EMC5707 EDUCATIONAL POLICY-MAKING
IN A COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Lecturer: Professor Ronald G. Sultana
Value of study unit: 5 ECTS
Mode of Teaching: seminar discussions, case study approaches
Mode of Assessment: Assignment

Course Outline:
Education policy-making can be seen through a variety of analytic lenses. Some see it as a result of rational deliberation and decision-making, building on the outcomes of ‘scientific’ research and consensual debate. Others consider education policy-making as being dependent on the general tenor of reforms in public policy. Yet others adopt a conflict perspective, considering policy-making in education to be the result of contestation between different groups who have diverse interests—and sometimes being nothing more than the expression of the corporate-governmental élite protecting its own interests. Some of the most cynical go as far as to link education policy-making to the notion of reform as ‘compensatory legitimation’, where change—or rather the discourse and rituals of change—provide a ‘political spectacle’. Such spectacle sometimes serves to export intractable economic problems to the educational sphere, with schooling serving as a scapegoat and alleged remedy.

During this course, we will consider different, often overlapping analytic approaches to education policy-making. In particular, we will argue that policies are produced within social contexts that are marked by contested understandings of what is a good and just education, of what are legitimate educational goals and how to attain them. We will consider educational policies as social constructions, created in legislatures and other policy bodies in response to specific stimuli, be these educational, technological, political, economic, cultural, or as a result of social movements.

Our focus will be comparative in scope. The unit will therefore explore educational policy-making in a global environment. In particular it raises questions as to how educational policy is generated, where it comes from, and the extent to which it addresses educational problems. The unit provides the students with the opportunity to learn about different approaches to educational policy-making, to identify the role of the social actors that participate in policy-making processes, and the contexts which frame them at national and international levels. Students in particular will be required to become familiar with theoretical and conceptual frameworks which implicitly and explicitly influence educational policy and the influence of personalities, institutions, international organizations, supra-national agencies such as the OECD and the EU Commission and foreign assistance on such processes.

Through a critical engagement with key texts in policy sociology, students will gain an understanding of the complexities of policy making in a rapidly changing world. Particular attention will be given to exploring trends of convergence or divergence in policy making in different countries, and the impact of neo-liberal ideology on a global scale. In addition,
students will be asked to focus on one or more education policy documents that have recently been published in Malta, with a view to analyzing the policy discourse, its intention and impact, as well as the process of implementation. In this way, students will increase their ability to analyze the policy-making process at work, the different agendas that may be present, the way such agendas are articulated, the way they are perceived by different actors, how policies are implemented, and how they are subject to processes of acceptance, accommodation, resistance and/or rejection.

**Course Learning Outcomes:** By the end of the course, students will be in a position to:
1. Identify appropriate theories and models to comprehend and explain substantive, administrative and political implications of educational problems.
2. Understand the complementarities between theory and practice in educational inquiry for policy.
3. Conceptualize and frame educational problems that can be subject to policy interventions.
4. Plan and execute inquiries into educational problems.
5. Use effective strategies for presenting the results of analysis in a persuasive, well organized and concise written form.

**Requirements:** The course will be conducted as seminar discussions in which the students and the lecturer will examine the pertinent literature and, via these readings will analyze various aspects of policy-making in a comparative perspective. Students are required to read session specific material in advance, and be able to critique them in class discussions. All students are required to actively participate in the sessions by providing thoughtful and critical comments in the sessions.

**Reading assignments:**
The course will have two key texts, and several supplementary readings which are listed below. Students are expected to have copies of the key texts. Starred* items are required reading.

**Key texts:**

**Supplementary readings:**

**Theme 1: Key Concepts in Policy Sociology**
Readings:

Theme 2: Intersections of Social Class and Educational Policy-Making
Readings:

Theme 3: Policy Models and Public Service Reform
Readings:

Theme 4: Currents Key Issues in Education Policy-Making


**Theme 5: Policy Borrowing and Policy Implementation**


**Sector-specific Journals:**


*Education Policy Analysis Archives* – free access at [http://epaa.asu.edu/](http://epaa.asu.edu/)

*Journal of Education Policy* – available at the UoM library