

ALGUNAS SEMEJANZAS Y SINGULARIDADES DE LAS INSPECCIONES DE EDUCACIÓN EUROPEAS DESDE SU NACIMIENTO HASTA HOY

SOME SIMILARITIES AND SINGULARITIES OF EUROPEAN EDUCATION INSPECTORATES FROM THEIR BIRTH TO THE PRESENT DAY

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Resumen

La profesionalización y secularización de las inspecciones de educación en Europa se produce de manera escalonada, iniciándose en Países Bajos y Francia a principios del siglo XIX y consolidándose en la práctica totalidad de los países a lo largo de los últimos dos siglos. Durante estos 225 años de historia de la inspección de educación en Europa, las finalidades de la inspección, las responsabilidades de los inspectores y las formas de organizar sus tareas presentan similitudes y variaciones dependiendo tanto de los diferentes momentos históricos, como de las características de los países, o incluso regiones, donde existen inspecciones de educación. Con este artículo se pretende, en primer lugar, hacer un breve recorrido por las inspecciones de educación de los diferentes países europeos, aportando algunos datos relevantes sobre los cambios que han determinado la finalidad de la inspección

escolar desde sus inicios hasta nuestros días y, por otro, detallar y reflexionar sobre la variedad de profesionales que ejercen la inspección en los establecimientos docentes y sobre algunas de las tareas que desempeñan en los diferentes países del continente europeo.

Palabras clave: *Inspección de educación europea, profesionalización de la inspección de educación, historia de la inspección, finalidad de la inspección escolar.*

Abstract

The professionalization and secularization of education inspectorates in Europe developed in a staggered manner, beginning in the Netherlands and France at the beginning of the nineteenth century and consolidating in practically all European countries over the last two centuries. During these 225 years of history of education inspectorates, the purposes of the inspection, the responsibilities of the inspectors and the ways of organizing their tasks present similarities and variations depending on the different historical moments, as well as the characteristics of the countries, or even regions, where education inspectorates exist. The aim of this article is, firstly, to make a brief overview of the education inspectorates of a variety of European countries, providing some relevant data on the changes that have determined the purpose of school inspection from its beginnings to the present day and, secondly, to detail and reflect on the variety of professionals who carry out inspections in educational establishments and the tasks they carry out in the different countries of the European continent.

Keywords: *European education inspection, professionalization of education inspection, history of school inspection, purpose of school inspection.*

1. CREATION AND DEVELOPMENT OF PROFESSIONAL EDUCATION INSPECTORATES IN EUROPE

There is academic consensus around the idea that throughout the 19th century, and especially during the second half of the century, in many European countries, education inspectorates of a professional nature were set up to replace clergymen, charitable institutions and even local corporations or provincial councils in the performance of school control and inspection functions (Galicia Mangas, p. 30). It is then that the idea spread that the control of educational provision establishments should be exercised by the states through seculars and, in the case of some countries such as Spain, by civil servants. However, in some jurisdictions, control was, for decades, exercised in a shared manner between Church and State. In particular, in countries such as France, the Netherlands, Scotland, Austria and also Spain —where Catholic schools were largely independent and inspection had few resources to be effective— inspections were in many cases carried out by members of the Church, in coexistence with other forms of governmental inspection (Gray, 2019, pp. 40-1).

In addition to the secularising and statist principles that governed policy initiatives in the nineteenth century, it is worth bearing in mind that in that century educational quality became a national strategy in countries such as Prussia, France and the United Kingdom. They competed with each other and needed to provide their workers with technical training and secondary education, which led to a considerable increase in the workload of inspectorates and a factor contributing to their need for professionalisation (Gray, 2019, p. 40). Thus, in the Netherlands, the state education inspectorate dates back to 1801. In France, meanwhile, the General Inspectorate of National Education (IGEN) was created in 1802, during the reign of Napoleon I, adopting the principle of the state monopoly of education, the three general inspectors that made up this management body had the mission of reporting to the government on the functioning of schools and

institutes. In addition, in 1835, a primary education inspectorate was added to the IGEN, which was later joined by women, the inspectors of infant schools (Jardon, 2022, p. 2). In Portugal, the 1844 education reform formulated the two essential functions of inspection, distinguishing between board administrators and commissioners of studies, the latter being responsible for evaluating the state of teaching and teachers in the classroom (Calçada and Mendonça, 2024). In Spain, the royal decree of 30 March 1849 created a corps of officials appointed by the Government to inspect primary schools. In Malta, a chief inspector of primary schools was appointed in 1850; and in 1853, secular inspectors already existed in Prussia. In the small state of Piedmont, provincial inspectors for primary and secondary schools were appointed in 1850, and this model was extended to the rest of Italy in the 1960s. Inspection in Sweden began in 1861 and in Finland it came under the Ministry of Education in 1866 (Gray, 2019, pp. 40-1). In England, modern school inspection, in many cases linked to the inspection of children working in mills and factories, began to become widespread from 1839, while Ireland has had a national inspection system since 1831 (Gray, 2019, p. 11).

From then on, and during the 20th century, professional inspectorates were consolidated in those countries where they had already been created, and in others, where they did not yet exist, they began to be set up. The inspectorate in Wales began to take shape in 1907, following the appointment of the first chief inspector; in Luxembourg, the primary school inspectorate was created in 1912; and in Sweden and Prussia, clerical control of the inspectorate disappeared in 1914 and 1918, respectively (Gray, 2019, p. 45). Inspections of secondary schools also began to develop between the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Scotland initiated them in 1888, Ireland in 1900 and England in 1903, for example (Gray, 2019, p. 44).

At that time, the main purpose of the inspections was focused, with many variations, on the control of schools, but the social, economic, political and cultural characteristics of each country determined to a large extent the focus of

this control. In Spain, the Education Inspectorate was created with the conviction that it would contribute to improving the education of the people (Gil de Zárata, 1855, p. 301, as cited in Galicia Mangas, 2016, p. 40), 'advising teachers, indicating to them the methods and systems they should follow and the books they should use, as well as instructing them in what they ignore and indicating to them the means to perfect their knowledge' (article 20 of the royal decree of 20 May 1849). In France, the inspectors general of studies supervised not only the teaching aspects, but also those related to the accounting and administration of these establishments, subsequently reporting to the government (article 17 of the General Law on Public Instruction of 1 May 1802, as cited in Galicia Mangas, 2016, p. 125). In the British Isles—in England, Wales and later in Scotland and Ireland—inspectors spent most of their time examining pupils to check the quality of school results. Because of the results of these examinations, a school's funding or teachers' salaries could be altered (Gray, 2019, p. 42). In Germany, on the other hand, the focus was ideological: "the School Inspection Law of 1872 sought to assert and reassert the authority of the state over all educational institutions and to reject the influence of the church" (Galicia Mangas, 2016, p. 185).

2. EDUCATION INSPECTIONS IN EUROPE TODAY

The way in which education inspectorates in different countries have been developed and developed over the last two hundred years, in some cases over the last two hundred years, has given rise today to institutions, professionals and bodies of civil servants which, although they largely share the objective of improving the education and training of European citizens, do so from very different organisational structures, mentalities and approaches. This diversity creates difficulties in finding a common definition of the concept of "school inspection", so much so that, when comparing inspections, it is necessary to dissect the term conceptually so that its meaning is enriched to include such different practices as "supervision", "control", "mediation", "observation", "guidance", "assessment", "evaluation" and others.

It is also worth highlighting the fact that school inspection, questioned and even eliminated in some places and at some points in its history, has re-emerged and been re-established in some countries. Among the factors that have driven the growth of inspection, Brown et al. (2016, p. 1) highlight the influence of educational quality on economic competitiveness or the results of comparative assessments of education systems such as PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) or international organisations such as the OECD, which have led to a constant flow of interventions and reforms designed to achieve better results in student performance.

The aim of this article is also to analyse the main aspects that define and identify inspection practice in European countries as a whole, highlighting those principles and practices that are common to many of them. In this respect, it is important not to lose sight of the influence that some systems exert on others. This influence is already clear in Spain in the 19th century when Gil de Zárate states that "this institution has been everywhere the one that has given the greatest impetus to primary education in Europe" (1855, as cited in Galicia Mangas, 2016, p. 40). In the 21st century, Grek and Lindgren (2015, as cited in Gray, 2019, p. 147) argue that while inspection takes place in a specific national context, no national context is a closed space. Altrichter, for his part, explains how international comparisons have led to 'travelling politics' and the adoption of inspection models imported from elsewhere, and gives as an example practices that the Austrian inspectorate has borrowed from Lower Saxony, influenced in turn, by others from the Netherlands (as cited in Gray, 2019, p. 147). Grek (2014) also insists on the idea of the impact of inspection, specifically that of Scotland, on European education policy, through the exchange of experiences, practices and materials between inspectorates in different countries.

2.1. PURPOSE OF THE EUROPEAN INSPECTIONS

For Vera Mur (2014), there are three common functions for European education inspectors: the control of regulations, the evaluation of the functioning and results of schools and their teaching staff, and advice and guidance. For him, moreover, 'support and advice to schools, together with evaluation, have been gaining importance and visibility, and now occupy a very significant part of the daily activity of European inspectors' (Vera Mur, 2014, p. 65). When analysing the purpose of Education Inspectorate, it is worth remembering that, from the 1980s onwards, the decentralisation of educational management led to a gradual change towards greater autonomy for schools. Thus, from 1988 onwards, in England, schools began to have greater autonomy in their organisation and funding and in the recruitment of teachers. In Spain, Organic Law 9/1995, of 20 November 1995, on Participation, Evaluation and School Governance, was published in 1990, with the aim of giving "new impetus to the participation and autonomy of the different sectors of the educational community in the life of schools" and created the teaching body of education inspectors, determining their functions, the requirements for access and aspects relating to the training of inspectors, the exercise of their functions and the organisation of inspection.

Ultimately, in the 1990s, a certain distrust of local authorities by central governments began to emerge, and steps began to be taken to create more effective national inspection systems and structures (Gray, 2019, p. 148).

It is also worth bearing in mind the influence that international assessments, such as PISA or TIMMS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study), have exerted and continue to exert on public opinion and education policy. In fact, the data provided by international assessments and studies have significantly conditioned the definition of inspection structures and practices in European countries, especially in this first quarter of the 21st century (Gray, 2019, p. 175). For Kemethofer et al. (2017), inspection systems have been modernised and new inspectorates have been created since the 1990s, in order

to cope both with increasing demands for accountability and the need to monitor and promote school quality in a more proactive way. In short, in contrast to the historical focus on compliance with standards and judging the work of teachers, inspection activity today is a complex mix of broader modern concepts of public sector management and governance, such as quality, improvement, accountability, transparency and cost-effectiveness (Brown et al., 2016). Consequently, an increasing number of European inspectorates are moving towards an advisory model for school improvement. Brown et al. (2021) argue that many Education Inspectorate systems around the world, for example, the Department of Education and Skills in Ireland or Education Scotland in Scotland see school self-evaluation and external evaluation as complementary processes for school improvement and add that, in recent times, both processes are seen as mutually beneficial and as part of a continuum of school improvement. If we take a look at the slogans and aims that inspectorates have adopted in recent years, we can see how this trend towards the pursuit of improvement is confirmed. The motto of the German inspectorate in Lower Saxony is "Improving education", that of the Netherlands "Effective supervision for better education", that of Bulgaria "Inspection - a tool for positive motivation to improve the quality of education", that of Lithuania "Let us learn, improve and act", the Slovak Republic uses the SICI motto "Better inspection, better learning", and that of Romania "For a better school"¹.

In other countries, the quest for improvement is linked to quality and excellence. For example, the motto of OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) is "Raising standards, improving lives", that of the Hamburg (Germany) inspectorate "Making quality visible" and that of the Irish inspectorate "Excellence in learning for all"².

In short, among the factors that have had the greatest influence on the momentum of education inspectorates and that have changed the way we

¹ SICI: <https://www.sici-inspectorates.eu>

² *Idem*.

understand it, liberalisation and the growing autonomy of schools should be highlighted. For Gray (2019), inspection allows for the remote governance of schools with greater autonomy, but whose efficiency in self-regulation is considered unlikely (p. 189). For their part, Brown et al. (2016, p. 2) argue that, at present, at least in theory, inspectorates are concerned, on the one hand, with creating a regulatory framework within which schools can enjoy greater autonomy and, at the same time, be accountable for pupil performance outcomes.

2.2. WHO ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR THE INSPECTION?

Who is responsible for inspecting schools is perhaps one of the most heterogeneous issues when analysing European inspectorates. The professionals who carry out the inspection functions in the different countries do not have a common profile in terms of their relationship with the administration, the form of access, training or the requirements for their work.

Prior to analysing the differences, it is important to be clear about the existence of forms of inspection in European countries and the nature of many of them. Of the fifty states on the European continent, the education inspectorates of at least twenty-seven countries are represented in the SICI (The Standing International Conference of Inspectorates). However, the number of members is higher, as some states, such as Belgium, Germany, Spain and Portugal, have several inspectorates in this body. Thus, of the seventeen Länder which make up the German state, six of them are members of the SICI, and there are four Spanish inspectorates in the SICI: the Basque Country, Catalonia, the Valencian Community and the Ministry of Education. However, there are also European Union member countries which are not members of SICI –Croatia, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Poland and Cyprus– which have education inspectorates, although in Greece the functions are carried out by education inspectorates and in Hungary by registered experts who are recruited on a fee-for-service basis. Nor

should it be forgotten that there are European countries which have neither members of the SICI nor are integrated into the European Union. Of these countries, Albania has had education inspectorates since 2010 (Gray, 2019, p. 175), Andorra, since 1997, Bosnia and Herzegovina, from 2007, Liechtenstein³, North Macedonia⁴, Monaco⁵, Switzerland⁶ and Turkey.

As far as the specifics of inspections are concerned, in countries such as France, Spain, Turkey and Portugal, there are currently administrative bodies which are exclusively in charge of certain tasks which are considered to be inspection tasks. However, there are notable differences between the functions of these bodies, depending on the country. For example, in France, as their main function, inspectors evaluate pedagogical and didactic aspects, focusing on the performance of teachers and subject or area departments. In Spain and Portugal, however, although actions requiring greater presence in classrooms have been promoted over the last decade, most of the activities focus on visits to schools, related to the enforcement of regulatory compliance and collaboration with other services of the administration. In Turkey, the responsibility for inspection in the education system rests with inspectors from the Ministry of National Education and provincial inspectors, but the evaluation of teachers is in the hands of school heads (Guzelergene et al., 2023).

On the other hand, professional inspectors exist, although not necessarily within education administrations, in many other countries - England, Ireland, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, Austria, to name but a few - but many of their tasks, especially those of school evaluation, are shared with other actors or stakeholders. In England and Wales, for example, there are full-time His Majesty's

³ See <https://www.llv.li/en/national-administration/office-of-education/organization-office-of-education/education-controlling-and-quality-assurance>

⁴ See <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/republic-north-macedonia/staff-involved-monitoring-educational-quality>

⁵ See *Ordonnance Souveraine n° 4.274 du 21 mars 1969 fixant les conditions de l'inspection pédagogique dans les établissements scolaires*

⁶ See <https://eurydice.eacea.ec.europa.eu/national-education-systems/switzerland/quality-assurance-early-childhood-and-school-education>

Inspectors (HMIs), but both OFSTED and ESTYN —Her Majesty's Inspectorate of Education and Training in Wales— employ part-time and temporary teachers and even other professionals to carry out inspectorate functions. In Estonia, external school evaluations involve one or two officials from the Ministry of Education and Research but may be accompanied by external experts. In Lithuania, external evaluators from an institution supporting the Ministry of Education, Science and Sport carry out school evaluations; most of them are teachers and members of school management teams, but there are also university teachers and representatives of municipal education departments. In Norway, the inspection of public schools is the responsibility of 'county governors', while inspectors working for the Department for Inspection —established in 2008— are responsible for the evaluation of private schools. This is similar in Denmark, where inspectors carry out full inspections only in private schools that are not under the responsibility of local authorities. In the Czech Republic, inspectors belong to an administration corps, but the inspection teams evaluating schools are composed of inspectors on the one hand, and auditors with specific training in economics on the other. Slovakia's inspectorate is staffed by inspectors, but also by specialists and technical staff. In Romania, evaluators are selected as external staff and paid per activity, as the Romanian Agency for the Quality of Pre-university Education has only 20 experts⁷.

2.3. INSPECTORS' MAIN TASKS

There is considerable variation between countries, and even between regions within countries, in the way in which different education systems use inspectors to address the purposes of inspection. Van Bruggen (2010) classifies the inspection process into categories that include, among others, a comprehensive school inspection system, the use of a framework of quality indicators and the observation of the teaching-learning process. Looking at these three aspects, we find that in countries such as the Czech Republic, Portugal,

⁷ See <https://www.sici-inspectorates.eu/Members/Inspection-Profiles>

Sweden and Slovakia and in regions or territories such as England, Northern Ireland, Hamburg, Saxony, Scotland and Wales (van Bruggen, 2010, pp. 122-123), to name but a few, full school inspections are carried out on a regular basis, mostly using quality indicator systems. However, the periodicity of assessments varies from one inspection to another. For example, in Portugal and the Czech Republic inspections have to be carried out every four years and in Sweden and Saxony every three years (van Bruggen, 2010, pp. 122-123).

The Netherlands is also obliged to inspect schools every four years, while Latvia in 2017 was using a six-year cycle (Gray, 2019, p. 212). As for the use of observation as a method of evaluation, this seems to be a widespread practice in most countries - out of the twenty-five inspections analysed by van Bruggen (2010), only seven omit this practice as an element of inspection.

In terms of inspection approaches, Ehren et al. (2013) find common elements in education inspections. Specifically, they specify that inspectors set expectations through their inspection standards and procedures to assess the quality of education by using existing data (e.g. statistics, student performance data) and by collecting additional information (e.g. through interviews with stakeholders or classroom observation). As a result, they produce reports that hold schools accountable to a wide range of targets related to performance, teaching, organisation and leadership.

Finally, it should not be forgotten that —as Simeonova et al. (2020, p.502) state in their comparative analysis of inspections in Ireland, Spain, Bulgaria and Greece— there is a need to overcome any trust deficit between schools and inspection services and to establish the credibility of the inspection process and inspectors by strengthening support systems and bringing transparency to the processes, especially with regard to results and agenda, as this will further strengthen the trust of schools.

CONCLUSIONS

In the first quarter of the 21st century, education inspectorates have become widespread in almost all European countries. They began to be created more than two hundred years ago and have been gradually developed and modified. The political, social, cultural and economic circumstances of each country, territory or region have marked their birth, development, sometimes their disappearance, sometimes their rise and, not infrequently, their rebirth. At present, the profiles of education inspectorates are varied, but they are adjusted to the priorities and characteristics of the systems in which they operate, with the common aim of providing quality and improving the educational service provided.

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