

doi: 10.26529/cepsj.1165

Slavica Ševkušić, Dušica Malinić and Jelena Teodorović (Eds.), *Leadership in Education. Initiatives and trends in selected European countries*. Institute for Educational Research, Faculty of Education, University of Kragujevac, Hungarian-Netherlands School of Educational Management, University of Szeged, 2019; 242 pp, ISBN 978-86-7447-149-4

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This book is one of the outcomes of a TEMPUS project (EdLead) coordinated by the Faculty of Education of the University of Kragujevac in Serbia, implemented in cooperation with three other Serbian universities (Belgrade, Nis and Novi Sad) and the Institute for Educational Research (Belgrade) between 2013 and 2017.² The project has aimed to develop a master's programme for school leaders in Serbia with the support of three international partners: the Netherlands School for Educational Management (Netherlands), the University of Jyväskylä (Finland), and the University of Szeged (Hungary).

The EdLead project included several knowledge-generating events and activities. One was an international scientific conference entitled 'Challenges and dilemmas of professional development of teachers and leaders in education,' organised in Belgrade in 2015. This event contributed to the birth of the idea to produce a collection of analytical national case studies presenting the state of the art and recent developments in school leadership in various countries. Many potential contributors were contacted, particularly in southern and



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 2 "Master program in educational leadership (EdLead)" (2013-2017). Project Reference: 543848-TEMPUS-1-2013-1-RS-TEMPUS-JPCR

central Europe: internationally known academics with a significant record in research and development work on school leadership and management. They became the authors of this collection of studies.

All the authors of the book 'Leadership in Education. Initiatives and trends in selected European countries' rightly emphasise that the quality of school leadership has been recognised globally and in Europe as a major factor determining education systems' effectiveness. Several European countries have made remarkable efforts to define the competencies school leaders need and create appropriate institutional frameworks to develop these competencies and strengthen the knowledge base of these efforts through academic research and professional communication. This has received significant support from the European Union, for example, through the creation of a policy network in 2011 focusing specifically on this area.³

Developments, however, have been uneven, especially in central and southern Europe. In some countries, the need for improvement in this area was recognised early, and some international development projects were initiated with funding from the European Union or through bilateral projects supported by various national governments. Most of these projects are mentioned in one or more chapters of the book. The authors highlight their importance in raising awareness, creating the necessary knowledge base, and building institutions and capacities. The EdLead project is one of the most recent initiatives of this kind, again proving the importance of international support and cooperation.

The editors of 'Leadership in Education. Initiatives and trends in selected European countries' collected case studies from 12 countries (Serbia, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Slovenia, Bulgaria, Hungary, Czech Republic, Slovakia, Austria, and Finland). Most of them are from southern European countries, but four central European cases are also presented, and one of the chapters is about a Nordic country, Finland. The authors of the chapters followed a common analytical framework: all presented the relevant elements of national legal frameworks. They provided an analysis of the most important developments in the field (including capacity-building arrangements and related research). They also included recommendations and suggestions for the future. However, they enjoyed significant freedom to shape the content of their chapters in the function of the specific national context and in the function of the relevant knowledge and information available for them in the given country. The reader can appreciate both the structural similarity

3 See the website of The European Policy Network on School Leadership (EPNoSL): <http://www.schoolleadership.eu/portal/project>

of the chapters, facilitating comparisons and their diversity, allowing a deeper exploration of what is specific to the different national systems.

The book reveals a high-level variety of national patterns in policy-makers recognising the importance of developing school leadership and taking actual policy actions to promote improvement in this area. In some countries (e.g., Austria, Finland, Slovenia), there has been a high-level of political awareness of the crucial role of school leaders in making schools effective for many years, and one can witness the emergence of strong and stable institutional frameworks capable not only of generating and maintaining advanced quality but also the creation and spread of innovative solutions. In other countries, policy efforts in this area are almost completely missing or, when they appear, they are fragile, not sustained, and overly dependent on temporary international development projects.

This book demonstrates that even in those countries where policy support for school leadership development is missing or fragile, there is a strong small professional community that is not only fully aware of the importance of the area but also capable of mobilising resources, producing high quality relevant knowledge and exploiting the potential of international development actions. Several members of these communities are among the authors of the book, which can also be described as a pool of their shared, common knowledge. They form a well-connected community of thinking and practice, with a significant potential for promoting nationally and internationally the cause of leadership development.

The different chapters of the book show that educational management and leadership has become a well-established research area: an important sub-discipline within the large domain of educational research. In every chapter, we see the presentation of the outcomes of several research studies on various problem areas, such as leadership impact, leadership-related beliefs and opinions, the skills needs of school leaders or the relationship between organisational capacities and leadership styles. In some chapters, we find the outcomes of qualitative studies, which enables the reader to obtain a deeper insight into the way school leadership works.

One of the book's strengths is the combination of studies written by those of the 'receiving side' of the EdLead project and those who were supposed to bring relevant international knowledge through Serbia's development activities. This is a good example of mutual international learning, when those participating in the process of 'policy transfer' or 'policy borrowing' are learning from each other. The advanced Finnish approaches focusing on professional learning communities, knowledge-sharing networks, the promotion of 'systemic

leadership' or 'distributed leadership' generated valuable insights in the Serbian context, where the establishment of basic institutional frameworks remains on the agenda. The same is true for the experiences of the Austrian 'Leadership Academy'. Both have attracted the attention of the OECD analysts when that organisation launched its thematic survey on school leadership (Pont, 2008).

The editors of the book, summarising the recommendations of the various chapters, underline three major options for further improving policy and practice. In the first place, they stress that there is a clear need to professionalise further school leadership. This includes the 'establishment of better defined, more stringent and transparent criteria for the selection of principals as well as the creation of appropriate mechanisms and instruments for evaluation of their work' (p. 9). They suggest that this can only be achieved if the political influence on the appointment and the activity of principals is minimised. This recommendation also includes references to a wide variety of capacity development tools. As the authors put it: 'the improvement of competencies of principals through appropriate initial, advanced, and in-service training and mentoring, creation of opportunities for principals' career progression and efforts to make principalship more attractive' (p. 9).

In the second place, the editors recommend, again on the basis of what each author emphasises, initiating systemic reforms changing the regulatory environment in which school leaders work, 'synchronising legislative and professional aspects of leadership and giving more autonomy to schools and principals, especially in the field of financing and budgeting' (p. 9). They demand actions for reducing the administrative burden of school leaders so that they could focus more on the core tasks of their school: the improvement of teaching and learning.

The third recommendation of the editors, again echoing what the authors of the various chapters suggest, is related to improving the knowledge base of leadership-development. As they stress, 'future research should, among other things, focus on studying the effects of existing training programs and examine what competencies are needed for principals to lead schools as they become more autonomous' (p. 10). This book is, in fact, a good example of how research can support policy development and the development of effective new institutions and processes.

A key challenge most southern and central European countries face when they envisage designing school leadership development programmes is to position themselves on a continuum that stretches from classical university- and course-based management training to school-based professional development embedded into the daily operation of schools and school networks. The

chapter on Finland, which is the only one to rely significantly on case-presentation and to follow an ethnographic approach, promotes the involvement of school-leaders in professional learning communities as the most effective way to develop their capacities. The author stresses that if schools and school networks are to be developed into professional learning communities, they have to develop a collaborative culture and network orientation, which makes it necessary to overcome the tradition of teacher isolation and also the building of strong inter-institutional horizontal connections. Perhaps the most important message of a reviewer on this book is that one should not be overly committed to the classical forms of professionalising leadership through formal training by professional, often university-based trainers. There is a need for openness to capacity development forms based on mutual, horizontal learning in less formal environments, such as communities of practice and learning supporting networks.

There is one additional element in the book to which I would like to draw the reader's attention: the role of entrepreneurship in school leadership. This appears in several chapters but receives the strongest attention in the chapter on Slovenia, which devotes a whole section to the entrepreneurial competencies of school leaders. As the authors of this chapter note: 'School heads need entrepreneurial skills in order to effectively manage their schools' (p. 219). They recall the definition of the relevant working group created by the European Commission: 'entrepreneurship refers to an individual's ability to turn ideas into action, to be innovative, take risks, plan and manage projects with a view to achieving objectives, and being able to seize opportunities' (p. 219). In fact, there are too few school management and leadership training programmes that recognise the importance of entrepreneurial skills, incorporate this into their intended learning outcomes and make concrete efforts to develop this necessary skill. Focusing on this specific aspect is a particular strength of the Slovenian chapter.

'Leadership in Education. Initiatives and trends in selected European countries' is an important book for all those who are engaged in developing school leadership or plan future initiatives in this area, not only in southern and central Europe but everywhere in the continent. It is a vital resource for those who design leadership training programmes or any kind of development actions in this area. There is perhaps one element that could have strengthened the future impact of this book: a substantial synthesis chapter going beyond what the relatively short preface could provide.

References

Pont, B., Nusche, D., & Moorman, H. (2008). *Improving school leadership*, Volume 1: Policy and practice. Volume 2: Case Studies on System Leadership. OECD Publishing.
