

Summary

This book offers an analysis of a seminal market in the Dutch educational system, the market of Student Information Systems (SIS, Dutch abbreviation LIS).

Part one sets the theoretical framework for the analysis.

In *chapter one* a model for market analysis is proposed. Taking its cue from the concept of optimal markets, the model elaborates on the perspective of consumers, pursuing it to its ultimate consequences. Firms need not and may not make profits and have to satisfy consumers expectancy to the full. The model is proposed in order to enable a critical analysis of markets. The strictly normative purpose of the model sets it apart from classical and current theories of markets and firms, that typically combine descriptive and normative goals. In spite of the difference in perspective and goal, the main ingredients of orthodox market theory can be incorporated within the normative model. In particular, various models for competition can profitably be used in the normative analysis undertaken in this study.

Chapter two outlines the market that is under consideration. The market is described from various angles. Though the market cannot be defined sharply, there are enough common denominators to distinguish this market from other markets and to identify its primary and secondary actors.

Part two offers a critical analysis of the market.

In *chapter three* a number of features are described that are characteristic for this market. These features cast more than a shadow of a doubt concerning the viability of the market, and its prospects. Notably, the main actors in the market, consumers and producers, appear to play a subordinate role. There is reason to believe that this uneasy balance of powers is reflected in both the prices of products in the market and the quality of products and services. Consumers appear to be unclear in what they expect from products and services. Producers, on the other hand, do not seem to use efficient methods and tools. In spite of this uneasy balance of powers, the market does not seem to be inviting to new competitors in the fields. Though, in chapter three, no obstacles to the market have been encountered, it appears as if there must be some obstacles somewhere.

Chapter four sets out to resolve this paradox. It describes a project initiated by the Dutch government to introduce a personal identification number in the Dutch educational system. In chapter four the project is followed from its beginnings in the mid-nineties to the present, more specifically to the point at which the last stage of the project is about to take off. The analysis follows

events in a roughly chronological order, detailing the challenges proposed to the parties involved and the way the challenges have been met. The results of the analysis are sobering. Even if the last stage of the project would not be haunted by certain endemic flaws, the project as a whole will have to be judged to be a failure in regard to its main purposes.

Chapter five describes the consequences of the project on the market. It is shown that simultaneous with and largely due to this project, obstacles have been created in the market. These obstacles are detrimental for producers that have a small market share as well as for newcomers. In effect, some parts of the markets are effectively sealed off by a combination of Vendor Lock-In and the much over-stated role of the functionality that pertains to the governmental project. Thus, the paradox that arose in chapter three is resolved.

Chapter six looks back on the original purpose of SIS. Though SIS-products cannot be said to be of an inferior quality, the progress made is largely technical and superficial in nature. The main challenges in the development of SIS-products, to wit to realize a stable and fully functional interface between administrative data and operational processes pertaining to the educational processes, have not been met. However, there is no reason to conclude or suspect that this is the result of ill-will. All parties involved have tried to succeed. Still, there isn't any reason either to conclude that the challenges were too formidable to be met. Thus, the analysis leads to the conclusion that the main factor in the failure was that the resources available have been largely wasted on functionality that was relatively easy to realize.

Therewith the critical analysis of the market ends. But this cannot be the end of the normative analysis. In **part three**, consisting of *chapter seven*, some facts and themes are taken up again, this time in the context of national and European regulation for competitive markets. Two trusts that can be found in the market, are analyzed in detail. Above and besides the presence of these trusts, the Dutch government cannot be said to have promoted a level playing field. It is argued that in its effective endorsement and sponsorship of developments that created obstacles to competition, the Dutch government has not behaved in accordance with the rules agreed upon in the European Community.

Throughout this study some more general themes are touched upon. The most important, though the less conspicuous of these themes is the alleged role of the individual, both as an economic agent and as a source of creative and productive energy. In a playful **epilogue** this theme is allowed to come to the fore.