

School education, nation and otherness *Comparative approaches to school systems in the South*

This international conference will explore how the school contributes, along with other spaces and institutions, to building a national ‘imagined community’ in the so-called ‘South’. It will examine how school discourses and practices combine, in various ways and to different extents, an objective of cultural homogenization of the nation and the promotion of diversity and of ethno-cultural minorities. It will shed light on inclusion and exclusion processes that underpin school socialization to the nation, and will explore the norms imposed by the state (central and local), as well as the resistances, mobilizations and conflicts they trigger, particularly among school actors (teachers, families, students).

Historically, the school was a key element in nation-building processes in Europe (Thiesse, 2001) and elsewhere (Bénéï, 2005), including in new states that emerged from decolonization. This historical process varied according to the different countries (Green, 1990). While the conference will take into account this historical dimension, the presentations will be more focused on contemporary developments. Like studies of nationalism (Gellner, 1989; Anderson, 2006), research on the relations between the school and the nation have been focused on periods of nation building, and less on how nations are maintained and reproduced today (Billig, 1995), including through educational policies (Elias, 1991). However, the current context is shaped by new trends, e.g. the rise of globalized educational norms and policies, evolutions and upheavals of political regimes in the South, increasing concerns about diversity and ethno-cultural minorities.

While a North-South comparison may be discussed during the conference (some URMIS members specializing on such topics in Europe and North America), the conference will be focused on school developments in the South. Indeed, social science studies on the South school systems are not very well known and are less disseminated in France; they allow for heuristic comparisons given the diversity of socioeconomic, political and cultural contexts in the South, and most of them question the influence of the colonial legacy on current school curricula.

The conference aims to contribute to this area of research by creating a dialogue between studies on various national (or regional/local) contexts. The presentations will be based on monograph studies or on comparisons between several contexts in the South. The conference will thus allow a reflection on convergences and differentiations in today’s school building of the nation. Papers will be based on different types of empirical data (analysis of recent educational debates, of official school guidelines, curricula, textbooks, teaching practices and their effects on families and students). Two main vantage points may be used to explore the relations between the school, nation and otherness:

- external and internal boundaries of the nation, which are apparent in school curricula and activities (through the teaching of history and geography, citizenship education, school celebrations, for example);

- more specifically, questions related to language policies, to the recognition of linguistic minorities and multilingualism in education.

References:

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- Green, A. (1990). *Education and state formation: the rise of education systems in England, France and the USA*. Basingstoke: Macmillan.
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