CHAPTER ONE

Educational Innovation in the Context of Challenge and Change: a Euro-Mediterranean Perspective

Ronald G. Sultana

Introduction

In her very useful synthesis of research on educational innovation, Cros (1997, p.127) refers to 18th century French dictionaries to show how the term ‘innovation’, while not new—indeed, we find it already being used in 13th century Europe—carried very different connotations to those it does today. The Dictionnaire de l’Académie Française (1740), for instance, defines innovation as ‘the introduction of a new element in customs, usage, or behavior’, adding that ‘One must not innovate. Innovations are perilous.’ ‘The innovator’ is one who introduces ‘something new, a dogma that goes against the sentiments and practice of the Church,’ and it therefore follows that ‘innovators’ are ‘dangerous.’ Similarly, the Dictionnaire Universel François et Latin (1771) notes that ‘all innovations are hazardous. Innovation in religious matters leads to schisms, and to civil war.’ This dictionary also counsels that ‘in order to have peace, one must not innovate, either in matters of the State, or in religion.’

It is perhaps that key episteme of the 19th century—the idea of progress—that led to a major shift in the way ‘innovation’ and ‘change’ became to be understood. Indeed, the very idea of modernity is based on the notion that had emerged in the 17th century when Francis Bacon argued, in his New Atlantis (1627), for a great enterprise which would give humankind a greatly expanded and improved knowledge of nature, ending the stagnation of many centuries. The belief in the possibility of human advancement was dominant in the Enlightenment, which indeed it did much to create (Bury, 1923; Tuveson, 1964), and eventually led to
ideologies—such as those of communism and Nazism—that saw progress in a Darwinian, historically teleological manner.

While postmodernism represents, to a large degree, the expression of a profound disillusionment with ‘grand narratives’ of progress (Jameson, 1991), one could argue that the notion of societies ‘maturing’ towards more ‘civilized’, ‘refined’ stages of being is far from dead. Technical-scientific rationality may very well have lost its state of innocence, seeing the mass destruction it has caused to human and planetary ecology, but the fundamental idea that societies can advance—economically, culturally, politically—through a calculated and systematic investment in the knowledge enterprise still has a taken-for-granted quality about it that is rarely examined. Indeed, much of the educational discourse that is extant at national, regional and international levels is impregnated with a confident belief that progress in learning inside and outside school is the key to the future. That discourse has been intensified as the dawn of the new millennium provided national and supranational entities with a unique motivation to articulate projects for ‘tomorrow’s schools’, and where the main call has been to innovate and change. The association of ‘danger’ with innovation has, in many ways, disappeared, and tends to surface only in the context of discussions as to how change is to be implemented. In that sense, innovation can, if introduced haphazardly or too quickly or without sufficient attention to contextual dynamics, lead to resistance or outright rejection: as the case of the dismissal of the French Minister of Education Claude Allègre from the Jospin government shows, the ‘mammoth’ task of reforming national education systems requires tact. But the idea of—and discourse about—inovation are rarely if ever challenged. Indeed, innovation is generally construed as the hallmark of dynamic education systems that respond—and in some ways prefigure and prepare citizens for—societal changes in the making.

This chapter sets out to focus on the notion of innovation in education, in order to both provide a framework for—as well as to introduce—the national case studies that make up the rest of the volume. First, the interaction between social change and educational innovation is considered. This is followed by a brief analysis of the relevance of ‘context’ to an understanding and evaluation of innovations. In this book, the overwhelming concern is with the Euro-Mediterranean, and an attempt is made to define the regional backdrop against which the case studies of educational innovation are played out, highlighting both the disparities and unities that mark the different sectors of economy, culture, and education.

Finally, some of the key themes and issues regarding educational innovation that emerge from the case studies are discussed, with a view to both presenting a set of perspectives with which to view the rest of the chapters, and to also indicate commonalities in the challenges and change forces that run through the region, and in the educational innovations that have emerged in response to them. One underlying thread running through this discussion, and indeed throughout the book, is that a focus on the Euro-Mediterranean region as a whole carries with it the promise of generating new insights about educational dynamics, which might not have otherwise emerged had the object of analysis been solely on the northern, or southern, or eastern shores of the Mediterranean Sea.

Social Change and Educational Innovation

The Paris-based observatory of educational innovation (NOVA), having collected over 300 definitions of the term (see Cros, 1996), notes that a leitmotif running through the majority of the literature surveyed is the idea that ‘innovation’ is something (an object, idea, or practice, or the process by which any of these are adopted) new, either in absolute terms, or from the perspective of where it is implemented. It refers not just to an idea, but also to its application. Authentic innovations carry with them an ameliorative intention, that is they are not implemented with a view to change for the sake of change, or to sabotage processes already present, but to improve effectiveness for the stakeholders’ (Marsh, 1997, p.185). Finally, a study of educational innovations includes an analysis of the process of implementation (Cros, 1997, p.129; West & Altink, 1996). Much the same approach to the term is adopted by the INNO DATA project of UNESCO’s International Bureau of Education, which documents and publishes case studies of innovations from around the world.

In education circles, ‘innovation’ has been a major focus of interest for researchers, and while the approach to studying and promoting innovation has changed in each decade from the 1960’s onwards (see Galton, 1989), what has not changed is the assumption that it is both positive and necessary. If anything, that belief has become more entrenched in what Giddens (1999) has termed a ‘runaway world’ marked by ‘supercomplexity’. In his introduction to UNESCO’s educational manifesto for the 21st century, Delors (1996), as chairperson of the Commission responsible for authoring Learning: The Treasure Within,
refers to education as ‘the necessary utopia’, and highlights ‘the ways in which educational policies can help to create a better world, by contributing to sustainable development, mutual understanding among peoples and a renewal of practical democracy’ (p.16). Delors goes on to argue that education has several challenges to face up to, in mediating—and helping nations overcome—the main tensions that will be central to the problems of the 21st century. Among the more important are the tensions between the local and the global, between the universal and the individual, between tradition and modernity, between long-term and short-term considerations, between the need for competition and the concern for equality of opportunity, between the extraordinary expansion of knowledge and human beings’ capacity to absorb it, and between the spiritual and the material.

This is just one way of articulating what is uppermost in the minds of many national and educational leaders, namely that the rapid pace of social change, at least in part brought about and vehicled by technological innovation and its almost instant globalization, demands educational systems to transform themselves in terms of the curricula they teach, the methods of instruction and assessment they use, and the way they constitute themselves as ‘learning organizations’. Of course, education has always tended to be subjected to pressures to change, not least because governments with struggling economies find it convenient to export their crisis onto schools and teachers, crying ‘reform’ in their attempt to generate ‘compensatory legitimation’ (Weiler, 1983). But it would be fair to state that, at the tail end of the ‘short twentieth century’ (Hobsbawm, 1994), where time and distance have been virtually annihilated, the synergetic forces of change have accelerated, and the erstwhile ‘comfortable’ certainty of national policy boundaries has been eroded by the forces of globalization. Discrepancies between yesterday’s curricula and tomorrow’s realities appear increasingly glaring, with governments keen to cross borders to learn about and try out ‘solutions that work’. Innovation has perhaps never featured as prominently, leading to a situation where ‘education is increasingly being wrenched away from its traditional anchoring concepts concerning its task and role and its content, organization, values, and ideology’ (Wieleman, 1998, p.140), with the acceleration of change leaving policy makers, teachers, parents and students often unable to cope with the new roles demanded of them.

There is a growing body of literature that attempts to make sense of the change forces operating on education, and on the interaction between social change and education. Much of this literature converges in identifying the same set of developments, which Mitchell (1998) has usefully summarized as being globalization, leading to the demise of the nation-state; demographic transitions, which will have a major impact on the structure of societies and the transactions that occur within them; the rise of multicultural societies with pluralistic epistemologies; the ICT revolution, which is already transforming the nature of work, business, entertainment, leisure, interpersonal interactions, and community; and the transformation of mass production economies to Information Age economies. There is also some agreement that, conservative as education systems tend to be, embryonic changes are already visible, possibly giving us a preview of things to come. The work of Kress (2000) is particularly useful because, by utilizing the concept of ‘frame’ developed by Basil Bernstein, he provides us with a vocabulary to better articulate some of the important shifts that are in evidence. Like Mitchell, Kress relates the issue of educational development very closely to both economic and cultural transformations in the post-modern age. Like Mitchell too, Kress speaks of the weakening of borders and the blurring of definitions of roles and sites for education. The modern school, which looks back to the 19th century, reflects the main concern of the industrial era, which was ‘reproduction’. Schooling in the mass production age provided strong framings of values and knowledge, with the curriculum serving the needs of the nation state, the labor force and the professions. Kress argues that we are now in a situation where the framing of what constituted education over the past century and a half is shifting. Specifically, he observes the following major trends:

There is a shift in the frame around the institution of education itself, with the strong distinctions between different institutions being eroded, partly as a result of changing conceptions of learning, and partly due to the fact that education has become more market-driven, with institutions having to capture their own clientele.

There is a shift in the frame around the site of education, with institutions preferring to operate in contexts that are normally associated with leisure, and which imply that the service provider moves to the site of the client, rather than the other way around.

There is a shift in the frame around the time of education, with the concept of life-long learning becoming ever more real, and with the extension of education beyond organized or institutionally controlled time.

There is a shift around the frame concerning the educational audience, with the marshalling of age-specific groups around learning tasks becoming increasingly questioned.
There is a shift in the frame of what constitutes educational knowledge, with blurring or abolition of boundaries between knowledge sanctioned in educational institutions and the knowledge of the everyday, between the ‘sacred’ and the ‘profane’.

There is a blurring in the frame of education-as-work and education-as-fun, where technological and social developments enhance the approach to learning as a leisure-type activity, which induces pleasure.

There is a change in the frame between the state and the market in the provision of education, so that teaching institutions have to market themselves and their services in order to capture a clientele, rather than expect the financial and logistical support of the state in guaranteeing such a market.

There is a shift in the framing and location of authority, with power shifting to the learner, who is now conceived of as a consumer/client rather than as a ‘student’ or ‘pupil’.

Clearly, different nations and regions in an unequal world experience these changes, challenges and shifts in different ways and to different extents. Given that this volume features a region that bridges the ‘North’ and ‘South’ divide, it is important that we remain sensitive to the diverse terrain in which challenge and change forces play themselves out, and to the complex ways in which the global interacts with the local, leading to increased homogenization and diversity at the same time (Green, 1997; Carnoy, 1999).

**Educational Innovation in Context/s**

In any comparative purview of educational innovation, therefore, context remains critical. Even ‘globalization effects’ are different, with cultural globalization leading to a gradual weakening of national identities in the West, while in other contexts—such as in Islamic and Asian states—it ‘has led to more dichotomous patterns with greater internationalization co-existing with the maintenance—or even renewal—of national traditions and cultures’ (Green et al., 1999, p.21). While schools in America or Europe or Australia will all be subjected to pressures to re-examine their goals and operational strategies, the context of innovation in these countries will tend to be very different from that to be found in the least developed nations in the world today. In forty-nine of these, half of the children do not have access to schooling, and half of those who do, drop out before the first four years of education (Ordonez, 1996). School systems both within and across national borders, will necessarily differ in the priorities they accord to aspects of the educational enterprise, in the way they inform that activity with meaning, in the institutional, organizational and value traditions they associate with it. In this regard, research such as that conducted by Green et al. (1999) serves to remind us that even in contexts where we most expect to see convergence—as in the case of the member states of the European Union (EU)—important divergences remain.

Despite deeply-rooted contrasts, however, what is of key interest here is that, first of all, the clarion call for innovation and change is to be heard as loudly and as urgently in all contexts, however widely they differ, and secondly, that despite the contrast in material wealth, in culture and schooling histories and traditions, one can detect a common thread in the issues and areas that are deemed to be needing attention and transformation, and in the manner in which such change ought to be brought about. Such convergence can be perceived more readily in some aspects of educational activity than in others. Meyer and his colleagues (Benavot et al., 1991; Kamens et al., 1996; Meyer et al., 1997) have shown, for instance, that over the past few decades, curriculum processes in highly dissimilar countries have converged, resulting in a few typical curricular patterns. More broadly, one can speak of a rise of a ‘world ideology’ in education (Benavot, 1983), where ‘the essentially arbitrary institutional and conceptual apparatus of modern Western education systems has embedded itself on a global basis’ (Broadfoot, 2000, p.363), so that the entrenched value-systems they express are insulated from criticism, disqualifying potential competing notions.

Despite real and important differences between countries, then, it may be possible to speak of world-wide ‘trends’, where the emerging global, interdependent and networked economy virtually demands that nations address a similar set of policy problems that ultimately affect the general approach to the question of education (Sultana, 1995). As we have already noted earlier in the reference to Mitchell’s work, each and every country, irrespective of its pecking order in the educational ‘league’ of nations, has to respond to the challenge of enhancing economic productivity, the induction of scientific inventions and technology transfer, the upgrading of work force capability, the overcoming of bureaucratic inertia, the change of public attitudes and habits, and the balancing of competing claims for resources (Guthrie & Pierce, 1990, p.180). Such convergent preoccupations are not, of course, simply and merely ontologically ‘real’. They are also the result of the social and ideological construction of
‘reality’, and the convergence in educational discourse, in the way problems and challenges are perceived and described, and in the kinds of policy-solutions that are proposed can, at least partly, be traced to the effect of colonial and ‘post’-colonial dynamics. International agencies such as the World Bank and the OECD, supranational entities such as the EU, development and aid agencies—one and all tend to promote similar perspectives and practices, so that the language of ‘decentralization and deregulation’, of ‘quality control’, and of ‘performance indicators’—to mention only three policy-related areas—practically exercises global influence, if not outright dominance, in the educational field. As is well known, the ideological and political agendas of donor agencies are generally inextricable from the funds they make available to recipient governments (Garrett, 1995).

Educational Challenge and Change in the Euro-Mediterranean Region

The issues of societal change, of the impact of this on the meaning and nature of education, of innovation as a response to such pressures, of the dynamics of change and the options among alternative courses of action in a divided world that has nevertheless gone global, are at the heart of the concerns of this volume. The case studies of educational innovation from nineteen of the twenty-four countries that can be said to ‘belong’ to the ‘Euro-Mediterranean region’ reflect the preoccupation of governments and educators with change, and with their attempts to mould educational systems to respond to wider social dynamics, or indeed to anticipate and manage them. The case studies also reflect the stress placed in the previous sections not only on the ubiquity of innovation and on the regularities of policy directions internationally, but also on the need to acknowledge the specificity of contexts, where imported policies and innovations are creatively received and reinterpreted, in a way that suggests highly complex dynamics in the interrelationship between the global and the local. While each chapter provides the knowledge required to make sense of the national context in which an innovation is implemented, there is some value in also portraying elements of the more relevant political, economic, cultural and educational features of the Euro-Mediterranean region as a whole, thus providing what will hopefully be a useful overarching backdrop for the stage on which the specific innovations are played out. It is this task that I will attempt in the next sections, before outlining some of the broad themes that emerge from the case studies themselves.

The Euro-Mediterranean region

The idea of considering the ‘Euro-Mediterranean’ region as a unit of analysis in comparative education is so new that it requires some justification. None of the key texts in comparative education literature have considered the countries bordering on the Mediterranean basin as a focus for their attention, with the more immediately evident economic, cultural and religious rifts between the north, south and east structuring the scholar’s gaze. This is true of independent researchers—such as Lê Thành Khôi, who argues that the Mediterranean is marked by ‘irreducible differences’ (2000, p.60), and who, in his masterly overview of Education and Civilizations (1995), prefers to parcel up the world in four regions, namely central and south-eastern Asia (Buddhist societies), China and Japan (Mandarin societies), Europe (Christian societies), and the Islamic world. It is also true of international agencies and organizations, such as the OECD, UNESCO and the World Bank, which also think of the Mediterranean in fragmented terms, finding it more meaningful to group different parts of the region within more immediately evident unities, such as the ‘Middle East and North Africa’, ‘southern Europe’, ‘eastern Mediterranean’, or ‘Balkan’.

There have been some attempts to consider education and educational development from the perspective of the totality of the Mediterranean region. The OECD had a unit working on education in the Mediterranean in the early 1970’s, while under the impetus of the now moribund MEDA initiatives of the European Union, and particularly of MedCampus, networking and collaborative research in the region flourished temporarily (see Schmid, 1996; Commission of European Communities, 1997). EU funding largely sustained the Community of Mediterranean Universities (which has been operating from its headquarters in Bari since 1983), and its rival the University of the Mediterranean (set up in 1991 in Rome). In 1994, a network of education researchers was established in the region under the co-ordination of the Comparative Education Program in Euro-Mediterranean Studies at the University of Malta, with its most visible product being the bi-annual Mediterranean Journal of Educational

Despite these and similar initiatives—many of them significantly short-lived—thinking of the Mediterranean as a whole remains conceptually challenging, whether we focus on economy, culture, or education systems. As I have argued in other contexts (see Sultana, 1996, 1998, 1999), the difficulty partly arises out of the fact that the project flies in the face of empirical evidence. What strikes us most about the contemporary Mediterranean are the region’s several discontinuities and fractures, where, to use Cowen’s (1998, p.69) useful phrasing, the economic, political, cultural and educational ‘genealogies’ or ‘codings’ of different states and groups of states reflect and occupy different ‘sociological times’. It is not a coincidence that much of the (burgeoning) literature on the Mediterranean refers to the region as a ‘constructed’ space, one that needs to be defended, re/invented, imagined (Balta, 1992; Ravenel, 1995; Maalouf, 1998). The argument pursued in this chapter—and which indeed informs the project that has led to this volume—is that despite the very real disparities, a focus on the Mediterranean helps generate new insights into the processes of change that are sweeping through the region, and into the nature of the educational innovations that are implemented in the different countries bordering on the Sea. In what follows I will first consider the region in some detail, before taking this argument further.

Defining the Euro-Mediterranean region

For our purposes, a state is said to be Mediterranean if it has access to the basin’s coastline or—as in the case of Portugal and Jordan—its hinterland. On that basis, delineation and definitions become straightforward: there are 24 such states, representing an overall population of about 450 million which can be repartitioned in the following manner: 176 million in the EU Mediterranean states; 27 million in the Balkans; 100 million in the Eastern Mediterranean; and 150 million in the Maghreb and Machrek (North African) countries. These states and territories have been partitioned in different ways, often reflecting the political, ideological, historical or cultural lens through which they are perceived. Perhaps the most straightforward way of grouping these countries is under four broad geographical headings: the Northern Mediterranean (namely the ‘Southern’ European countries of Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Greece and Malta), the Southern Mediterranean (namely, the north African states of Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt), the Eastern Mediterranean (namely Cyprus, Israel, Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine, Syria, and Turkey); and the Adriatic Mediterranean (namely Albania, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Slovenia). It is this typology that has been followed in this volume, with case studies covering each geographical area.

Regional Diversity

The partitioning of the Mediterranean into sub-regions is symptomatic of the real differences that exist, and which deserve to be highlighted, for while, as will be argued below, some characteristics are shared between education systems to the north, south, north east, and east of the Mediterranean, the divergences are equally, if not more, important. Economically, politically, and culturally, it is obviously reasonable to group Portugal, Spain, Italy, and Greece together as a Southern European bloc. France, over and above being a continental European and Atlantic state, is also a Mediterranean power, belongs to the so-called ‘Latin arc’, and indeed dominates it through its superiority in economic, political and military terms. It is present in this volume only in terms of the influence it has exerted, and continues to exert, on its erstwhile colonies.

If by ‘region’ we refer to a group of states whose pattern of co-operative (or confictual) relations or interactions exhibit a particular degree of regularity and intensity, then the enactment of the Single European Act in 1986, the ratification of the Maastricht Treaty in 1993, and the intensification of the process of European integration and enlargement (1993, 1981, 1986, and 1995) have consolidated the intergovernmental and trans-national relations between the northern states of the Mediterranean and Western Europe (Calleya, 1997, pp.89, 91). Malta, and occasionally Cyprus are often included in that bloc, both because of their aspirations for membership in the European Union and their attempts to measure up to the EU’s benchmarks, and also because of their deeply ingrained cultural, historical and religious affiliations to the old continent. Turkey too is sometimes associated with this sub-region in some of the ‘Southern European studies’ literature—despite the cold shoulder it has consistently
been shown by the EU for both political and economic reasons, and the increasing permeability and influence of political Islam in defiance of Atatürk’s secular legacy.

The countries of North Africa as well as those of the Levant—part of what the World Bank refers to as the ‘Middle East and North African (MENA) Region’—form another discrete bloc in the Mediterranean. Among their key unifying factors one can underline the Arabic language, the history of the Islamic Empire, the Islamic religion, Islamic civilization (including science and epistemology), the transnational political force of Islam (Buzan, 1991), and, in most cases, economic under-development. Israel’s misfortunes are very much part and parcel of the historical and political development of this sub-region, but its economic status differs from that of its neighbors, enjoying as it does a per capita GNP that is closer (and in some cases superior) to that of southern European countries.

The North African and Eastern Mediterranean sub-regional grouping differs from the north-western, European ‘bloc’ because while the latter’s regionalism has co-operative, transnational and intergovernmental dimensions (Calleya, 1997, p.93), in the former case ‘most of the states have been too preoccupied with distinct domestic or regional sub-grouping issues to attempt nurturing a complex network of relations with all the states in the region. Indeed, one could say that here, centrifugal forces have superseded centripetal forces as the majority of states in the Maghreb see their future in securing market access to Western Europe’ (Calleya, 1997, p.97, 99; see also Mahiou, 2000). This despite the attempts at cooperation between Arab states in areas such as security and energy (the Arab League, the Gulf Co-Operation Council, the Arab Maghreb Union), as well as education (ALECSO, ISESCO).

The six countries in the Adriatic Mediterranean sub-region have an older history that inscribes them in the economy of exchange that was facilitated—indeed made possible—by the Sea. Nevertheless, the dynamics in this sub-region are more properly ‘Balkan’ than Mediterranean, in the sense that their present systems and institutions—educational or otherwise—have been deeply marked by the Cold War, and the economic, political, and cultural upheavals that have come with its demise. The subsequent crises in ex-Yugoslavia have generated regional dynamics that have a more direct impact on European relations than those of the Mediterranean. However, it is not insignificant that it had to be a Yugoslav intellectual, Matejevitch (1992), who wrote the most moving testament to the Mediterranean on the eve of the 21st century.

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Population ’000</th>
<th>Fertility ratio</th>
<th>Enrol. rate: Education 6-17</th>
<th>Enrol. rate: Education 3rd level</th>
<th>Per capita GNP-US$</th>
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</table>
The distinctions between these different sub-groupings in the region are far from insignificant. Thus, the countries to the economic ‘North’ of the Mediterranean stand in stark contrast to those due ‘South’, when the commonly used indicators of development are taken into consideration. Table 1 highlights some of these differences, placing the countries with the highest per capita GNP first.

The gap between the different sub-regions is expected to widen by a factor of ten by the year 2010 (Regnault, 1992), largely due to the effects of the free market policies, promoted by the likes of the EU and the World Bank, which have led to the acceleration of the concentration of wealth and the promotion of investments that serve the interests of globalization rather than the development aspirations of the South (Walker-Leigh, 2000). The signing of free trade agreements between south Mediterranean countries and the EU, for instance, has largely had negative results in terms of development, trade, public finance and investment. Relations with the EU are marked by a huge negative balance of payments: two-thirds of the Maghreb’s commerce is with the EU (mainly France, Italy and Spain), but the region represents only 3% of the external commerce of the Union. Indeed, the EU ran a trade surplus of 12.1 billion ECU in 1993, and 9.3 billion ECU in 1994 with Mediterranean countries (Calleya, 1995). Imports by the EU from the Mediterranean fell from 41 billion to 31 billion ECU from 1980 to 1993 (Labaki, 1997), while the external debt of the south Mediterranean countries now totals US$233 billion (Walker-Leigh, 2000).

The northern shores of the Mediterranean, caught up as they are in the market logic that informs and drives the EU, will tend to consider the other Mediterranean states in a specific light, given that demographic trends, political instability, and indigence increase the flow of ‘North’-bound migrants who leave their homes in their hundreds of thousands in an attempt to satisfy legitimate aspirations for improved living conditions (Liauzu, 1996).

While mitigating the problem of unemployment, and occasionally having a positive boomerang effect in terms of financial, scientific and technology transfer (Meyer & Brown, 1999), such migratory flows nevertheless represent a veritable hemorrhage that further exacerbates the weak economic position of the south (Sabbir, 1993). They also tend to further entrench differences between ‘North’ and ‘South’, raising challenging issues that concern not just economy and finance, but cultures and identities as well.

Diversity in education

The diversity that prevails in the Mediterranean is also apparent if we had to focus on the education sector, a diversity that the case studies in this volume make immediately apparent. There are several sources of difference. Suffice it in this context to point out to a few. An obvious one concerns the divergent educational histories of each country, where present structures and practices are a complex reflection of colonial influence, and accommodations that have been made to that in response to political, economic and cultural pressures. Another source of diversity which is worth highlighting when considering the Mediterranean is the different relationship that education systems have negotiated with dominant religious authorities, where some states have managed to sever their symbiotic ties with the institutional church and have secularized their schools (e.g. Portugal and Spain), while others have had to accommodate demands, maintaining doctrine as part of the core curriculum, as well as the general ‘religious character’ of schools. This has been the case in Malta (Catholicism), and in Algeria (Islam), for instance.

A further source of diversity between the education systems of the Mediterranean is the state of their development. In South European countries, educational services have greatly expanded after the establishment of democratic rule, with systems now approximating closely, in reach and achievements, those to be found in democracies with longer histories. As the case studies in this volume suggest, much of this development has been inspired by benchmarks that are increasingly shared by member states of the EU, with Greece and Portugal in particular having access to substantial EU funding to enable them to attain such targets. In contrast, the countries to the south and east of the basin still have a large number of fundamental problems and challenges to come to terms with, despite the enormous investment made in education in the ‘post-independence era. Even though public expenditure on education as a percentage of GNP is—at 5.5%—higher in the Arab world than anywhere else in the developing world, up to 34% of students in the developing countries of the Mediterranean are still not receiving a primary education. The average Arab state spent approximately US$267 per student in 1990, while OECD countries spent about five times that amount, i.e. US$1,327 (UNESCO, 1995). We find high illiteracy rates for several Maghreb and Mashrek countries such as Morocco (50.5%), Tunisia (34.7%) (Gizard, 1992), Algeria (43%), and Egypt (48%) (Nucho, 1998), and generally
speaking, the quality of education in MENA countries is lower by a factor of seven when compared to that in OECD countries along an index that combines three characteristics, namely expenditures, student flow, and classroom contact time (Heyneman, 1997, p.456). The eastern Mediterranean fares better, where the illiteracy rates for Jordan and Lebanon are, at 20%, relatively lower (Nucho, 1998).

A final source of diversification that I will highlight in this context is the fact that some education systems in the region operate in a situation of relative peace, while others have been or are still deeply embroiled in a situation marked by conflict and war. This is true of many of the states along the Adriatic coastline, whose educational infrastructure and services have been devastated after the end of the cold war. In Croatia, for instance, so many school buildings have been destroyed that pupils have had to be packed into the remaining classrooms, in many cases increasing the student-to-teacher ratio by 20%. Schools are burdened by lack of space, teaching aids, and a chronic shortage of teachers (International Bureau of Education, 1998). The same is true for Albania, while the situation is even worse in Bosnia-Herzegovina (Benedek, 1997). The refugee situation across the Balkans is nothing short of tragic, with the obvious repercussions this has for education: the count for refugees and displaced persons is 404,066 for Croatia alone. While some of these stark realities overlap with those of other Mediterranean territories—Algeria and Palestine immediately come to mind here—it is more than clear that comparative educational analyses cannot afford to ignore the trenchant differences that mark the region.

Exploring Euro-Mediterranean distinctiveness around unifying themes

Having highlighted some of the disparities and discontinuities in the region, it is necessary, given the purpose of this volume, to also consider some of the important aspects that allow us to think of the Mediterranean space as a regional unit, of the unifying themes that are evident despite the diversity. One must first of all point out that this project of an 'imagined community' (Anderson, 1983) is not new, and has been addressed by historians (Rose, 1933; Braudel, 1949; Carpentier & Lebrun, 1998), anthropologists (inter alia Pitt-Rivers, 1963; Peristiany, 1965, 1976a,b; Gellner & Waterbury, 1977), economists (Amin and Yachir, 1988; Yachir, 1989; Baecck, 1994) and international relations specialists (Gillespie, 1994; Calleya, 1997), with education comparativists making a rather belated appearance on the scene (Sultana, 1996, 1998, 1999; Pampanini, 2000).

As Gilmore (1982, p.178) notes, 'Faced with virtually identical ecological problems, Mediterranean peoples have indeed responded historically in like ways'. Despite the heterogeneity of the region, therefore, attention to the longue durée of history reveals an inner soul and an identity worth privileging. That inner soul is the result not only of ecological continuities, but also of mutual influence among the peoples of the region. As Braudel (1992, p.548, 552) put it, 'in the Mediterranean to live was to exchange'—whether this exchange involved men, ideas, ways of life, beliefs ... or habits of courtship. And referring to a more contemporary world, Davis (1977, p.255) has argued that the intensity of contact has carried over from the past, so that 'Over the millennia it has proved impossible for Mediterranean people to ignore each other. They have conquered, colonized, converted
[each other] ... the contacts are perpetual and inescapable’. It is this constant factor of interaction, borrowing, diffusion and acculturation that are—at least partly—responsible for the homogeneity of the Mediterranean.

Since Braudel, others have set out to identify a logic of inter-relationships around the Mediterranean. Different members of the Annales School grouped around their mentor to produce studies on other aspects of the region (see Braudel, 1985; Braudel & Duby, 1986). But these projects concerned the historical, classical Mediterranean, one that fixed its gaze on the 16th century, not the contemporary one. It fell to anthropologists and social scientists to explore the extent to which one could speak of the present Mediterranean reality as a social system, an attempt that less than two decades ago was considered to be ‘new and controversial’ (Gilmore, 1982, p.175). Under the influence of such scholars as Pitt-Rivers (1963), Peristiany (1965, 1976a,b) Wolf (1969), Gellner and Waterbury (1977), the Schneiders (1976) and perhaps more importantly Davis (1977) and Boissevain (1976, 1979), a pan-Mediterranean focus was developed in order to explore Mediterranean distinctiveness around unifying themes. Their studies suggest—controversially—that a relatively uniform Mediterranean ecology led to an aggregate of socio-cultural traits that Gilmore (1982), drawing on a variety of sources, lists, and which are here paraphrased as follows:

- a strong urban orientation; a corresponding disdain for the peasant way of life and for manual labor; sharp social, geographic, and economic stratification; political instability and a history of weak states; ‘atomistic’ community life; rigid sexual segregation; a tendency toward reliance on the smallest possible kinship units (nuclear families and shallow lineages); strong emphasis on shifting, ego-centered, non-corporate coalitions; an honor-and-shame syndrome which defines both sexuality and personal reputation; ... intense parochialism and inter-village rivalries; communities are marked off by local cults of patron saints who are identified with the territorial unit; general gregariousness and interdependence of daily life characteristic of small, densely populated neighborhoods, where patterns of institutionalized hostility nicknaming abound, where the evil eye belief is widespread, and where religion plays an important institutionalized political role, as do priests, saints, and holy men. Marriage patterns, while superficially varied, signal the unity of the Mediterranean through the practice of the dowry. And there are important similarities in politics also, with weak bureaucracies at the national level leading to unstable democratic regimes, often alternating with dictatorships of both Right and Left. At the micropolitical level, this emphasis on informal personal power rather than formal institutions is reflected in the reliance on patronage, with clientage being the preferred form of adaptation to social inequality in the region.

Over and above these Mediterranean ‘traits’—which seem to have evolved due to internal contacts which are both historical and contemporary, and which tend to germinate around the basin due to a similar eco-environment—others have emphasized the identity of the Mediterranean region in terms of a shared subjugation to external economic and political pressures. Several authors (Amin & Yachir, 1988; Yachir, 1989) take a political economic approach to the Mediterranean, and draw on Wallerstein’s world-systems analysis with its emphasis on center-periphery relations, or on Santos’ (1990) theorization of semi-peripheral societies, in order to argue that what is quintessentially Mediterranean is not the result of local or regional conditions, but rather a more direct response to ‘de-development’ by the core powers.

Such authors would highlight the fact that practically all the states bordering on the basin share a common political history of domination and economic peripheralization. All the states of the Mediterranean—with the exception of France and Turkey—have only recently emerged from decades—and in some cases, centuries—of either colonial domination, or tutelary rule. Cyprus, Malta, Jordan, Egypt, Israel, Palestine were all colonies or ‘protectorates’ of Britain, while Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, Lebanon fell under French rule or mandate. Libya fell under the sway of Italy at a time when it was ‘fashionable’ for European states to have empires. The tardy establishment of democratic government in Portugal (1974), Spain (1975), and Greece (1974) means that in these countries as well, memories of totalitarian regimes are still fresh, as are those of Albania (1990), Croatia (1990), Slovenia (1991), Macedonia (1991), and Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992).

The Euro-Mediterranean Region, Education and Innovation

Many of the educational concerns in this region, which are at one and the same time so disparate and yet so deeply embroiled in the same set of historical, cultural and political dynamics, are addressed by the case studies of innovation that feature in this volume. Needless to say, these accounts do not attempt to portray the whole range of such concerns, even if it was ever possible to do so. Rather, they are part of a random patchwork that nevertheless succeeds in drawing attention to some of the common challenges that face education systems in the region. In this last section of this introductory chapter, I will attempt to tease out some of the themes that
are embedded in the different case studies, and to show how these speak to the specific challenges that the Mediterranean has to face as the region grapples with internal and external forces and pressures that define ‘development’ in national, regional and global terms. Such educational innovation will tend to reflect the ‘character’ of the Mediterranean, in terms of the conceptualization and implementation of change, as well as the continuities and differences that have already been outlined more broadly above. Proceeding with the key concerns as they feature in the case studies in the subsequent chapters of this book, it is most useful to comment in turn on operational definitions of innovation, on areas of educational innovation, on the process of implementation of innovation, and on the evaluation of innovations.

Operational definitions of educational innovation

Earlier, it was emphasized that educational innovations are generally considered to be intentional and real (i.e. actual) interventions meant to bring about improvements in education, however such improvements are perceived or defined, and whether such changes involve goals, skills, philosophy or beliefs, behavior and practice (Fullan, 1991). Most of the authors in this volume follow such a definition, often marking the boundaries of the meaning of the term in operational rather than over ways. They therefore present their case studies of innovation as purposefully selected interventions, often driven by educational leaders (policy-makers, university academics and researchers, international organizations and donors), with the intention of addressing specific challenges that are perceived to need attention. There are three exceptions which deserve to be highlighted: in the case study concerning Italy, Marco Todeschini develops a rationale and a justification for the need for curricular innovation and intercultural school practices in the face of the massive movement of people from the southern and eastern shores of the Mediterranean into the peninsula. Todeschini does refer to past and present Italian innovations that could guide the vision that he proposes, but the main thrust of his chapter is an argument, indeed a plea, for educational change that takes into account the new challenges that face the country. When writing about his native Jordan, Muhammad Raji Zughoul considers another crucial aspect of education that has relevance to the region, the language of instruction. Zughoul notes the spontaneous ‘accommodation’

made by interlocutors in code-switching behavior between English and Arabic in higher education contexts. What we have here is not an innovation by diktat, or a blue print of reform dreamt up in the corridors of power and then diffused from the center to the periphery; rather, it is about social actors exercising their meaning-making and interpretative faculties in order to negotiate global influences in such a way as to profit from them while at the same time retaining their identity—a temporary solution, perhaps, to the conflict between Arabic and English as the medium of instruction in tertiary level institutions. On her part, Mirjam Hladnik introduces a third important theme that has already been referred to briefly in an earlier section of this chapter, namely, that the discourse of innovation and reform can serve to legitimize governments, who thus portray themselves as being dynamic makers of history when in fact they fail miserably to address the crises that matter most. This distinction between the ‘real’ and the ‘discursive’ is critical to our definition of ‘innovation’, and Hladnik’s reflection on post-1989 Slovenia is a salutary reminder that so-called initiatives are often paraded in front of citizens as ‘innovations’, when a look at the deep structure of both process and content reveal an any continuation with past practices. Like ideology, the bandying about of the term ‘innovation’ can be real in its effects, even if such effects are far removed from the educational goals that are overtly proclaimed. This distinction between the real and the illusory raises another important issue regarding the definition of innovation that some case studies obliquely refer to, but which one would do well to highlight. I am here referring to the unintended consequences of an innovation, which ought to be stressed given the connotation of intentionality that underlies the operational definition that runs throughout this volume. As indicated earlier, the idea of progress that drives ‘innovation’ is linked to the enlightenment belief in rationality. However, the insights provided by the sociological framework of methodological individualism, and particularly Giddon’s notion of ‘effet pervers’ (1977), should alert us to the danger of adopting the rather naive model that would have us think of change as a function of planning and implementation. In other words, careful planning and diffusion of an innovation does not guarantee control of the change process. We will turn to this in more detail when we consider the process of implementation. Suffice it to point out at this stage that several dynamics will influence how a particular innovation is perceived, received, and reinterpreted by actors (such as teachers, parents, students), and how the ‘original’ meaning of an innovation is modified when it interacts with other
elements in the systemic force field in which it is planted. Xavier Bonal’s account of action-research for democratic education in Spain, or Helen Phtiake’s narrative regarding the drive for inclusive practices in Cypriot schools, are powerful reminders that an innovation can trigger off energies and repercussions that are much broader than originally intended or even hoped for, in some cases leading to significant political change that goes beyond the formal educational system. In Deborah Kalekin-Fishman’s case study of a five-year long project to introduce computers in schools, the focus increasingly shifted from the targeted goal to the overall pedagogical support that could be offered by the regional teacher centers that had been developed. Deborah Chetcuti’s account of the good intentions behind the introduction of a new form of assessment in Maltese schools, and how such an innovation ended up entrenching rather than challenging injustices, provides us with another insight into the way human intentionality can be inadvertently sabotaged.

It should also be noted that in all the case studies that feature in this book, innovation does not lead to the suppression of a previously existing initiative or service, but rather to its strategic (intended) amelioration, or more commonly, to the expansion of the reach of the system itself into new areas. In one important sense, this is to be expected, given that ‘post’-independence governments in the Mediterranean region have been ‘driven’ by rapidly expanding youth populations and the need to build nationhood and to establish political legitimacy and popular support for new regimes through making education a fundamental right of citizenship’ (Human Development Network, 1998, p.7). The chapter by Mohamed Miliani, for instance, highlights Algeria’s attempts to expand pre-school education, driven not only by popular demand, but also by an understanding that such a service has major positive implications for achievement levels at the compulsory school level. Other chapters refer to the challenge posed by expanding populations, either due to high birth rates, or, as in the case of Italy, to the movement of people across borders. In Turkey, as Hasan Simsek and Ali Yildirim point out, the extension of basic compulsory education led to a demand for more teachers and for improved teacher training. In the case of Greece, educational services were extended to include the ‘whole day primary school’, while in Malta, endogenous national examination systems have developed to take over tasks that had previously been performed by the erstwhile colonial power, England.

Finally, underpinning the operational definition of innovation in this volume is an understanding of the systemic nature of initiatives. This

statement has three elements to it: first, most of the authors in this book do not seem to advocate a ‘big bang’ approach to change, but rather understand innovation to be limited and possibly even narrow in scope. We have the introduction of a new area in the curriculum, or a new pedagogical approach in some areas of knowledge, or a new educational practice, service or technology. Second, despite this apparently ‘limited target’ strategy, most of the authors are keenly aware of what Eisner (2000, p.56) refers to as the ‘complexity of schooling [that] represents an interlocking network of forces that collectively need to be addressed if schools are to improve in significant ways’. As interventions into—and challenges to—the accepted way of doing things, innovations ‘disturb’ the ecology of schools, with all that that might imply. It is inconceivable, for instance, that a school succeeds in changing its pedagogy without also transforming its assessment strategies, and vice versa. Third, a sensitivity to the robustness of the ecologies of school structures and cultures leads many of the authors to allow themselves to be, at best, only cautiously optimistic about the results of innovation, knowing that the school as an institution is more likely to change the incoming stimulus than the stimulus itself. The introduction of ‘global education’ in Syria, for example, might indeed challenge the prevalent logic of rote learning in the rest of the traditional curriculum, but only time will tell whether the latter will prove to be too powerful and end up engulfing the innovation, transforming it into its own image.

Areas of educational innovation

The areas of educational innovation in this volume range across a broad spectrum, covering the three main areas of curriculum (from the pre-primary right up to the university level), pedagogy (including assessment and examinations), and teacher education. Each of these is considered in turn, in order to both highlight themes and to draw attention to what such themes might tell us about education in the Euro-Mediterranean region.

Curriculum innovation. This certainly seems to be uppermost in the minds of educational policy-makers in the region, if the case studies featuring in this volume are anything to go by. The chapters on Portugal, Libya, Morocco, Lebanon, Palestine and Syria deal directly with curricular change, while several of the others refer to it at length. This is far from surprising, given
the concern that is felt world-wide with creating curricula that are attuned to the demands of a changing world, demands that have already been outlined above. Awareness of the blurring of national boundaries in a world that has gone global has led many Mediterranean countries to revise their curricula in terms of the new profiles that citizens are required to have. Such profiles include new skills, competence in new knowledge domains, but also new personality structures—such as the ability to live harmoniously with difference, whether that difference refers to varying degrees of able-bodiedness, or to contexts that bring together people with different cultures, languages and faiths. In a region that has been marked so disastrously by ethnic and religious conflict, it is obviously crucial that curricula prepare the young to live together peacefully. In Lebanon, for instance, Nemer Frayha refers to the aspirations of the curriculum as a project leading to ‘national reconciliation’. Demographic trends and the movement of peoples in the region affects the northern and more economically developed shores—with Italy, Spain, Portugal, and Greece—going through the trauma of shifting from being countries of emigration (towards the more prosperous countries in Europe during the 1950’s) to countries of immigration. The curriculum is therefore under pressure to help young people make sense of these new realities, and to inculcate critical multiculturalism so that the hundreds of thousands of immigrants from the southern and north-eastern Mediterranean are positively integrated in the educational enterprise.

The recent, and in some cases, prevailing history of totalitarian government in many of the countries in the region has led to a preoccupation with the formation of a future generation equipped to function as active citizens in a democracy. Ronald Saltana provides an account of Syria’s implementation of the ‘global education initiative’, which introduces primary level pupils to important skills in the analysis of complex social situations, and in participating in educational encounters that privilege student voice. On his part, Xavier Bonal shows how teachers, through their involvement in school-based action research projects, can become politically aware of the effect that curriculum, textbooks, and educational practices can work against the interest of groups of students identified by their affiliation to class, gender or ethnic groups. Gertrude Amaro considers the impact of the introduction of a new, interdisciplinary curricular area in Portuguese schools, where one of the key goals is the encouragement of strong links with the community, particularly through the involvement of parents and local authorities.

Values associated with democracy, such as equity and participation, are embedded in many of the case studies, representing an important theme that drives and motivates several innovations. This is true for the chapter on Malta, for instance, where Deborah Chetcuti carefully considers the reform in the national examination system from the perspective of the enhancement of equity, particularly in terms of the options and opportunities that are open or closed— for students coming from the state and non-state education sectors. It is also true of Helen Phuika’s engaging and politically committed account of the struggle to integrate students with special needs in the Cypriot educational system, while Zakia Belhachmi takes us deep into the terrain of the political and epistemological struggle to establish a self-reliant system of education founded on the Islamic view of modernism, development and science, and the restoration of Islamic feminist knowledge within the patriarchal power structures of higher education and scientific practice in Morocco. Maher Hashweh and Ismail Njom recommend case-based approaches to teaching democracy in the context of Palestinian schools, showing how innovative pedagogical and curricular approaches can make this theme come to life in classrooms and beyond.

At another level, as Mediterranean societies struggle—against all odds, one is tempted to add—to participate in the new economy and in the benefits it could bring, curricula are under pressure to privilege science and the new technology, despite the expense that this represents. The demand for scientifically and technologically literate citizenry clearly comes across in the account provided by Devorah Kaledin-Fishman, who evaluates the achievements of the school computerization project in Israel, and who links curriculum development to her country’s contradictory aspirations to be a leading technology center in the Middle East while assuming its own defense interests. The concern with scientific literacy as a prerequisite for national development also comes through in the account provided by Suleiman Khoja and Frank Ventura, who consider the impact of curriculum innovation in Physics in Libya.

Pedagogical innovation. This is closely linked to curricular change, and driven by much the same set of motivations and justifications. Most countries in the region report a tendency for students to perform least well in those higher-order cognitive skills which are most sought after in modern economies, namely flexibility, judgment and problem-solving in new and unanticipated circumstances. What Mediterranean education systems seem to teach students is how to learn and retain answers to fairly fixed questions
in problem situations with little or no meaningful context, and where therefore those most skilled at passive knowledge absorptions and reproduction are most rewarded (see Golladay et al., 1995; Sultan 2001a,b). This explains why so many of the case studies in this volume— even when the context addressed refers to such otherwise diverse countries as Algeria, Greece, Lebanon, Palestine, Portugal, or Syria—are concerned with radically challenging a system where the main focus seems to be selection, channeling and credentialing rather than an induction into a culture of co-operative, critical and creative thinking. While it is only Deborah Chetcuti’s account of Malta’s examination system that deals directly with assessment issues, several of the chapters do highlight the fact that pedagogical innovations are doomed to failure if the spirit behind them is not reflected in the way students are evaluated, given that high-stakes criteria impact on how and what school administrators, teachers, parents and students pay attention to and why.

A wide repertoire of teaching strategies are referred to in the different case studies: in Algeria, for instance, the ‘pedagogy by project’ advocated an abandonment of a ‘one size fits all’ approach to teaching and learning, empowering teachers to develop methods and curricula in response to the needs and orientation of the learners. In Palestine, case-based approaches to teaching are promoted for their effectiveness in developing higher order and critical thinking skills in students, and for empowering teachers. Most of the authors either describe innovations or refer to pedagogical initiatives that encourage a new approach to education, which Nagwa Youssif Gamal el-Din summarizes when she refers to the Egyptian focus on the development of student-based and autonomous learning, peer tutoring, participative instructional contexts, critical and creative thinking, and the involvement of the community in the educational enterprise. Many authors also address a critical problem that is to be found in most of the Mediterranean region, namely the reliance of students on a single source of information, such as one textbook. While this problem is shared by other developing countries worldwide, the centralist management structures of Mediterranean education systems leads even relatively affluent countries such as Greece and Malta, to offer students an education that is sometimes starved of key instructional resources. In addition, teaching materials tend to be both scarce and out-of-date, due not only to lack of adequate funding but also to the tendency for Ministries of Education to subsidize a public producer monopoly, so that subjects, authors, production choices, graphics and supplementary materials in both print and non-print format are chosen.

...public employees. This is also why several of the case studies challenge the centralist administrative culture that prevails in the region, with many authors expressing the view that large and top-heavy bureaucracies are increasingly proving to be dysfunctional and inimical to a culture of innovation and change at the school site.

Teacher education. Four of the chapters deal directly with innovation in teacher education, namely those concerning the reforms in Turkey and in Albania (pre-service courses), and in Egypt and Spain (in-service professional development). All of the chapters, however, clearly acknowledge the fact that change in any aspect of a national education system requires improved systems of teacher training, both at the initial and in-service stage. ‘Training’ captures only one aspect of this challenge, namely the development of the new skills that are required by a particular innovation, competencies that could include the use of the new technology, the organization of the curriculum in a more holistic manner, or the use of project work, to mention just three examples. In one important sense, the teaching of such skills can be quite straightforward. What is not is the changing of the attitudes of teachers who, as workers, tend to generally manifest an ‘iterative trend’, that is a tendency to hold fast to tried and tested ways of doing things. The literature on teacher education is pretty unanimous in pointing out that teachers learn much more from their ‘apprenticeship of observation’ (Lortie, 1975) and the ‘cumulative experience of school life’ (Britzman, 1986), than from what is formally taught during courses (Sachs & Smith, 1988) which, as George Psias and George Flouris point out, are often seen to be pedantic and irrelevant to real needs anyway. Teachers do not typically develop new perspectives, but simply become more skilled at defending the perspectives they already possess (Stofffett & Stoddart, 1992), with prior beliefs acting as filters to screen out new ideas that are cognitively incompatible (Holt-Rednolds, 1992; Powel & Riner, 1992; Zulich et al., 1992). All this can, of course, spell the death knell of any innovation, which is why the chapter by Xavier Bonal on action research with (and not on) teachers, is so illuminating in this regard. Bonal draws on Touraine’s (1978) notion of ‘sociological intervention’ to show how innovation can really only come about if the focus is on changing teachers’ consciousness, not their practices. By working alongside with them and intervening to problematize issues as they arise in the field, teachers become more aware of the what, the how, and the why of school life, a process that can lead more effectively to their
examining routinized behavior and taking charge of their own development and change, even when the research team has finished its collaborative work with the school. The chapter by Maher Hashweh and Ismail Njoum also highlights the importance of changes in teachers’ consciousness, noting how case-based approaches helped Palestinian teachers examine their beliefs about subject matter, a process that had an impact on both subject and pedagogical content knowledge. In this regard, Gertrudes Amaro, while referring specifically to Portugal, highlights a problem that is common to many countries in the region, namely the lack of a school-based culture in teacher training for innovations, a strategy that is much more conducive to the kind of attitudinal change that is deemed to be crucial.

Process of innovation

Without drawing specifically on the frameworks of organizational sociology, the different chapters in this volume clearly reflect the view that innovation is a process, and not an isolated action. The emphasis on process suggests that while the goals of a particular innovation might be conceived in terms of materials that need to be produced (such as textbooks or I.T.-based interactive programs), or in terms of practice (such as changes in curriculum or in pedagogy), the very fact of introducing and implementing the innovation leads to changes in the relationships between those who are involved (Huberman & Miles, 1984). Many of the chapters in this volume highlight the way an innovation can lead to a restructuring of the way that heads of schools, teachers, students and parents interact between themselves. Roles are redefined, with a new sense of partnership and collegiality being developed in the pursuit of commonly shared objectives. Such role modification may even have an impact on the way the ‘center’ interacts with the school, as inspectors and even directors become involved, and influenced by the innovation.

The emphasis on process suggests that innovations have a ‘life-cycle’ and indeed, different chapters in this book address various stages of the development of an innovation, making a series of rather important observations in relation to the fundamental dynamics of—and strategies for—change. Key issues here include the origins of the innovation, the manner in which it is ‘pushed’ (or promoted) in the direction of schools; the manner in which it is ‘pulled’ (or owned) by schools; the way it is piloted; and finally, the way it is monitored and evaluated with a view to going to scale if the innovation has proved to be sufficiently successful. Elements of these aspects of the innovation process are briefly considered in turn, as much as they arise from the case studies featuring in this volume.

Origins of an innovation. If the chapters in this book are anything to go by, most of the educational innovations that have a high visibility in the countries of the Mediterranean region are of the ‘import’ rather than of the ‘home-grown’ variety. Thanks to UNICEF, Syria (together with many other MENA countries) borrowed its global education initiative from Canada; Malta’s examination structures are closely modeled on those of the GCSE system in England; while the Greek and Slovene case studies indicate how influential European practices and benchmarks can be on countries that are members of the EU, or are positioning themselves for accession. The Cypriot understanding of inclusion is strongly marked by the conceptualization of the field by its erstwhile colonial master, Britain, and Albania’s and Turkey’s reforms in teacher education are obviously inspired by current trends in the English-speaking world, and particularly in North America and the U.K. Tunisia wants to learn about technical education from Germany and France, and Spain wants to reform schools through action-research, a peculiarly Anglo-Saxon interpretation of the critical sociology of the Frankfurt School. The production and circulation of ideas in the region is clearly skewed towards the ‘North’, and while, in the important sense, a good idea is a good idea, wherever it comes from, a view of innovations which is sensitive to its systemic properties and impact pertains to the fact that educational practices are never shorn of sets of values. Al-Faruqi (1988, p.16) highlights this point when he chides Muslim scholars for adding new subjects to curricula in Islamic schools without realizing that such imports contain what he calls ‘alien values’, ‘facets of an integral view of reality, of life and the world, and of a history that is equally alien to that of Islam’.

Educational innovations travel along well-trodden paths, and reflect the geography of economic force-lines in much the same way as the cross, followed, accompanied or even preceded the sword in the colonial era. They reflect, and indeed are part of what Samoff (1992) calls the ‘intellectual-financial’ complex in educational research and policy. ‘Post-colonial dynamics lead to privileged links between ‘peripheral’ and ‘metropole’ or ‘mainstream’ countries, in such a way that economic and cultural ‘deals’ are struck in close succession, if not simultaneously. Promising students (and the children of the élite and the well-connected)
are provided with scholarships in the ‘North’, creating a conduit for ideas (and consultancies) Southwards. Increasingly, too, the Mediterranean is seen as a promising area for investment on the part of the ‘entrepreneurial university’, with American and European institutions vying with each other to establish fields of influence in the knowledge-hungry and youthful market (see Sultan, 1999; Kuitunen, 1999). Three of the chapters in the book focus specifically on the meaning of such trends. Gisela Baumgratz reflects on her experience in carrying out research in Tunisia, highlighting the challenge that different contexts pose to the transfer of knowledge from ‘North’ to ‘South’, and the central role of cultural factors in cross-cultural co-operation for development. It is not surprising that, with her experience of collaborative research in North Africa, Baumgratz makes a case for global ethics for knowledge transfer in a North-South perspective, and for cultural monitoring as an essential element accompanying technical co-operation projects. Mohamed Miliani wonders, in turn, whether the development of presumably ‘indigenous’ education practices in Algeria will ultimately end up mirroring the French system again, without benefiting from the assets and traditions that had carried with it during the colonial times. Possibly the strongest challenge comes through Zakia Belhachmi’s profound analysis of the significance of the establishment of a UNESCO Chair in Rabat, Morocco, where the international framework for development is inscribed in a logic and practice that is inimical to equitable partnerships and co-operation. Her contribution not only helps to raise fundamental issues regarding the epistemologies and values that donor agencies vehicle through the way they work and the knowledge traditions they transmit, but also alerts us to the exciting potential of generating new conceptual paradigms in the region, if only we knew how to prospect the rich mother load of endogenous knowledge. In this case, Belhachmi focuses on the way the feminist construction within the Islamic tradition is part of an affirmative process of development within the Islamic worldview, its independent scientific paradigm, and its epistemology.

‘Pushing’ an innovation. Most chapters are quite categoric in their claim that innovation cannot be imposed unilaterally from the top down. Even when resources are not scarce, as in the case of the introduction of computers in Israeli schools, it is sociologically and practically naïve to assume that teachers can simply be given a program and expected to carry it out. Innovation, as already intimated earlier, is born out of contestation of prevailing notions and practices, and itself leads to further contestation by those who have a vested interest in maintaining old ways on the one hand, and those who prefer to follow the new ones on the other. Cros (1997), drawing on Alter (1996), points to a clash between the logic of organizations, which tends to be guided by the objective of reaching pre-established targets, and the logic of innovation, which incites the creative use of available resources in order to exploit the opportunities to the maximum. The awareness of this clash in logic between bureaucracies, with their time-honored tempo and regularities, and change, with its potential to challenge and disrupt, alerts us immediately to the fact that innovations, by definition, set into motion processes of contestation, resistance, and accommodation. This is particularly important when we realize that the Mediterranean has a rich history of impositional policymaking, with patriarchal, even totalitarian States attempting to change societies by decree. The Napoleonic tradition of centralized government has deep roots in the region, where State authority—often coupled with varying degrees of religious control—holds sway over large arenas of social life. Reasons that could be given to explain this trend in the different regions of the Mediterranean include political histories of colonialism and endogenous autocratic regimes, where the State apparatus had to keep a strict control over the production of ideas and identities; industrial underdevelopment and delayed modernization, where the lack of an indigenous entrepreneurial class and the dynamics of the international division of labor led the State to take center-stage in several dimensions of the country’s life, including investment in human resources; and the influence of the ideology of centralized planning which, in the 50’s and 60’s, was common to most developing countries, and which led States to undertake manpower planning exercises and to plan and manage educational structures and services in view of pre-established economic goals (see Bonal & Rambla, 1996; Gomes, 1996; Kanakis, 1996).

Pulling’, or owning an innovation. Most chapters manifest an awareness of the complexity of the process of implementation; where there is no linear and unproblematic progression between conception and execution. Rather, it made abundantly clear that innovations operate in a field marked by conflicting forces, where incertitude is the order of the day, and where the interplay of competing interests may not only block change but, perhaps more insidiously, absorb it and modify it in the image of the prevailing elite. It was earlier noted that anthropologists have depicted Mediterranean societies as having an intensely active micropolitical level, where an
emphasis on informal personal power is reflected in the reliance on patronage and clientelism. In her chapter on Tunisia, Gisela Baumgartz develops this theme further, noting the way power relations play themselves out in contexts that are dominated by paternalism, affectivity and oral communication rather than by the language of rights and duties, and by written texts on rules and procedures. My own experience of carrying out ethnographic research in school contexts in Malta, Tunisia, Syria, and Palestine—together with first-hand knowledge of education systems across most of the region—prompts me to suggest that a research focus on the micropolitics of school change holds particular promise for an understanding of educational innovation in the Mediterranean. As Ball (1987) would point out, the negotiation of power at the school site will always tend to be marked by intrigue and the formation of loose-knit networked interest groups that shift allegiances according to perceived self-interest. I would not be surprised if such intrigue is intensified by the cultural traditions in Mediterranean societies, with a direct impact on the way innovations are received in schools.

As noted in an earlier section when discussing innovations in teacher education, the authors in this volume share the persuasion that innovation in education cannot take place without the enthusiastic consent and cooperation of teachers. Innovations, by definition, lead to uncertainty, with new tasks and roles questioning and challenging teachers’ professional identities. If innovations are not developed at the grass roots, as a way to solve new everyday situations, but are rather promoted by external social actors, then teachers have to see the value and validity of the proposed idea or practice, and to be won over to it. Teachers may be drawn to educational change in one of three ways, i.e. through ‘power-coercive’ strategies, through ‘normative/re-educative’ strategies, and through ‘empirico-rational’ strategies (Bennis et al., 1976). The first is based on the control of rewards and punishments, the second refers to the actions intended to manipulate recipients so that they see the situation differently, the third concerns those strategies that rely upon the recipients realizing that they should adopt the innovation in their best interests (Marsh, 1997, p.190).

Clearly, more than one strategy may be operative at the same time, and some innovations are more likely to be implemented by one than by another of the strategies.

Several of the case studies suggest that policy-makers ignore the issue of teacher motivation at their own peril. In Greece, for instance, the fact that teachers were not provided with adequate economic or professional benefits led to an insufficient motivational base for several innovations to be adopted and implemented in schools. In the case of Slovenia, teachers went on strike when curriculum innovation demanded that they adopt new roles and responsibilities. Israeli teachers who were obliged to team teach put up resistance to an innovation which challenged their routinized behavior in the classroom, while in Algeria, an innovation that required teachers to negotiate the curriculum with different partners could not take root, given that teachers simply had not yet developed a culture of self-confident autonomous professionalism, and therefore felt the new situation as a threat. It is only when teachers identify closely with the innovation that change is likely to happen and to remain, even after funding and consultants have disappeared from the scene.

The way the dynamics of extrinsic and intrinsic motivation plays itself out in schools has a particular relevance for the Mediterranean. This is because the region has a large army of untrained or poorly trained teachers who, in addition, are often de-motivated by low salaries and by the lack of a career path structure that rewards effort and achievement, and who tend to fill their spare capacities in holding down a second job. This often involves giving private tuition, so that teachers end up reinforcing the traditional focus on exams that progressive innovations attempt to target. Needless to say, teachers cannot help but consider any attempt to change the culture of teaching and learning as a threat to the underground economy that helps them attain lifestyles that a regular salary cannot guarantee. The mismatch between aspirations and earning power leads to a discouraged profession, unwilling or unable to respond to new educational challenges. While in some of the less democratic regimes, this discouragement is internalized and privatized (see Sultana, 2001a), in other contexts where there is a stronger tradition of unionized teacher activity, disgruntlement with prevailing conditions of work can lead to a mass resistance to change, binding the government—and educational progress—hostage.

Resistance to innovation, as the case studies in this volume show, can be a legitimate response to flurries of educational change on the part of policy-makers, who are keen to give the impression that they are modernizing school systems, but who are less keen to provide the necessary resources that should accompany the projects in question. The chapter on Greece highlights this issue, as does that on Libya and Lebanon, where new subjects were introduced or made part of the compulsory core curriculum without, however, providing the teaching materials, the laboratories, libraries and equipment necessary.
Appropriate conditions of work as well as the provision of adequate resources and training are two of the features that make an environment more or less receptive to innovation. There are others. Several of the authors note, for instance, that an innovation is more likely to be accepted if it is perceived to be better than the practice that preceded it. Equally, influential is the status the innovation carries with it (e.g. the introduction of a subject that is considered to be important, such as computer studies in the Israeli case study), or due to the patronage it receives of a person or group of persons who have high national visibility (e.g. the President of the Republic’s commitment to global education in the Syrian case study). Other elements that might facilitate acceptance include the complexity of the innovation, with implementers possibly being less keen the more the new element appears difficult to understand and to put into practice; and, as already intimated, the advantages that accrue for those associated with it—not just in terms of high salaries, but less class contact time, for instance, or, as in the Palestinian case study, the creation of a new congenial context that allowed teachers to meet and discuss curricular issues. In addition to these elements, Rogers (1983) also identifies two other conditions that enhance the take-up of innovations, namely, the consistency and compatibility with the general values, practices and ethos of the environment in which the innovation is to be implemented, and ‘triability’, or the degree to which an innovation may be experimented with on a limited basis, also influences the extent to which it is adopted or not. Both are explored in more detail in the next section.

Piloting an innovation. The idea that innovations have to be piloted appears in several of the chapters in this volume. As George Pasias and George Flouris note, pilot projects are laboratories for innovation, facilitating the consolidation of new ideas and technologies prior to their institutionalization on a national scale. Suleiman Khoja and Frank Ventura point out the problems that can be caused when an innovation is not piloted, an issue that is also raised by Nemer Frayha in his account of the uneasy experience of educational reform in Lebanon. Perhaps a key issue here is the difficulty of trialling out an innovation that goes against the grain of what is to be found in mainstream social practice. The Syrian case study, for instance, shows how many of the teachers who were initially keen to pilot the global education curriculum and approach were soon disillusioned by the fact that the context in which they were teaching had not changed. That creates several contradictions and pressures that teachers are obliged to manage—such as when the classification and framing of the curriculum are relaxed, but the examination system keeps on privileging coverage rather than mastery. While the idea of ‘tinkering towards utopia’ (Tyack & Cuban, 1995) has, in many ways, been legitimized, with the structural reforms popular in the 60’s and 70’s giving way to the more modest aspirations of the school improvement movement, the question does remain: to what extent can the new implant resist the overwhelming logic that drives the system? Indeed, to what extent can innovations transform the instructional environment they have been introduced in? These are important questions, given that innovations are often likened to Trojan horses, where the hope is that they will, like a virus or an oil stain, spread and influence other elements of the educational enterprise.

Evaluating an innovation. In the chapter on Palestine, the authors draw on Bruner to define their case study of educational innovation as ‘an account of the vicissitudes of intention.’ This nicely captures the fact that the process of innovation is complex and difficult to manage, and that it often generates what we have earlier referred to as effets pervers, i.e. unintended consequences, even in the most well planned and tightly managed human contexts. The serendipitous nature of innovation has an impact on the extent to which they can be evaluated. At one level, of course, one can agree with the likes of Cuban (1990) and Marsh (1997) that like fashion trends, innovations in education come and go, rising high in visibility and popularity one moment, only to fall into oblivion the next. Many innovations do not seem to have staying power, or to ‘permanently’ affect what happens in schools and classrooms, particularly when they are the result of ‘forward mapping’ by policy-makers, rather than of ‘backward mapping’, with practitioners generating their own answers to their perceptions of challenges in context, and on the basis of which innovations and policies are then developed (Vandenberghhe, 1988). It is more than ironic that a focus on innovation leads one to remark that the most visible element in the process of change could very well be stasis, and that social systems and social actors are more likely to fall back on old habits than to disturb their life-worlds by re-writing the script, as it were. As Rudduck (1986, p.6) put it, schools do tend to leave observers with a paradoxical impression of ‘stability and yet change, of diversity and yet sameness.’

At another level, educational innovations may set off processes that modify the learning environment in ways that may not have even been planned. Precisely because innovations are dynamic processes that refuse
to 'sit still', it is often difficult to disentangle the different elements that make up the educational situation they are implicated in, to posit cause-and-effect claims regarding their success, or to measure their impact. Thus, while the authors in this volume are generally for the innovation they describe, and indeed identify with it and are often personally implicated in it, the tenor of their narrative remains cautious, very much aware that, despite the monitoring and evaluation, there is indeed many a slip between the cup and the lip. Suleiman Khoja and Frank Ventura are of course right to be wary of declarative grand designs, and to insist that the main concern with innovation should be the extent to which it leads to improved effectiveness in learning, and that goal is particularly slippery, especially when the piloted innovation ‘goes to scale’. As Devorah Kalekin-Fishman notes in her case study, innovations are taken up in different ways in different school contexts, and the institutionalization of a successful pilot project carries no guarantee that the positive results will be ‘replicated’, simply because some environments have a higher ‘innovative capacity’ than others (Geissel et al., 1999; Smith et al., 1987; Rudduck, 1991).

Indeed, in this regard and reflecting on decades of innovation at the primary school level in Europe, Galton (1989, p.467) concludes that school diversity is ‘one of the biggest obstacles for policy makers during innovation.’ It is also, one could easily add, one of the biggest obstacles to evaluation, particularly if one of the intentions of the policy makers is to make a ‘successful’ innovation go to scale.

**Conclusion**

This introductory chapter attempted to achieve three goals. First, it set out to define the Euro-Mediterranean region in terms of both its diversities and its convergences. Second, it highlighted different elements and issues linked to the concept and process of educational innovation. In doing this, and by drawing not only on the relevant literature but also on the case studies featured in this volume, a third goal was targeted: that of introducing the reader to the substantive accounts which describe the manner in which different countries in the region are facing up to challenges that have both local and global implications.

It is hoped that, in choosing to consider the Euro-Mediterranean as a focus or prism for analysis, a fourth goal—that of generating new insights into the process of educational change and innovation—will also have been attained. Certainly, the regional focus has been a learning experience for all the authors involved in the project: not only have we learnt about each other's contexts—in itself a valuable achievement given the lack of genuine opportunities for South-South dialogue; it has also provided us with a new and exciting opportunity to connect our own personal, professional and intellectual biographies with larger regional processes. By choosing to focus on the Mediterranean as a whole, new themes that might have otherwise remained submerged have risen to the surface. Among these are the dynamics of interaction between the ‘North’ and the ‘South’, the interplay of cultural traditions, the way power and influence are divided between ‘policy-making’ and ‘policy-taking’ countries, the politics of international aid, the production and circulation of ideas, the movement of peoples across boundaries, and the impact that all this has on education. In a way, this volume has been as much about the discovery of the ‘self’ as about the discovery of the ‘other’. If readers feel they can share this sense of discovery and excitement, then the book, and the effort it represents, will have well served their purpose.

**References**


