

## EDITORIAL

### Comparative education insights between Greece and Sweden: The research work of Greek postgraduate students in International and Comparative Education at Stockholm University

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Starting point for developing this thematic focus issue was the 2018 Comparative Education Society in Europe conference that took place in Nicosia, Cyprus. As the outcome of collegial discussions among Greek and Swedish comparative education researchers, we realised that a large amount of Greek students enrolled in the Master Programme 'International and Comparative Education' at Stockholm University, Sweden, following the outbreak of the Greek economic crisis in 2008. Specifically, more than 5-6 students from Greece register to study the specific programme every year, while in 2013 this number reached to a peak of 15 students. The programme has an acceptance rate of approximately 40 international students per year, so we could argue that Greek students have consisted a significant group of emerging scholars over the past decade.

Stockholm University has a long history of comparative education research dating back to the work of Torsten Husén and the founding of the Institute of International Education in 1971. In recent years, the Institute of International Education has been integrated as a part of the Department of Education at Stockholm University, but the tradition in the field of international comparative education has been maintained through a research group at the department and the Master Programme in Education with an international and comparative specialisation. The specific programme has during the years become one of the largest master programmes offered at Stockholm University in English, attracting students from all over the world.

Although there have been Greek PhD students at the Institute of International Education already in the 1980s, the large number of students who have moved from Greece to Sweden in recent years could be partly explained as the outcome of the Greek economic crisis, as well as the effort of young scholars to improve their career prospects and specialise in the field of comparative education. Approximately 400,000 Greek citizens appear to have left Greece after 2010 heading to various destinations, primarily in Northern and Western Europe, in search of better prospects for social and economic progress (<http://seesoxdiaspora.org/research/the-new-greek-migration>).

Greek immigration to Sweden has gone through different waves. Already in the 1960s there was a Greek workforce immigration to Sweden which was partly followed by a wave of political refugees during the period 1967-1974. Still another wave can be seen in relation to the economic crisis in 2010 (Svanberg & Runblom, 1990; Migrationsencyclopedin, 2020). According to recent statistics based on figures from December 31, 2019, there were 19,547 persons registered in Sweden who were born in Greece. In addition to that group, the same statistical source indicates that there are 4,899 persons registered in Sweden who were born in Sweden with two parents born in Greece and another 7,845 persons born in Sweden with one parent born in Greece (SCB, 2020a). During the period 2010 to 2019, in total 12,355 persons have immigrated from Greece to Sweden with a peak in 2012 with 1,546 immigrants (SCB 2020b). Most likely though a large part of these Greek immigrants appears to have later returned to Greece, as there is in total 3,239 persons who moved from Sweden to Greece during the same period of time, with a peak in 2019 with 435 persons (SCB, 2020c). Over the years,

several Greek immigrants to Sweden have made a career as politicians, doctors, engineers, journalists, authors and researchers, while this development can be interpreted in the context of what is often referred to as ‘brain drain’ for Greece.

In an attempt to turn this brain drain into gain for the comparative education society in Greece, we have composed a thematic focus issue with articles from emerging researchers who have studied in the Master Programme ‘International and Comparative Education’ at Stockholm University. Such an academic endeavour aims to feature the work of early stage researchers from Greece and can help to shed light on issues of education borrowing and lending in Greece and Sweden. The two countries prove to be interesting sites for education comparisons, sharing several similarities and differences that make their comparison meaningful. Both countries are members of the European Union, while one is representing the North and the other one the South of Europe. Greece has been severely affected by a long-lasting economic crisis, which has impacted all aspects of public life, including education, while Sweden has faced various neoliberal reforms aiming to deregulate education in recent years. The papers invited in this focus issue highlight contemporary tensions related to educational phenomena in and between the two countries.

**Sofia Antera**, presently a PhD candidate in Education at Stockholm University, has compared the aims of Religious Education in the Swedish and Greek curricula in a European Context. Her findings indicate that the Swedish and Greek general aims coincide to some extent, as both promote the principles of religious freedom, non-discrimination, and independence of religion and politics. On a closer look, this turns out to be more complicated. The Greek curriculum focuses on students perceiving and understanding the role of the Orthodox Church in the formation of the neo Hellenic culture, making an implicit reference to the Hellenic–Christian civilization as the source of national identity. Religion in the Swedish curriculum is perceived as a philosophy of life and religious education as a mean of exploring it and understanding society more thoroughly.

**Alexandra Farazouli** examined the phenomenon of school choice and specifically the factors influencing parental choice towards private schools in Greece and Sweden. Findings indicate that the background of the family along with the schools’ location and the perceived quality

of private schools are the main factors leading parents to private school choice in both countries.

**Sofia Poultidou**, adult educator and graduate of the MA in Lifelong Learning at the University of Macedonia, has studied the contributing factors that affect school-to-work transition by comparing the Greek and Swedish vocational education and training systems. The results of her study reveal that existing work-based programmes act as a link between education and work in both systems, although the role of stakeholders needs to be further empowered. Both countries face also the problem of skills mismatch in terms of the needs of the labor market.

**Anthemis Raptopoulou**, presently a PhD candidate in Education at Stockholm University, has studied preschool teachers' perspectives and use of digital game-based learning in the Swedish context. The findings indicate that the role of the teacher is critical when it comes to the use of digital games in preschools, especially when it comes to their evaluation and implementation.

**Sofia Exarchou**, associate fellow for e-learning development at the United Nations System Staff College, explored the transfer of educational ideas related to cosmopolitanism from the European to the Greek policy context. Her study highlights the conflicting perceptions of cosmopolitanism at national and European policy levels, and the confusion that often occurs in the level of practice.

**Vasileios Symeonidis**, currently a postdoctoral researcher at the University of Innsbruck, has studied the emergence of global citizenship education. Specifically, he comparatively examined how the education systems in Greece and Sweden approach the concept of global citizenship. Findings reveal that a moral and environmental conception of global citizenship prevails in teachers' and students' perceptions, while a critical conception is missing.

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