

Editorial

In line with CEPS Journal conception and structure, we invited authors to focus on **Achievements (TIMSS, PISA) in International Research in Central and Eastern Europe**. In our invitation, we stated that we would particularly like contributions to shed light on:

- thematisation of internationally comparable research: theoretical backgrounds and methodological questions, the achievements of individual countries and national responses to these achievements,
- regional comparisons of results and comparisons of selected countries within the region with the achievements of countries outside Central and Eastern Europe,
- discussion of individual areas (equality, gender, mathematical achievements, etc.) in the light of national and regional comparisons,
- in consultation with the editors of the issue it is also possible to select other approaches to the theme.

As the result of our invitation, we have in front of us six articles discussing different aspects of achievements, mainly in PISA. Five of them focus on the results achieved in countries of Central and Eastern Europe, while one, due to a special invitation from the editors, discusses the Finnish march to becoming the best performing European nation in PISA. With this combination of nations from Central and Eastern Europe and Finland we embrace the two main ideas of the present CEPS Journal issue. On the one hand, we provide the ground for a thorough discussion of national and regional results in international educational attainment research. In so doing, we wanted to gather reflections that usually remain within the national sphere and present them on a regional level, thus offering our readers an insight into the state of the art in one of the important indicators of the quality of education in the region. On the other hand, we hope that in the idea of comparison readers and experts from the region will find stimulus to explore other topics and countries in the future (also in the CEPS Journal). We do not deny our aim, particularly by including Finland in the discussion, of stimulating the ambition of educators and policy makers in the region to strive for more – to achieve better results than the those of the past decade.

We believe that the articles briefly presented in this editorial can serve as solid ground for further elaborated reconsiderations of comparative research, both within the region and further afield. Comparison is far from being an educational panacea; however, it does offer numerous opportunities for research,

insight and reflection about more just and efficient education in the present and future.

Six articles in the **Focus** start with the paper discussing *Regional Educational Performance Patterns in Europe*. Péter Radó (an expert from Hungary) presents European educational performance profiles, claiming their relevance for education policy. Analysing PISA results within the conceptual frameworks of participation, quality of learning outcomes and equity of learning outcomes, the author proposes three European performance patterns: “the compensative education systems of North and Northwest Europe, the selective education systems of Central Europe and the attritional education systems of Southeast Europe.” On such a background, he provides an outline of major trends within the Central and Southeast Europe regions, offering reflections on the possible alignment of education policies in order to better fit the distinct context of the two regions, and proposing a conceptual framework for further comparative research of regional patterns in education.

In their article *Immigrant Students’ Achievements in Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia in Context*, Iztok Šori, Nika Šušterič and Slavko Gaber claim that achievement gaps between immigrant and native students indicate a failure to assure educational equity. Data demonstrate such a failure in the majority of countries assessed by the Programme for International Student Assessment in 2009 (PISA 2009). The authors discuss the reasons for the obvious inequity in education across OECD countries and other PISA countries and reflect upon how to succeed in addressing the migrant-native student attainment gap. While it may appear that in Europe the line of division matches that of old and new democracies, the authors demonstrate that such an explanation is not valid. During further contextualisation of the achievement results, the analysis also seeks explanations beyond the common education system explanatory model. The article focuses particularly on results from Croatia, Serbia and Slovenia, demonstrating the importance of language distance between native and immigrant environments and identifying immigration regimes as important factors in creating the achievement difference between native and immigrant students. Evidence shows that immigrant students score worse in countries with guest worker immigration than in countries with the large scale forced immigration of people of the same ethnic (linguistic) origin.

In their paper *The Big Improvement in PISA 2009 Reading Achievements in Serbia: Improvement of the Quality of Education or Something Else*, Dragica Pavlović Babić and Aleksandar Baucal discuss reading literacy among Serbian 15-year-olds by making a comparison with other selected countries and their scores in the 2006 and 2009 PISA studies. They also provide a detailed analysis

of the 15-year-olds' reading scores in terms of the share of students who attain individual levels of reading literacy by reading profile or individual reading aspects, and by the form of the text read. The authors observe progress in reading literacy among 15-year-olds in Serbia when comparing their scores in the 2006 and 2009 PISA studies. They identify the main reason for this in the decrease in the share of poor readers (i.e., readers who do not reach Level 2); in addition, they critically establish that it is easier to achieve progress among poor readers than among good readers or those who reach the highest reading levels (i.e., Levels 5 and 6). In fact, the PISA 2009 results do not confirm such an upward shift. Serbian secondary school students are also relatively more successful in identifying and selecting information in texts than in reflecting on and evaluating the texts read. Based on the findings obtained, the authors conclude that the reading progress of Serbian secondary school students depends primarily on the general social context, and less on changes in schools. In the future, it will be necessary to introduce modern teaching and learning methods in schools, such as active learning and research-based learning, which the authors believe would contribute to children's general cognitive development and to a greater transfer in competence learning, thus providing more opportunities for the more complete reading comprehension of texts (including more demanding texts) at higher levels.

Saša Milić's paper "*Montenegro in the PISA Study*" is a detailed analysis of the reading scores of Montenegrin secondary school students in the 2009 PISA study. The author observes that in 2009 the 15-year-olds' scores in all three assessment areas were somewhat lower than in 2006. He finds that the scores were significantly lower than the OECD average, and that 15-year-olds in all of the EU countries included performed better than the Montenegrin students. The reading literacy results are especially alarming because the decrease among the Montenegrin students is the greatest in relative terms, and due to the fact that reading literacy is a particularly important factor in academic performance. The analysis of factors influencing students' reading scores shows great differences among Montenegrin 15-year-olds in terms of whether they enjoy reading or not, the time they dedicate to reading, their awareness of the importance of developing effective reading strategies, as well as family environmental factors, such as parental education, the number of books in the home, cultural capital, the students' immigration status, and the age at which they first started attending preschool. Based on the findings obtained, the author analyses the potential reasons for the poor reading scores of Montenegrin students in greater detail. He highlights the fact that the 2009 PISA scores cannot provide a general quality assessment of the school reform that was introduced in Montenegro in 2001

and gradually implemented in schools from 2004/5 to 2006/7, because he believes this involves several subtle factors that must be identified and changed in order to provide a higher quality of knowledge in schools. Among the critical factors, he especially emphasises the insufficient quality of teacher education, especially in connection with process-target planning, grading that only exceptionally includes standardised tests, the inclusion of children with special needs despite inadequate professional support provided to schools, a professionally unsuitable strategy for teaching gifted children, and low shares of children attending preschool (in both the 1-3 and 3-6 age groups).

In his article entitled *A Case Study of Albania's Participation in PISA 2009*, Alfons Harizaj, an expert from Albania, presents Albania's results in PISA 2009. One of the main theses of the paper is that Albania made a significant step forward, in particular in the reading results of their students. To demonstrate his claim, the author compares the results of the Albanian students in 2009 with the results in 2000, when Albania also took part in PISA with the focus on reading. In the intervening period, major educational reforms were undertaken in Albania, and the author implicitly attributes the better results to the respective reforms. In the paper, the Albanian results are also compared with those of other countries participating in PISA, and with the results of other countries from the Albanian region. Finally, the author claims that the results give "a real view of the situation; they show us how effective the progress and our education policies are".

In his paper *PISA in Finland: An Educational miracle or an obstacle to change?* Pasi Sahlberg, an expert from Finland, discusses the role and impact of PISA results in Finland. The article starts by delineating PISA and TIMSS assessment. At the core of the paper is reflection on the ways in which education reforms since the 1970s have led to the Finnish PISA success. While praising PISA for its comparative insights into education, the author points out that, at least for Finland, PISA has slowed down the process of the continuous renewal of their education system. His conclusion is that "policy makers and media need to make better use of the rich data that have been collected, together with information about students' academic performance".

In the present edition, the **Varia** section of the CEPS Journal offers an article that focuses on teachers' emotional expression in the classroom. In the article, entitled *Teachers' Emotional Expression in Interaction with Students of Different Ages*, three Slovenian experts, Simona Prosen, Helena Smrtnik Vitulić and Olga Poljšak Škraban, present research in which teachers' emotions were observed by students of primary education during their practical work experience. The researchers' purpose was to establish which emotions were expressed

by teachers in their interactions with students, the triggering situations of the two most frequent emotions, and their level of intensity and suitability. Students used a scheme constructed for observing different aspects of emotions. The results show that primary school teachers express various pleasant and unpleasant emotions, with unpleasant emotions prevailing. The average frequency of teachers' expression of emotion decreases from grades one to five. Anger is the most frequently expressed emotion, followed by joy. Teachers' joy and anger are triggered in different situations: joy predominantly in situations of students' academic achievement and anger predominantly when students lacked discipline.

In the third section, there are **Reviews** of two monographs and one individual author's book. The first monograph is *Parent participation in the life of schools in South East Europe* (2011) (Kovacs-Cerovic, T., Vizek-Vidovic, V. and Powell, S., Ljubljana: CEPS, ISBN 978-961-253-063-1); and the second is *The Routledge Education Studies Reader* (2010) (Arthur, J. and Davies, I. (Eds.). New York: Routledge, ISBN 978-041-548-236-3). The individual author's book is the latest work by Pasi Sahlberg: *Finnish Lessons: What Can the World Learn from Educational Change in Finland?* (2011). New York: Teachers College Press, ISBN 978-080-775-257-9.

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