hierarchical approach? The main logic of classical hierarchical governing models is based on a public-private dichotomy (Pierre and Peters, 2000). This clear-cut Weberian model, which was the main approach followed by all Western countries after the Second World War, was suitable as the public service was standardised, the economy Fordist, and control of the market by the state was manageable. According to Bevir (2011), the intellectual grounding of early welfare state was influenced by developmental historicism (see also Tab. 1), which inspired grand narratives centred on the nation, the state, and freedom. So, the state was seen as arising out of a nation bound together by a common language, culture, and past. The public service employee was presumed to act as a prince (as opposed to a knave, to use the famous typology of Le Grand (2006)), with high moral values and a willingness to serve the public – a civil servant. At the same time, the citizen's activity was neither important nor desirable, as a minimum standard of service was guaranteed for everybody. The focus in the Classical model is on the process rather than on the outcome, and the strict following of procedure guarantees the legitimation and the distribution of the public good, which were mainly dedicated to expressing and recreating the national character and a loyal citizenry. Besides the inadequate assumptions of the contemporary nation-state and public-service workers,

the hierarchical system does not allow for flexibility or innovation (Bevir, 2010).

### *NPM*

Since the 1980s, most of the developed world has seen public sector reforms inspired by NPM, which foresees the privatisation, importation of management know-how from the private sector, and decentralisation as the drivers of success in public administration (Pierre and Peters, 2000) (see also Tab. 1). This has been a reaction to the welfare state crisis, where states are overloaded with responsibilities, and citizens with ambiguous expectations – dreaming of ever-better public services on the one hand, while not being willing to pay higher taxes on the other (Bevir, 2011).

According to NPM, the solution to the inefficiency of classical governing models is the market. In cases where handing service delivery over to the market is not possible, the creation of a market within the public service is favourable, i.e. a quasi-market with services which are performance-, efficiency- and auditing-oriented. Thus NPM, whose roots are in modernisation and rational choice (Tab. 1), foresees several suppliers and organisations included in the process of delivering the public good. The main slogan of NPM - “choice, diversity, market and competition” – presumes that the market enables all parties to a transaction to satisfy their needs, as the market empowers people to be aware of the “market situation” and to take responsibility for their choices. The ever-more flexible options from the demand side (school choice instead of catchment-based assignments, for instance) are believed to allow suppliers to react to diverse social needs. Paradoxically, the hoped ability of NPM to respond to the diverse needs fails and the drive towards efficiency leads unexpectedly to a narrower approach to public service and stratified service delivery.

Consequently, market-caused inequality has been one of the more criticised problems of choice-enabling public services. One of the problems here is peoples’ ability to choose, which is often dependent on their socio-economic background (see overview in Musset 2012), and there is substantial body of literature devoted to explaining the mechanisms of why choice segregates (see for instance Ball (2003) and Burgess *et al.* (2011) for different approaches to this).

Table 1: From government to governance: key characteristics

		GOVERNANCE MODELS		
		classical (government)	NPM	New Governance
KEY CHARACTERISTICS	theoretical grounding	developmental historicism	rational choice, positivism	(constructivist or sociological) institutionalism; system theory ...
	characteristics of public service	hierarchical, bureaucracy, process based; universally guaranteed minimum	marketization, which guarantees performance, transparency and accountability; outcome oriented	network management; collaboration; win-win through the ability to apply the best features of different sectors; horizontal partnerships
	citizen	passive citizens	active citizens (customers)	active citizens (source of extra knowledge for governing)
	common good	guaranteed by process	common good is the aggregated set of individual interests, i.e. superset of individual interest - diffuses	guaranteed by metagovernance
	reflexivity	NA	rather goal oriented than adaptive	core common values and interconnectedness, ie the quality of links
	reforms	generous welfare state	choice, accountability, autonomy	holistic (join-up & whole-of) government, empowerment, participation

Source: Author's syntheses based on Bevir (2011); Kjaer (2004); Newman and Clarke (2009).

Additionally, choice-based service models tend to narrow the meaning of public good. Public services have an ambiguous relationship with consumers, as Newman and Clarke (2009) point out, needing to recruit and satisfy them, while trying to manage levels of collective and individual demand downwards (since the use of a service often consumes the budget rather than generating income). These different organisations which have been contracted to deliver the public service are often autopoietic (Kjaer, 2004), meaning that their ability to learn from the external environment is self-referential – they digest new information according to an inner logic (annual business targets for instance), not according to wider developments and needs (the priorities of community). In the case of education, for instance, this means that children with special needs or with unsupportive

family backgrounds are not desirable, as these are ‘expensive cases.’ This inability to learn from the external environment dramatically challenges the social meaning of education in integrating children from different backgrounds into the education system. As a consequence, in the case of the managerial state logic of NPM, economic criteria have overruled social. Traditionally, public services are provided outside of the cash-nexus exchange mechanisms of the markets. Indeed, as Esping-Andersen (1990) and others indicate, de-commodification has been a key element of the rationale of public services, a mechanism to benefit public services in ways that insulate them from the impact of economic inequalities. Provision on the basis of right or need involves principles that are different from the ability to pay.

The mechanisms that channel the essence of public service toward homogenization are embedded in the price mechanisms in choice-based public service models and related auditing mechanisms. The price indicator of services in its non-cash nexus forms is usually the outcome of service (academic results in schools, for instance). The shift of focus from process to outcome stresses the importance of measurable skills and gives rise to the phenomenon of governance by comparison (Martens *et al.*, 2007) and league tables (of schools for instance), regulated by a central authority. This emphasis on efficiency works toward homogeneous rather than heterogeneous content and organisation of schools. Furthermore, related performance management increases centralisation and concentration of power, rather than the initially expected result of deregulation. Thus, choice (in this non-cash nexus form) is closely linked with the management of organisational performance through other competitive framings, notably evaluation, inspection and audit (external targets and motivation systems) to stimulate competition and as a driving force for service improvement. Many scholars have been sceptical of whether all these objectives can be delivered by the current apparatus of evaluation and of how the idea of diverse educational needs cannot be ensured through the NPM. For instance, Newman and Clarke (2009) wonder whether the burden of external motivation has distorted organisational priorities and purposes, as well as distracting organisations from their original purposes – organisations may have become better at managing performance evaluation than at managing performance. Instead of external motivation, the improvement should be initiated by internal values, i.e. by a deliberative and dialogic process of policy learning, where the purpose is not to ask

what people want, but rather to help people and community to understand what to want (Bevir, 2010). This type of process of naming and framing helps to create the meaning of public good and is not in contradiction with reflexivity and the institutional approach of interests' formation needed for the contemporary solution to public service delivery.

Newman and Clarke (2009) argue that, although there is considerable innovation in contracting out to overcome the governance in these types of problems of inequality, changing meaning and the diffusion of public good, there are still open questions. How will the search for scale of economy be reconciled with the current focus on engaging the public in deliberations on local needs and aspirations? What means are available to manage the potential failures of governance that arise from difficulties in specifying complex, dynamic problems in a reducible form? Such models tend to offer technical solutions to intractable problems, reducing the burden of 'public' risk in the process. These developments do not get rid of the dichotomised division of public versus private, although the solutions to complex problems presume to focus on linkages between the two. Furthermore, the changing of public service design is much more than a mere technical issue – important policy content emerges from institutional design factors, as we showed in previous pages, and there is potential to diminish the meaning (publicness) of public services and to shape new relationships with the public itself.

#### *New Governance*

The inadequacies of handling society and the inability to take into account the socially embedded nature of agents and networks are arguably (Bevir, 2010) the main reasons why NPM has come to be viewed as an historic phase in academic literatures. The drive for efficiency has not disappeared, but overlaid on it are new demands – public services should empower citizens and communities. There are many initiatives within public policy which look towards changing the behaviour of the public, in an effort to render citizens more health-conscious, more work-oriented, more effective parents, or more active contributors to the public good through voluntary and civil society participation.

The responsibility for service delivery has been simultaneously fragmented and devolved to multiple 'autonomous' provider organisations, each of which is responsible for managing its own performance and subjected to competitive performance evaluation. At the same time, the

political influence of international organisations is growing, blurring the traditional dichotomy more and more. As a consequence, the public sector entity is fragmented, and the question then is one of how to steer this self-regulating inter-organisational network. The concurrent phenomenon of centralisation and fragmentation has raised the importance of network management, where communication and interaction points (instead of agency and structure) form the main research focus, as these are the links between different agents, and their quality determines the success of whole system (Bevir, 2010). This approach suggests work across boundaries; that is, problems and solutions are often situated between the public and private spheres. Network management presumes collaboration instead of competition, process management instead of project management (Tab. 1). The latter is oriented towards budget and targets, while in the former, success depends on the contexts in which actors are included, the quality of their interactions and the nature of the mediations between them (Bevir, 2010). Governing takes the form of the transactor - the actor who has to manage new boundaries and relationships (Newman and Clarke, 2009). The interests are neither wholly public nor private, but shared, and soft tools such as participation, collaboration and agreements have to come into play. This does not mean that intervention by states' governments is not necessary, but the instruments to intervene need to be adequate for contemporary wicked problems. The additional knowledge and resources hope to include civil society, together with the creation of a network system where the best sides of each type of organisation are put to work.

The criteria for initiating these types of change and the environment of stability presumed for trust-based, collaborative, and voluntary practice, is the task of meta-governance. This is basically the governing of self-governance where the most challenging task is to be able to sustain the reflexivity essential for networks (Bevir, 2010). In many situations, the networks operate together with hierarchical agents, which bring about an asymmetrical relationship, as the hierarchical side has the power to define and change the game rules. Take education as an example; states must guarantee education for children (at least in the case of basic education, which is the focus of this particular article), and this means that the state is always the most powerful participant in the service delivery network. Also, in educational governance, there are usually several groups with especially strong interests (such as teachers and parents), but resources are provided by all. In these types of situations networks are argued not to be able to

guarantee equitable representation of interests, i.e. they might be biased toward particular interest groups and their resource allocation. Thus, it is the purpose of government to open up the conditions for structural opportunities, amongst which one may choose adequate solutions for governing. Therefore, the idea of meta-governance is not so much about managing, but delegating political competence and decision-making powers to create a sense of freedom and responsibility within a complex environment (Bevir, 2010). It is about coordinating the plurality and complexity of hierarchies, markets and networks.

While the market has failed in dealing with ‘diversity’, the ‘master narrative’ of industrial nations, ‘community’ has come to signal an increasingly important set of strategies for managing difference. This means that the field of social policy is not confined to the nation-state, but may be extended downwards through regions to the localities and upwards to transitional and global actors. Besides the notions of performance and transparency, participation has come to resemble a ‘global good’ in normative templates of reform. According to Newman and Clarke (2009), the increasing reliance on civil society organisations as the providers of public services means that the crucial meaning of participation, conceived of by the participatory projects as an effective sharing of power between state and civil society through the exercise of deliberation in new public spaces, is radically redefined as and reduced to management. However, public-participation initiatives are often deeply entangled with managerial forms of governance that have the capacity to reduce, rather than enhance, the meanings and practices of citizenship. According to Bevir (2010), public policies inspired by new governance theories and rational choice and new institutional approaches to social science are quests for efficiency, and not for participative, deliberative or dialogic alternatives. The focus on networks and community is less the search for democratic ideas than of an expertise that suggests they will promote efficiency.

The main roots of participation-related problems lie arguably (Newman and Clarke, 2009) in the perverse confluence of mixing the neoliberal project and participation, pointing in opposite and even antagonistic directions, although both projects require an active, proactive civil society. One of these tensions is related to the idea of representation, which rests on an assumption that identity and interests are formed and fixed in the private sphere, and brought ready-made to the public (the rational choice approach), rather than viewing communicative practices as a means

through which identities are potentially formed and/or transformed (the institutional perspective). The other tension is between authenticity and expertise, i.e. the construction of 'community practice' problematizes distinctions between professionals and lay citizens. The emphasis on achieving consensus masks deeper workings of power where lay members are positioned as 'good pupils' by the experts they encounter. Through this process of 'interest representation,' the hoped authenticity often 'disappears'. There are also negative examples of participation aligned with consumerism, i.e. governments are seeking to improve their legitimacy through the process of consultation, which becomes a subject of managerial power eliciting individual, aggregated opinions, and not deliberative forms of engagement.

To conclude this section, although the New governance developments are hoped to be a more adequate reaction to hierarchies, and market-based inequalities to respond to contemporary heterogeneity, as shown, it would be misleading to assume that this is problem-free. The critical aspects in success can be divided into three groups of tensions. The first group consists of tensions which are caused by questions of institutional set-up and the challenges of co-ordination of the fragmented, multi-layered system of actors without losing the system's reflexive ability. The latter is basically a question of how to respond adequately to heterogeneity while preventing the diffusion of public good and the social meaning of public service. These tensions have paved the way for development of the phenomenon of meta-governance, which should contribute to creating an environment of collaboration that manages these problems. The other group of tensions is related to the choice, i.e. the mechanism to increase the flexibility, efficiency and responsiveness of systems, which in turn creates severe inequality problems and raises questions of different social groups' ability and readiness to choose and the opportunities to improve this choosing environment. And lastly, the need for extra resources and expertise, and related participation initiatives have often been based on the rational choice-based assumption of interest-formation, which shapes the meaning of participation and its consequences. This fails to admit policy learning and the importance of interest-shaping and the governance role in these, i.e. the aspect of helping people to understand what they want and to contribute through this deliberative and dialogic process to the public good. As stressed by Bevir (2010), public service has to reflect collaboration and trust, even while being market-based, to increase responsibility and the

freedom to choose. In next section, the question of school choice as the most fundamental development of educational governance will be critically analysed to look for opportunities for integrative choice within contemporary educational governance models.

### **Configurations of school choice as an educational governance problem**

Starting with Friedman (1955, 1962), school choice has been a widely discussed topic in education. Usually, it means giving parents the opportunity to choose a school for their children, and is often triggered by a wave of decentralization of education as a part of NPM. This development is driven by a market-based ideology, which assumes that increased competition will generate the incentives that will improve schools and students' achievements. In addition to the efficiency argument, it is also hoped that school choice policies enable children from poor families to 'break the iron cage of zoning' (Gorard *et al.*, 2003). The effect of such a choice on educational outcomes is hotly debated in empirical and theoretical literature. It is shown in many cases, such as in Germany (Riedel *et al.*, 2009), various US cities (Burgess and Briggs 2006; Bifulco *et al.*, 2009), England (West, 2006), and even increasingly in Finland (Poikolainen, 2012; Seppänen, 2003), that choice tends to gather students from better socio-economic backgrounds into certain schools, creating not only positive peer effects, but also a negative externality for the rest of students.

However, the debate in academic literature concerning school choice has been focused mainly on so-called economy-driven strategies (Cookson, 1992), i.e. the potential efficiency- and equity-related consequences of choice models. Although in addition to economy-driven strategies, there are authors who mention a libertarian ethos as the third criteria when arguing for choice (see Musset, 2012 for instance), this argument is not often developed further. The education-driven strategies (Cookson, 1992) of choice, i.e. choice as a response to differentiated social pluralism (differing needs of children and families) and the governance-driven strategies of choice (Cookson, 1992), where choice is conceived of as democratisation – greater accountability to users, and the limiting of their subjection to

bureaucratic decision-making by reinstating citizenship – are clearly fading away in the light of economy-driven strategies of choice.

In this particular article, school choice is defined as a problem of educational governance, and it is argued that in the era of: 1) a paradigmatic shift from government to governance; and 2) active citizenship, where choice is, among other things, about the capacity for self-direction exercised by a self-possessed individual in personal, economic and political arrangements, the question of ‘why choice’ is inappropriate. Rather, the question focus should be on how to tolerate choice without problems of inequality, and how to preserve systems’ abilities to contribute to the public good, i.e. the main choice-related problems showed in the previous section. Defining school choice as the problem of educational governance stresses the education- and governance-driven aspects of school choice, categories of Cookson’s (1992) typology often overlooked in academic literature on school choice. Here, choice is seen as a response to differentiated social pluralism (the differing needs of children and families) and as democratisation – greater accountability to users and the limiting of their subjection to bureaucratic decision-making by reinstating citizenship (Cookson, 1992). In this regard, choice is a valuable instrument in building capability, a valuable characteristic of today’s public policy configurations. Stressing the education- and governance-driven aspects of choice does not mean that the potential inequality problems of choice-based systems have been underestimated, but rather that these have to be dealt within the challenges of contemporary heterogeneity and governance shifts.

Although it is quite common to distinguish between two opposing models of school choice – the catchment area-based, more equity-oriented comprehensive system, and the liberal, efficiency-seeking choice-based model – the opposition of these is not so dichotomised. Rather, flexible choice and initial geographical assignment is the frequent configuration in today’s OECD countries, although with different aspects in different degrees and configurations in each. Thus, there is some choice present in all European countries, despite different government models of public service delivery (e.g., quasi-market, unregulated, or controlled types of models) (Pöder *et al.*, 2013). The contexts in which the school choice phenomenon has emerged differ as well. In some countries, the policy of choice and competition has been a clearly managed policy direction and conscious policy tool aimed at improving teaching outcomes. In others,

school choice has been a rather latent development, in which school choice has been a by-product, since families were given an opportunity to apply to a school other than the one assigned on the basis of their residence, enabling schools to admit students from outside their catchment areas. In addition, there are countries where the meaning of choice has been more focused on how to include stakeholders from communities (including parents) into the management of schools, increasing the responsibility and opportunities of all parties, while in others choice is rather a market-mimicking device to create the demand side for schools. In different countries, these initiatives include different systems, in some countries taking place only within the private sector, and in some in both private- and public-sector schools. There are successful cases in each category.

However, there are countries with substantial school-choice experience, and others which try to avoid market elements in their public policy developments. The rationale of this article challenges the possibility of returning to the limited-choice policies of the post-World War II welfare period. This is not to undervalue the phenomenon of community schools, but rather to argue that strict, centrally assigned catchment areas are an inadequate solution in the contemporary welfare state. The argument is based on the general ideological shift in the (post)modern welfare state, showing that the state's role has shifted from redistribution to empowerment, responsibility and capacity building (Newman and Clarke, 2009). In this light, it is evident that the strict residence-based assignment, where families are passive recipients, not direct participants, is gradually disappearing. The strict system is not able to respond to contemporary complexity.

Thus, the superiority of the classical model, whereby states plan homogeneous education for everybody, has been challenged. The tendency of market- and choice-based models to separate children by socio-economic status into seemingly 'good' and 'bad' schools is well known. Besides, the classical model is not free of inequality problems either – the residential choice is one of the phenomena which initiated parental choice as an equity-driven strategy (Gorard *et al.*, 2003). Pöder *et al.* (2013) have shown that choice is not a necessary condition for an education system's failure in terms of educational outcomes (PISA in particular) and equity – there are many successful paths to a so-called good educational policy outcome where efficiency and equity are simultaneously stressed and achieved, among them examples of successful pro-choice countries (Netherlands and

Sweden for instance). Success is rather dependent on the institutional configuration of an education system, where each different institutional characteristic can have different value and importance in different configurations.

According to Perry (2007), for instance, equality, diversity, participation, choice, and cohesion form an integrated model of a comprehensive whole to assist in the design and evaluation of pluralistic education policy. However, this model is not prescriptive, but rather conceptualising. Among other aspects, it stresses in many ways the importance of diversity and active participation as key elements in a healthy democracy. Meaningful choice presumes some diversity in an education system, i.e. different approaches to teaching and learning based on various pedagogical ideas. This is not the segregation dependent on socioeconomic status, which we have seen is the unwitting consequence of the market-based solution or residential choice. So, how might choice be tolerated without a stratifying effect, or, in other words, do we have integrative choice alternatives? Democracy requires some basic consensus about the rules of the game, some cohesion. Citizens must feel that they are playing the same game (democracy) together, and that they make up a collective or cohesive whole. This, in turn, requires a certain level of trust, solidarity, and interconnection among citizens, which is not possible in an unequal environment. Cobb and Glass (2009) distinguish between unregulated and regulated choice plans, where the latter has the potential to increase the integration of schools and to prevent further social stratification. This argument is also supported by Pöder *et al.* (2013). Regulated choice programmes oversee the assignment of students to schools with equity in mind, and typically provide additional supports to children and families from disadvantaged backgrounds. The concrete support scheme is dependent on the particular location and priorities of the community. How do we agree on these?

One suggested channel of interest formation are the processes of participation within deliberative forums – such as user panels, youth forums, and area-based committees – developed as a means of encouraging a more active and participatory mode of citizenship, and of improving welfare services by making them more responsive to users (Newman *et al.*, 2004). However, new initiatives of governance often do not displace the old but interact with them, often uncomfortably.

“The introduction of collaborative governance strategies has been attempted in order to help solve a number of ‘cross-cutting’ social problems through policies emphasising partnership, participation and local capacity building. However, these developments have been subordinated to other policy imperatives linked to a highly managerial form of governance based on a plethora of goals, targets and performance improvement strategies. It has also extended forms of direct control from the centre through an intensification of audit and inspection regimes, coupled with the specification of national standards for local services. Each of these involves an extension of control from above that creates institutional constraints and limits the capacity of participatory initiatives to shape policy and practice from below. The conflicting regimes of power and different norms and practices flowing from these multiple and overlaid models of governance produces tensions within the public policy system” (Newman *et al.*, 2004, p. 218).

Here, participation is more often seen as the channel to bring in the knowledge of community, which, as we indicated earlier, fails to include the policy learning aspect of the interest formation process.

The other tension is the question of how ‘the local’ is defined: for many services that are delivered locally (such as housing education), the strategic goals and main principles have been determined at the central level, and thus are constituted as being outside the bounds of local deliberation. There is, for instance, a legal requirement that young people should receive education. Further, with the exception of those who use either private sector services or opt for home tutoring, the majority of education is provided by the public sector and delivered through state-funded schools, although there is some diversity in this structure. Thus, while the reforms in all public policy areas, including education, have left us with a rather fragmented system of organisations, and it is popular to argue for network-based managing, in the case of educational governance, the model we are talking about is self-regulation ‘in the shadow of hierarchy’ to borrow the famous expression from Sharpf (1997). States (or their proxies) remain central in the new models of public service organisation, even as their institutional forms, structures and relationships change.

The question of school choice is not simply about the best technical solution to the problem of matching students and schools, but also takes place in a context where the very meaning and value of education is contested, i.e. the content of education emerges from the institutional

design. There are two main reasons for this. The first is the question of the ability of school systems to prepare children for integration into social life despite their socioeconomic background, where allocation logic influences most of the components (peer effect and teacher effect, for instance) of educational production function (Põder *et al.*, 2013). The second is that the case of choice does not depend on its potential to alter school performance, but on the extension of rights and the devolution of power to service users, i.e. there are progressive choice alternatives (Goodwin, 2009).

The last section of the article places the developments of school choice as educational governance into the wider context of the paradigmatic shift from government to governance, and investigates the critical aspects to guarantee public good delivery in contemporary plurality.

### **Three ideal-typical models and their consequences for educational governance**

Being aware of many of the theoretically convincing failures of the classical and choice-based (NPM-inspired) educational governance models outlined in previous sections, the purpose of this section is to analyse school choice models through three ideal typical modes of governing so as to determine the most critical aspects of contemporary educational governance.

The Classical, often called hierarchical, model of governing is management by vertical integration and Weberian bureaucracy. The initial debate on school choice emblematic of this era is most often related to private schools as well as the financial models to increase the choice set for different students from different social backgrounds. The main matching principle of how to allocate children to public schools is catchment area-based (Tab. 2). The development of a welfare state and public services bring about the financial mechanisms to support the diversity of schools – charter schools and school voucher systems, and the growing flexibility of regulations regarding matching policies, have arguably been mostly equity-oriented. By this rationale, choice has been seen as a way to detach children from school zones in order to fight for residential-based discrimination, or residential choice (Gorard *et al.*, 2003).

It is often argued that the main characteristic of the public service of this era was a homogeneous, universally guaranteed minimum. However, severe differences of quality (residential choice for instance) appeared even within the comprehensive system. These differences were not those often valued in a diverse society – schools with alternative pedagogical practices and philosophies for instance. The differences are the consequences of socially and racially segregated city areas that cause a concentration of so-called “good” and “not-so-good” children into separate schools. This is exactly the same phenomenon that pro-choice supporters were fighting against, and, as we saw earlier in this article, the result – the phenomenon of so-called “good” and “not-so-good” schools – is the same as well. The difference is in the segregative mechanisms which cause the effect – segregated housing versus segregating choice.

As indicated in the theoretical section of this article, the quality of public services of the Classical model and the solutions for problems affecting the public good were guaranteed by process control (versus outcome) and by public service professionals, including teachers, who were devoted to public tasks. The meaning of education had a strong social orientation – education was the source of a loyal and culturally homogeneous citizenship.

Besides the residential choice phenomenon, the main problems related to the classical model are analogous to the general problems of the hierarchical approach indicated earlier. First of all, the needs of an ever-more heterogeneous and complex society were not answered by a homogeneous service approach, i.e. the question of complex problems, often also termed wicked or cross-cutting problems, which are essential to contemporary society’s needs cannot be dealt with via a hierarchical solution. Second, the state’s role shifts from policies of redistribution to those of enabling citizens to develop their capacities. Discourses of responsibility and respect are at the heart of many modernisation programmes, and these have challenged the idea of a common public sphere characterized by common national belonging. Third, the simplistic approach of ‘the more money in the education system, the better’ was challenged by welfare state developments and empirics, and the search for more efficient modes of delivery of public services became popular in public policy agendas.

NPM has been seen as a reaction to the crisis of the welfare state, hoping to bring market-based efficiency into the governing of the state,

which is, due to hierarchy and rigidity, too clumsy. Although the NPM boom is considered to be more related to United Kingdom and New Zealand, as their educational systems have arguably been most influenced by the neoliberal agenda (which is the ideological doctrine believing most fervently in the positive influences of the market), all European countries have liberalised their choice policies recently (OECD, 2012). The main slogan of ‘market, competition and diversity’ (Le Grand, 2007) and the wish to create markets within public systems has created structures where the supply of schools and the demand of families exist. Since families were given an opportunity to apply to a school other than the one allocated on the basis of their residence, and schools are able to take pupils from outside their catchment areas, there is a market-like situation inside the publicly maintained school system. Thus, the main matching principle is the parental freedom to choose the school for their child (Tab. 2). The market is believed to guarantee performance, transparency and accountability, and has the ability to empower citizens – everybody is forced to be kept in touch with the ‘market situation’ to make good choices. Focus moves towards outcomes and the better the educational achievement (in measurable skills), the better the school is considered to be. According to this principle: price = the quality of school = measurable skills (a la PISA, IEA, or national exams). This coincides with the comparative turn and governance by comparison initiated by international organisations (Martens *et al.*, 2007) which today have a great influence on national educational agendas.

Of course, there are private organisations among educational providers as well. These initiatives are in many cases even encouraged, as one of the components of the NPM agenda has been to allow different provider agencies to appear, and as there is evidence that countries with a larger proportion of privately-operated schools perform better in international achievement tests (Woessmann *et al.*, 2009).

At the same time, internationally, larger sums of public funding (as opposed to operation) are associated with better student outcomes (*ibid.*). Since public funding may increase the set of choices for poor families, the positive effect of public funding may be another aspect of the skill-enhancing capacity of school choice and competition. Thus, school systems based on public-private partnerships, where the state finances schools but contracts their operation out to the private sector, have been one of the

successful NPM-inspired configurations of educational systems (Lauri *et al.*, 2013).

Table 2: School choice as educational governance: critical aspects.

		SCHOOL CHOICE MODELS		
		classical (government)	NPM	New Governance
CRITICAL ASPECTS	matching principle	central catchment area based assignment and self-financed choice of private schools	parents' choices	central matching algorithm vs the preferences of parents
	the meaning of education	the source of loyal and culturally homogeneous citizenship	instrumental meaning, ie edu as the preparation for labour market	how to live together differently, i.e. the integrative choice
	argument	higher investments = better results	market ensures optimal allocation and efficiency (incentives)	holistic, balanced multi-actor governance
	"good" choice	the closest school; the most expensive school	excellent academic results	cohesivity enhancing
	problems	anachronistic; residential choice	segregating, socially inefficient; excludes hard cases	how to coordinate different actors

Source: author's synthesis based on several authors

NPM-related privatisation-, deregulation- and managerialism-produced performance measures were seen as the solution for inefficiency. And although in addition to choice focus there has been substantial focus on voice questions as well – parents on the governing boards of schools hoped to be empowered through participation – the main criticisms of NPM-inspired reforms in public services are related to diffusion of the social dimension of public service and the tensions around the meaning of public good.

“Stated in more general terms, two complexly related policy agendas are discernible in all the heat and noise of reform. The first aims to tie education more closely to national economic interests, while the second involves a decoupling of education from direct state control. The first rests on a clear articulation and assertion by the state of its requirements from

education, while the second gives at least the appearance of greater autonomy to educational institutions in the delivery of those requirements. The first involves a reaffirmation of the state functions of education as a 'public good', while the second subjects education to the disciplines of the market and the methods and values of business, and redefines it as a competitive private good. In many respects educational institutions are now being expected to take on the qualities and characteristics of 'fast capitalism' (Gee and Lankshear, 1995) and this involves not only changes in organisational practices and methods but also the adoption of new social relationships, values and ethical principles" (Ball, 1998, p. 125).

There are two main roots of the diffusion of public good. First, the social aspect of education diminishes, as the classical nation-oriented meaning is inadequate. Second, the social meaning dissipates, as this is not easily integrated into cost-efficient academic results-oriented school systems. Consequently, the meaning of education is instrumental, i.e. the main task of any education system is to prepare workers for the global economy.

However, the most visible problem of the market- and choice-based model is the inequality it causes. In schools implementing the choice context, the well-known empirical findings are as follows: First, choices tend to gather children with a better socioeconomic status (high-SES children) into certain schools, creating not only positive peer effects, but also negative externality for the remaining disadvantaged students. Second, early segregation will make families responsible for their children's achievements and can encourage preparatory schooling (Pöder and Lauri, 2011). Third, better teachers tend to accumulate in these better schools, fostering segregation and increasing the effect of background factors even more. However, as many have shown, the result depends on the specific design and implementation of school choice and there are examples of successful controlled choice models – particularly in the Netherlands and Sweden (Pöder *et al.*, 2013). We term these integrative choice alternatives here.

Besides inequality-related problems, within market-based models the meaning and ability to manage a common good problem quintessentially dissipates. Efficiency-oriented organisational goals are not able to include complex problems, such as children in need. While quality is defined by league tables, the environment remains competitive and the meaning of education instrumental, it is not logical to hope that schools and parents

themselves will see the importance of contributing to the public good (the integration of a diverse array of children into society). The hoped-for empowerment of citizens takes place only according to a 'valid' system, i.e. the system is goal-oriented (cost efficient performance management), and not adaptive or reflexive (Tab. 2). From learning about the organisational approach, we know that this problem is the so-called one-loop learning (see Morgan, 1986, for instance). The contemporary world needs a system which enables double- or triple-loop learning, which is rather possible through horizontal integration, thereby increasing the interdependence between the agents (here being schools, parents, governments, and others), and these interdependencies are key to a more deliberative approach in response to diverse needs.

Theories<sup>2</sup> described as 'New Governance' are a reaction to the ever-increasing functional differentiation and set-up which have been argued to presume a horizontal approach in governance (Bevir, 2010). The interests of the post-dichotomised era are neither entirely private nor public but shared. According to New Governance, it can be argued that the social meaning of education is again at the heart of educational systems, but it should be refocused: instead of a classical homogeneous nation-building approach, it stresses the question of how to live together differently. Thus, one of the purposes of education system should be the advancement of cohesion.

What are the opportunities to facilitate these types of developments? According to institutional theory, governance is about the setting of rules, the application of rules and the enforcement of rules (Kjaer, 2004), i.e. those who govern (here the layer or level is not crucial, whether it be on national, state or community level) should influence the frames within which citizens and public service employees act, and shape the identities and institutions accordingly. Thus the state (or its proxy) must influence and enforce the rules to initiate the delivery of the public good and the creation of organisations which participate in this system. In more descriptive wording, the task of governance is to provide the capacity to integrate individual games into the general game (public interest) in such a way that everybody would prefer to join in that general game rather than be left out.

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<sup>2</sup> In case of New Governance it is not possible to talk about one coherent organisation model or principle, as there are many strands in these developments.

In searching for integrative choice options, one possible way to reduce the competitive nature of school entrance would be to rely on a centrally designed matching mechanism (Abdulkadirouglu *et al.*, 2003; Erdil and Ergin, 2008; Pathak and Sönmez, 2008; Biro, 2008). As we have seen previously, the quality of a contemporary public service is dependent on 1) the ability to respond to the heterogeneity, i.e. the network governance where the environment of collaborations should be initiated by meta-governance; 2) the integrative choice opportunities, i.e. the notion of active and responsible citizenship is encouraged, but not at the expense of inequality and the diffusion of the public good; and 3) the forums of interest formation, i.e. the process of policy learning and communication between agents is crucial in sharing resources, goals, and knowledge to help people in understanding what they want and to contribute through this deliberative and dialogic process to the public good.

A centrally designed matching mechanism is a system that matches the priorities of the community (central matching algorithm) with the preferences of parents (see Figure 1 for schematic overview). It preserves the activism of citizens (the preferences of parents), but not at the expense of the diffusion of the public good (priorities of the community). This coordination device that is being designed allows participants to reveal honestly (with no manipulation, no need for potential over-investment to drill children to succeed in exams which are often dependent on socio-economic background, and so on) their preferences for schools and at the same time to enable the realisation of social goals which, consequently, do not bring along SES-based segregation and inequality problems.

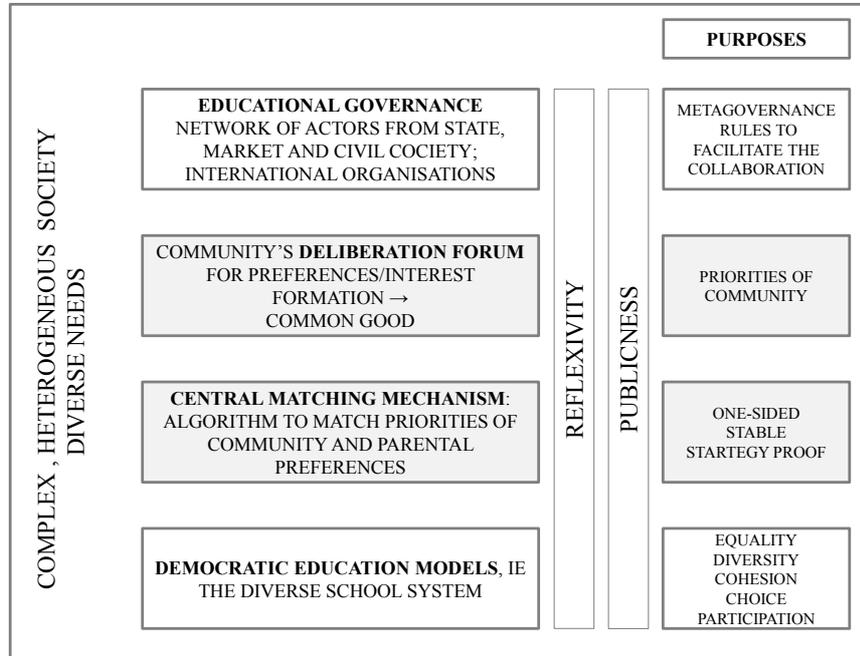


Figure 1: Central matching and deliberation forums contributing for integrative choice and contemporary educational governance . Source: Author's synthesis. Criteria of democratic education model from Perry (2007).

The justification of chosen principles is the cornerstone of the mechanism's design and its success is dependent on the meta-governance. To guarantee the legitimate list of priorities of the community, and the public service's ability to mediate these common values, the deliberative body tasked with determining these criteria should be a permanent forum so as to be able to react reflexively. This would be the medium within which, among other things, the network partners – schools, community, parents, teachers, and others – bargain, negotiate and mediate to bolster the links through which the quality of the common good is decided. This approach enables Ostrom-like (1990) bridging between approaches previously considered incompatible – those of rational choice and sociological. The latter is for negotiating and shaping the interest of people, where the focus

is not on the technicality of ‘asking the people’s opinion’, but rather helping them to see the solution, i.e. naming and framing the issue (Bevir, 2010). This approach sees dialogue and deliberation as the process of policy learning, as the course towards active and responsible citizenship. Public value is what the public values, and it is the role of public managers to help determine, through the democratic process of deliberation and public engagement, which social outcomes are desirable (Newman and Clarke, 2009).

The focal points can be designed by matching algorithms, and this is a technical solution, but the key to quality lies rather in the ability to agree on and deliberate about community priorities on balances in a democratic educational model (here the conceptual frame is borrowed from Perry (2007)). There is no alternative mechanism of matching that satisfies all the value criteria, and the choice of an acceptable mechanism depends highly on the current circumstances, historical educational institutions, and case-specific political aims to facilitate intersecting possibilities embedded in the remaking of publics and public services.

## **Conclusion**

The aim of this article was not to offer a solution to the contemporary educational governance model (and in the postmodern era, hardly anyone believes in such a possibility), but to critically examine the main problems related to educational governance in a pluralistic frame. The problems of educational governance were shown from the school choice angle, i.e. choice as a response to differentiated social pluralism and choice as a move toward democratic governance, aiming for greater accountability to users and limiting their subjection to bureaucratic decision-making. Through three ideal-typical governance models of school choice, and borrowing tools from institutional and governance theory, and also from the mechanism design approach, this article proposed a conceptual model of educational governance and integrative choice to succeed within the era of active citizenship and a post-dichotomised, network-based providers’ model.

While arguing that the classical approach is inadequate, and choice-based solutions result in inequality and the instrumentalisation of the meaning of education while failing in their contribution to the public good,

this article did not want to stress the hierarchical-choice dichotomy, but rather argue that choice is one of the cornerstones of modern welfare states' active citizenship, and the component of parental freedom is one important aspect of the looked-for solution configuration. The combined democratic education governance model should combine a mechanism-design approach and deliberation forums. The latter should define the people's opportunity set (the sociological institutionalism-inspired interest formation to agree on the public good – community principles, followed by the logic of appropriateness). The former should be a definite matching process executed according to agreed community principles, where the preferences of parents are matched with a community's priority list. The aims of these matching algorithms could be adjusted according to local conditions, taking into account whether it is more apt to use a random lottery, or to favour disadvantaged groups or academic excellence. All these aspects are negotiable and the agreed-upon 'opportunity set' is the reflection of publicness mediated through public service that should be motivating and constitutive of social imaginary, and not simply instrumental.

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