

Investigating school autonomy: a comparison between England and Italy

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Recent studies have shown that the institutional setting of the education system matters for pupil performance. This paper provides a comparative analysis of the institutional features of the English and Italian education systems, focusing particularly on the importance of school autonomy and the roles of the head-teacher and governing body. The English system is characterised as a market-oriented system; the Italian system more centralised. In England, school autonomy is extensive, depending on the type of school being considered, and includes management of all staff, buildings maintenance and facilities, while Italian school autonomy is certainly more limited. School funding as well is a crucial point of autonomy in both systems and both systems use formula-funding for delegated functions. To understand these institutional features further and to analyse the extent of genuine school autonomy across both education systems, we make use of three data sources: (i) existing institutional literature ii) PISA 2006 data (*schools questionnaire*) and (iii) interviews with academic experts and head teachers. The PISA data includes questions asked of head teachers about who has responsibility for tasks, who has influence on the decision-making process and about the presence and impact of competition. The interviews with key stakeholders in the system then provide further clarification on key points that emerge from the PISA data

Keywords: school autonomy, school funding

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1. Introduction

Recent studies have shown that the institutional setting of the education system matters for pupil performance (Hanushek & Woessman, 2007). This paper will describe in depth the characteristics of two clearly different systems: Italy and England. The focus is on school autonomy and the roles of the head-teacher and governing body.

England, from the 1980s, implemented a market-oriented system, in which schools have power over management and organization, are funded according to the number of pupils and are systematically evaluated, in order to give information to parents (Bartlett and Le Grand, 1993; Glennerster, 1991; Le Grand, 2003). Italy, despite some changes over time, is still a centralized system, in which head-teachers and governing bodies have little power to manage and organize their schools (Bertola & Checchi, 2008; Poggi, 2005). Indeed, both teachers' treatment and funding is almost completely managed by the government (Buratti, 1993; Bratti *et al*, 2007).

The aim of this paper is to understand these institutional features further and to analyse the extent of genuine school autonomy across both education systems. The idea is to examine the "real" school autonomy in order to illuminate on the positive and negative effect that two very different systems can produce. In this paper "real" school autonomy should be understood to mean as the extent to which schools' governor can impact on the pupils' performance.

In order to do that, in the next paragraph some critical average numbers are reported and commented, in the third one a framework used to compare the different backgrounds is described. Then, in the fourth paragraph, the questionnaire sent to Italian and English teachers and head-teachers is presented. Unfortunately, results from the survey are not yet available (they are expected back by the end of May) Thus, the last paragraph tries to draw some conclusion about the genuine school autonomy of both England and Italy.

2. A first glance at national data

Data has been collected on four categories: (i) participation in education, (ii) students' achievements and students' background, (iii) social segregation; and (iv) the characteristics of the education supply side. The aim of this discussion is to be aware of the different systems' dimensions and evidence before starting to compare the institutional assets. The comparisons are between the United Kingdom (UK) and Italy, later in the analysis comparisons shall be restricted to England. Hence, it must be born in mind that data for England would be slightly different.

< Table 1, here >

Table 1 presents data about participation in education, which show that enrolment and graduation rates for secondary school and entry rates to tertiary education are similar between Italy and UK. Italy has a somewhat higher enrolment rate than the UK but, by contrast, graduation and entry to tertiary education rates are higher for the UK. Thus, arguably the Italian system has higher participation while the British one is more successful having higher graduation. However, before dealing with performance, it is worth mentioning a significant difference between the two countries in their enrolment by program destination. The British rate of enrolment to ISCED 3A programmes (which are designed to provide direct access to tertiary education¹) is slightly lower than the Italian one. Likewise, Italian rate of enrolment to ISCED 3B programmes (which are designed to provide direct access to labour market²) is lower than the British one. Thus, table 1 suggests that UK and Italy are also quite similar in terms of their ISCED programme` enrolment rates.

< Tables 2, 3 and 4, here >

Three tables (2, 3 and 4) are presented which provide data on students` educational achievement and social background. Table 2 provides data on mean scores for each country in recent PISA international tests in science, mathematics and reading. The UK mean is higher than the Italian mean in all tests. Further the UK mean is very close to the OECD average for these tests. Thus, Italy seems to be performing worse than both the UK and the OECD average on these tests. Whilst some commentators are sceptical about the robustness of such international comparisons, Italy has under performed in these types of tests over time and hence this suggests some concern about the effectiveness of the Italian education system in this regard. Yet, variance is important as well, especially when means at country-level are considered. It is possible of course to have a high level of mean achievement because a minority of students do extremely well, rather than because achievement is strong across the student population as a whole.

Table 3 presents information on the variation in achievement by school on the PISA tests. There is more total variation in the UK education system than in the Italian system. In other words one could characterise the UK system as being more unequal. More interestingly, in the UK case, the majority of this variation relates to within school variance, while in the Italian case the variance is equally split relatively evenly into between and within school variance. OECD data represents a sort of middle point between the UK and Italy. In other words, the school you attend matters more in Italy than in the UK, in terms of your PISA performance. This might imply that efforts to regulate schools and encourage markets in schooling have limited differences between schools in the UK. However, one must remember that the total level of variance is higher in the UK.

¹ ISCED 1997, International Standard of Education, available at http://www.uis.unesco.org/TEMPLATE/pdf/isced/ISCED_A.pdf

² *Ibidem*

As it is unanimously recognized in the literature, students' background plays a crucial role in their educational performance. Table 4 provides some information on this issue. The effect of students' background seems to be more significant in the UK than in Italy, even though the percentage of students falling within the lowest 15% of the international distribution of the economic, social and cultural status (ESCS) in Italy is three times that for the UK. It is interesting to note that despite the UK having a reputation for both educational and labour market inequality, in fact the inequality in PISA scores for the UK is similar to that for the OECD as a whole. Another indicator which supports the idea of the UK school system as failing to give equal opportunities to those from poor backgrounds is the last column of the table, in which the difference between the mean science score adjusted for socio-economic background and the mean unadjusted score is negative (and significant) for UK and positive (but not significant) for Italy. In other words, in the UK socio-economic background makes a significant difference to a child's level of achievement in science.

< Figures 1 and 2, here >

Another major focus in the literature is the extent of social segregation across schools, not just in market-oriented systems³ but also in a centralized system, such as Italy⁴. In figures 1 and 2, two rankings have been reported according to two different indices of the unevenness of the distribution of social background across schools: the *dissimilarity* and *square root (SR)* indices, from a recent study about segregation in education (Jenkins *et al*, 2008). Both indices suggest that England is a more socially segregated country than Italy. Moreover, it is worth mentioning that, Scotland and Northern Ireland are below England in the two rankings of segregation, i.e. they are less segregated. This means that the UK data already seen (which combines information for England, Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales) about students' background must be even more different with respect to Italy.

< Tables 5, here >

Table 5 contains more detailed information about segregation. In the first column the SR index for each system as a whole is reported: as in the chart, the English index is higher than the Italian one. The others columns contain the SR index distinguished between only private schools and the "other schools" (which are all schools that do not depend on fees for most of their funding), the weighted sum of segregation in each sector, and the final two columns show within- and between-group segregation as percentages of total segregation. Two points need to be mentioned. Though in both countries private schools are socially segregated (to a similar extent), most of the school variance is attributable to within-group segregation. Hence, private schooling does not appear to be the main

³ Allen (2008) and Jenkins *et al* (2008).

⁴ Checchi (2004).

driver of social segregation in either country. Indeed, the segregation problem is present in the English and Italian state sectors as well.

< Tables 6, and 7, here >

The economic value of education is an alternative indicator of the performance of the education system as a whole. The greater the economic value of schooling, the more the recognition of its value by the labour market. In other words, a high employment rate, or a high salary for individuals who have finished the secondary school suggests that the education system is meeting the needs of the labour market⁵. In table 6 Italy and the UK show the same trend: the higher the person's education level, the higher is their likelihood of employment. The British rates of employment are higher than the average for the OECD, which in turn, are higher than for Italy. This might suggest that the education system is better meeting the needs of the labour market in the UK. However, there are of course many factors that determine employment, including capital investment, institutional structures and global economic trends. What is more significant is that the relationship between education and wages and employment is relatively strong in the UK. Data in table 7 confirm this for people who finished secondary education. Primary education data do not confirm this but given that universal primary education has been in place in the UK for some time this is perhaps unsurprising. Overall, the data on both PISA performance and the labour market indicators suggest a better performance from the UK education system.

We now report, as has been discussed, data on the supply side of the education system. The data presented include resources, teachers' characteristics and some more information about the private and public sector. Tables 8 and 9 show how Italian and English private sectors are similar, in terms of numbers of schools and private sector rates of student enrolment in primary and lower secondary school. However, in upper secondary school, UK relies much more than Italy on government-dependent private schools to offer that education level⁶.

< Tables 8 and 9, here >

Italy and the UK do not seem significantly different in terms of expenditure on education. This is clear looking at table 10. By contrast, the Italian average class size is lower than the British one, especially for primary education (table 11). This could be interpreted as an inefficiency signal. Likewise, table 12 confirms this point, showing the lower ratio of students to teaching staff of Italy. In both tables, the biggest difference between the two countries is in primary education. Thus, essentially, data on resources suggest that, with roughly the same amount of resources invested, the

⁵ Of course, a significant shortage of secondary school skills would imply a high price for these skills in the labour market. Thus, high economic returns result from the interaction of supply *and* demand.

⁶ However, from a UK perspective is hardly to agree with OECD classification of public and private schools. For more detail see the OECD notes reported in the appendix about table 9.

UK manages to “offer” more – quantitatively – than Italy, if we consider teachers as the core resources of education. However, the fact that the UK and Italy spend similar amounts per student on education suggests that the UK is using these resources on non teacher resources, ending up with higher teacher ratios. This may be optimal, given the better performance of the UK education system as described earlier.

< Tables 10, 11 and 12, here >

There are interesting differences which arise from the data on teachers’ characteristics. Italian teachers are lower paid and older than UK ones. Table 13 shows salaries at different stage of teachers’ careers: at every point UK salaries exceed Italian ones. Even the OECD average for teacher salaries is significantly higher than the Italian average. Not only are Italian teachers paid less, but the ratio of Italian salary to OECD average or the UK average after fifteen years of experience is lower. However, what is even more interesting is the strong difference in teachers’ ages shown in table 14. Almost all Italian teachers are between 40 and 59 years old, while the UK teachers are more evenly distributed across different ages. The two pieces of evidence that have arisen from these tables are linked: the selection process for teachers in Italy is quite centralized, and so those who wish to become a teacher need to wait for several years before being taken on by a school. Thus, the low salary and the long time needed to wait, could lead younger and more productive workers to take alternative jobs. Therefore, in Italy when the system appoints a teacher from the list of those available to the schools, he or she is very likely to be much older than in the UK, with many implications for the education system as a whole (the selection process of teachers in Italy is described in more detail in the next paragraph).

< Table 13 and 14, here >

In conclusion, through some national data, it is possible to highlight the most important difference between England and Italy. School performance – according to PISA tests – is higher for the UK, and the labour market seems to follow the same trend. However, the UK is characterized by greater influence of the students’ background, so there is a low level of equity of opportunities. As a result, the UK appears to be more segregated than Italy, and particularly, England is more segregated than the other countries belonging to the UK.

Another significant difference between the two countries deals with how the resources are allocated, especially looking at the average class size and the teachers’ salaries. With roughly the same amount of money, Italy offers smaller class size and lower salary for teachers than England.

3. A framework to compare England with Italy

PISA numbers have revealed some interesting pieces of evidence about the two countries, however they do not reveal anything straightforward about the link between institutional assets and outcomes. Rather, they lead to several questions about the real differences between the two countries. In order to integrate that information, it is necessary to describe the background in depth.

The English system is characterised as a market-oriented system and the Italian is more centralised. It is useful to adopt a framework in order to give a more detailed description of these differences. The English system has been studied and analysed for long time – and still is – by international researchers. The key characteristic is the feature called *quasi-markets* (Bartlett and Le Grand, 1993): a *choice-and-competition* system in which most powers have been devolved to a low level, i.e. to schools.

The framework of the quasi-market system introduced new concepts to the education system:

- **Choice.** Parents should be free to choose the school that they consider right for their children
- **Autonomy.** Schools should be free to decide how to allocate their resources and how to supply education. It also means managing the core resource of school: teachers.
- **Money follows people.** In order to make parents “powerful”, to stimulate schools to meet parents’ and students’ needs and so, to inject competition into the system, schools should be funded in accordance to pupils enrolment, as a sign of needs met.
- **Evaluation.** Parents can only make a “right” choice if they have enough information about quality of schools, which implies evaluation of schools performance and their public availability.

In order to give a comparable description between England and Italy, this quasi-market framework shall be used.

4. The comparison of the backgrounds

4.1 England

England implemented a quasi-market institutional setting, starting in the 1980s (1980, 1988 and 1993 Education Reform Acts) and now it is almost completely embedded in the country, although different governments have come to power, the pillars of this feature are still operating. However, the English system is more complicated than it appears, so it is worth describing how it works in a bit more detail.

4.1.1 Choice

Parents certainly have the right to choose their preferred school, but a problem arises when *one* school is chosen by *many* families, in other words, when a school is oversubscribed it has to select someone and to reject someone else. The criteria used to select students are subject to regulation by central government⁷, which are, mainly, the presence of siblings in the school, whether the child is “looked after” by the state (i.e. in social care) and whether the child has special educational needs. However, after these categories, schools use catchment areas in order to decide who will be accepted and who will not (Allen, 2008 and Parsons *et al.*, 2000). Thus, some complication about implicit or explicit selection by ability⁸ or by income⁹ might occur.

Nowadays, in England, choice and admissions are an issue, so it is not possible to address that in depth in this paper; it is enough to bear in mind that English parents have freedom of choice but, nevertheless, it can happen that a pupil will not be admitted to his first choice school¹⁰, even though evidence shows that in primary schools almost every family get their first choice. (Burgess *et al.*, 2009).

4.1.2 Autonomy

The managers of the school are the governing body, which embodies parents and – eventually, depending on school type – stakeholders. Every school (Levačić 2008a and Simkins 2004):

- determines all matter relating to its staff, recruiting, pay-roll, training, disciplining and dismissing;
- has discretion on how to teach and organize the national curriculum;
- is the owner of lands and buildings.

However, in relation to the staff, school autonomy is somewhat limited in its ability to hire and fire teachers as it has to negotiate/engage with the unions (there are numerous unions with different degrees of strength).

4.1.3 School funding¹¹

Public funded Local Authority (LA) maintained schools¹² in England receive their funding in two stages: firstly, a central government grant for education is given to the LAs, secondly, the LAs are

⁷ Code of Practice (1999, 2003) and School Admission Code (2007).

⁸ Some schools can select by ability, like Grammar schools and Academies schools (while other ones could not) but these are generally schools that were established a long time ago, but new schools cannot select on ability. Anyway, studies argue that some schools ask for more information to families in order to understand students' ability (Allen, 2008; Coldron *et al.*, 2008; Pennell *et al.*, 2007).

⁹ Provided the huge use of catchment area criteria in order to select pupils a family can increase her probability for being chosen just buying home in the school's catchment area. Thus it can argue that not all families could do that (Allen, 2008; Parsons *et al.*, 2000).

¹⁰ To know more about that, see Coldron *et al.* (2008) and Chamberlain *et al.* (2006).

¹¹ A lot of the information about school funding derives from Levačić (2008b) and Sibieta *et al.* (2008).

required to determine a budget for each school using a *formula*. The largest grant distributed to LAs is called *Dedicated School Grant*¹³ (DSG), which is allocated by the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF). The DSG is the primary source of funds for schools' "recurrent expenditure", i.e. spending on teacher salaries, support staff salaries and other items such as books and equipment. It is called "ring-fenced", meaning that the LAs cannot spend DSG funds on LAs' administration costs or on the provision of services not related to education.

The amount of DSG is largely based on historic spending (*spend-plus* method introduced in 2006), even though according to factors that allow disadvantage LAs (such as ones in areas with high poverty rates, like percentage of Free School Meals beneficiaries) to get higher levels of funding per pupil. Before 2006, these allocations were calculated on the basis of a basic amount per pupil with top-ups for area costs and for deprivation. Thus, each LA now has a different level of DSG per pupil. Apart from DSG, which is about 70% of funding for education as a whole, there is another fund (about 10% of education spending) useful to mention, devoted to *schools capital spending* (i.e. several grants for investment in school buildings and ICT), a part of which can be retained by LAs. The allocation criteria depend on each specific grant but, mainly, pupil numbers and stage of education, levels of social deprivation and educational need. Moreover, in some cases LAs must agree projects with other governmental bodies.

At the second stage, LAs allocate what they have received, eventually integrated through other resources like council tax revenue. Moreover, once LAs determine their own budget for their central educational services¹⁴ (on average 12% of that), they are required to draw up a funding scheme for their schools (School Standard and Framework Act 1998). What every school receives by LA is called Individual School Budget (ISB). At least 75% of ISB must be allocated for primary and secondary schools according to the number and ages of pupils at each school. The remaining 25% may be delegated in relation to:

- a fixed amount regardless of size of school;
- indicators of additional educational needs, of which free school meals is the most popular (Marsh, 2002);
- indicators relating to the costs of operating the school building and grounds (size, condition, split-sites, special facilities, etc...).

¹² There are 56 schools which are not maintained by LAs but are funded directly from DCSF and not via DSG. They are Academies and City Technical College.

¹³ There are other funds for school but they are negligible with respect to DSG: Sixth Form Funding, School Standards Grant, School Development Grant, Academies, Specialist Schools and CTCs grants, Investment in school buildings grants, ICT grants and others.

¹⁴ In order to avoid too much retaining by LAs, government forbids to them to make growing retained funds faster than Individual Schools Budget.

Moreover, LAs must guarantee a minimum increase in their per-pupil funding. Indeed, their formula will be overruled if it prescribes a funding increase below the minimum guarantee (which is set by the government).

It is worth noting that through this two-stage funding system a problem can arise when there is an “advantaged” school in a “disadvantaged” LA. In this case it can get a higher rate of funding simply because the disadvantaged LA gets a higher rate of funding and then distributes it pretty equally across the schools in its area.

4.1.4 Evaluation and information

Also this item is a quite huge one, especially with respect to the methodology. However, some information about which are the main instruments used to, regardless of methodological issues, should be useful as well. The English school system has both external and internal evaluation. The external one consists of the league tables and OFSTED’s inquiries. Every year, the results of GCSE (at 16 years old) and A-level (at 18 years old) exams¹⁵ in England are published on websites and in newspapers. The information published for every school contains: the number of pupils at the end of KS4¹⁶, the contextual value added, that is measure progress made by pupils between KS2¹⁷ tests at 11 years old, at GCSE and percentage of A*-C passes.

However, it has been recognized that only GCSE and A*-C scores give a very misleading picture of school effectiveness, as some schools have much different intake than other ones. Thus, Value Added measures were given to parents, which measured pupil progress and took account of intake kind. Then, Contextualised Value Added measures which not only took account of prior pupil attainment but also other factors that might influence attainment, such as FSM, ethnicity, and gender.

This development in the information provided to parents continues and is quite problematic, because whatever measure is provided to parents tends to be the measure schools focus on. For example, schools may focus too much on a certain percentage of pupils getting A*-C grades at GCSE and not so much on those who will never get a GCSE or those who will get A* anyway.

OFSTED is the Organization for Standard in Education, which assesses in depth the situation of certain schools. The outcome is a Report that describes the problems detected and the targets to solve them.

Every school also has an internal evaluation. In England, schools observe their teachers over time, giving them marks and sending them on training courses in the case of teachers who are under performing.

¹⁵ These exams are standardized test, so are equal across the country; therefore, they are comparable across schools.

¹⁶ Key Stage 4 is at the end of compulsory schooling, when students have to attend to GCSE exam.

¹⁷ Key Stage 2 is at the end of primary school.

4.2 Italy

Italy has a quite different education system. In order to highlight the differences with respect to England, it is useful to consider the same categories.

4.2.1 Choice.

Schooling supply in Italy is diversified as well but not as in England: while in England very different school types belong to state sector (Community Schools, Religious Schools, Foundation Schools, Grammar Schools, City Technology Schools, Academies Schools and Specialist schools), in Italy the only difference across public schools depends on what they teach: roughly, humanist, technical or vocational subjects. Humanist schools are the best performers and the vocational schools are the worst, while technical schools are in the middle¹⁸ (Cecchi, 2004). Likewise, there is a higher economic value for humanist education than for vocational and technical one (Brunello *et al.*, 2000)¹⁹. Students deriving from humanist schools are more likely to attend to University²⁰ and to be successful²¹, while about one third of students who attend technical schools go to university, and the percentage of students attending vocational schools is quite low (ISTAT, 2009).

Thus, although family background is still one of the main determinants of students' performance it seems that school (type) choice matters as well (Bratti *et al.*, 2007; ISTAT, 2009). Moreover, the former affects the latter: students with a good background (advantaged and educated parents) are more likely to attend a humanist school while the students with disadvantaged background a vocational one²².

Apart family background, another factor that can affect school type choice is the advice that teachers give to parents at the end of the lower secondary education (*middle school*). But of course, the advice is strongly related with the pupils' final score that, in turn, is related to family background, so teachers advice too, could lead to segregation²³. However, it suggests that advice can matter only for pupils

¹⁸ However, it must bear in mind that also territorial differences affect school performance, in other words, a school in South-Italy either humanist, technical or vocational one, would perform in a quite different way to respect with a school in North-Italy (See Bratti *et al.*, 2007; OECD, 2009).

¹⁹ The estimate considering monthly wage gives that finding, although they find different results with hourly wage.

²⁰ In accordance with ISTAT inquiry on students that have completed upper secondary school, more than 90% of "humanist students" attend to University, 53% of "technical students" and just 30% of "vocational students" (ISTAT, 2009).

²¹ ISTAT (2007) and Cecchi and Lucifora (2004).

²² Using PISA 2000 data, Cecchi (2004) shows that in case of illiterate parents, the pupil has 93% of probability to go to vocational or technical school while in case of one graduated parent, the pupil has 63% of probability to go to humanist school (26% for technical and 11% for vocational).

²³ Cecchi (2004) uses ISTAT inquiry on students whose finished secondary school, in which score at the end of middle school and education of parents are matched. To give an example, 52% of students with illiterate parents attend to vocational school, while 40% of students with graduated parents attend to humanist school.

who scored in the middle²⁴, while for high score pupils and low score ones, family is still the main determinant (Checchi, 2004).

As for the state sector, Italian families have the right to choose any school they want and, normally, they get it (there are no catchment areas)²⁵: there are no oversubscribed schools in Italy or, at least, not as in English. It can happen that some schools are oversubscribed, but the number of pupils rejected is quite negligible²⁶ and there are more in the primary school than in the secondary school. Anyway, when it happens, the criteria schools use are not determined by the government but by the school board²⁷. Mainly they are proximity, siblings, disabled students and, eventually, a lottery is used. Rejected students go to the second choice school.

Probably, important reasons for that (as reported in the next paragraphs), are the complete absence of information for parents about school performance and the strongly mitigated school autonomy. Therefore, the motivations underlying the parents' and children's choices often, deal with school type (humanist, technical or vocational one) and school proximity. Interestingly and differently from England, there is no emphasis on choosing a house near a "good" school by families.

Moreover, it must mention the total absence of selective and the near complete absence of religious schools in the Italian state sector. The first categories do not exist at all and the second – which serve about 6% of the pupils' population²⁸ – exist just nominally: they belong to the state sector, so that they are recognized as public schools, but a negligible amount of money²⁹ is devolved to them³⁰, hence they set fees that only advantaged families can afford. Thus, they have roughly the same characteristics as a proper private sector, including much more autonomy than public ones. This is the reason for which the issue about choice in Italy deals also with the possibility for parents to send children to "private schools", especially to religious ones.

4.2.2 *Autonomy*

²⁴ At the end of middle school the score scale is: *sufficient, good, distinct* and *excellent*. So, "middle score" shall be *good*, high score *distinct* and *excellent* and low score *sufficient*.

²⁵ Every family can submit the child in the school they prefer with other two schools in priority order, in case of oversubscription (*Circolare Ministeriale*. n. 4 prot. n. 240/R.U.U. and *Circolare Ministeriale*. n. 17 prot. n. 1171/R.U.U.).

²⁶ Some more pieces of information will be available through the survey.

²⁷ D.M. n. 24/1998, art. 15, c. 2.

²⁸ www.istruzione.it

²⁹ Actually, a national fund devoted to private sector exists but it is just about 500 million of euro for the whole country. Anyway, roughly from ten years, a couple of regions started to provide subsidies to disadvantage families who want to send their children to private schools. The amount of the subsidy depends on the region rules and on families' income, but it is not more than 50% of the fees in the highest case.

³⁰ This feature is due to the interpretation, though it is quite controversial, of article 33 of Costituzione Italiana.

Italian school autonomy is rather weak³¹. Schools have no power on recruiting, pay-roll and dismissing of teachers. The process through which teachers are recruited is quite complicated. It embodies three different actors: the government (that is the employer), *Ufficio Scolastico Regionale* (USR), *Ufficio Scolastico Provinciale* (USP) – a sort of local education authorities – and, eventually, the schools. The first determines the number of classes and the second the allocation between schools, given their requests³². It is worthwhile to notice that schools request not a particular person but just somebody teaching a certain subject, in other words, they do not select their own teachers. Teachers' salaries are determined and paid by the government (apart from fixed-term contracts).

Thus, schools just manage facilities, integrative projects and the possibility to collect money by private or local institutions.

4.2.3 School funding

Given that it is the government that employs teachers, Italian school funding deals only with facilities. Until 2006 USR distributed funds of facilities but, since 2007, the competence has been attributed to the government. The amount of resources that schools receive for that is determined, in part³³ through a formula, and in part³⁴ according to national agreements between the government (or USR and USP according to different matters) and trade unions. The formula takes account of the number of students (disabled students are more weighted), the school type and school size. Finally, there is another fund “for the widening of schooling supply and for redistributive interventions”, that is distributed according to ministerial priorities³⁵, dealing with teacher training, disadvantaged areas and evaluation or innovation projects³⁶. Its amount is around 180 million and, moreover, not all of this funding has been distributed directly to schools, roughly: one fourth via USR, one fourth via Minister of Education and half to schools. Moreover, the criteria are not so clear. To give an example, the ministerial priorities for year 2008³⁷ were: i) widening of supply projects, for healthy and legality, training teachers, private schools (95 millions); disabled and look after students (10 millions); iii) development and support to strongly vocational schools (37 millions) and iv) evaluation and innovation projects.

4.2.4 Evaluation and information.

³¹ Legge n. 59/1997, D.P.R. n. 275/1999, D.I. n. 44/2001.

³² For more details, see Fontana e Petrina (2001).

³³ *Fondo per il funzionamento delle istituzioni scolastiche*.

³⁴ *Fondo per le competenze dovute al personale escluso quello a tempo determinato e indeterminato*.

³⁵ Legge n. 440/1997

³⁶ To give an example, the *Direttiva Ministeriale* of 6th August 2008 n. 69 has distributed money in this way: 95 millions for widening of schooling supply (health, legality and teacher training projects) and to private schools; 10 millions to disabled students projects; 32 millions to vocational schools; 37 millions for adults learning projects and 4 millions for evaluation and innovations projects.

³⁷ *Direttiva Ministeriale* n. 69 of 6th August 2008.

This is very weak point for Italy. Until three years ago there were no standardized tests. Since 2007 INVALSI run tests on quite a large sample at the end of middle school (14 years old), but the results are not published in the newspapers and are aggregated region-by-region rather than school-by-school. In other words, the information's target is not families, but single schools or any other allowed subject can request data from INVALSI. Thus, data are used just on statistical inquiries, but there is no available information to parents.

5. The questionnaire

The inquiries by the Programme for International Students' Achievements (P.I.S.A.) rely on questionnaires as well. Their aim is to find information about the impact of school and system practices, policies and resources. PISA 2006 dealt with several factors including the policies and practices in admitting, selecting and grouping students, school management and funding, parental pressure and choice, accountability policies, school autonomy, and school resources.

This paper does not analyze that, so it is important to say what this paper's questionnaires add to the PISA analysis. PISA questions aim to find out some crucial characteristics of schools (such as the number of students or the number of teachers and non-teaching staff) and the extent to which power is differently distributed between schools, local and national authorities within each country. In other words, there is no information about the head-teachers' and governors' *will*. This is crucial information, especially when it is needed to understand how the institutional asset as a whole affects the "actors" of that system. Hence, this paper's questionnaire does not ask just whether the school do something or not, but also whether the school agrees with this practice and whether they do just what is prescribed by law or, instead, they do something more, because they want to. Thus, the idea is to shed light on the relationship between the system as a whole and the schools autonomy, beyond what it is regulated. In that way, it is also possible to know more about the directions towards which school governors are going in order to perform better.

The questionnaire first of all requests some basic school characteristics: whether they are a primary or secondary school, school type and status, number of students, number of teachers and number of non-teaching staff employed. Then, some questions about the real governing-body's work, i.e. who are the members and who really makes the decisions. That is interesting because it can assume that the higher is the power devolved to governing body, the more should be the discussion needed before taking one decision. Several questions are devoted to teachers' management, with a focus on their salaries. There is a strong difference between England and Italy in this area, and so it is important to see if different systems coincide with different schools governors as well. For example, it is significant whether English schools agree with it or not. It is even more interesting if there is any sort of attempts by

Italian governors in doing that and, in both of two countries, which are the reasons for paying (or trying to pay) or not paying (or not trying) by performance.

More information than PISA questionnaire is requested about accountability to parents, pressure of parents and competition. What is asked about accountability is to distinguish between information that schools must provide and information that schools want to provide. In the latter case the questionnaire asks the aim of that supplementary information. Through this question it is possible to get some indication about the relationship between school and family. Likewise, the teachers and head-teachers have been asked what kind of pressures they face, and how they address these pressures. Indeed, parents' pressure can have several meanings and, above all, can be positive, like encouraging teachers and head-teachers in what they do, or negative, like protesting against any kind of report about their child. In the same way, some information about what kind of competition and how governors face that is requested in the questionnaire.

As has already been said, social segregation is an issue in education. A couple of questions were asked about choice and admission, even though for England that problem is so complicated that it is hard to face it in depth here. Yet, it is significant to know which is the information's "source". In other words, it is not irrelevant to know whether the head-teacher in his or her school has quite homogeneous students' background, is oversubscribed every year and he or she controls its own admission.

Several questions were asked about funding: the amount of the annual budget that each school is receiving every year; the percentage of these funds that is under their control; whether they receive funding from a non-state source. Some further questions were asked in order to know if collecting money through external sources is continuing for a long time, has just finished or they just cannot; why has been asked as well. What is supposed to know about funding is, given the different systems and rules, the ability to collect money and how ability can differ within the countries and/or between school types.

Finally, the issue of evaluation was raised. This paper has already described the strong difference between England and Italy on this topic. However, it is important to know if, beyond what is prescribed by law, schools of both countries evaluate themselves, why they do that and what are the results they achieved.

In order to get as much information as possible through this questionnaire, at the end of every section (i.e., funding, evaluation etc...) teachers or head-teachers were invited to make any other comments they wished. The questionnaire has been sent to teachers and head-teachers in both countries (around 40 Italian teachers and head-teachers have already replied), and they are expected back by the end of May.

6. Conclusions

Unfortunately, results from the survey are not yet available. However, some important signs have arisen from PISA data and from a detailed description of the backgrounds. Through the latter one, it is possible to maintain that the biggest differences deal with school autonomy and school evaluation: England has higher degree of these, while Italy has a low degree.

The English institutional asset seems to be effective, since performance rates and returns to education are higher than Italy and near to OECD average. Yet, all this seems have a price: more social segregation and more influence of students' background.

Finally, it is worth mentioning the strong difference about teachers' status and the expenditure for education as a whole. Put simply, Italy has older teachers who are lower paid, but even so, most of the money is devoted to them. This suggests that the allocation process of resources must have several problems of efficiency as well.

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Tables and figures

Table 1. Indexes of participation in education in 2007

Participation data		Italy	UK	OECD
Enrolment rate (% of 15-19 years old) ¹		80	71	82
Upper Secondary education graduation rate ²		84,9	88,7	82,1
Entry Rates to Tertiary Education ³		53	55	56
Enrolment by programme destination ⁴	ISCED 3A	81.7	77.7	70.2
	ISCED 3B	1.4		7.9
	ISCED 3C	17	22.3	25.6

¹ Source: OECD (2009), Tab. C1.2.

² Source: OECD (2009), Tab. A2.1.

³ Source: OECD (2009), Education at a glance; Tab. A2.4.

⁴ Source: OECD (2009), Education at a glance, Tab. C1.4.

Table 2. Students' performance by PISA inquiries

Education Achievement ¹ (2006)	Science		Reading		Math	
	mean	st. dev.	mean	st. dev.	mean	st. dev.
Italy	475	96.0	469	109	462	109
United Kingdom	515	107	495	102	495	69
OECD average	500	95	492	99	498	92
Education Achievement ² (2003)						
Italy	486	108	476	101	466	96
United Kingdom ^a	m	m	m	m	m	m
OECD average	500	105	494	100	500	100
Education Achievement ³ (2000)						
Italy	478	98	487	91	457	90
United Kingdom ^a	532	98	523	100	529	92
OECD average	500	100	500	100	500	100

^a missing or not reliable data because of the shortage of the sample.

¹ OECD PISA (2006), Tab. 2.1c, Tab. 6.1c, Tab 6.2c.

² OECD PISA (2003), Tab. 6.6, Tab. 6.2, Tab. 2.5c.

³ OECD PISA (2000), Report by Participating Countries – Italy, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/31/48/33685150.pdf>, pp. 76, 62, 39.

Table3. Between-school and within-school variance in student performance on the science scale in 2006

Variance by schools and schools programmes in students` performance (SP)	Between School Variance in SP	Within School Variance in SP	Total School Variance in SP	Performance (dis)advantage for students enrolled in vocational programmes (2000) ^a
Italy	52.6	51.8	100.8	-10.8
United Kingdom	23.5	97.8	124.4	a
OECD	33	68.1	100	a

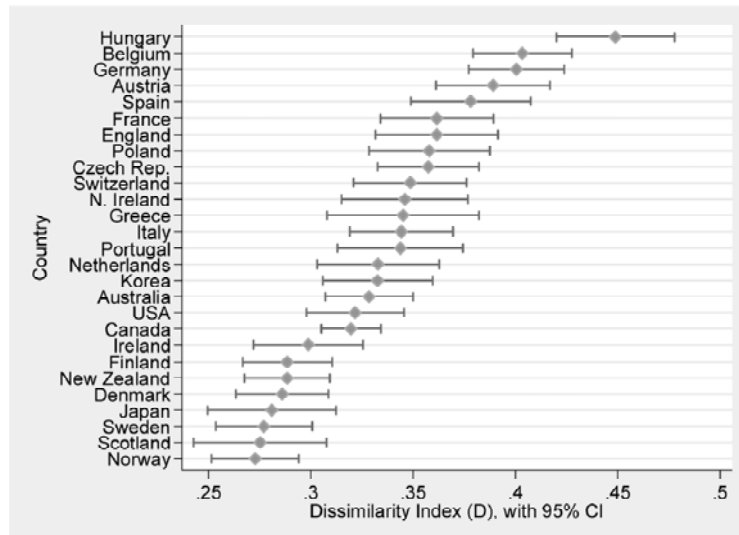
^a Data from OECD (2005) at <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/15/20/34668095.pdf>, table 4.1, p. 127.
Source: OECD PISA (2006), tab. 4.1a.

Table 4. Indexes of the effect of students` background in 2006

Influence of students` background	slope of ESCS gradient	Percentage of explained variance in students performance	Percentage of students that fall within the lowest 15% of the international distribution on the ESCS	Difference between mean score science adjusted and not adjusted
Italy	31	10	18.7	-3
United Kingdom	48	13.9	6.6	7*
OECD	40	14.4	14.9	0

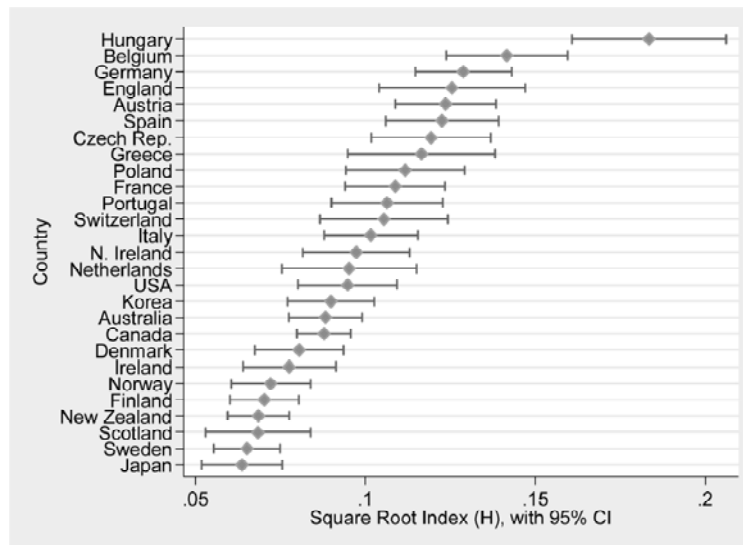
Data from OECD PISA (2006), tab. 4.4a.
* significant

Figure 1. Ranking of social segregation with dissimilarity index in 2003



Source: Jenkins *et al* (2008).

Figure 2. Ranking of social segregation with Square Root Index in 2003



Source: Jenkins *et al.* (2008).

Table 5. Decomposition of the Square Root index value in 2003

Segregation within and between the private and other schools - square root index	All schools	Private schools	Other schools ^a	Within groups	Within groups as %	Between groups as %
England	0.126	0.206	0.101	0.102	81	19
Scotland	0.068	0.035	0.054	0.055	80.9	19.1
Italy	0.102	0.153	0.095	0.098	96.1	3.9

Source: Jenkins *et al.* (2008).

^a Both state schools and privately managed schools that do not depend on fees for most of their funding.

Table 6. Employment rates by educational attainment in 2007

Employment rates of 25-64 year-olds by educational attainment	Below upper secondary	Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary	Tertiary education
Italy	52.8	74.5	80.2
United Kingdom	64.9	80.9	87.8
OECD	58.4	76.2	84.5

Source: OECD (2009), tab. A6.2a.

Table 7. Returns to education in terms of relative earning in 2006

Relative earning by educational attainment ^a	Primary Education	Secondary Education
Italy	76	155
United Kingdom	71	160

Source: OECD (2009), Tab. A7.2a.

^a Upper secondary and post-secondary non-tertiary education =100.

Table 8. Number of public and private schools in 2007

Number of Schools	Primary School	Secondary School	Private Sector	Private %	Total
Italy	23755 ^a	5161	3816	13.20%	32732
England	17361	4421 ^b	2340	10.74%	24122

Source for Italy: www.istruzione.it

Source for England: <http://www.dcsf.gov.uk/rsgateway/DB/TIM/m002003/index.shtml>

^a Primary School plus Middle School

^b Special schools including

Table 9. Enrolment rates to public and private schools in 2007

Student enrolment by private and public institutions	Primary School*		Lower Secondary School ^a		Upper Secondary School		
	Public	Private	Public	Private	Public	Government-dependent private	Independent private
Italy	93.1	6.9	96.2	3.8	94.3	1	4.8
United Kingdom	94.7	5.3	94.2	4.7	52.9	41.6	5.5
OECD	90.9	2.9	87.8	2.7	81.9	13.7	5

Source: OECD (2009), Tab. C1.5. OECD note about classification of public, government-dependent private and independent private: "A government-dependent private institution is one that receives more than 50% of its core funding from government agencies. An independent private institution is one that receives less than 50% of its core funding from government agencies."

Notes available at <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/34/58/43618406.pdf>, page 9.

^a Government-dependent private sector absent or negligible in primary and lower secondary school for both countries. It is 6.7 for OECD average.

Table 10. Expenditure on education in terms of euro per student in 2007

Annual Expenditure on educational institutions per student for all services (€)	Primary Education	Secondary Education
Italy	7.7	8.5
United Kingdom	7.7	8.8
OECD	6.4	8

Source: OECD (2009), Tab. B1.1a.

Table 11. A comparison between the average class sizes in 2007

Average class size ^a	Primary Education	Secondary Education
Italy	18.6	20.9
United Kingdom	24.6	22.6
OECD	21.4	23.9

Source: OECD (2009), Tab. D2.1.

^a Total public and private institutions.

Table 12. Ratio students to teachers in 2007

Ratio of students to teaching staff	Primary Education	Secondary Education
Italy	10.5	10.2
United Kingdom	19.4	13.6
OECD	16	13

Source: OECD (2009), Tab. D2.2.

Table 13. A comparison between the age of teachers in 2007

Teachers` age	< 30	30-39	40-49	50-59	>= 60
Italy	0.8*	9.3	32.9	50.5	7
England	18.7	24.5	25.5	29.8	1.4

Source: OECD (2009), Tab. D7.1.

Table 14. A comparison between the salaries of teachers in 2007

Teachers' salaries	Primary education				Lower secondary education				Upper secondary education			
	Starting salary/ minimum training	Salary after 15 years of experience /minimum training	Salary at top of scale /minimum training	Ratio of salary after 15 years of experience to GDP per capita	Starting salary/ minimum training	Salary after 15 years of experience /minimum training	Salary at top of scale /minimum training	Ratio of salary after 15 years of experience to GDP per capita	Starting salary/ minimum training	Salary after 15 years of experience /minimum training	Salary at top of scale /minimum training	Ratio of salary after 15 years of experience to GDP per capita
Italy	24 945	30 174	36 765	0.99	26 877	32 859	40 351	1.08	26 877	33 778	42 179	1.11
England	30 172	44 507	44 507	1.26	30 172	44 507	44 507	1.26	30 172	44 507	44 507	1.26
OECD average	28 687	39 007	47 747	1.17	31 000	41 993	51 470	1.23	32 183	44 782	54 440	1.30

Source: OECD (2009), Tab D3.1.

Annex

The Questionnaire

We are undertaking research comparing the situation in Italian and English schools. We are therefore seeking the views of head teachers here in England and in Italy. The survey is anonymous and we value your frankness.

As such, we would be grateful if you could complete the following survey as best you can and email to:

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Phd student – Polytechnic of Milan

Department of Management, Economics and Industrial Engineering

tel. +39 02-2399 3959

fax +39 02-2399 2720

piergiacomo.sibiano@mail.polimi.it

Please could you tell us about the characteristics of your school:

Primary _____ Secondary school _____

School type and status:

Number of students enrolled:

Number of teachers employed:

Number of non-teaching staff employed:

Responsibilities of Governing Body as a whole

We are interested in the roles and powers of Headteacher and the Governing Body, beyond what is prescribed by law.

1) What types of individuals do you have as members of your governing body?

2) Do the decisions of the governing body generally reflect the will of the Headteacher or is there a real influence from any members?

3) Given your previous answer, can you provide any comments on the differences between the formal powers of the governing body and the real power exercised by that body?

If you have any other comments you wish to make on this issue please do so here:

Teaching and Learning

4) Given the constraints of the National Curriculum, to what extent can teachers determine the content of what they teach at your school?

If you have any other comments you wish to make on this issue please do so here:

Discipline

5) Does your governing body discuss and make decisions about disciplinary matters? To what extent are discipline matters dealt with only by the headteacher?

If you have any other comments you wish to make on this issue please do so here:

Teachers

6) To what extent do you, as Headteacher, have autonomy over teacher recruitment, salary and teacher dismissal?

7) What role does the local authority or central government play in the selection and recruitment of teachers in your school?

8) Suppose a teacher was performing very badly, which tools can you use in order to manage this situation? *[Please, distinguish between tools formally prescribed by law and more informal methods]*

9) In the England schools have some autonomy to pay by performance, do you do that in your school?

a. If yes, does it, in your opinion, work in the sense that it improves teacher performance?

b. If not, why not?

c. If you do this but feel It does not work, why is this?

d. If you previously paid teachers according to performance but do not do so now, why did you stop doing so?

e. If you do not currently pay teachers according performance but you wish to do so, which are the obstacles that prevent you from doing so?

If you have any other comments you wish to make on this issue please do so here:

Accountability to parents

10) What information about your school do you routinely provide to parents?

11) Do you provide any other information to parents, beyond what is prescribed by law?

a. If yes, which is your aim in doing that?

b. If not, why not?

c. If you did provide additional information but do not do so anymore, why did you stop?

d. If you do not currently provide additional information to parents but you wish to do so, what are the obstacles that prevent you from doing so?

If you have any other comments you wish to make on this issue please do so here:

Pressure of parents

12) Do you feel that your school and your teachers are subject to certain pressures from parents?

If yes, what kind of pressures: e.g. about performance or discipline?
How do you manage such pressures?

If you have any other comments you wish to make on this issue please do so here:

Competition

13) Does your school face or has your school ever faced any sort of “competition” from other schools?

a) If yes, what kind of competitive pressures does your school face and how do you deal with such pressures?

b) If no, is it because of a lack of real presence of “competitors” in the neighborhood or other factors?

If you have any other comments you wish to make on this issue please do so here:

Choice and Admission

14) Is the pupil intake to your school quite similar in terms of their social-economic background or are pupils quite diverse?

15) Which is the proportion of English as an Additional Language pupils in your school?

16) Usually, is your school oversubscribed? If yes, what are the criteria used to determine which pupils gain admission to your school.

17) Does your school control its own admissions or is admission determined by the Local Authority?

If you have any other comments you wish to make on this issue please do so here:

Funding

18) Approximately what is the total annual budget for your school?

19) What percentage of these funds is under your control, without constraints?

If you have some restrictions on how you spend the funds where do these restrictions derive from?
[i.e. government, trade union...?]

20) Do you receive funding from non state sources?

a) If yes:

i. from whom?

ii. how much?

b) If you previously received funds from non state sources but do not do so anymore, why did you stop?

c) If you do not receive funds from non state sources, what are the obstacles that prevent you from doing so?

If you have any other comments you wish to make on this issue please do so here:

Evaluation

21) All schools in England are subject to evaluation by OFSTED. What, in your opinion, are the positive and/or negative effects of this?

22) What kinds of internal evaluation of your school's performance do you undertake?

23) Does internal performance evaluation lead to real improvement in school performance, in your opinion?

24) Supposing a student was performing very badly, which tools can and would you use in order to change that situation?

If you have any other comments you wish to make on this issue please do so here:
