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TranState Working Papers

TRANSFORMING EDUCATION
POLICY IN NEW ZEALAND.
A CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

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No. 97

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Transforming Education Policy in New Zealand A Case Study Analysis

ABSTRACT

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the changing face of New Zealand education policy over the past 25 years. It highlights the phase of socio-economic transformation in the late 1980s and its far-reaching impact on the education system, before turning to the last two decades, in which New Zealand's education policy has been increasingly shaped by its system of education export, its willingness to engage in international comparison and its close cooperation with international organizations. The article also emphasizes the various domestic forces, which have shaped education policy-making. They include a unique willingness to experiment, pragmatism, and an underlying "culture of balance and inclusion", which account for the high degree of flexibility and adaptiveness of the country's secondary and tertiary education systems.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the changing face of New Zealand education policy since the 1980s. The study of New Zealand's (NZ) education system is an interesting endeavor for various reasons and this analysis will shed light on the forces that have shaped the policy process and outcomes in this country of 4.1 million inhabitants. Firstly, the analysis highlights that geographical distances can easily be overcome during the spread of international best practice and that countries in the most remote locations can have a shaping impact on internationally promoted policies. NZ policy-makers not only demonstrate a unique willingness to engage in international co-operation at various levels. They also have influenced the development of education policy at the OECD level. Moreover, New Zealand arguably has a longer tradition of tight synergies with the OECD than many European countries. These links have been strengthened by the recent emergence of the OECD as a potent education actor (see Martens 2007; Martens / Jakobi 2007). Secondly, NZ education has undergone radical changes over the past 25 years. The sweeping changes in the public sector spilled over into New Zealand's education system, making the country an early reformer and to a large degree experimenter with regard to education policy. Thirdly, New Zealand education has been strongly impacted by its key role in the global market for tertiary (and secondary) education. Over the past 15 years the government has actively facilitated the liberalization of education by means of the GATS framework (see Martens / Starke 2008; Codd 2003), making the "export" of education to foreign students one of the country's main industries. Although certainly not a model for all countries, the additional funding drawn from the education export business has granted education institutions additional flexibility and leeway. Fourthly and as a result of the parameters set in the 1980s, NZ currently finds itself in a different and arguably more favourable situation than many countries participating in the Bologna Process and therefore perhaps offers a preview of what is to come for European education systems. The past 15 years have not been characterized by transformation, rather by efforts to optimize education in symbiosis with national exigencies and the demands of the international policy arena. As a result – and this is the core argument of this paper – New Zealand has consistently aligned itself with policies promoted within the framework of "IO governance" to optimize its policy settings and to identify foreign practices that best balance underlying philosophies on education (broad participation, equity, return on investment) in the NZ context. This philosophy can be described, in brief, as a mixture between a drive for equity and a distinct emphasis on the "return on investment" in education, which is widely viewed as New Zealand's key to competitiveness and survival in the knowledge economy (see Fitzsimmons 1997).

This study seeks to outline the broad array of domestic and external factors shaping reform in NZ secondary and tertiary education. It places particular focus on aspects of internationalization and synergies between domestic politics and the role of international organizations. Under what conditions do international organizations (IOs) and cooperative arrangements stimulate change in national education policy, both at the secondary and tertiary level? Has the overarching international level impacted domestic policy, for example, with regard to governance patterns, quantitative-structural developments, funding, or the delivery of education? In the analysis of secondary education, particular emphasis will be placed on the PISA study (Programme for International Student Assessment) initiated by the OECD. With regard to higher education, the impact of New Zealand's involvement in a series of international and multilateral education initiatives will be scrutinized. As other studies in this research framework address the Bologna Process, this overview will probe whether this European platform has influenced NZ policy in any way.

The ramifications of such international pressures will be theorized on the basis of the concept of *IO governance* (see Leuze et al. 2008). This concept is based on the notion that international organizations employ various governance instruments to stimulate change in national education policies. These include, among others, comparative statistics and student assessment, which in many cases serve to pinpoint weaknesses in national systems and present concrete policy recommendations. The OECD, in particular, promotes an array of overarching principles, which primarily emanate from the idea that education should serve economic purposes. More recently, the OECD has increasingly framed education within the context of cross-border trade, and hence supported the export of educational services for national and international economic benefits (OECD 2004). Moreover, it advocates overarching policies such as “lifelong learning” (OECD 2006; see also Jakobi 2009) and the expansion of education provision, but also “burden-sharing” through tuition fees. Although known for a chiefly neo-liberal stance on education, the policy regime of the OECD has also consistently incorporated complementary concerns such as equity, inclusion and social cohesion (see Lingard / Grek 2008).

In some cases, policy guidance from the international level can even call into question or alter the very nature and role of state institutions. However, it would be overly simplistic to assume that countries are willing to act on all external recommendations, proposals and stimuli. Therefore, so-called *national transformation capacities* (Leuze et al 2008) are also thoroughly scrutinized. They essentially comprise mediating factors which explain how international pressures and stimuli are blunted, filtered, or even facilitated by domestic institutions. Focus is placed on national veto-players as well as historically rooted principles and understandings of the role and function of education. Against this background, an analytical framework is developed in which national educa-

tion policy change is conceived as the dependent variable and governance via international organizations as the independent variable. To what extent do national transformation capacities – acting as an intervening variable – alter the impact of international organizations? Due to the low number of institutional veto-players and the relative flexibility and pragmatism in NZ education, there are favorable conditions for policy change and high potential for convergence towards education models, instruments and principles advocated by international organizations (i.e. delta-convergence, see Heichel et al 2005).

The research design was guided by the methodology laid out in Nagel et al. (2009). It draws on qualitative data from various sources, including OECD datasets. The qualitative data are also derived from 14 interviews conducted in NZ in April 2008 with a diverse array of education stakeholders spanning from ministerial employees to representatives of quasi-governmental qualifications authorities, on to representatives of teachers' unions and academic lobbies. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and coded according to the project scheme, before being analyzed with the text analysis program MaxQDA.

Section 2 provides a historical overview of NZ education and its core characteristics. Section 3 examines the “big bang” phase in secondary and tertiary education in the 1980s. This phase is crucial for understanding the subsequent reforms of the late 1990s and present decade and due to its magnitude must be treated separately from the subsequent reforms. Section 4 focuses on the impact of international organizations on education policy, politics and polity in NZ. Emphasis is placed on how IO governance has guided and facilitated the “phase of stabilization and optimization” since the early 1990s. The study also looks at the internal decision-making fabric of NZ to discern whether and how IO governance has penetrated existing domestic practices, ideas and paradigms of education. Particular attention is dedicated to how NZ has managed the tension between various guiding principles on education, e.g. education as human capital vs. education as a human right. The conclusion offers a summarizing analysis of the findings through the prism of state transformation capacity and international stimuli for policy change.

2. EDUCATION POLICY IN NEW ZEALAND

This section addresses key aspects of the NZ education system and its distinctions from its British and Australian counterparts. It outlines, in particular, the quantitative-structural changes resulting from the substantial reforms in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It should be noted in advance that New Zealand is a bi-cultural nation and multi-cultural society. Biculturalism stresses the notion that prominence is given to the two founding and main cultures of the country – indigenous Māori and the English-speaking

culture (Pakeha). Moreover, New Zealand has established itself as an attractive destination for immigration and both biculturalism and multiculturalism have left their mark on secondary and tertiary education.

2.1 Initiation and historical development

The Education Act of 1877 established the first free national system of primary education. Previously, education was primarily administered by fee-paying schools operated by the church and municipalities. Free secondary education only gained traction in the early 1900s and was given a significant boost with the passing of the Education Act of 1914. This legislation required all secondary schools to offer free education to all pupils passing a proficiency examination. Schooling was based on the egalitarian ideas of early policy-makers and the notion of providing students with a common set of values and knowledge as a basis for citizenship (see Olssen / Morris Matthews 1997). By 1917 more than a third of the population went to secondary school. A further impetus for the expansion of the scope of and participation in secondary education was the Thomas Report of 1944, which introduced a core curriculum, aimed at all school-aged children with a focus on practical and academic training.

Tertiary education also emerged in the same decade with the establishment of the “University of New Zealand” which – despite the lacking tradition of federalism in NZ – had a federal structure spanning across several campuses around the country¹. The University Act of 1874 stipulated that the University of New Zealand would not operate as an independent teaching and research entity, rather as an umbrella organization assuming oversight and evaluative functions over the individual campuses. The Universities Act of 1961 then granted the individual campuses university status, leading to the abolition of the overarching University of New Zealand and the emergence of eight separate universities.²

2.2 Guiding principles

New Zealand education is characterized by a series of guiding principles which in various ways complement each other and offer possible explanations for the success of the system. The guiding principles of secondary post-war education were comparable qual-

¹ University of Canterbury, University of Otago, University of Auckland, Victoria University of Wellington, Canterbury Agricultural College and Massey Agricultural College.

² Auckland University of Technology, Lincoln University (Canterbury), Massey University (Palmerston North, Auckland, Wellington), University of Auckland, University of Canterbury (Christchurch), University of Otago (Dunedin), University of Waikato (Hamilton), Victoria University of Wellington. Other institutional types will be discussed in the upcoming segments.

ity of schooling and equity (Gordon 1997: 66). Contrary to other colonial societies, social distinctions in NZ did not consolidate into a class-based system of education (OECD 1983: 21). The public education system was thus developed in terms of its contribution to equality in education opportunity. Schools were assumed to offer the same range of opportunities regardless of location and pupils. An interventionist Department of Education attempted to safeguard this principle nation-wide. Like the secondary level, tertiary education has traditionally been guided by principles of openness and equity (Interview NZ-07), resulting in unique institutional breadth and diversification. In part due to this, New Zealand is not characterized by the predominance of one particular historically embedded education philosophy (e.g. Humboldtism in Germany; étatism in France and Russia) (Interview NZ-01; see Neave 2003). Nevertheless, a stronger orientation towards British traditions is obvious, but not as trivial as one may think. In New Zealand a distinction between English and Scottish education traditions comes to bear. According to the English tradition, it is assumed that the relationship between the government and universities should not be proximate and that universities are primarily accountable to their local community (Neave 2005: 3). The English (and Scottish and American) tradition of distance and separation from the state indeed also taps into the Humboldtian legacy of academic autonomy and unfettered scholarship, but views the referential community of higher education to more local and permeable to local interests than continental European traditions. While the English tradition viewed the task of the university to be the diffusion of knowledge to create a class of “gentlemen” well-equipped for public functions (Neave 2003), the Scottish tradition is based, above all, on accessibility, equality and the vital importance of education for all (Interview NZ-07). Both philosophies are reflected in NZ education, which stands out with a strong tradition of community stakeholdership as well as openness and accessibility. At the same time, NZ can be viewed as a forerunner with regard to the institutionalization of life-long learning programs, having already actively espoused the principle in the 1980s (Interview NZ-05). The tradition of openness and equity is also reflected in institutional diversity and relatively flexible admissions, which are seen as a strategy to overcome class-related divisions.

Nonetheless, New Zealand has witnessed a rise of market philosophy over the late 1980s and 1990s (Gordon 1997; Olssen / Matthews 1997) and is increasingly characterized by the diversification of funding sources, strengthened university management, tight interlinkages with the private sector and a fortified entrepreneurial spirit. Hence, altogether NZ stands out with its emphasis on community engagement (Interview NZ-12), a tradition of concordance, multi-lateral coordination, and market relevance rejecting more radically market-oriented policies. In short, NZ education policy is driven by efforts to balance the notion of education as a human right and as human capital. This is

complemented by an increasing conviction that education is essential for survival in the knowledge economy (Fitzsimmons 1997).

2.3 Structure and general data

Several key features of the secondary education system stand out. NZ boasts a very high number of schools per capita, offering compulsory education for children between 6 and 16 (15 with parental and school permission), and education is a right until the end of the calendar year after the pupil's 19th birthday.³ NZ operates various types of secondary schools, comprising private schools (also known as registered or independent schools), state schools and state-integrated schools, the latter two of which are government funded. The private schools, by contrast, are only state funded at a rate of approx. 25% and are dependent on tuition. State integrated schools were formerly private schools covered by the state system on the basis of the *Private Schools Conditional Integration Act 1975*, which “will preserve and safeguard the special character of the education provided by them”. Broken down by institutional type, approx. 85% of schoolchildren attend state schools, 10% attend state integrated schools, and 4% attend private schools. In addition, NZ schools are characterized by their very high degree of financial and managerial autonomy vis-à-vis the government and local authorities (Gordon 1997), which is reflected in the strong self-management of budgeting and everyday operations.

Prior to 1990 NZ can be considered as having had a well-differentiated tertiary education system consisting of three types of institutions: universities, polytechnics, and colleges of education (Codling / Meek 2003). However, the Education Amendment Act of 1990 altered this constellation by redefining these institutions and introducing a fourth institution known as *wananga* to cater to the Māori community. As a result, there are currently eight universities offering undergraduate and postgraduate degree programs, 23 polytechnics, four colleges of education and four *wananga*. The polytechnics and *wananga* can be classified, for the most part, as small institutions offering programs for Māori language and culture, while the polytechnics offer specialized applied programs (Codling / Meek 2003: 84). Higher or tertiary (as referred to in NZ) education therefore spans a larger spectrum of institutions than the general OECD definition of tertiary education and includes all post-secondary education: foundation education, industrial training, adult and community education and post-graduate qualifications (OECD 2006).

The swift rise in tertiary participation has been facilitated by the principle of open access. Accordingly, domestic students who have fulfilled minimum entry requirements

³ Students with special educational needs may remain in school until the age of 21. A recent government proposal known as Schools Plus would require students to remain in some form of education until the age of 18.

for a particular course are admitted. Hence, all prospective students are theoretically given the opportunity to partake in tertiary education (OECD 2006: 19). In fact, NZ is unique among OECD countries in that it guarantees entry to university for a first degree to mature age students (usually 20 years), without regard to already held qualifications (OECD 1997: 9)⁴. And for polytechnics and colleges of education NZ does not have nationally stipulated minimum entry requirements, as they are set exclusively by individual institutions.

Due to this open access policy combined with government policies supporting increased tertiary education participation, NZ tertiary education has been characterized by unprecedented expansion and diversification since approx. 1979. Even by the mid-1990s, nearly half of all school graduates continued to some form of tertiary education (OECD 1997: 9). This is reflective of the significance the government attaches to expansion and diversification, but also of the responsiveness of institutions to accommodate new entrants. This includes two highly salient non-traditional groups now partaking in tertiary education: the 25 + age cohort, which has rapidly increased in absolute and relative terms (OECD 1997: 9) and the influx of foreign fee-paying students. Subsequent to this expansion and as a result of government strategy participation in tertiary education has dramatically increased in the past decade. By 2004 nearly 60% of all New Zealanders had tertiary qualifications, while the number of students completing certificate and diploma qualifications more than doubled. Between 1996 and 2006 the number of New Zealanders in tertiary education increased by 82 %, which is attributable to a large extent to enrolments of people over 40 (NZ Ministry of Education 2006: 15). By 2004 nearly 60% of all New Zealanders aged 25 to 64 had tertiary qualifications (ibid.)

As for the degree structure, New Zealand has traditionally followed the three-cycle model now promoted in Europe. However, as indicated earlier, ‘tertiary education’ is very broadly defined and graduate degrees include not only bachelors and masters degrees, but also certificates, diplomas, and industry training. The typical first degree offered by universities is the bachelor’s degree, which generally takes three years to complete, while students have the option of returning for one additional year for bachelor with honours. The New Zealand Register of Quality Assured Qualifications contains details on the qualifications and a credit-point system which defines common standards for the different levels of qualifications. The national register comprises 10 levels with 10 (doctoral degree) being the highest. Levels 1 to 4 pertain to the mentioned certificates, levels 5 and 6 are diplomas, while level 7 comprises bachelor degrees. Level 8

⁴ Specified courses may be subject to restrictions on the grounds of insufficient resources. Some study programs (medicine, dentistry) automatically have restricted entry.

covers post-graduate diplomas and bachelors with honours and level 9 (OECD 2006: 119).⁵

2.4 Decision-making processes and current problems

As a result of the sweeping reforms to be addressed, the legal framework for education is currently laid down in the Education Act of 1989. Besides outlining governmental competences and responsibilities in education, the Act describes the structure and function of various types of institutions. It stipulates the Ministry of Education as the chiefly responsible governmental agency for developing the policy framework and strategic direction of education. The Act also defines the role of a series of additional quasi-governmental institutions. With regard to higher education, the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) is responsible for operating the government's funding scheme and co-shaping tertiary education strategy with the Ministry. The New Zealand Qualifications Authority is entrusted with the provision of overarching quality assurance in the tertiary sector (Education Act of 1989).

New Zealand is in the relatively fortunate position that it underwent sweeping changes in education already in the mid-1980s as part of overall efforts to revamp the public sector. Current policy-makers have inherited a system marked by a high degree of flexibility, diversity and autonomy, which is simultaneously buffered and controlled by a well-developed system of quality control. At the same time, NZ draws on a comparatively long tradition of cooperation with the private sector and industry, which has prevented education from shielding itself from socio-economic and regional needs. This also holds for secondary schools, which have a strong tradition of parent and local involvement, which ensures continuous communication and accountability checks.

Nevertheless, education providers are operating within the context of a rapidly transforming society, which has embraced the notion of knowledge-based economy (Ministry of Education 2006: 16). Despite its geographical isolation, New Zealand is deeply engaged in international trade and commerce and currently intensifying relations with China and the Asia-Pacific area (Codd 2003). The increase in the number of immigrant students both in secondary and tertiary education is compounded by New Zealand's policy of actively recruiting foreign students. Moreover, as will be demonstrated, NZ is plagued by other problems, the most important being the high degree of achievement inequality between indigenous Māori and Pasifika populations and New Zealanders of other, primarily European, descent (see Maringi Johnston 1997).

⁵ The levels do not reflect the length or duration of study programs, rather the depth and complexity of learning involved to achieve the qualification.

The Pasifika and Māori populations are expected to increase by 59 % and 29 % by 2021, while the Asian immigrant population is expected to more than double by 2021 (OECD 2006: 25). The population of European descent, by contrast, is expected to be only 5 % greater than at the turn of the century. Subsequently, NZ education is now confronted with a situation in which high growth is expected among the weak-performing groups.

2.5 Context of internationalization

New Zealand can be considered a geographically isolated country, with its closest neighbours (Fiji Islands, Tonga, French Polynesia, Australia) a 3-4 hour flight away. However, NZ has proven extremely open to international markets of students and ideas and has turned education into a fundamental component of its export-driven economy (see Martens / Starke 2008). Internationalization has been flanked, in particular, by the significant rise in numbers of foreign students since the late 1990s (OECD 2006: 22). Over the recent 15 years, the government – allied with quasi-governmental bodies and private sector institutions – has devised a comprehensive and strategic approach to exporting NZ education to fee-paying foreign students. This has fostered the expansion of a broad range of international activities not only among tertiary providers, but also secondary level schools, which also provide education to foreign school-aged children (see Lewis 2005). New Zealand's commitment to education export has been reinforced by the development of a long-term strategy known as the 2004 International Education Framework, which reflects the wide-spread consensus on the strategic benefits of internationalization and the contribution of the industry to the national economy (see OECD 2006). Along these lines, NZ has consistently pressed for the international mutual recognition of qualifications and actively encouraged transnational partnerships between tertiary institutions and with internationally operating businesses. Hence, education policy-makers demonstrate a keen awareness of how their education is perceived by the outside world (Interviews NZ-02, NZ-12), which is in turn reflected in the broad scope of quality assurance measures implemented in the past two decades.

2.6 Participation in OECD/PISA and GATS

Unlike other countries in this research framework, New Zealand is not a signatory to the Bologna Process due to its geographical location. Nevertheless, it is actively involved in various transnational education regimes, not only as a participator but often as an initiator and facilitator. As part of its efforts to promote the idea of a *global economy* and neo-liberal policy approaches, the OECD has become an assertive actor in education. NZ has a long tradition of cooperation with the OECD, essentially dating back to the first OECD Review of New Zealand's Education Policies in 1983 (OECD 1983). How-

ever, the initial involvement of the OECD was primarily of a descriptive nature, as it merely offered a stocktaking of NZ education policy, without asserting any particular future recommendations or comparatively examining the system. As Rizvi and Lingard (2006: 250) assert, the OECD's initial activities were primarily aimed at supporting national agendas. In other words, the organization responded to national priorities while refraining from imposing its perspective on individual countries.

This has changed decisively in the past 15 years, foremost as a result of changes in the OECD's working method towards comparative assessment (Martens 2007). NZ can currently be characterized as an enthusiastic participant in the 'PISA' study. The 'Programme for International Student Assessment' (PISA) is a standardized international assessment administered to school children aged 15 covering reading, math and science. Three rounds of assessment have already taken place in 2000, 2003, and 2006, while the following round is scheduled for 2009. At the moment, New Zealand's (secondary) education system ranks 7th best in the world (OECD 2006) and substantially higher than the OECD average. Despite having established itself as a top performer, all three PISA studies have revealed a significant performance gap when the results are broken down by socio-economic background (Interview NZ-08). As shown in the upcoming segments, PISA has had a strong impact on policy, in particular with regard to the efforts undertaken to remedy various weaknesses of the system.

NZ tertiary education is also well linked with the OECD, a tradition dating back to the 1980s, when the OECD produced its first "Review of National Policies for Education". The involvement of the OECD has intensified over the 1990s with NZ's participation in the Thematic Review of Tertiary Education. In 2007 NZ provided the OECD a fresh Country Background Report as part of the Thematic Review of Education.

New Zealand higher education is also covered by the General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS). New Zealand – along with several other countries including Australia and the US – urges other WTO countries to commit their higher education sectors to the GATS framework, which allows for the international free flow of education services. More specifically, NZ has requested other countries to open up their entire education sectors to foreign competition, while allowing foreign private education providers to operate in NZ without restrictions. Based on the argument that international trade in education services can supplement and support national education policy objectives, the NZ Education Ministry is urging WTO members to "strike a balance between pursuing domestic education priorities and exploring ways in which trade in education services can be further liberalised" (World Trade Organization 2001). Despite being allowed to make trade reservations on any service, NZ has become one of the least restrictive countries in GATS by putting far more of its public services in the agreement than other countries (Interview NZ-08).

3. CHANGES IN EDUCATION POLICY-MAKING IN THE 1980S AND EARLY 1990S

The following segment analyzes the definitive education policy reforms that NZ embarked on 20 years ago which have enabled the country to position itself in the global education market. I begin by outlining the “big bang” in secondary education and then turn to the more moderate changes in tertiary education. Then I address the radically altered education policy arena in both the secondary and tertiary segments, while also probing for the potential impact of transnational interlinkages during this first reform phase. As Martens and Jakobi argue, the involvement and success of OECD education activities were limited until the 1990s (2007: 248) and we cannot expect *IO governance* to have played a major role. However, many of the reforms undertaken account for the uniqueness of NZ education, in particular with regard to its role in the transnational education policy community, its receptiveness to international trends as well as its transformation capacity.

3.1 The core reforms in secondary education

Secondary education reform in NZ could best be described as *shock therapy*. The socio-economic framework of the early 1980s was marked by protectionism, a strong welfare state and wide-spread governmental engagement in the economy. At the same time, NZ suffered from low productivity and growth, high deficits and unemployment, and continued overdependence on Great Britain, which under Thatcher embarked on mass deregulation and shifted its economic focus to the European Union. Inspired by the Thatcher reforms in Britain (Interview NZ-10), the NZ Labour government embarked on arguably the most extensive economic liberalization programme ever undertaken by a stable democracy. This entailed wide-spread deregulation, liberalization, and the dismantling of trade barriers to what was hitherto known as “Fortress New Zealand” (Interview NZ-10; see Fitzsimmons et al 1999). At the same time, the Treasury emerged as a key policy-maker enabling the diffusion of human capital theory (see Fitzsimmons 1997) and promoting public sector reforms based on managerialism (Interview NZ-08). These circumstances placed extreme pressure on NZ education, which was increasingly perceived as a costly burden on society, instead of a revenue-generating force (Codd 2003: 24). Subsequently, in 1988 a taskforce mandated to review public education drew up the report *Administering for Excellence: Effective Administration in Education*, also known as the Picot report (see McKenzie 1999). The taskforce reached a consensus that there was overwhelming societal support for the spill-over of the reform package to secondary education. The Department of Education concluded that “merely massaging present administrative structures would be both ineffective and time-wasting because urgently needed reform would not be achieved” (Department of Education, 1988, p.

vii.). Hence the Department embarked on far-reaching efforts to revamp secondary education on the basis of the Reform of Education Act and Tomorrow's Schools initiative (see Wylie 1989).

This had philosophical, policy-related and institutional (polity) ramifications. On the philosophical front, the previously predominant understanding of education based on equality and opportunity was soon overshadowed by principles of 'efficiency', 'choice', 'competition' and 'accountability' (Olssen / Morris Matthews 1997: 18). The new theoretical approach was Transaction Cost Economics, which aims at restructuring schools to reduce costs of quality control, professional development, institutional arrangements and information provision (see Olssen 2001: 22). As regards the institutional context, the Department of Education was not only downsized into a significantly smaller Ministry of Education, but also "de-regionalized", as the regional Education Boards were abolished⁶. Secondly, the Act turned schools into self-managing entities. Thirdly, each school appointed a board of trustees consisting of community representatives to manage its finances (Interview NZ-03).

Crucial to the understanding of the policy shift is the notion of bulk funding, according to which the government grants each school a lump sum to spend at will on teaching staff.⁷ The fourth fundamental change was the introduction of the national certificate of education achievements, i.e. a new qualification system, which – in simple terms – awarded pupils for what they know, rather than subjecting them to continuous exam-based rankings. The government simultaneously undertook measures to increase home-school partnerships and establish greater educational opportunities for disadvantaged groups, in particular Māori children and children from low-income homes.

According to Olssen / Morris Matthews (1997: 19) Tomorrow's Schools resulted in the following fundamental changes:

- 1) transfer of responsibility for employment of staff away from the state to elected boards and associations
- 2) transfer of management over assets, property, and money spent in education to school boards
- 3) increased emphasis on market discipline of 'choice'

⁶ To put this in perspective, each NZ school has its own school board which handles governance activities in cooperation with teachers, parents and local stakeholders. In the USA or Canada, by contrast, school boards generally function as umbrella organizations for a conglomerate of several local schools.

⁷ Purported advantages are increased flexibility in staffing structures, financial advantages and the ability to self-manage and improve student-teacher ratios (LaRocque 2005)

4) greater state control over essential educational services in the form of national curriculum guidelines and assessment procedures

The reform course constituted a dramatic shift and Hirsch goes as far as to speak of NZ “abolishing its education” system, while creating a “series of virtually autonomous providers” (1995: 6). In view of the transformed role of the state, this assessment is exaggerated. NZ indeed shifted towards a quasi-market scheme based on a culture of local enterprise and school choice. However, the quality of education was bolstered and monitored by a series of quasi-governmental bodies (NZQA, ERO – see below) entrusted, among other things, with facilitating the seamless transition between secondary and tertiary education as well as the labor market. This was reflected in the NZ National Qualifications framework drawn up as a unifying approach to qualifications with a strong focus on outcomes. The NZ Qualifications Authority (NZQA) was entrusted with assisting industrial partners and other involved parties to develop qualifications. On these foundations, the quality assurance of providers was achieved through processes of registration and accreditation, while standards were set with which providers must comply before becoming eligible for funding or award credit (Eppel 2007). Nevertheless, the OECD has identified NZ as one of the countries with the highest proportion of decisions made directly at the school level in secondary education (OECD 2008).

3.2 The core tertiary reforms

Following a less radical approach than at the secondary level, the newly established Ministry also veered tertiary education towards greater institutional autonomy and competitiveness, leading to mass increases in participation (see OECD 1997). The most significant government-mandated document was the Hawke Report⁸ (1988), which essentially aimed to frame tertiary education reform within the context of the “Learning for Life” strategy (Department of Education 1989; see Lange and Goff 1989; Codling and Meek 2003). Although more an advocated philosophy than a concrete reform package (Interview NZ-13), “Learning for Life” essentially sought to bring education and industry closer together, while fostering a culture of “fluidity” between secondary, tertiary education, and the labor market (Eppel 2007).

The proposals in the Hawke Report (financial autonomy for universities, accountability) were later codified in the Education Amendment Act of 1990, which fostered a series of reforms to the structure, funding, and governance of tertiary education⁹. Univer-

⁸ Report of the Working Groups on Post-Compulsory Education and Training (Department of Education 1988)

⁹ For the most part, the polytechnics and colleges of education were very pleased with the proposal, which promised them greater autonomy and control over internal and external activities – in contrast to their hitherto tightly controlled environment (Codling and Meek 2003)

sities and polytechnics underwent changes with regard to funding sources and the mode of allocation. Contrary to previously existing formula-based funding devolved via the University Grants Commission (UGC), funding was now attached to student numbers. Since the reform package of the late 1980's funding has been officially based on the principle of burden sharing. The government provides part of the funding under the label 'teaching and learning' funding and by means of a student loans scheme. The remaining costs of tuition are covered by students and their families in the form of tuition fees amounting to an average of €2500 - €3000 per semester. Institutions conducting research may generate additional funding from the users/beneficiaries of research. An additional vital source of funding are foreign fee-paying (FFP) students, who are cited as contributing approx. 1.7 billion NZ Dollars to the national economy each year (Codd 2003: 21). Despite this financial diversification, tertiary education operates on the basis of an integrated funding framework, which enables the government to steer the system in line with the so-called Tertiary Education Strategy (TES). In other words, the government uses the funding scheme to maintain leverage over the otherwise highly autonomous institutions to ensure that they operate flexibly, accountably and responsibly.

The evidence also reveals that NZ policy-makers were willing to be inspired by transnational interlinkages and foreign practice, even prior to increased OECD involvement in education. Faced with competing interests over a private or public loan scheme and calls for a stronger equity (Interview NZ-05), governmental policy-makers and education stakeholders actively conducted an extensive analysis of experiences in North America and Europe. Specifically, they sought to integrate elements of the Swedish model to offset the tuition burden on students with a stronger equity component. This resulted in student loan scheme, in which loans were granted on a non-interest basis – in a country with comparatively high annual interest rates – and exemptions from payback obligations were granted to students under a certain income level after tertiary education. The reform was essentially conceived as a means of marketizing and diversifying the funding system, while sustaining a strong component of equity (Interview NZ-05).

3.3 The changing education playing field 1985 – 1995

Despite the introduction and/or increase of tuition fees, NZ experienced a massive increase in the number of providers and tertiary participation rates at all levels, so that it is now well above the OECD average (Ministry of Education / OECD 2006: 28). The reform course also drastically reshaped and diversified the education policy arena. Most prominently, the role of the state was transformed and repositioned within a now more multi-faceted education landscape. However, with regard to institutional diversification, it appears that secondary and tertiary education pursued different pathways. The new

secondary actors were essentially the now highly autonomous individual schools themselves. In tertiary education, by contrast, stakeholder engagement was assured through institutional diversification, beginning with institutional reforms at the state level. Firstly, the Ministry of Education replaced the Department of Education as the policy-making nucleus. Unique to NZ is, secondly, the strong leverage of the Treasury over education policy-making. More than just a “banker” for the government, the Treasury is essentially a combination of a finance ministry and a treasury with authority and veto-power over any issues with funding implications (Interview NZ-10). Yet the most significant developments arguably took place at the intermediate level, with the establishment of an array of stakeholder bodies. In tertiary education, the University Grants Commission (UGC) was abolished, giving rise to the establishment of two additional institutional actors. Firstly, the NZ Vice-Chancellors’ Committee (NZVCC) inherited various functions of the UGC, above all academic program approval. It arranges for inter-university course approval as well as accreditation and moderation procedures. Hence, universities seeking to offer new qualifications or change existing ones must consult the NZVCC, which then evaluates proposals by peer review. Secondly, the University Academic Audit Unit, an independent body established by the NZVCC, provides support to universities in “achieving standards of excellence in their academic responsibilities in research and teaching” (NZVCC 2008). At the same time, the NZVCC took on a fundamental role in policy advocacy and the representation of universities vis-à-vis the state (Interview NZ-13).

Secondly, the New Zealand Qualifications Authority (NZQA) took on responsibilities for qualifications throughout all levels of education. As an independent and impartial expert organization, NZQA is entrusted with the coordination of the administration of quality assurance of national qualifications. The Ministry of Education appoints NZQA’s Statutory Board, which is to reflect community, industry and education interests. The Board, in turn, sets the strategic direction of NZQA in consultation with the competent Ministers, while the NZQA as a whole bears responsibility for implementing the broad National Qualifications Framework. However, NZQA is not responsible for university qualifications, rather only non-university secondary and tertiary providers.

Besides devolving autonomy to self-managing schools, the Tomorrow’s Schools reforms had further institutional ramifications. The reforms recognized that the greater the level of self-management and diversity, the more difficult it was for the state to keep a grip on the system (Interview NZ-10). In consequence, the Education Review Office (ERO) was set up as an audit body for schools and childhood centers. Formally an independent audit agency, the ERO enabled the state to oversee self-managing secondary

education providers by conducting three-day quality audits of individual schools¹⁰. Unless the performance of a particular school is poor, reviews are carried out approximately every three years, on the basis of which recommendations are presented to individual boards of trustees.

The reforms of the late 1980s also led to the entrance of policy think-tanks into the education arena. The NZ Business Roundtable (NZBRT) put forward its report “Reforming Tertiary Education in New Zealand”, which advocated the notion that education is a marketable commodity (Olssen 2001: 26). The so-called “Education Forum” arose from the NZBRT as a pro-market think-tank involved in the dissemination of market-friendly views such as tuition burden-sharing, links with industries, and parental choice. Moreover, it actively rallied for greater competition and self-management in and between education institutions (Interview NZ-10). Although the Education Forum only played a consultative role in the overarching reform process, it did have a major impact in fostering a “culture of international comparison” in NZ education by disseminating comparative international analyses of education issues (Interview NZ-10). The introduction of tuition fees also led to a more assertive role of the New Zealand Union of Students’ Associations (NZUSA)¹¹. The reform package enabled students to take positions on decision-making bodies, which in turn reinforced the corporatist nature of policy-making (Interview NZ-06).

Altogether, NZ education was heavily impacted by what is known as the NZ experiment. The economization of broad segments of society and public services was instrumental in the “big bang” phase in education, leading to extensive school autonomy, decreases in tertiary state funding, and the increased engagement of industrial and local stakeholders (Kelsey 1995). Even earlier than most other western democracies, the number of consultative actors and quasi-governmental bodies (QUANGOs) multiplied. As expected, IO governance did not play a significant role for the mere reason that the activities of international organizations, in particular the OECD, were limited in this phase. The evidence instead reveals that NZ effectuated a radical overhaul of its educa-

¹⁰ The ERO remains one of the more controversial education institutions in New Zealand. This has to do, primarily, with its working method consisting of three-day snapshots of schooling activities. Autonomously operating schools perceive this as an unwarranted intrusion on their operations by an external institution which is unable to comprehensively document what is actually happening over the long range (Interview NZ-11)

¹¹ The organisation was founded in 1929 as the New Zealand National Union of Students. It previously did not have a tradition of opposing governmental policies. In its early days it was more attentive to sporting and social issues, before shifting its focus to issues concerning student well-being, e.g. student healthcare. In the 1960s and 1970s it focussed on issues such as apartheid, racism and the peace movement (see <http://www.students.org.nz/index.php?page=history>).

tion system on its own initiative without the external guidance and/or financial support of IOs. The domestic reform course generated an array of policies which are highly indicative of what is presently taking place in much of Europe (e.g. tuition fees, enhanced quality assurance, institutional diversification, multilateral governance). However, the precedent set by Great Britain and Australia proved to be influential as a reference point and external reinforcement (Interviews NZ-05, NZ-01). This is indicative of New Zealand's willingness to engage in and react to international influences, comparisons and foreign models. One must also emphasize the willingness of the government to draw on scientific and academic advice (e.g. Hawke Report/Picot Report) and conduct in-depth analysis of foreign practice. Before giving a more extensive account later, it shall also be noted that veto points in the political system did not prove to be an obstacle. After all, the reform package was driven by the center-left Labour Party (see Shaw / Eichbaum 2006) and embraced by the pro-market, center-right National Party (Interview NZ-05). Potential academic veto-players were also willing to "come on board" due to diverse incentives offered to them (self-management for schools, diversified funding). Moreover, self-managed schools are cited as fitting well with NZ culture, which is driven by small municipalities and community and parental involvement (Interview NZ-04). However, it is critical to note that the reform course actually created more potential informal veto points due to the shift to "QUANGO governance".

4. THE SECOND WAVE OF REFORMS – 1995 TO PRESENT

This section highlights the second wave of reform and stabilization in NZ education. It first looks at tertiary education reform and then the impact of the OECD and the Bologna Process. I then shift the focus to reforms in secondary education and the impact of IO governance on this sector in recent years. To conclude, I return to the theoretical framework of the paper and address the transformation capacity of the NZ education system, while focussing on the role of veto-players and the impact of guiding principles on the function and purpose of education.

4.1 Tertiary education reforms – 1995 to present

By the mid-1990s NZ had already converged on the market-oriented paradigm of tertiary education governance (see Dobbins 2009; Dill 1997) characterized by shared funding and a government-operated student loan scheme. The government also actively promoted institutional diversification, reflected not least by the increased autonomy of polytechnics and the emergence of *wananga* for Māori education. Moreover, the recruitment, enrolment and assimilation of international students have also placed additional burdens on tertiary (and some secondary) school managers, giving rise to issues

such as the capacity of the system to absorb and cater to international students (Ministry of Education/OECD 2007: 22; see Lewis 2005 for pastoral care of foreign secondary students).

The OECD asserts that NZ is a country that is reforming again and again (OECD 1997: 3). However, upon closer analysis, it appears that NZ is engaged in small-scale policy adjustment within the *grandes lignes* established in the previous phase (Interview NZ-10). In fact, this applies to education politics, polity, and policy, with education policy perhaps having undergone the most changes. In essence, the second phase of reform can be characterized by three concurring central phenomena 1) internationalization by means of export education and 2) the optimization of resources and 3) the enhancement of quality assurance. The ensuing policies have been tailor-made to the long-term goals of internationalization, expansion, equity/inclusion, and cost-sharing, all of which coincide with the overarching principles promoted by the OECD (see OECD 2008).

Once again, the main impetus for the ensuing reforms was provided by the Ministry of Education in its so-called Green Paper (Tertiary Education Review) of 1997. Guided by the themes “accountability, “responsiveness” and “transparency”, the paper aimed to foster improvements to student tuition schemes, research funding, quality assurance and internal university governance. The second influential document released one year later by the Ministry, the so-called Tertiary White Paper, echoed the same or similar principles of subsidies and costs, quality assurance, as well as governance and accountability (Olssen 2001: 29)

The resulting ministerial activism in tertiary education can be viewed in two different ways. On the one hand, the role of the state was transformed from control and oversight to what Neave deemed the “evaluative state” (1998), which seeks to ensure quality control and accountability. On the other hand, the modified framework emanating from the Green and White Papers is indicative of tightened state control over tertiary education, i.e. the state’s effort to gain more “spearage” or steering authority over the system (Interview NZ-04). For example, Olssen asserts (2001: 29) that “state-centrist tendencies are indeed evident in the changes introduced into all tertiary education policies since 1990, a trend highly contradictory of the anti-statist ideology one would assume from a neo-liberal approach”.

This explains the initial academic resistance to the proposals made in the earlier Hawke Report, which were implemented in the late 1990s: the increased separation of research and teaching, increased private funding, the appointment of CEOs to university councils on fixed-term contracts and more extensive auditing and performance monitoring. However, academia has been able to fend off the state intervention lamented by Olssen by creating institutional buffers to strengthen its collective interests vis-à-vis the state. This is reflected in the more pro-active role of university management. According

to one ministerial interviewee (NZ-04), tertiary education management moved away from being a mere academic community to entities that are “run much like business or academic enterprises”. This entails a vastly increased level of strategic planning, represented foremost by the vice-chancellor whose role, in sum, is to “keep senior academics happy, while also meeting business objectives” (NZ-04).

The relationship of direct ministerial leverage over autonomous tertiary providers also changed as a result of the establishment of the Tertiary Education Commission (TEC) in 2001, which was borne out of the dissatisfaction among tertiary providers with ministerial intervention (Interview NZ-05). Conceived as an intermediary body between the state and tertiary institutions, the TEC was granted responsibilities for administering state funding and shaping policy in symbiosis with the Ministry. Contrary to Olssen’s fear of increasing state-centeredness of NZ tertiary education, the establishment of the TEC fortified the corporatist nature of education policy-making, with the TEC now functioning as a strong advocate of the “delivery side” of education and advisor to the government. The TEC is a Crown, i.e. governmental, entity, consisting of education practitioners, who design overarching long-term tertiary strategy. Thus, the NZ Vice-Chancellors Committee bears responsibility for quality assurance, while the TEC is entrusted with the allocation of government funding and planning matters. As a result, “system design” and quality monitoring are now vested in these two intermediate bodies with strong academic representation.

External stakeholder representation is guaranteed both within the TEC as well as tertiary management structures, most frequently known as councils. A university council usually consists of approx. 20 members – a chancellor, vice-chancellor, but also employer representatives, a union representative, academic staff representative, as well as approx. three student representatives. As a rule of thumb, the university council has approx. 50 % internal representation and up to four or five government appointments (Interview NZ-05). The TEC commissioners and executive board are also characterized by their broad mixture of academic and management experience, while various high-ranking members were even employed directly by the OECD¹².

What is also striking about the NZ tertiary system in the past decade is the shift towards performance-based funding. Previously state funding was pegged to the number of students, which automatically compelled institutions to increase enrolment (Interview NZ-13). In the past few years, however, NZ has moved towards a more quality-based system. All evidence points to the fact that international policy developments, but not necessarily the OECD shaped the debate surrounding the Performance Based Research Fund (PBRF) (Boston 2006: 12). The main driving force behind its introduction was the

¹² See TEC website – www.tec.govt.nz

broad perception that state funding in tertiary education was too low. In particular the British RAE scheme (Research Assessment Exercise) provided a substantial anchor point (Interview NZ-05) for the design of a system, in which performance accountability were not only aimed at increasing performance accountability, but also granting universities incentives to procure additional research funds. One side-effect of the PBRF has been the emergence of university rankings in NZ, hence fortifying the spirit of competition among tertiary providers.

However, the PBRF has not been without controversy, as a broad array of academics regard it as an intrusion on their institutional autonomy (Interview NZ-13) because the system gives the government greater traction over the focus and content of research. Moreover, the emergence of the PBRF has been accompanied by a more comprehensive focus by the Ministry on quality assurance and performance measurement. Such activities include, for example

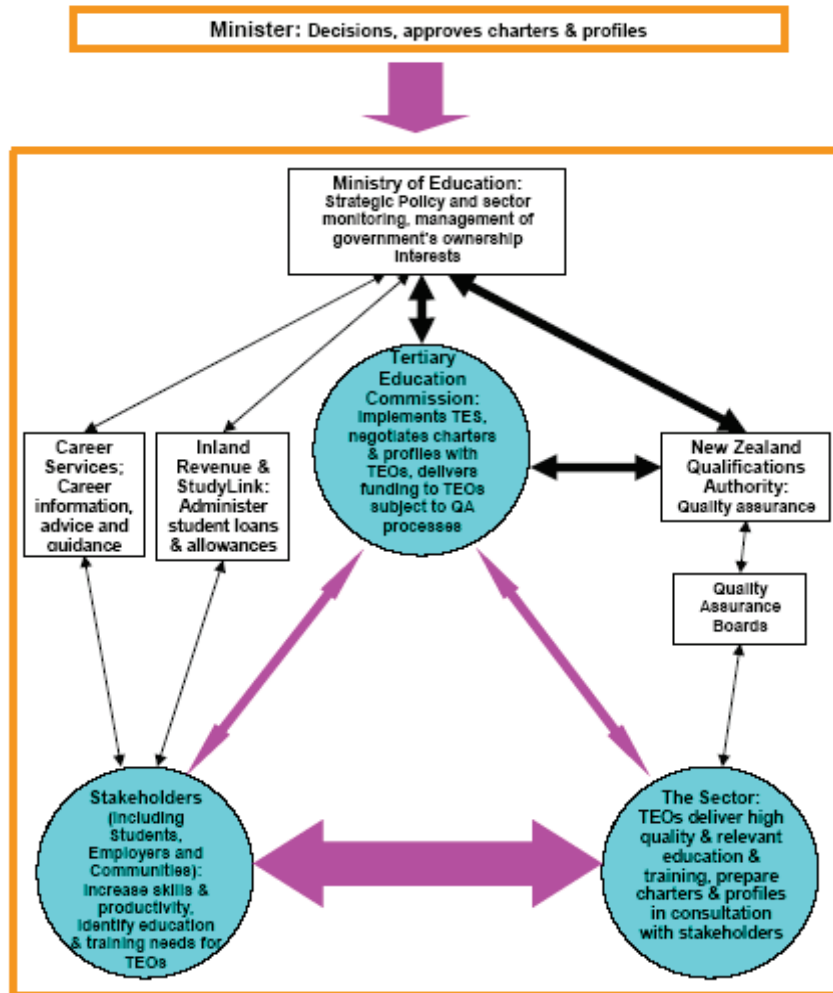
- The publication of a monitoring framework for the second Tertiary Education Strategy describing the indicators used to assess progress
- Contributing to the development of a new quality assurance and monitoring system building on tertiary self-assessment and backed up by monitoring of organisational performance against key performance indicators and by external evaluation and review

(Ministry of Education 2008)

What we are now witnessing is a more assertive role of the state in setting targets for tertiary education providers and attempting to shape various aspects in line with national economic objectives. While NZ was previously primarily concerned with generating a framework of policies focusing on the “sales dimension” of the internationalization of education, it has shifted more recently to a very strong emphasis on ensuring accountability by providers for the sake of national economic benefit. At the same time, tertiary providers themselves are now actively engaged in self-assessment and are benchmarking themselves with other similar institutions overseas (Interview NZ-13). Hence, New Zealand can now boast a “multipolar” quality assurance system. The Ministry seeks to ensure quality and accountability vis-à-vis national economic goals by means of evaluation and review, combined with the PBRF, while universities now have multiple incentives for performance optimization. Besides the PBRF, the most important is the targeted recruitment of foreign fee-paying students (see Martens/Starke 2008), meaning that institutions compete with other domestic and, above all, Australian institutions to attract foreign students and foreign capital. This in turn has ramifications for the quality assurance system, which must ensure that NZ qualifications are clear and transparent for both incoming and outgoing students. This automatically compels pol-

icy-makers to match up national qualifications with international best practice (Interviews NZ-12 / NZ-02).

Illustration 1: Relationships between key actors in the tertiary education system



Source: Ministry of Education / OECD 2006

4.2 Impact of IO governance on tertiary education in NZ

As discussed in the introduction, New Zealand demonstrates favorable conditions for policy change due to its unicameral and non-federal political system. And with its strong tradition of internationalization in education, it is expected to be highly receptive to transnational forces. This chapter briefly re-examines to what extent these expectations were fulfilled with regard to the OECD's education initiatives, while also briefly discussing the impact of the Bologna Process.

4.2.1 Impact of the OECD

Particularly striking with regard to the NZ Tertiary Education Strategy are the frequent references to the OECD. In fact, it appears that outperforming other OECD countries (in particular Australia) or OECD averages is a constant underlying aim of NZ education policy. The ministry's Strategy bears scattered assertions to the tune of 'The NZ government now spends more of our national income on tertiary education than most OECD nations'. Moreover, since the 1990s there have been striking correlations between policy goals advocated in NZ and those promoted by the OECD. These include the expansion of participation, tuition/diversified funding, inclusion of ethnic minorities, and export and internationalization of education as well as a heavy focus on the economic value of education. Core elements of the Tertiary Education Strategy are reflective of relative weaknesses of NZ in comparison to the US, UK, and Australia, in particular. In other words, the strategy reflects the state's increased efforts to remedy some of these weaknesses by means of strategic steering. Compared with the OECD average and the US and the UK, New Zealand has a lower participation rate in the youngest age group but higher participation rates thereafter. The comparative weakness was immediately addressed in the Ministry's subsequent Tertiary Education Strategy, which sought to ensure that more New Zealanders complete tertiary education qualifications by the age of 25. Thus, OECD comparisons give the state orientation with regard to where to further invest in the system (Interview NZ-01). In short, comparative OECD studies have set standards for NZ with regard to the share and allocation of education expenses by the state.

On the one hand, New Zealand policy-makers are very engaged in OECD policy-making and always have their "global antennae" out. As one TEC official states:

Even back then New Zealand officials would go to meetings with the OECD (...) and other kinds of education experts, academic support. So I imagine it was an awful lot of stuff in the wider international policy community that was drawn on. If there is anything distinctive in New Zealand about the way we do things is that we are a community where people travel extensively, we are a long way from anywhere. We are very globalized. I would say we are constantly running across every theory, constantly looking across our shoulders. (Interview NZ-05)

On the other hand, it is difficult to disentangle the impact of the OECD from broader trends in international academic and economic policy networks. After all, the OECD is a conveyer of "modern" economic philosophy stemming primarily from Anglo-American countries. It would be equally plausible to make the argument that NZ's participation in the international market for education products and services combined with economic exigencies have been the main driving forces behind change. In this vein, IO

governance and the OECD in particular could be regarded as an additional anchor point to legitimize an already stabilized web of related policies. It is clear, though, that IO governance has not triggered any paradigmatic changes in NZ tertiary education, but instead had a reinforcing and optimizing impact of the central policy pillars – broad participation, marketization, economic relevance of education, and inclusion. The impact of IO governance on tertiary education is also inseparable from NZ’s policy of education export, which has served to fortify and consolidate the quality assurance system (Interview NZ-09). However, education export is not a by-product of IO governance, as NZ had adopted this strategy long before it was promoted by the OECD. Instead, it is actually the OECD that continually points to the success of the NZ education export strategy to promote this policy goal internationally (OECD 2004). The same applies to life-long learning and related policies of expanding education at all levels, areas at which New Zealand has excelled as a result of the policies it implemented in the late 1980s and early 1990s. Hence, in various ways NZ has evolved to become the “poster child” for the success of the tertiary education regime now promoted by the OECD (Interview NZ-09). However, as the upcoming segment on secondary education shows, the OECD has provoked changes which can be directly attributed to its enthusiastic participation in the PISA study.

4.2.2 Impact of Bologna

As indicated earlier, despite the already existing strong alignment of NZ with internationally promoted policies, “modern” education strategies and best practice, NZ continuously has its international antennae out to tap into transnational developments in education. The Bologna Process, which is geographically irrelevant for NZ, is an example of this. The establishment of a European Higher Education Area is perceived as a springboard for NZ to enhance its international interlinkages and thereby ensure that its graduates can access academic and labor markets around the world (Ministry of Education 2008). Although the NZ tertiary education system is already fully compatible with the Bologna study-cycle model, the Ministry strives to tap into the tools and approaches developed within the Bologna framework to promote the recognition of NZ qualifications. At the same time, various policy-makers (Interviews NZ-07; NZ-04; NZ-01) explicitly state that Bologna provides a platform for NZ to build on its existing quality assurance framework. For example, New Zealand has joined the Lisbon Qualification Recognition Convention and also is investigating the introduction of a Diploma Supplement (Ministry of Education 2008). As the Ministry states, “At the same time as en-

hancing our engagement with Bologna, we have also focused on ensuring our tertiary education system relates to other education systems around the world and maintains its own individual characteristics” (2008). Bologna has additionally provided NZ an impetus to engage in the bi-lateral “synchronization” of qualifications and quality assurance instruments. This is reflected by cooperation between the NZVCC, NZQA and Ireland aimed at increasing the comparability of the NZ Register of Quality Assured Qualifications with the Irish National Framework of Qualifications (Interview NZ-07). The evidence thus reveals that NZ is actively searching every corner of the earth to optimize the efficiency and transparency of its tertiary qualifications and quality assurance system.

4.3 Secondary education reforms - 1995 to present

Secondary education witnessed a rapid shift towards school autonomy and performance optimization in the late 1980s and early 1990s. It should be emphasized that, as a result of the reforms, an array of new challenges were on the horizon for secondary schools. These pertained, above all, to management and implementation capacities of increasingly autonomous providers. As one interviewed expert put it:

You’ve got 2000 schools, 2000 principals almost, 2000 school boards. That’s a lot of principals and a lot of school boards and maybe we shouldn’t have that many. Maybe we should make it a bit more flexible and have one board for 15 schools. I don’t want to go back to the way it used to be where you have the bureaucracy running it, but you have to worry about things like that. (Interview NZ-10)

Like the tertiary sector, secondary education has not radically changed since the introduction of self-managing schools in 1989. The past 10-15 years have instead been characterized by a mixture of “policy roll-back” and “policy build-up”, while the “build-up” component has been driven to a large extent by IO governance. The “roll-back” affected, foremost, the system of bulk-funding to schools implemented after 1989. The 1990s witnessed a more assertive role of teachers, resulting in the consolidation of various teachers unions under the banner of the NZ Education Institute Te Rui Roa. They succeeded in dismantling some of the perceived more burdensome and less practicable aspects of the self-management. This pertained, above all, to the bulk-funding system, which enabled schools to set their own staffing structures within their budget and self-manage student-teacher ratios. However, unions asserted several fears with regard to bulk funding – that it 1) would lead to lower teacher salaries, 2) would impose an excessive burden on the fledgling management capacities of more urban schools, in particular and 3) would widen the gap between rich and poor schools (LaRocque 2005). Under pressure from teachers unions, the Labour government abolished bulk funding in 2000

and reintroduced a more formula-based funding method, hence slightly reducing the degree of self-management of schools.

A partial roll-back is also reflected in the school enrolment scheme and zoning policy. As a result of the Tomorrow's Schools reforms, school enrolment provisions were loosened in 1989 and further loosened in 1991 under the National (conservative) government. This meant that schools determined and approved their enrolment schemes and that pupils did not have an absolute right to attend local schools (LaRocque 2005b). In other words, schools were authorized to enrol "out-of-zone" children to fill in vacancies. This open policy was amended under the Labour government in 2000-2001, giving the Secretary of Education authority over the preparation of an enrolment scheme and taking away some of the discretion of schools. Hence, as in the case of bulk funding, the current trend has been a reduction of school discretion with regard to enrolment schemes. As a consequence, the reintroduction of school zoning, i.e. the mandatory geographically based assignment of pupils to particular schools, has led to a decrease in school choice for parents.

Despite these two shifts in authority back to the state, the devolution of self-management authority to individual schools in the late 1980s changed the playing field to the extent that it is difficult for the state to promote overarching innovation and change vis-à-vis highly autonomous schools (Interview NZ-08). However, the Ministry has increasingly engaged in policy "build-up" to increase its steering capacity in reaction to various ascertained weaknesses in the system, above all performance disparities. And it is here that the PISA study has played a decisive role.

Previously NZ had inherited a largely British system, in which it was automatically assumed that some pupils would perform well and others would not (Interview NZ-08). New Zealand has however departed from that philosophy in the past 5-10 years and pursued a strategy which, in short, raises achievement while reducing disparity. As a result the Ministry has designed a series of measures aimed at the following:

- raising expectations that all students can and must achieve;
- focusing the attention of educators, students and the community on outcomes;
- improving the quality of teaching and capability of teachers and school leaders through provision of professional development, support tools, good practice exemplars, and supplementary funding pools;
- strengthening the engagement of families;
- improving the knowledge and information available to decision-makers at the school and policy level to ensure that teaching, school management, and policy review is up-to-date, focussed and effective;

- strengthening the network of schools by improving schools' flexibility over property related decisions, and encouraging better use of resources through collaboration.

(Ministry of Education 2008)

One of the main reform pillars since 2000 has therefore been the assessment of the qualifications at secondary schools.

“The idea was (...) that we would have an assessment regime that would provide a much greater recognition of what they were learning. And this goes hand in hand with international change.” (Interview NZ-08)

NZ has established a multi-polar assessment regime with a strong focus on the content of learning, which in turn should facilitate economic transformation and innovation through knowledge, skills and research (Ministry of Education 2008; Interview NZ-08). For example, the Education Standards Act 2001 instituted a self-review procedure which individual schools must conduct in addition to ERO audits. This is intended to ensure greater correlation between guiding principles 21st century knowledge economy and school curriculum (Interview NZ-12).

Besides the greater pressures for accountability and performance optimization imposed in schools, the past 5-10 years have also been marked by greater ministerial activism, which was flanked to a significant extent by the PISA study. In the previous rounds, the study has revealed that New Zealand 15 year-olds perform significantly better than the international average for mathematics, science and reading literacy. This very high performance was also highlighted by the most recent PISA results (September 2008), in which NZ excelled in all categories. As a result of the consistent high rankings, the PISA results have not triggered extensive media coverage in NZ¹³ and have not had thrown the *raison d'être* of the system into question. However, the PISA results are taken very seriously in NZ:

The PISA results have been very, very important to the international studies that we take part in on student achievements, because they have given us some benchmarks. And within schools' areas some of the things, being able to see what are the things that distinguish us with lots of, not just our average results but also what is the size of our underachievement and to get between what high achievement, good proportion of high achievement is that too many down at the bottom, but also what proportion about the variation of student achievement within schools as opposed to between schools... It has been a cause to improve

¹³ To put this in perspective, the PISA study has only been addressed by an average of 1-2 articles annually in the leading daily newspaper New Zealand Herald.

teaching and learning and to work with principles in these self-managing schools. (Interview NZ-12)

Each previous round of PISA has revealed that despite the overall high average achievement, there are significant performance disparities, with key population groups (Māori and Pasifika students in particular) overrepresented among the low achievers. In other words, the best students performed very well, while NZ has a disproportionate number of students who fared very poorly. Hence, PISA has been a driving force in revealing that a certain segments of the population are not meeting expectations, which is particularly problematic in a society that attaches great value to equality (Interview NZ-08).

In a sense PISA has thus been an ice-breaker in addressing the so-called “long tail of underachievers” (Interview NZ-13), dominated by Māori and Pasifika children. This has prompted the Ministry to undertake concrete measures to decrease disparities by addressing the Māori population directly (Interview NZ-03). And according to another ministerial interviewee:

The results of PISA have had a huge impact on policy in really attending to what are we going to do with this large group of people who aren't doing so well, particularly when you are trying to build up a knowledge-based economy. And we need people with all kinds of skills (Interview NZ-14).

This is reflected in the latest Māori education strategy and Schools Plus strategy, which assumes that the traditional format of school is not suited to all pupils and must be adapted to individual needs (Interview NZ-08). The most current Māori Strategy advocates a shift in focus or even philosophy towards the Māori population to overcome the severe achievement gap. This entails, for example, a greater emphasis on realizing potential instead of remedying deficits, investing in people and their inherent potential instead of government intervention, tailoring education to learners instead of targeting shortcomings and focussing on Māori background as an asset and no longer a hindrance (Ministry of Education 2008). As a result, the emphasis on the cultural distinctiveness and potential of underperformers has become a key element of the ministerial activities.

The high performance gap revealed through PISA and the qualifications assessment have also stimulated the development of the so-called *Schools Plus* framework, which addresses students who leave school without qualifications required for the labor market. The state-funded program essentially aims to keep struggling students in the education system, by opening up pathways beyond school (Ministry of Education 2008). Similar to the Māori education strategy, Schools Plus also emphasizes tailor-made learning and flexibility, enabling students to focus on learning areas most relevant to them and facilitating a smooth transition to tertiary education or the working environment. On some occasions, the reform strategy seeks to bring the labor market directly into classrooms to cater to students struggling with the traditional school format, as highlighted

by the PISA study. Examples of this are the Youth Apprentice Scheme, which offers pupils to accumulate key skills needed for a career in industry while still in school, and the Youth Training program, which provides pre-employment training to children under 18 years with few or no qualifications. Previously, the latter program had targeted children who had already left school, while the current scheme provides opportunities for children to learn in different environments while remaining connected to school (Ministry of Education 2008). Finally, the Ministry has adapted its funding formula, which now weighs the number of Māori students in individual schools or classes and hence funds them more generously (Interview NZ-08).

4.4 Impact of IO governance in secondary education

Like in tertiary education, NZ secondary education also demonstrates an overarching commitment to internationalization and the economization of education. This is reflected in the embedding of goals of adapting to the knowledge economy and return on investment into all strata of policy. The evidence has revealed that the OECD is a potent actor in secondary education by virtue of the comparative PISA study (IO governance by performance comparison). By no means as influential as in Germany, the PISA study has, however, starkly impacted public expenditure in secondary education. By identifying various weaknesses inherent in the system, it has prompted the Ministry to reassess learning and teaching methods aimed at students who struggle with the traditional learning format. Pressures to compete in the 21st century economy have increased the perception that large performance gaps between schoolchildren are no longer tolerable. Instead of contenting themselves with their outstanding performance by international standards (and compared to “big brother” Australia), NZ policy-makers have used the PISA study as a springboard to alleviate the shortcomings of the system. This has meant integrating the labor market into the classroom in order to prevent drop-outs. In short, PISA has been an additional contributing factor to NZ’s long-standing policy of inclusiveness.

4.5 Transformation capacity in New Zealand education policy

Now that it has been discussed how international organizations have influenced the NZ policy-making machinery and outcomes, it is expedient to examine whether, how, and to what extent, domestic institutions have filtered, impeded, or facilitated the influence of IO governance. In this regard, two aspects are crucial 1) formal and non-formal veto-players and 2) the impact of nationally rooted principles on the role, purpose and function of education.

On both fronts, NZ demonstrates a fertile basis for swift policy adjustment, which is particularly evident with regard to veto-players. New Zealand has inherited the Westminster system, which according to Tsebelis (1995) only knows one partisan veto-

player, the opposition party. At the same time, NZ has a unicameral system of government. This relatively low number of veto-players leads to the assumption of a high capacity for policy change.

We are small and have fewer veto-players... partly because we are a unitary state. And we have a unicameral parliament, one chamber, and no senate (...). We do not have sub-national government that you have to get on course to do things. We have a very centralized government, but decentralized governance. From the constitutional point of view there are fewer veto-players - also in the tertiary education system and probably the education system generally. (Interview NZ-05)

Hence, due to its non-federal structure New Zealand has significantly higher executive capacity in education, which means that the government has the legal authority to compel education providers to take action, whereas in Australia, for example, only the individual state governments have authority (Interview NZ-01).

However, it would be careless to focus exclusively on formal institutional structures, as a system of “QUANGO governance” has also emerged. As a result, education policy is designed and steered by a dense network of statutory and non-statutory actors. This complexity is increased by the strong involvement of parents and communities in secondary education and the mere breadth of the tertiary education segment, with approx. one tenth of the population in tertiary education at a given time. However, as Tsebelis (1995) asserts, not necessarily the number of veto-players is decisive, but the heterogeneity of their preferences. Most involved actors in NZ demonstrate a remarkable congruence in terms of education policy aims – optimization of quality, export of education, internationalization, balancing equity with competition, and finding an equitable funding mix. It would be an exaggeration to assert that education is not a conflict-ridden issue though. Academic autonomy in universities has frequently resurfaced as a bone of contention, as the state has continually pushed for more entrepreneurial management and high external stakeholder participation. Such efforts have, however, been resisted by the NZVCC and university staff (Interview NZ-05). Yet as one interviewee states, the “god-professor Humboldt model has been dead in NZ for 30 years now” (Interview NZ-01), which implies that the academic lobby is less potent than various continental European systems.

The relative weakness of veto-players and the success of the system are also explained by the culture of consultation and moderation. The government indeed has a strong ability to assert itself and remedy various weaknesses and optimize the balance between the market, state oversight and academic autonomy, but it has shied away from radical approaches since the gargantuan wave of fundamental reforms. Already before

the “big bang”, the OECD had made various key observations on the policy-making style of NZ:

“New Zealand is saved from many time-consuming and frequently unproductive arguments that beset societies elsewhere. The style of education policy-making (...) remains consensual and incremental, guided by a combination of individualism and tolerant conformity within what has been, at least until recently, a society characterized by common values to an unusual degree.” (OECD 1983: 10)

This spirit of consensus, commitment to consultation and broad community involvement still characterize the policy-making style of NZ today, which helps neutralize potential informal veto-players. This also holds for the parliamentary process, as coalition governments including the dominant governing party and one or more minority parties are forced to compromise on key policy issues (Interviews NZ-07; NZ-12). Once deals have been reached, the government – unconstrained by formal veto points – is in a relatively assertive position to push through its agenda.

The role of overarching principles and philosophy on education also must be taken into consideration when examining education policy change. Unlike in some countries, the policy debate is not centered around the logic, function, and role of education. New Zealand has instead rather successfully incorporated and balanced a series of principles viewed as complementary to one another (broad participation, market proximity, return on investment, equality). The notion of education as a privilege of the elite vanished decades ago (Interview NZ-01), which in turn explains the promotion of inclusiveness and investments in lower-performing secondary students.

By promoting broad participation and inclusiveness, the government has effectively catered to both guiding philosophies on education: education as a human right and education as human capital. On the one hand, there is a perception in NZ that more education is better, resulting in not only open and flexible entry to tertiary education but also institutional diversity. As highlighted, this includes institutions catering to special segments of the population, e.g. *Wananga* for Māori. Yet on the other hand underlying market-based components of the system ensure that education is fundamentally aimed at generating human capital for NZ to thrive in the 21st century.

5. CONCLUSIONS

The analysis has revealed that education policy in New Zealand must be assessed within the context of two different phases. Unlike much of Western Europe, education was already radically transformed in the late 1980s and early 1990s within the context of the Tomorrow’s Schools program and the Hawke Report. New Zealand undertook a large-scale reform which reflected many of the policies discussed in other countries currently

seeking to modernize their education systems: self-managing schools, expansion of evaluation mechanisms, multi-stakeholdership, introduction to tuition fees, diversification of providers, entrepreneurial management, etc.

The ensuing phase has been marked by smaller-scale reforms within the existing framework with the goal of optimizing the interplay between accountability, market relevancy, quality, and equity in secondary and tertiary education. NZ policy-makers have indeed dedicated great attention to policies promoted by means of “IO governance”. Unlike in Germany though (see Niemann 2009), this has not led to any noteworthy paradigmatic changes to the guiding principles of education. This has to do in part with the already existing relative congruence of the “modern education ideas” promoted by the OECD and NZ education policy. Nevertheless, New Zealand has consistently drawn on the “international market of ideas” to promote domestic policies based on equilibrium, balance, but also effectiveness and accountability. Hence, NZ is undertaking seemingly endless efforts to optimize its system of quality assurance (Interview NZ-02), create the most equitable funding scheme for all involved parties, and balance notions of education as human capital and as a human right.

Geographically isolated New Zealand has also successfully drawn on the international market for academic services. This is reflected by the system of education export, which coincides with the wide-spread consensus on the advantages of internationalization to the national economy (see OECD 2006). The provision of education services to foreign students has in turn affected the system of governance by granting university and school management greater authority of finances and marketing their institutions. Moreover, due to its commitment to internationalization and the targeted recruitment of foreign students, NZ policy-makers must ensure transparency for incoming and outgoing students and thus match up national qualifications with international best practice. As a result, NZ boasts one of the most comprehensive quality assurance systems for all levels of education.

As expected, the analysis highlighted that the relatively smooth introduction of various policy modifications was facilitated by a series of factors addressed in the theoretical framework. Firstly, NZ can be attested a high transformation capacity. This is explained in part by the low number of veto-players. Due to its unicameral system, once policies have been agreed on, the government is relatively unconstrained in implementing them. Perhaps more important, however, is the comparatively high degree of congruence among actors with regard to education policy goals. Unlike the German case for example, where academic autonomy and marketization are often seen as conflicting goals, NZ policy-makers tend to view overarching goals – most prominently quality optimization, increasing equity, increasing competition, and finding a balanced funding mix – as interdependent and seek to reconcile them in a pragmatic way. In other words,

policy progress is not constricted by philosophical debates on the *raison d'être* of education, as underlying principles and philosophies (marketization, state engagement equity, competition) tend to “peacefully” coexist. Consequently, NZ has on the one hand experimented with various unique policy approaches, while on the other hand consistently shied away from more “radical” approaches reflected in some of the ideal-type education models (e.g. high tuition fees, extreme professorial autonomy, school vouchers; see Dobbins 2009). This has resulted in a balanced system in which policies aimed at greater equity co-exist with those fostering greater “return on investment” in education.

Finally, the reformability of the system is enhanced by a now deeply entrenched “culture of international comparison”. As outlined, IO governance has not triggered any paradigmatic transformation of NZ education. Instead, the evidence has revealed that international interlinkages with the OECD have reinforced and to a large extent optimized its main pillars – broad participation, marketization, economic relevance of education, and inclusion – all of which are promoted as modern education policy by the OECD framework (OECD 2008). However, performance comparisons within the OECD framework – combined with the “national pastime” of outperforming neighboring Australia – have starkly impacted public expenditure in secondary education as well as efforts to increase participation at the tertiary level. Thus, policy-makers have used the results of international comparisons to smoothen out the revealed weaknesses of the system.

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