



REPORT ON MASTER THESIS

Name of the student: Edona Begu

Study program: Public and Social Policy

Title of the master thesis: Pre-university educational system and inequalities in Kosovo

Supervisor: Prof. PhDr. Arnošt Veselý, Ph.D.

Name of the referee: Prof. PhDr. Arnošt Veselý, Ph.D.

Master's thesis of Edona Begu deals with highly relevant and current topic – educational inequalities. Although this topic is generally widely studied, Edona has chosen to study the issue in a context of Kosovo that no scholar work has focused so far. The master thesis thus provides original contribution to the field, both in terms of scholarship (extending our knowledge about educational inequalities), and in terms of practice (contributing to educational policy debate in Kosovo). So first of all, I must appreciate courage of Edona in the choice of the topic, as well as her perseverance in overcoming the obstacles when writing the thesis (especially the problem with unavailable data and sources).

The thesis is divided into eight parts. First, brief historical overview of Kosovo and its educational system is provided. Second, literature on the core concepts (such as stratification and centralization) is reviewed. Third, analytical framework based upon the concepts of standardization and stratification is provided. Fourth, methodology and data are described. The last four chapters are devoted to the analysis of educational inequalities in Kosovo structured according to analytical framework. In general, the structure of the thesis is clear, although the titles of some chapters perhaps could be labelled differently. For instance, the “literature review” is in fact outline of theoretical concepts used in the thesis. Also, research goals and question, now formulated in introduction, could be stated more explicitly and separately.

The main goal of the thesis was to describe and analyse educational inequalities in Kosovo. The initial intention was to do original analysis of the Kosovo data, and to find out to what extent educational achievement is determined by socio-economic background of the parents. The lack of the data led the student to change research strategy. She decided for predominantly theory-based and deductive approach to the



issue. On the basis of the literature, she set the basic features of educational systems that are assumed to be associated with educational inequalities (such as high level of stratification), and then examined to what extent Kosovo educational system resembles such characteristics. Obviously, such indirect reasoning has its limits, but to the credit of the student, it should be noted that these limits are explicitly considered.

One of the strongest aspects of the thesis is careful consideration of relevant theories and creation of analytical framework based upon the work of Allmendinger and Kerckhoff. This framework is then applied to Kosovo education. The features of Kosovo is analysed on the basis of analysis of policy instruments and documents. Though I appreciate author's own analysis which is depicted also in clear and comprehensible visualisations, it would be perhaps worthy of noting that reality can be different from formal procedures, rules and strategies. For instance, based upon Kosovo Education Strategic Framework it is concluded that pre-service training of teachers is highly standardized. However, is it really so in practice? Are all teachers really of the same quality and are quality teachers really allocated equally across schools?

The thesis comes to conclusion that Kosovo educational system can be described as both highly stratified and highly standardized. Using PISA data, it has been found that one-unit increase on the economic, social and cultural status of students was associated only with 18 score-point difference in science. As such, these results mean that the socio-economic disadvantages has relatively minor role in explaining variation in the performance of students in Kosovo. However, as the author argues, it may be because there is in fact little variation – all schools are in international comparison rather underperforming. So, we could say that it is rather “equality in the lack of access to quality education”. It would be, however, interesting to discuss and analyse whether they are really not any good quality schools in Kosovo. It seems that in each society there is a tendency to establish some kind of elite schooling for those who have economic or political power. Is Kosovo really exception to that? If so, why?

It is also found that the system does not provide equal access in terms of upper secondary education, because students from vocational schools have significantly worse prospects in entering labour market. The thesis also describes the low percentage of Kosovo youths entering tertiary education. It is argued that inequality in access to education is likely “postponed” to tertiary education. Despite the fact that we lack many



data that would document some arguments in the thesis, Kosovo is definitely very interesting case. As a newly established country, it provides an interesting case for research as it enables to analyse social phenomena in *statu nascendi*.

The language of the thesis is clear, and the presentation of arguments is relatively easy to follow. However, the thesis includes many typing errors and incorrect use of English. Also, the format for references is not uniform and standard. The references for journal articles, for instance, should be provided in full (web page is not sufficient). It seems that it was finalized in rush, and it somewhat impairs otherwise well-written thesis.

Conclusion: I recommend the master thesis for defence and I suggest grading it either as excellent (1) or very good (2)



Suggested questions for defence:

1. PISA research focus upon 15-year-old students. In Kosovo, thus all of the surveyed students are already at some upper-secondary school (gymnasium or vocational school). It is argued in the master's thesis that students are selected into gymnasium on the basis of highly academic criteria. It could be assumed that academic achievement at the age of fourteen is still strongly influenced by socio-economic background of the children. But, according to PISA, socio-economic background play rather marginal role in explaining the educational outcomes. Are there any other possible factors that can explain this puzzle (such as specific culture in Kosovo, generally low motivation for further education etc.)? Is it really so, in your experience, that family do not play important role in applying to either gymnasium or vocational school in Kosovo?
2. Is state matura exam compulsory requirement for entering higher education? Is it possible to pass state matura exam for students in vocational schools? One of your recommendations is to introduce "dual system" like in Germany. But would not this lead to even more stratification of the educational system with negative consequences for educational inequality?

Date of evaluation: May 29, 2017

Referee Signature: