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Private supplementary tutoring in Europe: an overview

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1. Introduction

Private supplementary tutoring has a long history in Europe. The phenomenon has not been given much attention at a research level because it is embedded in the culture and naturalised. Everybody knows that it happens but it is generally not mentioned outside closed social circles. That is the case, for example, in Austria where private tutoring “has been not only a «shadow industry» but practically «invisible»” (Gruber, 2007: 1). The domestic approach to private supplementary tutoring and its black market environment explains a lot of the predominant silence.

The university was one of the most important contexts for private tutoring in Europe. Gordon & Gordon (1990: 33) mention the relationship between the development of the universities and tutoring, as according to them, “in the history of tutoring the rise of the university is of no small importance. University students and their professors acted as tutors outside their school”. According to Fulton (2003: 53), private tutoring was the preferred option among the upper class in the eighteenth century in Scotland and “a great deal of the tuition for young boys was private rather than institutional and that many a family of rank, fashion, or means employed a bright young man, fresh from the university and seeking preferment or eventual ordination, to tutor its male children in Latin, literature, and mathematics, perhaps some geography, and maybe a little elementary science”. Ireson (2004: 110) states that “in the UK, private tutoring has long been a respectable and valued employment for university students seeking financial support and for teachers wishing to supplement their income”. This statement also applies to other countries in Europe. For example, in Las Palmas, Gran Canaria Islands, Spanish territory, private supplementary tutoring was widespread during the nineteenth century. Private lessons in Italian, English, French, music, drawing and painting were considered as embellishing and were mainly addressed to women (Méndez, 1990: 123).

Private supplementary tutoring is strongly connected with teachers. They possess training in education and knowledge of the curricula of the subjects they teach. Teachers will generally provide private tutoring in a part-time basis, as their main organisational activity is their work at school. This tutoring will commonly take place informally, with no written contracts and frequently the payments received are not declared for tax purposes. Private tutoring can take place in one-to-one sessions, or in small groups at the student’s or at the tutor’s house or at private tutoring centres. Tutors with large groups (more than 10 students, for example) are not in Europe. Most private supplementary tutoring takes place informally, in arrangements between teachers and students, but the number of private

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tutoring businesses is increasing. In part due to this informal aspect of private supplementary tutoring there is lack of research on the subject. We will discuss the current tendencies of private tutoring in Europe, with the available literature on the issue. This theme is given some attention in the media. We will, therefore, also analyse some newspaper/magazine articles that discuss private supplementary tutoring. The increasing awareness and discussion on this subject is mainly related to national school rankings, institutional evaluations and equity issues. In this paper, having in mind the diversity, the complexity and the hidden character of private supplementary tutoring, we will try to present the main topics and trends of this increasing social, pedagogical and economical phenomenon in Europe.

2. Extent of the phenomenon

Data on the scale and nature of private tutoring is sparse and lacks longitudinal perspective in most regions of the world. Due to the fact that private supplementary tutoring still uses a shadow education approach in many settings, it is difficult to monitor accurately this subject. Even so, organisations and researchers have done considerable work trying to uncover the extent of the phenomenon. According to a research carried out by MORI\(^1\) (2005: 7) in the United Kingdom, about one student in six, 18% of the sample had attended private supplementary tutoring sometime during their school life. Ireson & Rushford (2005: 4) administered questionnaires to English pupils in 2003. Students of years 11 and 13 were asked if they had ever had a private tutor anytime during their school life. Of the 3515 pupils who answered the question, 27% had received tutoring.

Susinos Rada & Zubieta Irún (1994) carried out a study on private tutoring in the 1990/91 school year with pupils attending “Bachillerato” (the last stage of secondary education in Spain, not mandatory, with the duration of 2 school years, normally between the ages of 16 and 18)\(^2\) (through a questionnaire and interviews) in a school in Cantabria, Spain, parents, teachers and tutors (through interviews). The results obtained with the questionnaire distributed among the pupils indicated that 54.9% of the pupils attended at least one extracurricular activity after school - Maths, Foreign Language and Physics and Chemistry were the most popular subjects for tutoring (Susinos Rada & Zubieta Irún, 1994: 180).

According to Ventura et al. (2008: 139) private supplementary tutoring is a widespread phenomenon in Portugal. Based on longitudinal surveys at a local level and national data from the Portuguese Ministry of Education, these authors state that many pupils attending the 12th year of schooling (the last of secondary education) receive private supplementary tutoring. In the longitudinal study undertaken between 2004 and 2007 in a medium-sized Portuguese town an average of 56.6% of 12th year pupils attended private supplementary tutoring sessions. National data from a very

\(^1\) Research agency on public opinion and markets (www.mori.com).

\(^2\) http://www.mepsyd.es/educa/jsp/plantilla.jsp?id=981&area=sistema-educativo
important sample (due to the number of pupils that answered the questionnaire) of the 2004-2005 school year reveals that 43.1% of 30,359 pupils applying for higher education attended private supplementary tutoring during that year. Mathematics is the core subject for private supplementary tutoring either at the local study level (76% of students attending private tutoring sessions) or at the national one (72% of 13,000 students). Both pieces of research show that Maths is a kind of lingua franca intertwined with other subjects. As a matter of fact, at the ranking of subjects for private tuition, Chemistry, Physics and Descriptive Geometry use Maths as common and indispensable language (Ventura, Costa, Neto-Mendes & Azevedo, 2008: 140).

In France, a 2004 survey was undertaken with 534 parents of schoolchildren, aged from 10 to 16 years, who were interviewed face to face in their homes, at the request of the publishing company Éditions Atlas (TNS Sofres / Editions Atlas, 2004). According to this survey, 43% of the parents had already made use of private tutoring sessions for their children. Of this percentage, 28% had invested in one-to-one tutoring at home, 14% in group sessions and 1% in tutoring through the Internet (TNS Sofres / Editions Atlas, 2004).

In 2005, at the request of Academia, a private tutoring company, a survey was conducted by telephone with 739 parents with children attending school (Academia / IFOP, 2005). The results of this survey showed that 13% of the parents had already invested in private tutoring sessions for their children. This proportion varied according to the school level the children were attending: 5% invested in tutoring for children in primary school, 14% for children in middle school and 22% for students in high school. In what concerned the reasons for tutoring: 52% of the parents gave as main reason the bad results obtained by their children or decreasing school results, and 19% of the parents answered that their main motive was the search of excellence for their children – the goal being to help them and encourage them to advance in their work.

41% of the private tutoring sessions were provided by teachers, and of this percentage 13% were provided by teachers to their own students. 21% of the parents had decided to use specialized businesses like Academia (Academia / IFOP, 2005). This leading corporation in private supplementary tutoring in France has been created by Thierry Romero in 1989. The strategy of this company is not traditional. Academia tutees do not attend a tutoring centre – Academia gives parents a list of tutors available, parents choose the one they prefer, and then the Academia tutor goes to his/her tutee’s home, at the times and days agreed between them. According to Leboucher (2005) since its foundation, Academia has recruited about 30,000 teachers to help students of 70,000 families. Nowadays, this corporation is responsible for 2 million tutoring sessions each year in France.

A recent joint report in France from the General Inspectorate of National Education and the General Inspectorate of Education Administration and Research (Bassy et al., 2006) estimates that French families spend around 2 billion euros each year in private supplementary tutoring and that this market is growing 10% every year.
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3. Types of private supplementary tutoring in Europe

One of the first barriers that research has to overcome is the diversity in what concerns the designations of private supplementary tutoring services in different countries. These services are found under different names. For example, in Germany they are usually called “nachhilfe”, in France “soutien scolaire” or “aide scolaire”, in Ireland “grind schools”, in Portugal “explicações”, in Turkey “dershane”, in Spain “clases particulares”, in Italy “preparazione universitaria” or “scuola privata”, in the United Kingdom “private tutoring” or “after-school support”, and in Greece “frontistiria”. Diversity is also the rule in what concerns the type of providers and the scope of the services offered to private supplementary tutoring customers in Europe. We will consider, however, the prevalent types available in the European market. The size and the market coverage of the offer of private tutoring allows us to consider a first categorisation: individual; local; regional; multiregional; national; international. We can find private tutoring services of all these different scopes in the European scenario.

The traditional domestic approach of one-to-one tutoring or of a tutor and his/her tutees around a table at home is less predominant nowadays. But it still exists in all countries. It is in most cases a clandestine moonlighting market with characteristics that are very difficult to get to know in depth. Providers and customers tend to prefer discretion. For instance, in France there are estimates of 80% of non declared revenues in the market of private supplementary tutoring (Domicours & 2Amath, 2008: 5). In Spain, an article of EIDia.es (2005) states that according to the Regional Association for Professionalized Training in the Canary Islands (Asociación Regional Canaria de Formación Profesionalizada - ARCAP) private tutoring that is undertaken as a secondary activity, not subjected to taxes, and not even declared to the Social Security services, is a submerged economical activity and is being dealt with in a permissive way. This Association claims that this kind of private tutoring generates 28.5 million euros each year in the Canary Islands, and because these revenues are not declared an amount of 4 million euros is withheld from the public treasury (EIDia.es, 2005). The president of this Association presented a denunciation to the Work Inspection Office asking it to investigate the activities of the individuals responsible for almost a hundred advertisements for private tutoring and he believes that in the Canary Islands around 1,500 teachers of the public school system of different levels provide this type of services (EIDia.es, 2005). This Association argues that this form of tutoring poses unfair competition to legal private tutoring businesses, and condemns especially the teachers who are employees of the public school system and provide this form of private tutoring at the same time (EIDia.es, 2005).

Private investors and corporations are perceiving education as a good and promising business. The fastest way to develop a network of providers at a national or international level is franchising. Around five years ago franchising in private supplementary tutoring began growing at a very fast pace in Europe. Franchising allows brands to penetrate faster the national markets. One of the examples in Europe
is *Academia*, the French brand which is now in France, Spain, Portugal and Germany. Merigó (2006) in a newspaper article mentions the development of this new sector in Spain: businesses that offer tutoring in the homes of their clients and that professionalize a traditional activity. The reporter adds that these businesses manage a portfolio of tutors that they assign to families, tutors that adapt themselves to the demanded schedules and locations. Furthermore, educational advisors keep in touch with families and are in charge of choosing and managing tutors, and also of changing them if parents are not satisfied with them (Merigó, 2006). Another article (franquicias.hoy.es, 2008) states that *Academia* began the new school year in Spain with a 25% growth in relation to the previous year. The company, which is currently present in 16 Spanish provinces, with 45 franchises (and of these, 4 new agencies were opened since January 2008), has currently more than 10,000 active students and 4,000 tutors, closed the year with a turnover of almost 7 million euros (franquicias.hoy.es, 2008). Still according to this article, the greatest argument of this company is its adjustment to the needs, profiles and interests of the pupils — in this way, tutors go to their pupils’ homes in the days and at the time that the pupils decide (franquicias.hoy.es, 2008).

In Portugal tutoring centres at a local or regional level, and national and international networks are flourishing. One of the reasons for the increase of the number of tutoring centres opening in Portugal is the existence of a large number of unemployed teachers, who (due to low availability) will not be able to secure a school placement in the near future and are therefore available as qualified workers to assume a new social occupation commonly known as “tutor” (Costa, Ventura, Neto-Mendes, & Azevedo, 2008: 55).

Large lecture theatres with overflow rooms are one of the growing forms of private supplementary tutoring delivery in Asia (South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong). In Europe, as far as we know, there are no examples of this kind of provision. Nor of the tutor goods, a trend typical in Hong Kong (Bray, 2003: 49; Ventura, 2008: 73-74).

A way of delivery that has becoming popular in this increasingly globalized world is the provision of tutoring services through the use of the internet with the support of a panoply of devices such as webcams, microphones, scanners, and WhiteBoard software, which allow for tutor and student to work on problems, simulations and assessments synchronously. There are national approaches at this level. In France, Classeur, a Marseille-based company, is a good example. Students and their families choose the online tutor in this portal, through the analysis of his/her curriculum vitae, and the tutoring sessions, which take place through the internet and using webcams, are recorded in video. This way, parents can monitor their children’s performance at any time (Prof Express, 2008a). The company is, using the new brand Prof Express, already entering the Spanish market (Prof Express, 2008b).

But the most interesting approach is the one of corporations using outsourcing to recruit teachers and offer their products and services in several countries. That is the case of companies such as Bangalore-based TutorVista that uses tutors in India to
tutor Western students (United States, Canada and United Kingdom) and Asian students (Singapore and Malaysia) over the internet (Economist.com, 2007).

4. Driving forces of private supplementary tutoring on the rise in Europe

With globalisation it is increasingly difficult to find differences between regions of the world in all subjects. The specificities of each culture are losing ground. Nevertheless, tradition, public policies, corporate strategies and market demand still have a word to say in the shape of private tuition in different countries. In Europe, as elsewhere, parents are spending important amounts of money in addition to the costs of their children’s public or private schooling that they also pay with their taxes. So, one of the driving forces for this growing phenomenon is the critical importance that European parents attach to education and to their children’s academic success.

Public policies in some countries have an important role as well in the development of private tutoring. In France, the Borloo plan of 2005 is a good example of a policy with great impact on the market of services to people, namely at a private tutoring level. The extraordinary growth of the home delivery of private tutoring is a result of this policy measure. Jacques Delors, President of the French Conseil de l’Emploi, des Revenus et de la Cohésion Sociale stated recently that the main goals of this policy measure introduced by the Minister Jean-Louis Borloo were to reduce the non-declared share of this business and to decrease unemployment through structuring the offer and the development of companies in a field where workers were usually directly employed by private individuals (CERC. Rapport n° 8, 2008: 3).

Sociological and demographic changes also have an impact at this level. All over Europe there is an increase in the number of women working outside of their homes. In most cases, within the family unit, women are responsible for the education of children. But today, working outside the home, they have almost no time to accomplish this task. Furthermore, one-parent families are also on the rise. Both trends create in parents a growing need to get help in order to deal with their children’s education. Ireson & Rushforth (2005: 7) surveyed in England 240 parents who indicated that they employed a tutor and specified that the main reasons for arranging extra tuition for their child was, for 71% ‘to improve understanding of the subject’. This was closely followed by ‘to increase self confidence’ (68%) and ‘to help achieve the highest examination grades’ (59%). We can say that the reasons driving parents to spend money in this extra help for their offspring are complex and vary according to social contexts and rules in education. As Ireson & Rushforth (2005: 11) mention, “psychological, cultural, educational and economic factors influence the employment of tutors”. In some countries, there is also a new “ingredient”. Some students put pressure on their parents to receive private supplementary tutoring.

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2 Employment, Income and Social Cohesion Council.
because they are “fashion victims”. They want to attend private tuition because it is fashionable and shows their peers that they belong to a wealthy family.

Another driving force behind the expansion of the use of private supplementary tutoring is the customers’ level of satisfaction and the perceived positive impact of those sessions. Usually, markets are results-oriented. In this field of private supplementary tutoring the sustainability depends on pupils and families’ perception that it is a good investment and that it has an impact on academic results.

Some research concludes that private tuition does not have a helpful impact in learning and in academic success (Powers & Rock, 1998). But sometimes social representations carry more weight when compared with research. As a matter of fact, according to our research, pupils show a sustained positive perception of the effect/impact of tutoring. Susinos Rada & Zubieta Irun (1994: 182) refer that 89.7% of the pupils they surveyed consider that they are “pleased” or “very pleased” with the private supplementary tutoring that they receive. In addition to that, 83.2% of those pupils answered that private tutoring sessions help them “enough” or “a lot”. When asked “If you compare your tutor with the teacher that teaches you the subject at school, which of the two seems better (or do you like best)?”, 61.2% of the pupils answered that they thought best or liked best the tutor, and 29.7% considered that there were no substantial differences between the two (Susinos Rada & Zubieta Irun, 1994: 182).

Data from our research in Portugal also sustains this view. Indeed, at a local level, an average of more than 80% of students who attend private tutoring sessions consider that these have a positive impact in their learning and academic success (Ventura, Costa, Neto-Mendes & Azevedo, 2008: 139).

National examination systems integrated in a framework of accountability on the rise also play a role on the development of private supplementary tutoring. Under pressure by those examinations, students and parents try to get extra help from private tutors to achieve better results. In a report undertaken by a team of researchers at the University of Cambridge (Primary Review, 2007: 1), which presents findings from meetings with different individuals involved in the day-to-day work of primary schools (teachers, children, head teachers, among others) that took place in different regions of England between January and March 2007, a connection between the SATs’, pressure and private tutoring was mentioned. The children questioned (197 children in total) stated that “SATS were ‘scary’, made them nervous and anxious, and put them under pressure”. They further added, in connection to these tests, that “it’s important to do well for secondary school”; “tests get us into private schools” (sounding 2, in an

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4 SATS (Standard Attainment Tests) are national tests that assess pupils “at the ages of 7, 11, and 14, at the end of Key Stages 1, 2 and 3. These tests are designed to help teachers assess pupils’ strengths and weaknesses and to determine pupils’ understanding of a subject”. (http://www.standards.dfes.gov.uk/onlinelhelp?view=A-Z&version=1&lr=s).
affluent area where many parents preferred private secondary schooling for their children) and ‘high grades give you confidence’” (Primary Review, 2007: 15). The teachers met by the researchers mentioned that SATs, among others, “put children and teachers under intolerable pressure”; “turn the final year of primary schooling into to the wrong kind of educational culmination – a year of cramming and testing”; and “disadvantage those children whose parents cannot afford to pay for private SAT coaching” (Primary Review, 2007: 19-20).

Numerus clausus schemes, which exist, for example, in Portugal and Austria, and the rising marks needed to enter the best universities also characterize the situation in several European countries. As a result, even good students need to be excellent if they want to succeed in the higher education entrance examinations.

Finally, on the side of supply there are amazing changes in size, scope and techniques. Approaches are more corporate, market-oriented and sophisticated than ever. The wisdom to attract clients is shared in a globalized market that is getting more transparent every day. Mainly through the use of the internet, as a platform to captivate customers, to advertise products or services, and increasingly also to provide private supplementary tutoring in different ways, customized according to the needs of demand.

A move that shows a development and lobby strategy from the side of supply is the creation and development of representative organizations of the private tutoring sector. Indeed, there are clear steps towards a national and international coalition of private supplementary tutoring suppliers. At a national level, OEF, the Hellenic Federation of Foministria Teachers is a good example in Greece. This organization created in 1981 has 3.000 members who are private tutoring centre owners and 37.000 tutors throughout the country. At an international level, the European Confederation of Educational Institutes of School Support (ECEISS), established March 22nd 2008 in Athens during a meeting that included private tutoring industry representatives from Germany, Greece, Cyprus and Turkey, is a good example of that trend. According to the Founding Declaration of this new confederation, its main objectives are the following: i) the promotion and protection of private educational units operating complementary and in parallel with the formal national educational systems, to the benefit of quality, accessibility, effectiveness and efficiency of European education; ii) the opening and expansion of fair competition in complementary and supporting educational fields and the extinction of unfair state interference; iii) fair, equal and effective management of European educational resources (ECEISS, 2008).

5. How do governments deal with this phenomenon?

Sooner or later, governments need to face the many challenges that private tutoring poses to mainstream education systems. All over the world there are differences between governments in the way they deal with private supplementary tutoring. Some governments treat this private sector with benign neglect, intentionally or not. Others promote it as a useful complement to the public sector when the state does not want to
or cannot afford to pay all the education costs. Finally, some attempt to put it out of existence through legislation, mainly due to the consideration of equity and corruption issues.

In all countries the costs of tutoring are not only financial. In what concerns provision and impact there are significant social issues interconnected. The million dollar question is whether governments should ignore, monitor what is happening, interfere on the market or create more or less explicit partnerships with providers. Assuming that they interfere, should policy makers use different policies for different levels of education (kindergarten, primary, lower secondary, upper secondary and university)? Should Ministries of Education craft a framework of policies which could deal with private supplementary tutoring at central, regional, local and school levels?

In most European countries governments and Ministries of Education tend to ignore the undergoing trend of private supplementary tutoring. It is tricky business to control such a widespread and intertwined phenomenon. So, the rule is to avoid the situation, letting the free market to function freely according to its pace and characteristics. Attempts in other parts of the globe to control this issue have not been exactly successful. The European Union has not debated and does not provide governments with a coherent policy to deal with this subject.

In 2007 the French government has announced government policies to develop supplementary tutoring at the network of public schools with the aim of reducing social inequalities, so that this help will be accessible to everyone, and not only to students of wealthy families that can afford to pay private tuition fees (Portail du Gouvernement de la République Française, 2008b). For now, this offer is mandatory in some of the schools and voluntary in others, but the French government has already announced that all schools will offer this kind of support, which includes homework help, cultural activities and sport between 16.00h and 18.00h, four days a week, during the 2009-2010 school year and it has allocated 140 million euros to implement this policy (Portail du Gouvernement de la République Française, 2008a).

The Portuguese government has implemented several measures to offer in state primary schools some free curriculum enrichment activities such as English, Music and Physical education that were previously paid by families in private institutions. Besides, the government is also slowly engaging itself in the monitoring of the private supplementary tutoring phenomenon through questionnaires applied to secondary school pupils by a central service from the Ministry of Education.

Perhaps the most spectacular policy of one European government on the field of private supplementary tutoring is the initiative inspired by the PERACH project in Israel that has its origin with the Austrian Chancellor, Alfred Gusenbauer. This politician “offers to university students the refunding of their university tuition fees if they participate in a national programme of tutoring for children from underprivileged families” (Gruber, 2007: 1).
6. Conclusion

After this brief overview on the private supplementary tutoring scenario in Europe, we can conclude that the European situation is not very different from other regions of the world. Globalization, ICT and international corporate strategies are reducing specificities. Yet, there are still differences between each country ensuing mainly from tradition, market configuration, political choices and social conditions in a broad sense. There is still a long way to go, but we can say that private supplementary tutoring is becoming less and less a shadow phenomenon. Researchers, policymakers, media and the general public are increasingly aware of the shape and impact of this education provision. The big challenge, as elsewhere, is to avoid that the added-value of this offer impacts on educational and social equity. Politicians and education researchers are responsible for finding ways to deal with the dangers of unbalanced distribution of this incentive to education and achievement.

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