

Title: The Publicness of Small Private Schools at the Compulsory Education Level in Depopulated Areas: A Comparative Study of Cases in Japan and Germany

Research Overview:

In depopulated areas where it is difficult to maintain state schools, alternatives are needed to ensure children receive an education. This study, therefore, examines the publicness of small private schools at the compulsory education level in depopulated areas through a comparative case study of Japan and Germany.

Purpose of Study:

The aim of this study is to explore alternatives to ensure school education for children in depopulated areas where maintaining state schools is difficult. To this end, by conducting a comparative study of cases in Japan and Germany in which small private schools at the compulsory education level help maintain the educational functions of their local communities, this study seeks to highlight the publicness of private schools. This publicness transcends neoliberal marketisation and serves as a basis for re-examining the concept of public education.

Research Methods:

First, we analysed private schools in Sakuho Town (Japan) and Vorpommern-Greifswald (Germany) to clarify their impact on local education. Data were collected through field visits and interviews with education authorities and schools in these depopulating regions.

Second, we re-examined the concept of public education. Key discussions examined included those of Teruhisa Horio (Horio, 1971), who posited state schools as the ideal organisational form for public education and significantly influenced the formulation of the concept of public education in Japan; Isao Kurosaki (Kurosaki, 1980), who, in contrast to Horio,

explored the potential for organising public education through private funding within the history of school development in early modern Japan; and Hogan and Thompson (Mockler et al., 2020), whose work presented a new typology of public education in light of recent trends towards commercialisation.

Results and Discussion:

In Sakuho Town, private elementary and junior high schools have been established on the site of a former public elementary school that closed due to declining pupil numbers, whilst distinctive educational programmes are also being implemented in the town's municipal elementary and junior high schools, which have undergone consolidation. Through research conducted in the town, a model for school provision was identified that contributes to the settlement of families with children, including new residents, in depopulated areas and enhances the sustainability of local communities. In Sakuho Town, a key advantage of being a small-scale municipality is the spatial and psychological proximity among the local government, schools and residents, resulting in close cooperation between these parties. Consequently, it became clear that school providers are responding sensitively to children's educational needs and ensuring the provision of public education.

With regard to the Vorpommern-Greifswald District, the study focused particularly on two private schools that contribute to the regeneration and maintenance of local communities' sustainability in depopulated areas. Given that the new community formed by migrants and the existing church community play major roles as central actors in providing alternative schooling to the local authority, the emerging picture is of private schools serving as the responsible entities for educational functions within these communities. This confirmed that the development of private schools is a self-directed endeavour aimed at creating, maintaining and restoring the spontaneous educational functions of local communities.

A common feature of both the Japanese and German case studies was that school founders were responsible for school management whilst forming local educational communities together with residents.

Based on Horio's formulation of 'public education as the organisation of private affairs' (Horio, 1971, p. 14), the publicness of a school need not necessarily be distinguished by whether its sponsor is public or private. Referring to Kurosaki's argument, a school maintained through the subjective involvement of local community members can be positioned as public education underpinned by the publicness of the local community, beyond the distinction between public and private sponsors. In light of the above, this study concludes that, to ensure public education in depopulated areas where maintaining state schools is difficult, small private schools established through local community initiative can serve as an alternative.

Keywords (maximum five):

Public Education, Private School, Compulsory Education,
Underpopulated Area, School Provision

References:

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