Abstracts

Introduction

Increasing school enrolment around the world has been accompanied by the growing number and diversity of pathways offered by education systems, aiming to better prepare young people for jobs that have become more skilled and changing. Young people and their parents have demanded and obtained greater freedom to choose their educational pathways. This in turn has contributed to increased risks of social discrimination and imbalances in the way schools operate. In an attempt to reduce these risks, pathways to employment have become more flexible, making educational guidance more complex. This dossier presents ten case studies from: Dubai, Spain, China, Burundi, Australia, Algeria, Estonia, Germany, Uruguay and France.

In order to explore school choice in a quasi-market context, this article describes the unique Dubai education system and examines how families perceive and exercise free choice within it. Some distinctive features of the local educational landscape, characterized by the prevalence of the private sector, a wide range of options and weak institutional regulation, appear to offer fertile ground for the satisfaction of parental aspirations. However, a closer look at the actual choice process reveals the duality of the system and the existence of constraints that generate double standards.

Data repeatedly shows that Spanish rates of early school leaving and youth unemployment are still the highest in Europe, despite recent improvements. Although the causes are complex, this problem largely originates in secondary education, more specifically in its transitions. This article analyses the situation and its consequences on students' life trajectories. It also examines the mechanisms that are meant to address the issues, including: promoting dual vocational training, making education pathways more diverse and flexible, and developing education and family guidance with regard to the choice of studies during and at the end of compulsory secondary education.

In China, the expansion of the youth football training system has generated an advancement mechanism favouring student footballers, creating a new landscape of football participation, school choice, and long-term educational planning. This article shows how the top-down initiative undoubtedly represents a political social endeavour with complex educational benefits and social consequences for parents from different backgrounds and their offspring. A highly competitive educational environment has transformed youth football into a bargaining chip for the advantaged classes aiming to secure prestigious educational opportunities, and a lifeline for marginalized groups seeking basic access to urban education. How to effectively balance the tension between national objectives and public aspirations remains an intricate problem, which necessitates more systematic governance innovations.

Student access to the University of Burundi is managed by an admissions committee appointed by the Rector. It is supposed to take into account the student's personal choice of course of study, as well as the capacity of each faculty/institute to accommodate and supervise students. The article deals with the link between the student's enrolment (whether voluntary or not) and his or her development at the Institute of Physical Education and Sports. The majority of first-year students are directed there against their will. Interviews and a questionnaire survey showed that the level of satisfaction with learning and feeling of fulfilment were statistically linked to the fact of having chosen this institute personally or not, and to the student's ease of adaptation. It was also worth noting that students adapted easily, regardless of whether or not they had chosen this career pathway.

While the direct transmission of a profession from parent to child is now disqualified in France, as in most comparable countries, guiding young people towards a profession is still an issue of crucial importance. Supposedly based on academic merit, it gives decisive weight to schooling. Since the 1960s, policies have opened up access to education and sought to make curricula less dependent on pupils' social background. But over and above inequalities in attainment, parents' efforts to maximise their children's chances mean that the choices they make remain closely linked to their detailed knowledge of an increasingly complex system. Young people's 'choices' depend on a socially diversified self-selection process, incorporating unequal constraints (greater or lesser risk of failure, weight of geographical origin or gender stereotypes, etc.), and relating to schooling rather than professional outcomes. As long as school pathways continue to be shaped by social background, and as long as young people and their families anticipate professions that are unequally desirable, student pathways will reflect neither the merit nor the plans of individual pupils.