Educational Decentralisation in Post-Conflict Societies: Approaches and Constraints

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Introduction

The immediate post-conflict phase provides a unique if limited window of opportunity to initiate systemic change in the education sector.[1] Such reforms are vital to long-term conflict transformation because education replicates and reproduces the core values and practices of the political system;[2] it provides new generations with an understanding of past violence and of the mechanisms in place to redress it;[3] and its delivery affects directly or indirectly most of the population, and has an important symbolic and practical function related to inclusion, social mobility and communal equality in the aftermath of conflict.[4]

Most educational intervention to date have not explicitly embedded education in a wider strategy of development for peacebuilding.[5] The recent emphasis on educational decentralisation may be an exception: partly due to the influence of the World Bank and IMF, there is widespread consensus that decentralisation is an important element in educational reform strategies worldwide.[6] Decentralisation may be even more crucial in post-conflict societies because the decentralisation of educational design and delivery affects the state's 'ability to cope with the dual problems of policy conflict and the erosion of its own legitimacy'.[7] However, the literature also points at the ambiguous effects of educational decentralisation on post-conflict societies, warning that it may 'reinforce ethnic divisions if it is not moderated by strong institutions at the national level'.[8] Fundamental questions remain: is decentralisation 'good' or 'bad' for education in post-conflict societies? Does it enable local governments to employ schools for long-term conflict transformation? Under which conditions?

This paper employs rich and detailed qualitative data about Lebanon, Northern Ireland and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (hereafter, Macedonia) to shed some light on one of the ways in which local government can contribute to peace: through the provision of formal education.

It suggests that the power of local government to design and deliver educational services which decisively contribute to conflict management are mediated by two factors, previously overlooked by the literature: the model of decentralisation adopted in the aftermath of conflict and the decision-making model at the centre.

This article first presents the existing literature on educational decentralisation. It then introduces the methods and case studies. The bulk of the article analyses three examples of education services in Lebanon, Northern Ireland and Macedonia, respectively: the reform of the Lebanese University, the establishment of Northern Ireland's Education and Skills Authority, and the rationalisation of Macedonia's school network. The final section concludes and maps avenues for further research.Several acronyms will be used throughout the article. Table 1 lists them in alphabetical order.

Table 1: Acronyms

ACRONYM	ORGANISATION
EA	Education Authority (Northern Ireland)
ESA	Education and Skills Authority (Northern Ireland)
FYRoM	Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia (also Macedonia)
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education (Northern Ireland)
GFA	Good Friday Agreement (Northern Ireland)
IMF	International Monetary Fund
OFA	Ohrid Framework Agreement (FYRoMacedonia)
TA	Taif Agreement (Lebanon)
UCDP	Uppsala Conflict Data Program

Educational Decentralisation: Review of the Literature

Decentralisation is often portrayed as a panacea: a key to the reform of education systems worldwide[9] as well as 'a useful mechanism in reducing both ethnic conflict and secessionism'.[10] However, studies of educational decentralisation often overlook Lauglo's assertion that 'decentralisation should not be thought of as a unitary concept'.[11]

Indeed, there are numerous approaches to decentralisation in general, and to educational decentralisation in particular.[12] Most importantly, educational decentralisation may be territorial or non-territorial (functional). This is because decentralisation is not only a spatial concept, but has also important hierarchical implications in the case of education systems, in which the centre is also generally the apex of decision-making.[13] Thus, non-territorial decentralisation entails a transfer of

authority to parallel 'parastatal, nongovernmental or private agencies'.[14] Territorial decentralisation conversely implies redistribution of power 'from higher to lower geographical tiers of government'.[15]

Moreover, decentralisation encompasses both delegation and devolution. Delegation implies the transfer of management and administrative responsibilities to local actors under the direction of local government.[16] In this sense, it approximates deconcentration, as a weak form of decentralisation which may 'merely shift responsibilities from central government officials in the capital city to those working in regions, provinces or districts'.[17] In contrast, devolution entails the transfer of all decision-making and managerial powers over specific matters (such as education) to the local level.[18] But how do different models of decentralisation impact on local government's scope for contributing to conflict management? This question is overlooked by the existing literature.

In fact, the dominant discourse holds that– regardless of its approach – educational decentralisation would benefit post-conflict societies in three main respects. First, decentralisation would reproduce at the local level central decision-making and foster representative, transparent and peaceful policymaking.[19] Accountable and responsive design and delivery of educational services would enhance state legitimacy.[20] It may also foster conflict transformation by eroding existing inequalities and patterns of patronage, thereby promoting social mobility and long-term equality among previously warring groups.[21]

Second, Weiler identifies the 'efficiency argument', portraying decentralisation as increasing efficiency and rationalisation of educational provision.[22] it is widely accepted that the delivery of education immediately after a violent conflict provides 'an early peace dividend' and entrenches the legitimacy of a peace process.[23] The efficient delivery of education could also enhance policy legitimacy.[24]

Third, decentralisation would allow 'spatially concentrated minority ethnic groups' to protect their distinctive identities, cultures and resources.[25] Separate schools catering for children of different backgrounds could hamper long-term conflict transformation due to a combination of structural factors, curricular contents and unequal long-term opportunities.[26] However, multi-lingual education (combining mother tongue education with advanced teaching of the state language), may promote the inclusion of linguistic minorities and their long-term socio-economic equality.[27] Similarly, ethno-national communities could gain an opportunity to contribute to reform of curriculum contents and pedagogical approaches, which remain crucial to the conflict-mitigating potential of education.[28] These initiatives would address the root causes of conflict by ensuring the self-management of previously warring communities and allaying fears of discrimination.[29]

However, some empirical research casts doubts as to the ultimate impact of educational decentralisation on the transition out of conflict. It needs to be remembered that educational decentralisation is implemented rarely and education systems throughout the world remain highly centralised.[30] Moreover, Dyer and Rose warn that when educational decentralisation is not explicitly designed to expand democratic spaces and to nurture a diffused culture of participation at the local level, it may simply reinforce local elites.[31] The development literature confirms that political and administrative decentralisation risks entrenching patronage politics.[32] This may undermine service delivery and post-conflict reconstruction and prevent long-term conflict resolution.[33]

Finally, there is widespread agreement that educational decentralisation may 'reinforce ethnic divisions if it is not moderated by strong institutions at the national level'.[34] This is because only the central government can promote essential structural reforms, enforce common standards, ensure a balanced distribution of resources and prevent indoctrination and recruitment in schools.[35] Indeed, recent empirical research confirms that local governments in a number of post-conflict societies 'exacerbated conflict or, at best, not contributed to peace'.[36] This may occur when, as a consequence of decentralisation, the quality gap between schools serving better off and worse off communities widens.[37] This is the case especially local actors lack the capacity to fulfil their new role.[38] The failure of local government to deliver on promised services and deal with emerging conflicts may erode state legitimacy or hamper the very process of decentralisation.[39] In Jackson's words, 'effective local government makes conflict less likely whereas ineffective local government increases conflict risk'.[40] But what affects the effectiveness of local government and its ability to employ education to foster long-term peace in post-conflict societies?

The existing literature suggests three core factors shaping local governments' ability to employ education for conflict transformation: the overarching consensus over the aims of education in general and of educational decentralisation in particular;[41] bureaucratic inertia;[42] and the legacies of violent conflict.[43] However, Lauglo, Bray, Dyer and Rose call for an improved understanding of the interaction between political structures and different approaches to educational decentralisation through analysis of specific case studies.[44]

The present article responds to this call by looking at three societies which adopted a constitutional and political system broadly identifiable as consociational power-sharing (hereafter, power-sharing): Lebanon, Northern Ireland and Macedonia. Power-sharing aims to manage or ameliorate violent inter-communal conflict through a combination of elements of shared rule (coalition government, mutual vetoes, proportional representation) and of self-rule for the previously warring groups.[45] Self-rule may be expressed through a spectrum of autonomy, ranging from non-territorial autonomy to territorial autonomy. Wolff observes that territorial self-governance is an increasing common and beneficial element of both the theory and the practice of power-sharing,[46] and finds expression in both Northern Ireland and Macedonia. However, power-sharing draws its roots in non-territorial forms of self-rule, which tend to be 'explicitly ethnic' in being granted to ascriptive ethnic, national or religious groups which participated to conflict,[47] as most obvious in Lebanon. Recent studies suggest that the idiosyncrasies of power-sharing affect the implementation of territorial decentralisation in favour of non-territorial autonomy.[48]

Drawing on this literature, the present article proposes two further factors which mediate the power of local government to design and deliver educational services contributing to conflict transformation: the model of decentralisation adopted in the aftermath of conflict and the decision-making model at the centre (power-sharing).

Methods and Cases

This study is grounded in rich and detailed data collected in the course of fieldwork in Lebanon, Northern Ireland and Macedonia in 2012-2013. This includes thirty-three semi-structured interviews with politicians, policymakers, experts and activists in the three jurisdictions. Interviewees were

selected on the basis of their professional background and expertise on education policy, but also to ensure broad representation of all the relevant political and ethnic groups.

All the interviews were carried out by the author, who is Italian and was between 28 and 30 years old when carrying out fieldwork. She has no religious affiliation, but many interviewees assumed she was Christian (in Lebanon and Macedonia) or Catholic (in Northern Ireland). This may have affected the propensity of certain interviewees to disclose (or hide) their opinion. Language did not affect the interviewees, as they were mostly carried out in English (in which she is fluent). The author also speaks a little Arabic and French, but no Macedonian or Albanian. All the interviewees were offered the opportunity to use an interpreter, but only one of them accepted (Interview 5) whilst the others chose to carry out the interview in English. The interviews focused on the challenges and opportunities for education policy since the signing of the three peace agreements, and specific questions were asked about decentralisation in Lebanon and Macedonia. In Northern Ireland, the questions touched on educational changes since devolution. To avoid any blind spots in her understanding, the author asked every interviewee for suggestions of sources and issues to be examined. Interview data was complemented with a wide collection of newspaper clippings (such as *The Belfast Telegraph, BBC, The Daily Star* and *Transitions Online*), and government and international data and reports.

Case Selection

The three case studies were selected according to the most different systems design method of comparative research, which is ideally suited to highlight patterns among few case studies.[49] Due to the limited number of case studies, further research should be undertaken before generalising these findings to other post-conflict countries.

Lebanon, Northern Ireland and Macedonia differ in terms of their key socio-political cleavages (with religion at the heart of Lebanon's war, religion/nationality at the heart of Northern Ireland's Troubles, and language/nationality at the heart of Macedonia's conflict), of their historical experiences and of their regional environments. However, they all experienced violent inter-communal conflict (the 1975-1990 civil war in Lebanon, the 1968-1998 Troubles in Northern Ireland and the 2001 conflict in Macedonia). Following Wolff and Cordell, the conflicts of Lebanon, Northern Ireland and Macedonia can be defined as ethnic conflicts, in which 'the goals of at least one conflict party are defined in (exclusively) ethnic terms, and in which the primary fault line of confrontation is one of ethnic distinction'.[50] Moreover, despite the fact that in any society emerging from violence 'peace is often insecure, relapses are frequent',[51] the three case studies are hailed as successful examples of conflict management generally, and as success cases of power-sharing more specifically.[52] Indeed, UCDP data on the number of battle-related deaths since the conclusion of peace agreements confirms that Lebanon, Northern Ireland and Macedonia 'have experienced recent and severe outbreaks of violence, but are demonstrating clear signs of transitioning towards higher levels of peace'.[53]

Two characteristics make Lebanon, Northern Ireland and Macedonia particularly suitable for the present comparative analysis of educational decentralisation in post-conflict societies. First, the Taif Agreement (TA), Good Friday Agreement (GFA) and Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) established or re-established power-sharing to accommodate the previously warring ethnic, national, linguistic and religious groups in Lebanon, Northern Ireland and Macedonia, respectively.

Second, the three peace agreements mapped decentralisation as part of the package of institutional reforms aiming to ameliorate the conflicts in Lebanon, Northern Ireland and Macedonia. However, the different demographic structure of the three societies, their historical traditions and the priorities of external actors contributed to engender different approaches to decentralisation, ranging from non-territorial autonomy to devolution, to de-concentration.

This article suggests that the model of decentralisation implemented in the aftermath of conflict, as well as the adoption of power-sharing (and the interaction between these two factors), affects the extent to which local governments can design and deliver educational services contributing to conflict transformation. To evaluate this hypothesis, it analyses three specific examples of the design and delivery of education services in Lebanon, Northern Ireland and Macedonia, respectively: the reform of the Lebanese University, the establishment of Northern Ireland's Education and Skills Authority, and the rationalisation of Macedonia's school network.

Lebanon: Reforms of the Lebanese University

Controversies over the Lebanese University since 1989 provide a unique vantage point to evaluate the relationship between central and local actors in the context of power-sharing and extensive non-territorial autonomy. The Lebanese University was founded in Beirut in 1951. In 1977, at the height of the civil war, Christian Education Minister Camille Chamoun signed a decree establishing a second branch of the Lebanese University to allow all students to attend university in a city divided along Christian-Muslim lines.[54] Muslim politicians protested the decision on the grounds that 'dividing the university [meant] dividing the country'.[55]

The Taif Agreement (TA) concluding 15 years of brutal civil war, vaguely suggested that 'the conditions of the Lebanese University shall be reformed', implying an intent to fully decentralise or fully re-centralise the University.[56] The re-centralisation of the University into a single, Beirut-based campus, in which students from different backgrounds would study together could have provided opportunities for dialogue and mutual knowledge, ensured uniform teaching standards and equalised the long-term opportunities of students. Conversely, the full de-centralisation of the University into several autonomous institutions located across Lebanon may have enhanced transparency and efficiency in the management of resources, as well as promoting a more efficient educational provision grounded in local demands.

In fact, almost three decades on, the Lebanese University remains a hybrid actor: it retains a centralised administrative structure but dozens of *de facto* decentralised campuses keep 'mushrooming' throughout Lebanon.[57] Even the parties that initially opposed its fragmentation, subsequently started claiming that the separate branches allowed the 'sharing' of resources and 'for all parts of the country to develop'.[58] The impact of the failure to reform the Lebanese University upon long-term peace is unclear but anecdotal evidence suggests that its different branches cater to a largely homogeneous student population and employ staff and teachers from the same confessional and political community. This does not promote the sustained and positive personal contact which fosters reconciliation.[59] In fact, an interviewee reflected that 'it is like apartheid'.[60]

This article hypothesises that power-sharing and specific models of decentralisation affect the provision of educational services, and specifically the contribution of local actors to an education conducive to peace. Did they do so in Lebanon?

The TA re-established power-sharing after the 15-years hiatus of the civil war. It also entrenched the non-territorial autonomy of Lebanon's 18 confessional communities (which retain separate personal status laws), and provided for rather limited territorial autonomy: 'expanded administrative decentralisation'.[61] Power-sharing provisions were immediately enforced under the Syrian aegis. This was not the case for territorial autonomy: in subsequent decades, the lack of a clear division of responsibility with the central government, excessive central control, lack of fiscal autonomy and weak local administrative capabilities prevented Lebanese municipalities from assuming the responsibilities they have on paper, including responsibilities for the management and delivery of education services.[62]

Kerr and Hamdan suggest that power-sharing itself constrained the implementation of territorial decentralisation in favour of non-territorial autonomy. They propose that Lebanon's power-sharing leads to segmental political parties (rather than the government) controlling political, administrative and fiscal matters. By accessing state resources and redistributing them to their clientelistic networks, central-level politicians maintain strong local power-bases in their traditional strongholds.[63] Education is part and parcel of these dynamics, as communal and political actors such as Hezbollah draw considerable legitimacy and support from their provision of schooling in fragile and remote locations. As an education expert put it, the 'weakness of the formal administration, gives way to exercise power informally'.[64] In this sense, the proliferation of branches of the Lebanese University allows Lebanon's political parties to instrumentalise this state institution to promote their 'factional, communal' interests.[65] As a consequence, an interviewee argued that 'each leader wants a piece of' the university and this explains the political opposition to full re-centralisation of the Lebanese University.[66]

Yet, central political parties also oppose the full administrative decentralisation of the Lebanese University into several autonomous institutions. This is at least partly because of the delicate politics of power-sharing. Lebanon's power-sharing is premised on the sharing of high-level governmental posts among Muslims and Christians, and among the 18 different confessional communities. According to these quotas, the President of the Lebanese University is Shiite, whilst the positions of University Deans are distributed among Muslims and Christians. The dismemberment of the university would mean that 'we as Shia would lose one very interesting post'[67] and would require a major redistribution of high-level posts among Lebanon's political parties and communities. 'Fear of imbalance between the communities',[68] and the desire to avoid complex and potentially incendiary negotiations, contributes to explain the stalemate over reform of the Lebanese University.

This brief overview corroborates the hypothesis that power-sharing and the specific model of decentralisation adopted by a post-conflict society affect the scope for education reforms conducive to conflict transformation. The case of Lebanon suggests that power-sharing may complicate the implementation of territorial decentralisation where there is a strong tradition of non-territorial autonomy. Territorial decentralisation may be opposed by political parties which benefit from extreme non-territorial autonomy because it could reduce their access to state resources and their ability to redistribute them to their local clients.[69]

The case of Lebanon also suggests that the interaction between power-sharing and non-territorial decentralisation complicated the formulation and implementation of education policies conducive to conflict transformation. As mentioned, both the full re-centralisation and the full decentralisation of the state university may have fostered long-term peace. However, the status quo, consisting of a hierarchical and centralised administrative structure, combined with fragmented *de facto* autonomous regional branches, has ambiguous consequences for long-term conflict transformation. On the one hand, it may foster short-term stability by entrenching wider power-sharing structures and reproducing existing patterns of clientelism.[70] Weiler also suggests that the fragmentation of university institutions 'allows the state to diffuse the sources of conflict' as well as to contain and monitor dissent more efficiently.[71] On the other hand, it also perpetuates an inefficient and corrupt administration of state resources and deprives students of opportunities for contact with others who belong to different confessional and political groups.

Northern Ireland: From Education and Skills Authority to Education Authority

There is widespread agreement that Northern Ireland's education system is not cost effective due to the existence of four parallel school sectors: state controlled, Catholic maintained, integrated schools, and Irish-medium schools.[72] In 2012, the Department of Education confirmed that there were about 85,000 surplus places in schools, equivalent to 150 schools.[73] This is problematic in the context of an increasingly 'strict budget' allocated by London.[74] Separate schools catering for different communities in Northern Ireland have also been accused of hampering rather than encouraging reconciliation by preventing contact between children of different backgrounds.[75] More recently, it was found that the quality of a child's educational experience depended on communal background, with Catholic maintained schools (catering for the Nationalist and Catholic community) generally providing a better quality of education than state controlled schools (catering for the Protestant and Unionist community). It also depended on socio-economic conditions: pupils entitled to free school meals were twice as likely as more affluent pupils not to achieve five good GCSEs in 2013.[76] Finally, it depended on the zone of residence: whilst pupils in Belfast could access educational psychologists within 30 days, in more rural constituencies it could take up to a year.[77] This disparity has important indirect consequences for the peace process: underperforming schools were concentrated 'in Protestant loyalist working class areas', and this reportedly 'has the potential to destabilise our community'.[78]

The Good Friday Agreement (GFA) did not address the complex structure of schooling in Northern Ireland. However, at the same time, Westminster promoted a Review of Public Administration to create 'a two-tier model of public administration', with a regional tier in charge of policy formulation and municipal actors in charge of service delivery.[79] The review was ostensibly informed by principles of subsidiarity, equality and good relations, common boundaries and strong local government.[80] Its primary implication for the education sector was the ambition, according to then Northern Ireland Office Minister Ian Pearson to effect 'significant reductions in the number of public bodies', including those administering education.[81] It resulted in the plan to establish an Education and Skills Authority (ESA) to replace the existing plurality of administrative bodies, including five Education and Library Boards managing state controlled schools), the Council for Catholic Maintained Education (supporting Catholic maintained schools, the Northern Ireland Council for

Integrated Education (managing integrated schools) and the Council for Irish-Medium Schools (Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta, supporting Irish-medium schools).

As Knox puts it, ESA was expected to 'rationalise the plethora of education quangos, plan in a unified way the future education estate and save £20 million per year in so doing'.[82] Beyond fostering economies, the centralisation of educational administration into ESA was expected to support peace-building by furthering collaboration (or even fusion) among schools catering to different sectors of the community. Policies like Area Planning and the Entitlement Framework encouraged the pooling of resources and inter-school collaborations.[83] However, the different legal and administrative frameworks regulating each education sector posed often insurmountable obstacles to collaboration and fusion across communal lines.[84] One interviewee suggested that by unifying the legal and administrative structure of the four educations sectors, ESA would generate more opportunities for sustained and positive contact among children of different backgrounds (shared education).[85]

Over the following decade, ESA became 'one of the most expensive yet non-existent bodies in the history of Northern Ireland's power-sharing Assembly'.[86] After years of political wrangling between Nationalist and Unionist parties and over £17 million invested its establishment, in April 2014, Education Minister John O'Dowd signalled the 'death knell' for ESA.[87] Instead, the Education Authority came into being in April 2015 and simply replaced the five Education and Library Boards that previously administered state controlled education.[88] The EA's statutory duty to support shared education may be a step towards more sustained and positive contact between children of different communal backgrounds. However, interviewees point out that the merging of the five Education and Library Boards may also entrench 'the status quo and the planned separate development of our schools'[89] and 'may reinforce the sectarian divide'.[90]

This article suggests that power sharing and devolution affect the ability of local actors to design and deliver transformative education services. The GFA established power-sharing between the representatives of the Unionist community and of the Nationalist community. It also mapped the re-establishment of a devolved Northern Ireland Assembly as 'the prime source of authority in respect of all devolved responsibilities' (including education), but did not envisage decentralisation of educational responsibilities to the municipal level.[91] This model of devolved administration affected the formulation and delivery of education services, which generally excluded municipal actors, despite the recommendations of the Review of Public Administration.

The establishment of local power-sharing and restoration of devolution in 2007 impacted on plans for the creation of ESA in two main respects. First, as a major legislative bill, the bill to establish ESA required cross-community consensus.[92] Controversies focused on the scope for the promotion of integrated and Irish-medium education through ESA,[93] on the autonomy of grammar schools,[94] on the effective scope for rationalisation of the existing school network, and – most substantially – over representation on the ESA executive board.

Second, Westminster had conceived the ESA executive board as a small body of technocrats.[95] However, the devolved administration quickly established that ESA's executive board should 'encompass a wide range of education interests'.[96] This came to mean politicians,[97] who would 'balance out the control of the minister of education',[98] as well as representatives of the main Churches (as owners of the school buildings).[99] The integrated and Irish-medium sectors also

demanded representation.[100] It appeared that's, as Knox puts it, 'the existing education quangos, so often criticised for lack of political accountability' were being 'replaced by a super-quango'.[101]

Despite extensive compromises over political and religious representation, Unionist parties remained staunchly opposed to the establishment of ESA. A prominent politician argues that this was a challenge to Sinn Fein's 'dogmatic' approach to education policy[102] but others suggest that it was in retaliation for the abolishment of academic selection at age 11.[103] Ultimately, a policymaker reflected that 'in the absence of trust we simply didn't have the cross-party support to make progress'.[104] By mid-2014, the plan to establish ESA was abandoned in favour of the more modest Education Authority, which would simply replace the five Education and Library Boards that previously administered state controlled education.[105]

This effectively eliminated the little territorial decentralisation of state controlled education which existed previously, in keeping with the GFA's emphasis on devolution to Belfast rather than on decentralisation to municipal or sub-regional actors. Moreover, the composition of the EA board reflected and reproduced wider structures of power-sharing. The board is composed from eight Church representatives (four representatives of the Protestant Churches from the Transferors Representative Council and four representatives of the Catholic Church from the Trustees of Catholic Maintained Schools), eight political representatives (shared proportionally to electoral votes according to the D'Hondt formula), and one member representing each of the integrated, Irish-medium, voluntary grammar and controlled grammar sectors.[106]

This brief analysis of efforts to establish an overarching Education and Skills Authority in Northern Ireland illustrates clearly the constraints experienced by local actors in promoting transformative education reforms in a post-conflict society. They relate to two factors. First, the model of devolved administration adopted by Northern Ireland set the stage for a full devolution of education policy and management from Westminster to Stormont, but not for a decentralisation of educational responsibilities to municipal or sub-regional actors. Thus, municipalities remain marginal both in the definition of education policy and in the delivery of education services in Northern Ireland.[107] In fact, the limited sub-regional decentralisation of state controlled education was reversed with the establishment of the EA.

Second, Northern Ireland's power-sharing constrained the scope for a full centralisation of educational provision into a single ESA. Consensus decision-making and the reproduction of wider patterns of proportional representation at all levels of the administration meant that the equally funded separate education sectors catering to different communities, remain key to the organisation of educational policy and management. In other words, similarly to Lebanon, in Northern Ireland, non-territorial autonomy is paramount when considering the design and delivery of education services.

How does the failure to establish ESA (and the establishment of the more modest EA) impact on Northern Ireland's conflict? It is clear that the EA board reproduces and legitimises wider structures of power-sharing,[108] perhaps entrenching its short-term stability and legitimacy. As mentioned, the EA's statutory duty to support shared education may be a step towards more sustained and positive contact across communities. However, the EA also establishes the state controlled sector as one among a variety of equally legitimate state-funded education providers catering for different communities, rather than as the default state provision. In this sense, some interviewees reflected

that it encourages the emergence of a specific 'Protestant' ethos in a sector which had previously portrayed itself 'as we just provide state education'.[109] This 'may reinforce the sectarian divide'.[110]

Macedonia: Rationalisation of the School Network

One of the core demands of the Albanian insurgency during Macedonia's 2001 conflict was the expansion of the right to mother tongue education at all levels, and state financing for institutions teaching in languages other than Macedonian.[111] Indeed, there is widespread agreement that the pre-2001 centralised educational system did not respond to the specific needs of local communities in regard to mother tongue education and to the opening and closing of schools.[112] Macedonia's school network was built in the 1960s and 1970s and did not adapt to changing demographics. by the early 2000s, up to 30 percent of schools had less than 20 students and were understaffed.[113] These were largely in rural areas, inhabited predominantly by ethnic Macedonians. Yet, the urban areas –particularly the municipalities inhabited by ethnic Albanians and Roma - experienced rapid demographic growth. As a result, up to 30 percent of primary schools were overcrowded and operated in two or even three daily shifts.[114] Funding was also allocated on the basis of class numbers rather than on the basis of pupil numbers, so per capita spending on education differed markedly across schools and municipalities, to the advantage of municipalities inhabited primarily by ethnic Macedonians.[115]

To address the demands of the Albanian insurgency, the Ohrid Framework Agreement (OFA) entrenched the right to mother tongue education at primary and secondary school level, and provided for state funding for university education 'in languages spoken by at least 20 percent of the population of Macedonia'.[116] How would this help peace-building? It is established that mother tongue and multilingual education are important instruments for transition out of conflict, particularly when linguistic cleavages are politically salient.[117] Thus, in the Macedonian case the fulfilment of the OFA's promise for language rights, and the narrowing of the quality gap in education, remain key to the stability of the peace process.

The OFA also established power-sharing and mapped extensive territorial decentralisation. The negotiators believed this would help conflict management by strengthening municipalities, as the unit of government 'closer to the people' and which best 'reflected the ethnic composition of the population'.[118]

The 2002 Law on Local Self-Government tasked local governments with responsibilities like founding schools, owning school buildings, paying staff salaries, opening and closing schools, and appointing school directors.[119] Effectively, it made municipalities responsible for granting access to mother tongue education in their territory. Lyon reports that, according to municipal education officers, decentralisation made it easier for municipalities to open new classes teaching in Albanian or Turkish.[120] Certainly the proportion of children studying in the Albanian and Turkish languages and the number of schools offering instruction in Albanian and Turkish increased considerably since 2001.[121]

Yet, some substantial restrictions remained to the opening of classes in the languages of Macedonia's ethnic minorities, including requirements for a minimum number of students and frequent resistance to employing new staff members.[122] Moreover, the central government retained

most of the ultimate decision-making powers, as well as ultimate financial control.[123] The Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Finance needed to approve the opening (and closing) of any new class and school in Macedonia.[124] Municipalities lacked formal channels to influence the government: they did not have legislative powers, they were not represented in Skopje, and even the municipal association was largely marginalised by the central government.[125] Thus, most interviewees agreed that whereas the education system was officially decentralised, decision-making remained highly hierarchical.[126] An international expert explained that it is 'a hybrid situation where municipalities are in charge of the physical part… and the staffing, the budget for the schools and the contents part [i.e., the curriculum] is centralised'.[127]

This impacted directly on municipal initiatives to rationalise the school network to meet demographic pressures. Lyon reports that in 2009 only three out of nine municipal initiatives to rationalise the educational network were implemented successfully.[128] In 2008, the World Bank confirmed that up to 87 percent of secondary schools still operated in double or triple shifts.[129] Indeed, municipalities were often caught between a rock and a hard place, with rising numbers of ethnic Albanian students demanding Albanian-medium education, but without the funding to open new classes.[130] In fact, there was anecdotal evidence of municipal requests for new classes being rejected by the Education Minister.[131] For example, Lyon mentions the high profile case of Albanian-medium classes in the municipality of Struga, which were approved by the ethnic Albanian deputy education minister but later declared illegal by the ethnic Macedonian education minister.[132] The continuing disparity in service provision affects the quality of education for minority communities: lessons are shorter when students attend school in shifts and class sizes remain extremely large (up to 40 pupils in Albanian-language classes).[133]

This article suggests that the model of decentralisation adopted after conflict, and power-sharing, affect local actors' ability to design and deliver educational services which contribute to long-term conflict management. The extremely limited agency of municipal actors, and their failure to decisively promote those education reforms which would contribute to long-term conflict management (specifically a more rational school network) are partially explained by the model of decentralisation implemented since 2001. Despite the OFA's ambitious promises, it appears that decentralisation in Macedonia amounts primarily to the delegation of central responsibilities to the local levels. Lyons suggests that Macedonia's approach is simply a 'de-concentration of central government'.[134]

Lyons also suggests that Macedonia's 'de-concentration of central government' helped replicate 'consociational power-sharing locally'.[135] It did so through decision-making procedures governed by proportionality, by weighted majority rules and by inclusive forums like the Committees for Inter-Community Relations.[136] The drawing of municipal boundaries to maximise ethnic homogeneity also helped embed the new political representatives of ethnic communities on the local level[137] whilst reinforcing patterns of patronage.[138]

This hampered flexible change in the school network. The Ministry of Education took up to three years to respond to municipal applications.[139] Moreover, ministerial decisions on capital funding were not 'very transparent', and some sources suggest that municipalities governed by the majority parties were advantaged.[140] Conversely, as in Northern Ireland, 'no politician wants to close a school'.[141] This was the case particularly when the rationalisation of the education network entailed

a 'decision concerning the redistribution of resources from under-populated (predominantly Macedonian) areas in the east of the country to over-populated (predominantly ethnic Albanian) areas in the north and west'.[142] As an international observer summarised it, closing a school often meant 'losing out to the other community'.[143] Ultimately, interviewees reported that the very parties participating to the power-sharing government did not trust each other and did not cooperate effectively in the educational realm.[144] An ethnic division of labour emerged both at the central government and at the local government level: ethnic Albanian officers dealt with Albanian schools and classes whilst ethnic Macedonia officials dealt with Macedonian schools and classes.[145]

This corroborates the hypothesis that the ability of local government to promote conflict-management through the education sector is mediated by two factors: the model of decentralisation adopted in the aftermath of conflict and the decision-making model at the centre. Lyon suggests that perhaps territorial decentralisation 'facilitated heterogeneous policymaking in the delivery (but not design) of educational services' in Macedonia.[146] The brief overview above suggests that –even when considering only the delivery of education services - the power of local government is severely constrained by the model of decentralisation adopted in Macedonia: de-concentration to the local level (rather than devolution). Here, even the change of a school's name needs to be approved by the Minister of Education, so 'you cannot say this is full decentralisation'.[147]

As in the other cases, power-sharing interacts in complex ways with de-concentration of central government in Macedonia. Power-sharing appeared to be particularly conducive to enhancing the non-territorial autonomy of previously warring communities, as expressed through language rights, the emergence of parties as communal champions, and the informal division of labour between ethnic Albanian and ethnic Macedonian politicians and bureaucrats.

In fact, despite their many constraints, local actors succeeded in contributing to conflict management through education reform: the increasing provision of mother tongue education at all levels is an important success. More ambiguously, recent analyses of power-sharing through the lenses of political economy suggest that clientelism may help legitimise the new central political system when it benefits the parties in power.[148] In this sense, the emergence of local political parties as ethnic champions, the reproduction of the decision-making patterns of power-sharing, and the entrenchment of a political economy of power-sharing on the local level may also help the short-term stability and legitimacy of the new political system. However, as a local observer reflected, the continuing tension between local demands for more school places in areas inhabited by minority communities, limited municipal capabilities to satisfy these demands, and the constraints placed by central government resulted in education being 'a source of tension' rather than an instrument for conflict management).[149]

Conclusion

The existing literature suggests that education can contribute to transition out of violent conflict by delivering badly needed peace dividends, providing new generations with an understanding of past violence, redressing the inequalities and grievances that motivated conflict and reproducing and legitimising the wider socio-political system.[150] In the cases of Lebanon, Northern Ireland and Macedonia, education reforms aiming at sustaining the wider peace process focused on redressing existing inequalities in access and quality of education (in Northern Ireland and Macedonia) and on

reforming identity-sensitive aspects of schooling (like mother-tongue education in Macedonia and the fragmented Lebanese University). The three peace agreements also mapped educational decentralisation as an expression of the wider self-government of previously warring communities.

The brief analysis of educational initiatives in Lebanon, Northern Ireland and Macedonia suggests that, whilst full educational decentralisation may in fact promote genuine conflict management as postulated by international donors, the implementation of decentralisation in post-conflict societies faces several constraints, which hamper its conflict-mitigating potential. This study hypothesised that two constraints are particularly salient in post-conflict societies: the model of decentralisation adopted after conflict, and the model of central decision-making (power-sharing).

Table 2 provides a summary of the characteristics of each case study, including information about the conflict and peace agreement; the key constraints to each education reform; and the outcome of each initiative. The following remarks will draw some general conclusions from the comparison between the case studies.

Table 2: Summary

	CONTEXT	CONSTRAINTS	OUTCOME
Reform the Lebanese University (Lebanon)	1975-1989 Civil War (Christian-Muslim cleavage). Taif Agreement: - Corporate Consociational Power-Sharing. - Expanded administrative autonomy and non-territorial autonomy.	- consensus in decision-making. - proportionality in political and administrative appointments. - resource distribution through political and clientlistic channels.	No reform: fragmented University but centralised University administration.
Establish an Education and Skills Authority replacing all existing managing organisations (Northern Ireland)	1968-1998 Troubles (Protestant/Unionist-Catholic/Nationalist cleavage). Good Friday Agreement: - Liberal Consociational Power-Sharing. - Devolution to Belfast but no decentralisation to municipalities and non-territorial autonomy.	- devolution of education to Belfast. - consensus in decision-making and legislation. - proportionality in political and administrative appointments. - non-territorial autonomy expressed through diverse educational provision.	Established Education Authority to replace the Education and Library Boards. Educational management still fragmented across sectors.
Rationalise the School network while promoting mother-tongue education (Macedonia)	2001 Conflict (Albanian-Macedonian cleavage) Ohrid Framework Agreement: - Liberal Consociational Power-Sharing. - Decentralisation (implemented as deconcentration) and non-territorial autonomy.	- proportionality in political appointments at local level. - consensus in local decision-making. - limited local financial autonomy and decision-making powers. - distribution of resources through clientelistic and ethnic channels.	Expanded mother-tongue education. No rationalisation of the school network.

In Lebanon, Northern Ireland and Macedonia, the establishment of power-sharing affected local government's ability to employ education for peace in two main respects. First, as Lyon reflects, local government reproduced the central structures of power-sharing at the municipal level,[151] as well as within the administrative bodies in charge of education services (such as the management of the Lebanese University and the executive board of Northern Ireland's Education Authority). In this sense, local governments may foster the short term stability and legitimacy of the post-conflict political system.

Second, power-sharing generally provided for extensive communal autonomy. In fact, it may enhance non-territorial autonomy in post-conflict societies. This analysis suggests that non-territorial and territorial forms of autonomy interact in complex ways, and impact on the design and delivery of educational provision. For example, the stalemate over reform of the Lebanese University is at least partially due to the desire to avoid lengthy and complex renegotiations over the representation of Lebanon's communities in the upper levels of the state administration. In Northern Ireland, the failure of ESA may be attributed to the desire to retain separate education sectors as embodiments of the autonomous local communities. Similarly, in Macedonia, municipal decisions to open or close schools are often constrained by wider considerations about the distribution of central power among ethnic Albanians and ethnic Macedonians. Whilst this finding is limited to the education sector, further research should be carried out in the ways in which territorial and non-territorial autonomy interact in the presence of central power-sharing, and on their impact upon other non-political institutions.

The model of decentralisation adopted in the aftermath of conflict also shapes the power of local government. The weak territorial decentralisation of Lebanon is balanced by a strong emphasis on the non-territorial autonomy of the previously warring confessional communities. As mentioned, Lebanon's strong tradition of non-territorial autonomy constrains the scope for devolution of power to municipalities. Similarly to the Lebanese case, Northern Ireland and Macedonia also grant some non-territorial autonomy to their previously warring national and ethnic communities. In Northern Ireland, the devolution of powers from London to Belfast was not a prelude to further decentralisation to the municipal level: in fact, it led to the centralisation of policy and service delivery in Belfast. In Macedonia, territorial decentralisation, a mainstay of the OFA, appears to have simply resulted in delegation of some limited central responsibilities to the local level, as central ministries are required to approve even the minutest local decisions on education. An expert suggested that perhaps central politicians 'are centralising the control and only decentralising the blame [for failed policies]'.[152] This corroborates Weiler's suggestion that political rhetoric about decentralisation may represent a key tool to enhance central legitimacy and manage conflict.[153]

How do local actors contribute to conflict management through education in this context? This paper suggests that rather than resting on local government, communal self-government was often fulfilled through non-territorial forms of autonomy. Separate educational sectors catering for different communities in post-conflict societies are an expression of such autonomy and are instrumental to the legitimacy and stability of power-sharing in the short term.[154] However, decentralisation did not erode the zero-sum politics over educational reform: it reproduced politicised debates over education locally and entrenched political parties as communal champions also at the municipal level. The political polarisation along the lines of previously warring parties questions the sustainability of a long-term peace process.

Furthermore, local governments did not challenge inefficient service delivery, despite the theoretical expectation that they would do so. In fact, they entrenched it when it resulted from a history of parallel provision and from clientelistic networks. If power-sharing is sustained by a political economy of corruption and clientelism, as Hass and Ottmann maintain, this may be beneficial to the short-term political stability of post-conflict societies which adopt power-sharing.[155] However, this does not necessarily enhance long-term conflict resolution or state legitimacy.[156] Indeed, the failure of local actors to deliver on promises of cost-reducing reforms may delegitimise them on the long-term, particularly once international funding dries up in the decades after the conclusion of a peace agreement.[157]

In sum, a comparative analysis of the decentralisation of educational provision in Lebanon, Northern Ireland and Macedonia confirms Jackson and Scott's observation that local governments did not decisively contribute to peace through education.[158] It questions the most optimistic promises of decentralisation: in the three case studies, autonomy did not foster transparent decision-making, did not enhance efficient and rational service delivery, did not erode clientelist networks, nor did it remedy existing discrepancies in educational quality across regions or communities. Most often, the constraints of power-sharing and of different models of decentralisation led to de facto fragmented education systems, in which children belonging to different communities or coming from different regions have access to a different quality of education, and in which contact between students from different communities is limited. This may allow local communities to protect and nurture their separate cultures and identities. It certainly furthers the political equality and autonomy of previously warring groups, promoting short-term conflict management. However, it does not directly promote the long-term transformation of the conflict.

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