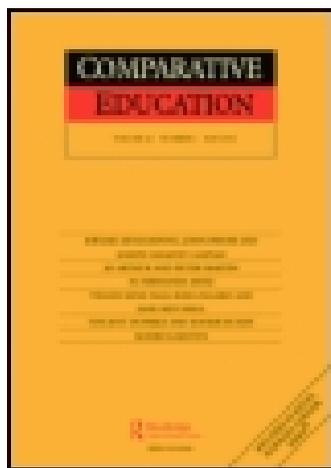


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Jaap Dronkers^{ab} & Silvia Avram^{ab}

^a ROA, Maastricht University, Maastricht, the Netherlands

^b ISER, University of Essex, Essex, UK

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What can international comparisons teach us about school choice and non-governmental schools in Europe?

Jaap Dronkers^{a,b*} and Silvia Avram^{a,b}

^aROA, Maastricht University, Maastricht, the Netherlands; ^bISER, University of Essex, Essex, UK

All European states have a primary obligation to establish and maintain governmental schools everywhere, but as the result of political struggle and constitutional guarantees, they have also allowed and often financed non-state schools based on special pedagogical, religious or philosophical ideas. Depending on the level of state grants for non-state schools, states have more or less the right to supervise these non-governmental schools and seek to guarantee that the quality of organisation and teachers are not lower than those in governmental schools. Using comparable cross-national data for all member states of the European Union, we first describe four existing basic arrangements of non-governmental and governmental schools: integrated educational systems of public and non-state schools, denomination supportive educational systems, limited-support non-governmental schools and educational systems with segregated public and non-state schools. Using the same cross-national data for all member states of the European Union, we then explore three other topics: parental background and the choice of non-governmental schools, non-governmental schools and their cognitive outcomes, and non-governmental schools and their non-cognitive outcomes. There are important differences between non-governmental-*independent* (without state grants) and non-governmental-*dependent* schools (with state grants); that school choice of non-governmental-*dependent* schools is more related to socially mobile parents, whereas schools choice of non-governmental-*independent* schools is more related to the reproduction of social classes; that in a majority of European countries, non-governmental-*dependent* schools are more effective cognitively than governmental schools, but that non-governmental-*independent* schools are more effective cognitively only in a few countries and more ineffective in a larger number of countries. Also non-governmental-*dependent* schools are *not* more effective non-cognitively than governmental schools.

Introduction

This article aims to summarise some of the empirical outcomes of a Europe-wide comparison, and we focus on the functioning of religious non-governmental schools in relation with their institutional context (notably funding and social selection) and school choice in a more or less secular Europe (Smyth, Lyons, and Darmody 2013). Maussen and Bader (2014) provide an overview of the situation of non-governmental religious schools in Europe (see also Glenn and De Groof 2002; Wolf and Macedo 2004). Most of the debates and research on non-governmental religious schools follow strictly the lines of the national states and thus tend to overemphasise the

*Corresponding author. Email: j.dronkers@maastrichtuniversity.nl

uniqueness of the national religious schools, and underscore the more general trends in the functioning of religious non-governmental schools and school choice in secular Europe. However, the empirical evidence on cross-national similarities and differences in the functioning of non-governmental schools in comparison with governmental schools is scarcer, even within Europe.

The first reason for this scarcity is the omission of information about the religious background of schools in the mayor cross-national data-sets, collected by the OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development) (the so-called Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) data of 15-year-old pupils, which we will use in this article as well) or the IEA (International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, with data-sets like PRILS (Progress in International Reading Literacy Study), TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study) and ICCS (International Civic and Citizenship Education Study)). Religion has become a private and irrelevant matter in Europe, at least in the eyes of the data-collecting authorities.¹

The second reason is the political sensitivity of the religious background of schools and the possible differences in outcomes between governmental and non-governmental schools. The struggle between non-governmental schools and the state about the degree of their funding and supervision makes any comparison of educational outcomes between governmental and non-governmental schools highly sensitive. Especially in countries that have witnessed intense school struggles, and/or in which state–church relations tend to be subject to deep ideological and political contestation, and/or in which ‘colour blindness’ of the state vis-à-vis religious and ethnic differences is the norm, even reporting the situation of religious schools from a comparative perspective is a sensitive issue. For instance, France has deleted all school information for the public PISA data-files since the first wave, and Canada has deleted the variables, which would allow the identification of schools as governmental or non-governmental from public PISA data-files.

Alongside these non-governmental-dependent schools, there exist in a number of European countries’ non-governmental schools that do not get funding from the (local, regional and national) government. Financially, they are fully dependent on student fees, donations, sponsorships and parental fundraising. The best-known example is the English public school. However, even their school autonomy can still be restricted in two ways. Authorities might set conditions (some teacher qualification, minimum quality of school buildings, rules related to home teaching, etc.) even for independent non-governmental schools in order to ensure some minimum quality of socialisation of the next generation. Although there is no recognised exam of these schools, these school had to function within their societal context and could not fully ignore the constraints of that society. For example, entrance criteria for universities will restrict the autonomy of a non-governmental school’s curriculum, or pupils need an additional state exam and some preparation for that exam, either by the non-governmental-independent school or by another school. However, non-governmental school autonomy will be the largest in their student admission policies, especially given the importance of student fees for the financing of these schools.

In this article, we summarise the most important outcomes of a European project on religious schools (Smyth, Lyons, and Darmody 2013).² The aim of this European project was the comparison of a number of systematic case studies of religious schools in a few EU countries. As an addition to these separate national case studies, we have analysed all available cross-national data on non-governmental schools in

all EU countries, among which PISA data are the most prominent (Avram and Dronkers 2011, 2013; Dronkers and Avram 2010a, 2010b). These cross-national data can show the more general trends in the functioning of religious non-governmental schools and school choice in secular Europe, and not only in the case study countries. That is also the aim of this chapter: a general overview of the functioning of religious non-governmental schools in relation with their institutional context (notably funding and social selection) and school choice in a more or less secular Europe, based on cross-national comparable data.

Institutional opportunities and school autonomy

This chapter based on cross-national data aims to sketch a picture of non-governmental schools in all EU countries, not just in a few selected countries. That is important because non-governmental schools (which are in majority religious schools) do not only exist in Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, the Netherlands and Scotland. They exist in many more European countries, sometimes already for a long time (for instance Belgium), sometimes interrupted by regime changes (Hungary) and sometimes recently emerged (Sweden). By comparing all European countries, we can see that the religious schools of the selected countries are not unique cases, and we make the more general trends in the functioning of religious non-governmental schools and school choice in secular Europe visible.

Variations among non-governmental schools within the European Union³

EU countries vary greatly in terms of their educational systems and practices, including the approach taken to the provision of religious education (see Glenn and de Groof 2002, volume 2). Historical legacies relating to the relative power of church and state in influencing key aspects of education are of particular relevance in the context of this research. Avram and Dronkers (2013) analysed the cross-country variation in the role of various religious bodies in education. They used three aspects of the relationship between school and religion, namely the role of religion in state-provided education, the existence and organisation of faith schools and school autonomy. Based on 11 indicators of these dimensions, they found that substantial country divergence exists in these characteristics. Most countries have a constitutional separation of church and state, especially Roman Catholic countries (like France, Italy and Austria), where both institutions have fought for primacy for many years, and where religious and anti-clerical political parties and movements exist. By contrast, there tends to be a less clear-cut separation in predominantly Orthodox and Protestant countries, where the state has had a long tradition of incorporating the Christian church as a branch of the state apparatus. The UK is a good protestant example with the king as head of the Anglican Church and Anglican bishops as members of the Upper House.

Religious education is normally available in all of the state-provided school systems, except for France where there is a well-established principle of secularism within state-provided education. However, countries differ in the emphasis they place on and the importance they attach to religious education, with practices ranging from having compulsory religious education (in Austria, Cyprus and Greece), quasi-compulsory religious education (with a special procedure to opt out needed in England and Ireland) to offering it on an optional but regular basis (students have to opt out of religious education in Malta, Belgium, the Netherlands, Bulgaria,

Poland, Portugal and Scotland) or offering it on request (students have to opt for religious education in Estonia, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Latvia and Lithuania). Countries also differ in the extent to which they impose the obligation on schools to make religious education available in the pupils' faith, when the subject is optional.

Great variation in the size of the non-governmental sector exists as well, from under 1% of the primary school pupil population in Bulgaria and Lithuania to 100% in Ireland, where technically all primary schools are non-governmental. Not surprisingly, the non-governmental sector tends to be more developed in countries where at least some public funding is made available to non-governmental schools. The exceptions are Central and East European countries where the only recent re-emergence of the non-governmental sector is still visible in its small size relative to state-provided education.

A national curriculum, quality control as well as national examinations are all ways in which the content of teaching and the instructional process in non-governmental schools may be controlled from the central level. The strictest form of control is the setting of a national curriculum. In prescribing the content and outcomes of a sizable portion of (sometimes the entire) teaching time, it allows for less flexibility at the school level for the establishment of a certain ethos of the teachers or a more stimulating school climate. The introduction of national examinations constitutes the opposite approach. It does provide for some, albeit indirect, control of the content of the educational process (for example, by drawing examination questions from a given syllabus), but it highlights the output side, that is, the actual achievement of students. Direct quality control, most often through external inspection, represents the middle ground between curriculum setting and national testing. Depending on how the inspection is structured, and the exact characteristics of the inspectors, it can vary in emphasis on the actual content of teaching or the educational output. All countries have some form of control, either through a national curriculum, national examinations or an inspection system. In fact, the majority of countries have at least two such control mechanisms in place. A more detailed account of country variation along these lines will follow further on, in the context of a discussion on school autonomy.

Schools may also be circumscribed in their ability to set their own staff policies. Almost all countries set special teaching certification/qualifications as a necessary precondition for employment in the non-governmental educational system (clear exceptions are England and Wales). Hiring and dismissal usually fall under the remit of general employment legislation, although special additional conditions may apply either because of educational legislation (for example, Hungary and Lithuania), collective branch agreements (for example, Finland) or because the government directly pays the teacher salaries and is thus their employer (for example, France and Spain). Restrictions regarding the flexibility of pay setting may also apply, especially when schools receive funding for all or a considerable size of their personnel expenses from the state budget (for example, in Belgium, Ireland and the Netherlands).

Finally, countries differ in whether administrative responsibilities regarding schools are allocated to the central or local level. A number of countries have centralised systems in which a central body, usually the Ministry of Education, is responsible for administering schools. A slightly smaller number of countries have decentralised responsibility for running and often also for financing state-provided schools at the local level. In these countries (for instance, the UK or Germany), it is the provincial, district or municipal authorities that are in charge of taking administrative decisions (for example, establishing or closing schools, appointing staff and so on) regarding

state schools. Finally, there are some countries (like Italy) that split the various responsibilities between central and local levels. Usually, the Ministry of Education retains decision-making power over more sensitive areas, while local governments are charged with settling routine issues.

The cost of attending a non-governmental school may differ considerably by country and, in some countries, by school. Very often, countries that offer public funding for non-governmental schools on an equal footing to public ones, or which shoulder the majority of non-governmental school expenses, impose limitations on the fees that non-governmental subsidised schools may ask of their pupils. The most common situation is that in which non-governmental subsidised schools are required to provide education free of charge to their students (for example, Finland, Belgium, Spain, Hungary and Slovakia for the higher subsidy amount). In a few cases, governments allow some fees to be charged but these have to be either nominal or proportional to family income (for example, Slovenia or Germany).

Four basic arrangements for non-governmental schools within the European Union

No clear blueprints emerge when looking at all of the 10 indicators in conjunction. The 10 dimensions cut across each other, thus making any parsimonious grouping of countries in homogeneous clusters elusive. Nonetheless, some broad patterns may be discerned. When looking at the position of the non-governmental sector and at that of faith schools within the non-governmental sector, four basic arrangements exist from the funding point of view:

- (1) countries in which non-governmental education is more or less on the same footing as state-provided education, termed 'integrated educational systems': Denmark, Finland, Ireland, the Netherlands, Poland, Slovakia, Spain and Sweden;
- (2) countries where faith schools (of some or all of the denominations) receive a more favourable treatment than other schools in the non-governmental sector, termed 'denomination-supportive educational systems'; the religious bias can be more prominent, such as is the case in Austria, Malta, Portugal and the UK where almost no funding is made available for non-governmental non-faith schools, or relatively mild as in the Central European countries of Hungary and the Czech Republic where faith schools are entitled to have a larger share of their expenses borne by the state;
- (3) countries that offer varying degrees of subsidisation to the non-governmental sector, but (always) less than the corresponding amount they spend on state-provided schools: Belgium, Estonia, France, Germany, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg and Slovenia. This category is rather eclectic; it not only contains countries that make public funding available on generous terms such as Belgium and Slovenia, but also contains countries where no public funding is guaranteed although it is offered in some cases such as Italy;
- (4) countries that fail to make any public funding directly available to the non-governmental sector, termed 'segregated educational systems': Bulgaria, Cyprus, Greece and Romania.

A brief review of the four categories of countries reveals some interesting findings. First, all the countries that have segregated educational systems are Eastern Orthodox

countries. Unlike the Roman Catholic Church, Orthodox Churches have tended to be national churches and, as such, developed a special relationship with the state. Rather than running a parallel educational network, the Orthodox Church has made its influence felt in state-provided education through the state (a sign of the influence of the church can be found in the importance given to religious education in the state-provided sector). As a result, no tradition of separate faith schools developed in these countries. The non-governmental sector developed and was perceived as an (almost) exclusively commercial enterprise, and the state sees no reason to support it.

A sizable non-governmental but state-supported sector developed in particular in countries with a large Roman Catholic population (for example, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Spain and Germany). Often, the existing arrangements came about after prolonged accommodation and protracted conflict between the state and the Catholic Church or the Calvinist Churches over the control of the educational system. As a result, faith schools have gained equal status as state-provided schools while maintaining their specific ethos. But because the state often refused to acknowledge a special position to any particular church, it extended the favourable status enjoyed by Catholic and Calvinist schools to the entire non-governmental sector.

A peculiar situation arose in Britain. Here, the church initially established its own schools but subsequently agreed to the state overtaking the financial and educational responsibilities for these schools. Consequently, faith schools have been integrated into state-provided schools; that is, they are financed almost in the same way as state-provided or municipal schools, but the church has retained considerable influence on the way these schools are run and continues to be represented on their boards. The overall result has been to accord a special position to faith schools within the educational system.

Decentralisation also encourages the emergence of favourable conditions for the funding of non-governmental schools, a situation that is typical of the Nordic countries. However, the decentralisation of the educational system does not mean that the central state can take a more unitary approach towards the various types of schools, thus making school ownership less irrelevant in an indirect way when it comes to the allocation of central funds.

The subsidisation of non-governmental schools by the state is, of course, only one side of the coin. In return for its financial support, the state has imposed and continues to impose various types of controls on schools and in the process has reduced school autonomy (for example, by setting a ceiling on the fees that may be charged). However, the most important way that the state may seek to control schools is through the educational process itself. As already mentioned, there are at least three ways by which the state can try to obtain some leverage, namely outlining a compulsory national curriculum, establishing national examinations (possibly as a precondition for certification) and by directly inspecting schools. Pooling all three aspects together yields a classification of countries based on school autonomy. Because prescribing educational content through a national curriculum is potentially the most intrusive way of exercising control, this dimension has been treated differently than the other two. Four categories have been constructed, which represent points along a continuum stretching from extensive school autonomy to strict school control:

- (1) countries with significantly considerable school autonomy (only one of national testing or school inspection is used as a method of control): Belgium, Hungary, Germany and Sweden;

- (2) countries with substantial school autonomy (both national examinations and school inspection are employed as methods of control): Denmark, Latvia, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, England and Wales and Scotland;
- (3) countries with some school autonomy (a national curriculum exists along with either national testing or school inspection): Austria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Lithuania and Spain;
- (4) countries with restricted school autonomy (all of the three control methods are present): France, Ireland, Luxembourg and Malta.

One thing that becomes immediately apparent is the interconnection between school autonomy (as defined above) and system centralisation. All countries in the group with the largest degree of school autonomy have decentralised educational systems, while all the countries in the group with the lowest level of school autonomy have centralised administration. The strong coupling of decentralisation with school autonomy points to a consistent pattern of central state involvement in the educational system. Countries that see education foremost as a state responsibility and domain for intervention tend to both directly administer the state-provided sector and limit the freedom of the non-governmental sector. The state tries to take direct charge of the system. On the contrary, countries that give more importance to non-governmental and local initiative allow both non-governmental entities and the local government more room to take decisions. In these countries, the state mainly plays the role of a facilitator and regulator.

Apart from decentralisation, school autonomy is also related to outcome of the state–church struggle. Countries in which the state succeeded in subduing the church (such as France) developed a setting that restricts further school autonomy within the national educational framework. In contrast, in countries where neither of the two parties achieved supremacy, a more flexible national framework was adopted allowing for more school autonomy within that framework (for example, Belgium and the Netherlands).

The school autonomy classification depicted above includes only countries, which make some kind of provision for public support of non-governmental schools. The four states that comprise the last category of the non-governmental sector subsidisation classification (that is, countries with no public funding available for non-governmental schools) have been intentionally omitted from the analysis. Since they do not shoulder any of the expenses incurred in the non-governmental sector, in principle, these four countries should have less of an incentive to restrict non-governmental schools' autonomy. Quite surprisingly, this expectation is not borne out. Two of them, Cyprus and Romania, have all three control measures in place, while the other two retain a national curriculum, and in the case of Bulgaria, quality inspection as well as tools to intervene within the non-governmental sector. However, a more careful reconsideration of the history of these four Orthodox nations underlines the prominent place that state agency has always held. Indeed, the strong centralisation of school administration in all four countries confirms the exceptional role of the state.

To conclude, current educational systems in Europe are very much a product of national historical developments. Past contingencies have created specific equilibria that retain a lingering influence on the way the educational system is organised and educational instruction structured. Both public support for the non-governmental sector and the various degrees of embedded school autonomy can be traced back to state formation processes, such as the emergence of a conflict for supremacy between the state

and the (Catholic) church, the outcome of this conflict and, more generally, the role that the state assumed in shaping society.

School choice and the market orientation on schools

Since the '70s of the last century neo-liberalism and libertarianism started the current debate about school choice and the market orientation on schools. The position of the non-governmental schools in England and its former colonies has always been quite different from that of those in continental Europe. Archer (1984) has explained this Anglo-Saxon deviation by its stronger confidence on the market to organise and finance schools, which resulted in a relatively large non-governmental-independent school sector. Therefore, parental choice and non-governmental schools are often advocated in Anglo-Saxon countries as a means of introducing competition for pupils among schools and decreasing the level of bureaucracy, thereby improving the quality of teaching and reducing the cost of education (Chubb and Moe 1990). The introduction of charter schools in the USA (non-governmental, non-religious schools, but funded under certain conditions by the states) can be interpreted as a consequence of the growth of neo-liberalism and a market orientation on schools.

Another argument used in libertarianism, which is much stronger in the USA as a political stream, states that schools should offer young people an education that is in accordance with the way of life of their parents. This latter line of reasoning comes closer to the European tradition of government-dependent religious schools (Godwin and Kemerer 2002).

The growth of neo-liberalism and a market orientation on schools in the USA since the '90s influenced the discourse and policies on the relation between governmental and non-governmental schools in Europe. This influence was strongest in the UK and Scandinavia, where fully subsidised non-governmental schools were rare. But also in countries like Belgium, Germany, France and the Netherlands, these neo-liberal and market arguments became stronger and partly replaced the older religious arguments for the existence and subsidising of non-governmental religious schools. The latter was also necessary because the high level of secularisation and non-membership of churches in Europe (Bruce 2002; Davie 2002) made the religious arguments for non-governmental religious schools partly outdated. Yet, it is also possible that, as a consequence of this secularisation, religious schools are no longer keen on or successful in forcefully moulding the attitudes and beliefs of the students attending it. If religious schools are not able or willing to alter (in comparison with governmental schools) these attitudes and values of their pupils, the confessional character of a school becomes irrelevant for irreligious parents. These irreligious parents would be able to select a religious school based on their superior effectiveness in delivering academic performance and not be concerned by a potential religious, moral or values conversion of their children. This might explain the continuous existence of religious schools in a secularised and irreligious Europe (see Merry 2014).

However, migration towards the European Union since the '60s resulted also in the growth of non-Christian religions in Europe, notably Islam and Hinduism. Adherents of these non-Christian religions started to claim the same right to subsidies of non-governmental Islamic or Hindu schools, and they have been successful in a few European countries (for instance the Netherlands) in establishing these Islamic or Hindu schools within the framework of the national educational laws. One of the related debates is whether the existence of Islamic or Hindu schools is a hindrance to the

integration or assimilation of these children of migrants and whether these Islamic or Hindu schools have a higher added value than governmental schools for educational performance (Driessen 2007; Driessen and Merry 2006).

This combination of religious and neo-liberal arguments for subsidised non-governmental religious schools and the additional migration controversy makes these European cross-national comparisons also relevant for the USA, not only for debates around the charter schools as a form of non-governmental subsidised non-religious schools, but also for the legal battles around funding non-governmental religious schools, and the societal consequences of the introduction of non-governmental school in immigrant societies like the USA.

Patterns of non-governmental or governmental school choice processes⁴

State legislation can facilitate or, on the contrary, impede the development of the non-governmental sector in general and of faith schools in particular. But the ability of faith schools to secure a firm foothold hinges on whether parents choose to send their children to non-governmental schools instead of state ones. So the question arises as to how this choice regarding the decision between state and non-governmental schools is made.⁵ More specifically, who are the parents who are more likely to send their offspring to non-governmental schools and what are the characteristics of the schools that are most successful in attracting students? Unfortunately, no comprehensive cross-national data exist on attendance of state-provided versus faith schools at the primary level. Nonetheless, a valuable insight into school choice processes can be gained from the PISA, developed by the OECD. It not only collects cross-nationally comparable information on student achievement and skills among 15-year-olds, but also contains rich data on student and school background.

The PISA survey does not distinguish between faith and non-faith schools. However, it does provide information on both school boards and funding. While the exact details vary, most countries allow faith schools to be run autonomously from the public system and make available substantial public funds for them, often on a par with public establishments. Consequently, we have opted to use the government-dependent category as an indicator for faith schools. Although a reasonable assumption, it has to be kept in mind that the overlap between the two categories is not perfect. In particular, some non-governmental-dependent schools are not affiliated with religious organisations, as freedom of establishment is a right enshrined in the constitution in countries such as the Netherlands, permitting a wider range of organisations to establish their own school networks. For instance, there exist in Dutch non-governmental primary education six non-religious school sectors (for instance anthroposophy), eight Christian religion school sectors (for instance Catholic and various protestant orthodoxies) and three non-Christian school sectors (for instance Hindu and Islamic). Thus non-governmental schools are not equal to religious schools in the Netherlands. Although the Netherlands is an extreme case, and the degree of overlap between religious schools and non-government-dependent schools is likely to be much higher in other European countries, it might be different across countries.

Based on existing literature comparing non-governmental and governmental schools, as well as on the availability of comparable data in the three waves of PISA, a variety of family and school characteristics that are likely to influence school choice by parents are included. Gender, immigrant status, cultural possessions (like books, painting, own desk), wealth, both maternal and paternal education

and occupational status have been incorporated to account for family background variation in the population of non-governmental and state schools. The school's social composition (the percentage of students having at least one parent with a university degree), size, admission policies (whether it considers parental endorsement of the school's educational philosophy and attendance of its special programmes as criteria when admitting students) as well as variables related to the school's resources, namely student–teacher ratios, computer–student ratios and a composite index of educational resources, have been considered as potential factors influencing school choice on the school side. Finally, to gauge the potential deterrent effect that financial costs of attending a school might have, a variable on whether the school charges tuition fees has been included.

We found that two roughly equal groups of choice patterns in the choice of a non-governmental-dependent school over a state-provided one can be discerned. The first group contains Belgium, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal, Slovakia and Spain. The second group is made up of Austria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, Ireland, Germany, Luxembourg and Sweden. In the first group, non-governmental-dependent schools appear to be chosen more for their *specific school philosophy* and less for their favourable student composition. The parental background of their student body is mixed, including both working-/lower middle-class parents and immigrants alongside middle-class families. In the second group, non-governmental-dependent schools tend to educate students from *families with the most financial resources*. They also tend to be smaller and have lower student–teacher ratios. Girls are more likely to be sent to non-governmental-dependent schools in these countries. Maternal and/or paternal high occupational statuses along with cultural capital also increase the chances of attending a non-governmental-dependent school instead of a state-provided one. Higher social class together with enhanced resources seem to constitute the prevailing reason for choice of non-governmental-dependent schools in the second group of countries, with these schools tending to cater especially to children of upper-class professionals.

We also found that two roughly equal groups of choice patterns in the choice of a non-governmental-independent school over a state-provided one can be discerned. The first group consists of Austria, Switzerland, Italy, Greece and the UK. Non-governmental-independent schools in these countries are chosen by native-language-speaking pupils from more wealthy families who choose non-governmental-independent schools for their high socioeconomic school composition and the special programmes of these schools. One might characterise the non-governmental-independent school choice in these countries as a *social class reproduction choice*. The second group contains Belgium, Portugal and Spain. Non-governmental-independent schools in these countries are chosen by foreign-language-speaking pupils from less wealthy families who choose schools with many material resources. One might characterise the non-governmental-independent school choice in these countries as *an outsider's choice for a well-equipped school*.

As we have seen above, the school philosophy or a well-equipped school, next to social composition and social reproduction, is important for the choice of public and non-governmental schools (dependent or independent). Therefore, it is important to investigate whether the cognitive and non-cognitive performance of pupils at non-governmental schools differs, and to what extent these differences in cognitive and non-cognitive performance are related to the social composition of these schools.

Performance of non-governmental schools: cognitive outcomes

The results we present in this section are based on a precise and restricted comparison, using propensity score matching analysis. We only compare pupils who have a comparable chance to attend a non-governmental-dependent or a governmental school. We omit those pupils in non-governmental-dependent schools who have no comparable match among pupils in governmental schools. This leads to the loss of quite a large number of pupils in the sample, particularly in countries where the non-governmental-dependent sector is small or obviously skewed towards better-off families. The big advantage of this precise and restricted comparison is that it provides a fairly better proof of eventual different outcomes between dependent, independent and governmental schools.

If we do not take into account the comparability of dependent and governmental schools, we would find that the pupils of non-governmental-dependent schools in Austria, Belgium, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Norway, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland have higher reading scores on average, and that pupils of non-governmental-dependent schools in Italy and Luxembourg score significantly lower compared to those in governmental schools. However, if we would only select those pupils who have a comparable chance to attend a non-governmental-dependent or a governmental school, and match each pupil attending a non-governmental-dependent school to another pupil with a similar chance but attending a governmental school, the only significant positive differences in the reading score between pupils of non-governmental-dependent schools and governmental schools are still found in Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, the Netherlands and Portugal. Pupils of non-governmental-dependent schools in Austria score significantly lower than their counterparts in governmental schools.

We apply the same procedure of a precise and restricted comparison to independent schools. Given the school choice selectivity discussed earlier, it is no surprise that pupils of non-governmental-independent schools in nearly all countries have higher reading scores on average (except Switzerland). But if we apply the same comparison, we find only significant positive differences in the average reading score of pupils attending non-governmental-independent and governmental schools in Belgium and Greece, and pupils of non-governmental-independent schools in Switzerland score significantly lower than their counterparts in governmental schools. In the remaining countries, the differences in the reading score between pupils of non-governmental-independent schools and those of governmental schools are no longer statistically significant.

Performance of non-governmental schools: values and attitudes as non-cognitive outcomes⁶

Hitherto, especially in the European context, an important aspect of legitimacy of religious schools is not related to any academic superiority but to producing positive outcomes, like certain (religious) values and desirable attitudes towards life and the world. Religious schooling, with its deep historical roots, makes up an important part of European educational systems (especially in the Western and Central parts of the continent). Given its specificity, religious schooling can be expected to place a greater weight on values teaching and moral education. Churches themselves played an overwhelmingly important role in norms and tradition preservation and transmission

in the ancient regime (before the French Revolution); although diminished, it still retains this function nowadays. As such, it may be more effective in bringing about certain attitudes and opinions. It also may be more successful in creating a warm and caring atmosphere, thus helping students to better emotionally connect to the school community.

However, differences in non-cognitive achievements are not found in most national studies. This contradicts the *raison d'être* of state-funded religious schools, because the right of parents to determine the moral and religious education of their children always has been more or less explicitly the basis of state recognition and funding of religious schools. But the higher cognitive effectiveness of state-funded religious schools also contradicts this *raison d'être* of religious schools, which maintain throughout that they do not want to compete with state schools for better academic outcomes. As a consequence, most state-funded religious schools and their organisations in various European societies tend to deny any higher cognitive effectiveness and try to avoid any research in that direction. Also state schools and their organisations tend to avoid research on their lower cognitive effectiveness in order to avoid embarrassment and political defeat by religious organisations, with which they have struggled so long for hegemony. This avoidance of political difficulties and embarrassment around a politically sensitive topic can explain why the research on effectiveness of public and state-funded non-governmental schools in Europe is not as extensive as one might expect given the disproportionate size of and the current increase in the state-funded school sector in various European countries. To show the problems around non-cognitive outcomes, we analyse non-cognitive outcomes by making use of three waves of data collected in the framework of the PISA study.

More specifically, public and publicly supported non-governmental (as our proxy for religious) schools have been compared on two dimensions, the emotional integration with the rest of the school community, as reported by students,⁷ and the concern and feelings of responsibility towards the environment.⁸ In the first case, except for Austria, Belgium and Spain, no evidence could be found that the type of the school has any impact on the reported psychological adaptation to the school. In these three countries, publicly supported non-governmental schools tend to be more successful in integrating their students. In the latter case, students in public and non-governmental-dependent schools were equally environment oriented, taking into account several student and school characteristics. Thus, whereas differences in emotional integration between non-governmental and governmental schools are only found in three countries, differences between non-governmental and governmental schools in environmental responsibility are not found.

The lack of schooling-sector differences in attaining non-cognitive aims (psychological well-being/integration, environment preservation) may have at least three causes. First, ecological issues could be salient enough not to necessitate any special religious or moral reinforcement in order to gain traction. They are, in fact, among the few examples where a strong public consensus exists on the desirable course of action. Second, governmental schools may use religious education or ethics just as fruitfully and consequently they are just as successful in values and norms transmission. In fact, a variant of moral, civic or ethics education is always present in the official curricula for public secondary education in all countries. Further research is needed to probe into these hypotheses.

It should be kept in mind that we only analyse one normative dimension, namely concern and willingness to protect the environment. This debate is a fairly recent

one in which the Christian churches have only just begun to take part. Religious and governmental schools may foster much more contrasting attitudes in more traditional areas such as gender roles, abortion, euthanasia, tolerance and respect for diversity and one's fellows and so forth. Yet, it is also possible that confessional education is no longer keen on or successful in forcefully moulding the attitudes and beliefs of the students attending it. If such were the case, the lack of school sector differences on non-cognitive dimensions could shed light on the mechanisms behind the success of religious schools in secularised societies. If religious schools are not able to alter the attitudes and values of their pupils, their confessional character could be irrelevant for irreligious parents. If parents are interested in cognitive skill development, they would be able to select a religious school based on their superior effectiveness in delivering academic performance and not be concerned by a potential religious, moral or values conversion of their children. For the moment, such a mechanism remains a hypothesis. Further research is needed to probe into the ways non-governmental school characteristics are intertwined with parental school preferences.

Conclusions

Using comparable cross-national data for all member states of the European Union, we first described four existing basic arrangements of non-governmental and governmental schools. Then we explore three other topics: parental background and the choice of non-governmental schools, non-governmental schools and their cognitive outcomes, and non-governmental schools and their non-cognitive outcomes. Most of the debates and research on non-governmental religious schools follow strictly the lines of the national states and thus tend to overemphasise the uniqueness of the national religious schools, and underscore the more general trends in the functioning of religious non-governmental schools and school choice in secular Europe. By comparing all European countries, we can see that the religious schools of the selected countries are not unique cases, and we make the more general trends in the functioning of religious non-governmental schools and school choice in secular Europe visible.

We summarise first the most important points of this cross-national comparison of school choice and performance of governmental and non-governmental schools.

The first point is the importance of the distinction between non-governmental-independent and non-governmental-dependent schools, next to governmental schools. Lumping non-governmental-independent and non-governmental-dependent schools together into one category as 'market-driven' schools is misleading (Vandenberghe and Robin 2004). That would underestimate the seriousness of the restrictions, which go with the state grants in most countries and ignore the still powerful history of the struggle between the state and the church. This distinction between non-governmental-independent and non-governmental-dependent schools might have different names in different countries, but that does not mean that they function differently. On the other hand, the same name in different countries does not necessarily mean that their function is equal.

The second point is that school choice and subsidised (faith) non-governmental schools are widespread phenomena in European countries, although not always visible like in France where the image of a dominant governmental school sector is wearing thin. However, there is a large variation in the relations between countries' religiosity and the existence of subsidised faith schools, caused by the historical path

dependency in the different countries. As a consequence, there are different arrangements and patterns of these relations in the different European states.

The choice of non-governmental schools seems driven not only by parental class and inequality. The choice of non-governmental-dependent schools seems more related with parents who are or wish to be socially mobile. On the other hand, the choice of non-governmental-independent schools seems to be more related to the inter-generational reproduction of existing inequalities.

Non-governmental-dependent schools are more effective cognitively than governmental schools, but not in all countries. In a few countries, non-governmental-dependent schools are less effective than governmental schools, and in the remaining countries, they are as effective cognitively as governmental schools. Non-governmental-independent schools are more effective cognitively than governmental schools in only a few countries and more ineffective in a comparable small number of countries. In the remaining countries, they are as effective cognitively as governmental schools.

The main argument for religious schools in the nineteenth and the first part of the twentieth centuries has been the assumption that faith schools would socialise the pupils in the religious values and attitudes better than governmental schools could. Therefore, parents had the right to send their children to subsidised faith schools in order to ensure the socialisation of their children by the school in the values and attitudes of their religion (non-cognitive performance of schools). However, non-governmental-dependent schools (of which the majority are faith schools) are not more effective non-cognitively than governmental schools. This contradicts the *raison d'être* of state-funded religious schools, because the right of parents to determine the moral and religious socialisation of their children always has been more or less explicitly the basis of state funding of religious schools. This ineffectiveness of non-governmental-dependent schools in the non-cognitive domain is compensated by the larger effectiveness of non-governmental-dependent schools in the cognitive domain. The latter might be a good explanation for the survival and even growth of faith schools in a secular European Union.

Notes

1. This omission of the religious background is not unique for education. In a cross-national data-set on fertility from the late '90s (Family & Fertility Survey, collected by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe), there was no question about the religious background of the surveyed women, although it is generally acknowledged that religion relates with fertility.
2. Financed by the European Commission within the seventh Frame Work (FP7-SSH-2007-1-REMC).
3. In this and the next section, we used extensively Avram and Dronkers (2013).
4. In this and the next section, we used extensively Avram and Dronkers (2012) and Dronkers and Avram (2010a, 2010b).
5. It goes without saying that governmental and non-governmental schools are not the only or the most important school characteristic that parents will consider when they have to choose a school.
6. In this section, we use extensively Avram and Dronkers (2011).
7. The index of the items – my school is a place where: I feel like an outsider, I make friends easily, I feel like I belong, I feel awkward and out of place, other students seem to like me, I feel lonely.
8. The index of items like: do you see the environmental issues below as a serious concern for yourself and/or others? Air pollution, energy shortages, extinction of plants and animals, clearing of forests for other land use, water shortages and nuclear waste.

Notes on contributors

Silvia Avram is a senior research officer at the University of Essex, UK. The topic of her Ph.D. thesis at the European University Institute (Italy) was Antipoverty Policies in Central and Eastern Europe (2011). She obtained her International Master in Social Policy at the Katholieke Universiteit Leuven, Belgium, and her B.A. in Sociology and Political Science at the National School of Political Science and Administration in Bucharest, Romania. Email: savram@essex.ac.uk

Jaap Dronkers has held the chair in international comparative research on educational performance and social inequality at Maastricht University since December 2009. He was Professor of Social Stratification and Inequality at the European University Institute (2001–2009) and of Empirical Sociology (1999–2001) and Educational Sciences (1990–1999) at the University of Amsterdam. Email: j.dronkers@maastrichtuniversity.nl. Personal homepage: http://www.roa.unimaas.nl/cv/dronkers/nw_dronkers.htm

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