

PRESENTATION OF PRIVATISATION TRENDS AND NEW EDUCATIONAL BUSINESS IN PANDEMIC TIMES

I, TERESA ARTEAGA AND MY COLLEAGUE VALERIA CARRIZO THANK YOU FOR THIS VALUABLE OPPORTUNITY TO WORK ON ONE OF THE FOUR REPORTS THAT CLADE PROMOTED, RELATED TO THE PRIVATISATION OF EDUCATION AND WHICH IS PART OF THE GLOBAL WEEK OF ACTION WITH THE BILLION VOICES CAMPAIGN.

TO GET INTO THE ISSUE, I WILL BEGIN BY NOTING THAT WILLIAMSON AND HOGAN ARGUE THAT FROM THE FIRST MONTHS OF THE PANDEMIC, THERE WAS EVIDENCE IN THE RESPONSES OF EDUCATION SYSTEMS OF THE PRESENCE OF COMMERCIAL PROVIDERS OF EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGIES AND THE ORGANISATIONS THAT SUPPORT THEM, WHO HAVE FORMED POWERFUL NETWORKS AND COALITIONS TO PROMOTE THEIR PRODUCTS AND ENCOURAGE SCHOOLS, TEACHERS, PARENTS AND PARENTS TO USE THEM. THESE COALITIONS ILLUSTRATE THE EMERGENCE OF NEW TYPES OF MULTI-SECTORAL PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS AND POLICY NETWORKS RELATED TO THE EXPANSION OF EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGIES, AS WELL AS THE INCREASING IMPORTANCE OF THE PRIVATE SECTOR IN THE REGULATION AND DELIVERY OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES.

NAOMI KLEIN ARGUES THAT THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC HAS DEALT A SEVERE BLOW ON A GLOBAL SCALE AND HAS GENERATED A WORST-CASE SCENARIO, CONSOLIDATING SEVERAL CRISES INTO ONE. WHILE THE GLOBAL TRAGEDY TRIGGERED BY THE PANDEMIC IS IN THE SPOTLIGHT, BEHIND IT ARE THOSE WHO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF CRISES TO DO BUSINESS AND MULTIPLY THEIR PROFITS. FOR KLEIN, "DISASTER CAPITALISM" IS THE WAY IN WHICH PRIVATE INDUSTRIES EMERGE TO PROFIT DIRECTLY FROM CRISES. THE "SHOCK DOCTRINE" IS THE POLITICAL STRATEGY OF USING THESE CRISES TO PUSH THROUGH POLICIES THAT SYSTEMATICALLY DEEPEN INEQUALITY, ENRICH ELITES AND WEAKEN EVERYONE ELSE. DURING THE "SHOCK" OF DEALING WITH THE CRISIS, THE PRIVATE SECTOR OFTEN STEPS FORWARD WITH CALCULATED, FREE MARKET "SOLUTIONS" TO SOLVE SEEMINGLY INTRACTABLE PUBLIC "PROBLEMS".

LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN COUNTRIES CONSTITUTE AN ATTRACTIVE MARKET FOR LOCAL, NATIONAL AND TRANSNATIONAL EDUCATION COMPANIES. THEREFORE, PRESSURES TO LIBERALISE THE ECONOMY IN THIS AREA ARE EXERTED AT THE INTERNATIONAL LEVEL, WITH THE AIM OF FREEING UP INTERNATIONAL TRADE IN EDUCATIONAL SERVICES. IT CANNOT BE DENIED, THEN, THAT

PRIVATISATION TRENDS PRIOR TO THE PANDEMIC ARE DIVERSE, RANGING FROM STRUCTURAL PROCESSES AFFECTING THE ROLE OF THE STATE TO INCIPIENT BUT INSISTENT PRIVATISATION INITIATIVES.

THE PANDEMIC HAS BROUGHT WITH IT CONFINEMENT AND QUARANTINE, FORCING A SHIFT TOWARDS "*E-LEARNING*" AND "*EMERGENCY DISTANCE LEARNING*", WHICH HAS MADE TECHNOLOGY A CENTRAL COMPONENT OF EDUCATION, GIVING THE PRIVATE SECTOR AND COMMERCIAL ORGANISATIONS A CENTRAL ROLE.

WE HAVE REVIEWED THE WEBSITES OF **23** MINISTRIES OF EDUCATION IN THE REGION, DETECTING THE SPACES EXCLUSIVELY DEDICATED TO EDUCATION IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PANDEMIC IN ORDER TO KNOW THE STRATEGIES THEY IMPLEMENTED, BUT MAINLY TO EXPLAIN THE ALLIANCES ESTABLISHED WITH COMPANIES, FOUNDATIONS, NGOs AND OTHER PRIVATE ACTORS.

21% OF THE COUNTRIES REVIEWED DEVELOPED LEARNING PLATFORMS, THAT IS, THEY CREATED INTERACTIVE ONLINE SERVICES THAT PROVIDE TEACHERS, STUDENTS AND PARENTS WITH INFORMATION, TOOLS, RESOURCES AND A VIRTUAL SPACE FOR TEACHING. ALL THE OTHERS HAVE AT LEAST CREATED SPACES WITH DIGITAL RESOURCES SUCH AS DOCUMENTS, GAMES, BOOKS AVAILABLE ONLINE TO COMPLEMENT THE EDUCATIONAL TASK; THESE RESOURCES ARE OFTEN ORGANISED BY GRADE AND SUBJECT, BUT THERE IS NO SPACE FOR MEETING WITH THE TEACHER.

56% EXPLICITLY INCLUDE SPACES PROMOTED BY ALPHABET INC, MAINLY GOOGLE, GOOGLE CLASSROOM AND MICROSOFT. **91%** OF THE WEB PAGES CONTAIN SPACES THAT DIRECTLY LINK TO TELEVISION CHANNELS AND RADIO STATIONS, BOTH PRIVATE AND STATE-OWNED. **17%** OF THE PAGES EXPLICITLY FEATURE COMPANIES, FOUNDATIONS OR NGOs.

80% OF THE CONTENT ON THE PLATFORMS IS OF PUBLIC ORIGIN, MEANING THAT IT IS CONTENT GENERATED BY THE MINISTRIES OF EDUCATION THEMSELVES, **15%** OF THE CONTENT IS PUBLIC AND PRIVATE AND ONLY **5%** IS EXCLUSIVELY PRIVATE, WHERE EVEN ACCESS TO CERTAIN DOCUMENTS AND PROGRAMMES IS SUBJECT TO A FEE. **36%** OF DIGITAL RESOURCES ARE PDFS, **34%** VIDEOS AND **10%** GAMES, THE REMAINING **20%** ARE VIRTUAL AND FREE LIBRARIES, HTML DOCUMENTS, BOOKS, WEBINARS, EPUBS, ONLINE CHANNELS AND AUDIOS.

OF THE **23** COUNTRIES ANALYSED, **13** PROVIDE SOME APPLICATIONS, SERVICES, PLATFORMS AND PACKAGES. **55%** DO SO VIA YOUTUBE, **22%** VIA MICROSOFT OFFICE 365, **11%** VIA TEAMS, **6%** VIA GOOGLE CLASSROOM AND ANOTHER **6%** VIA ANDROID APPS.

THE MOVE TO VIRTUALITY CLEARLY FAVOURED THE POSITIONING OF COMPANIES SELLING DISTANCE EDUCATION SERVICES THAT WERE ALREADY OPERATING OR THAT QUICKLY ADAPTED TO THIS SITUATION. IT ALSO FAVOURED OTHER COMPANIES THAT ARE NOT SPECIFICALLY EDUCATIONAL, BUT WHICH OFFER TOOLS AND TECHNOLOGIES THAT HAVE BECOME VERY NECESSARY IN THE EDUCATIONAL FIELD.

DUE TO THE PANDEMIC, SPECIFIC TELEVISION PROGRAMMES, TRAINING PROGRAMMES FOR TEACHERS AND PROGRAMMES FOR CHILDREN AND ADOLESCENTS HAD TO BE DEVELOPED IN A VERY SHORT TIME. SOCIETY DEMANDS ANSWERS FROM THE STATE, DEMANDS THE RESOLUTION OF PROBLEMS AND FOUND THE STATE UNPREPARED IN TERMS OF STAFF TRAINING, INFRASTRUCTURE AND RESOURCES. THIS PHENOMENON IS PART OF A PROCESS OF WEAKENING OF THE PUBLIC SECTOR DUE TO THE DEFUNDING OF EDUCATION.

STATES STOPPED INVESTING IN RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGICAL PRODUCTION, SO THAT INVESTMENT, RESEARCH AND TECHNOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT ARE IN THE HANDS OF PRIVATE BODIES. AS THEY WERE NOT PREPARED FOR THIS TRANSITION TO VIRTUALITY, THEY FORMED ALLIANCES WITH LARGE COMPANIES.

FOR MAGNANI, TECHNO COMPANIES ARE GROWING AT THE PACE OF THE ACTIVITIES THAT TAKE PLACE ON THEIR PLATFORMS, SCREEN TIME HAS MULTIPLIED, EVEN IN SOME AREAS WHERE THERE WAS RESISTANCE, SUCH AS EDUCATION. TO GROW, THESE CORPORATIONS ARE ACQUIRING MEDIA OUTLETS, TRANSPORTATION COMPANIES, FILM DISTRIBUTORS, TOURISM SERVICES AND EDUCATION SYSTEMS.

LARGE MULTINATIONAL TECHNOLOGY CORPORATIONS HAVE SEEN DEMAND FOR THEIR PRODUCTS AND SERVICES SKYROCKET BECAUSE OF THEIR ABILITY TO DELIVER SOLUTIONS INTERNATIONALLY, QUICKLY AND AT NO COST - NOW INCLUDING EDUCATION SYSTEMS. THESE COMPANIES, BACKED BY POLITICALLY INFLUENTIAL MULTILATERAL ORGANISATIONS AND NATIONAL GOVERNMENT BODIES, HAVE INTEGRATED STUDENTS, TEACHERS AND SCHOOLS INTO THEIR ONLINE EDUCATION PLATFORMS AND CLOUD SYSTEMS, INCREASING THE LIKELIHOOD OF LONG-TERM DEPENDENCE OF

PUBLIC EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS ON PRIVATE TECHNOLOGY INFRASTRUCTURE. THUS, IN ADDITION TO MAKING MILLIONS, THEY ARE ALSO ATTRACTING MILLIONS OF USERS AND POTENTIAL CUSTOMERS. BREAKING DOWN LONG-STANDING RESISTANCE TO THE PRIVATE SECTOR.

IN THIS CONTEXT, CIVIL SOCIETY CAN GENERATE VARIOUS ALERTS:

ALERT 1. VIRTUALITY AS A NEW REALITY: DIGITAL SOVEREIGNTY, THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN EDUCATIONAL PROCESSES AND THE DEMAND FOR CONNECTIVITY FOR ALL.

ALERT 2. DENATURALISING THE POSITIVE ATTRIBUTES OF PRIVATISATION AND ITS STRATEGIES.

ALERT 3. MAKE THE EDUCATIONAL COMMUNITY AWARE OF AND PROBLEMATISE THE IMPLICATIONS OF PRIVATISATION OF EDUCATION.

ALERT 4. ACTIVE AND VIGILANT SOCIETY IN THE FACE OF PRIVATISATION AGREEMENTS.

DESPITE THE NEGATIVE OUTLOOK IMPLIED BY THE PANDEMIC, THIS CRISIS HAS ALSO POSITIVELY STIMULATED MAJOR AND IMPORTANT REFLECTIONS AND DEBATES ON THE URGENCY OF CHANGING THE WAY IN WHICH "EDUCATION IS DONE", QUESTIONING PRESENCE AND NON-PRESENCE IS A TASK THAT MUST BE PROMOTED BY STATES, EDUCATORS, ACADEMICS, CHILDREN, ADOLESCENTS AND YOUNG PEOPLE. IT ALSO INVITES US TO RECOGNISE THAT THERE IS A DELAY IN PUBLIC POLICIES REGARDING NEW TECHNOLOGIES, THE STATE MUST BE CAPABLE OF CREATING OPEN SOURCE PLATFORMS, GENERATING VIRTUAL SPACES FOR TEACHER TRAINING, GENERATING EDUCATIONAL MATERIALS AND TRAINING PROPOSALS, AMONG OTHER ALTERNATIVES. THIS GLOBAL SITUATION CAN NO LONGER BE SUSTAINED. IT IS CLEAR THAT IT SHOULD NOT ONLY BE A QUESTION OF GENERATING TEACHING PLATFORMS, BUT ALSO OF PROMOTING A TRUE EDUCATIONAL REVOLUTION.