



THE GOVERNANCE OF EDUCATIONAL WELFARE MARKETS

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE
EUROPEAN SOCIAL FUND
IN FIVE COUNTRIES

EDITED BY DANIEL POP AND CRISTINA STĂNUȘ

Peter Lang

Preface

This book is intended as a first exploratory inquiry into possible educational selectivity effects of the European Social Fund. It is the result of the *Educational selectivity effects of the European Social Fund* project, which was developed between July 2012 and December 2013 with the support of the Education Support Programme of the Open Society Foundations.

This is a comparative research project aiming to showcase the effects of the European Social Fund (ESF) in Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Romania and Slovakia. The main hypothesis of the project is that the weak regulation via tender documentation generates four adverse effects in our country cases: 1) it leads to low propensities to form inter-institutional and inter-sectoral partnerships for organizing and delivering public services; 2) it leads to a centralization of contractors to a small number of urban clusters, causing massive discrepancies in terms of geographical equity; 3) it leads to a convenience-driven purposeful selection of project beneficiaries that is also afflicted by an upward bias in the vulnerability continuum; and 4) it leads to high propensities to develop convenient, rather than efficient and innovative projects. If confirmed this evidence would suggest that, under these circumstances, the social-service delivery contracting as an instrument of governance is no longer regulating against risks for beneficiaries, but fuels increased social division in access to public services. The focus on these particular five countries is a natural one, as the European Social Funds is an instrument dominantly focused on Eastern Europe and, among other new EU members, these countries were perceived as not very good performers in terms of ESF implementation.

The project is divided into three research streams. The Public Stream focuses on the institutional setup of ESF-implementation in the five countries. The Contractors Stream focuses on how the uses of specific regulatory tools lead to specific responses from those competing for educational service contracts. The Beneficiaries Stream focuses primarily on the ways in which

contractors identify target groups and the overall impact of ESF-funded interventions on vulnerable groups. This book is the result of research conducted under the Public Stream of the project.

The project is a collective effort, involving a team of sixteen researchers in the five countries. This book, reflecting a part of the project results, has benefited from the inputs and ideas of all researchers and from a series of meetings and workshops organized by the Education Support Programme. The editors would like to thank the governing board of the ESP for understanding the importance of a project dealing apparently only indirectly with education. Support, advice and highly valued comments came from Hugh McLean, director of the ESP. The project, the workshop and the book would not have been possible without the invaluable support of Laura Czyszter and Boglarka Fedorko. Elemér Könczey's caricatures graphically describe the challenges of ESF implementation in Central and Eastern Europe and enrich the book. The editors would like to thank the contributors for their patience despite heavy editing and tight deadlines. Finally, the editors would like to thank their families for their support and tolerance towards laptops taken on holidays.