KNOWLEDGE ACTORS AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF NEW GOVERNING PANORAMAS: THE CASE OF THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S DG EDUCATION AND CULTURE*

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ABSTRACT: This paper focuses on the case of education governance in Europe. This field has been dominated by major transnational interest and organizations, among which the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the European Commission (EC) are two of the most significant. The paper aims to explore and explain what the constitutive effects of measurement and standard setting practices are in the increasing policy convergence, between the EC's Directorate General Education and Culture (DG EAC) and the OECD; the latter - through PISA and other international test - has become an influential actor in education policy globally. The paper aims to identify the effects of "governing by numbers" in the interrelationships between the two international organizations themselves.

Keywords: international organizations; measurement; Europe; OECD; PISA.

Atores do conhecimento e a construção de novos cenários de governança: o caso da Direção-Geral de Educação e Cultura da Comissão Europeia

RESUMO: Este artigo aborda o tema da governança da educação na Europa. Esse espaço da política tem sido dominado por grandes interesses e organizações transnacionais, entre as quais se destacam a Organização para a Cooperação e Desenvolvimento Econômico (OCDE) e a Comissão Europeia (CE). Este artigo procura explorar e explicar quais são os efeitos constitutivos que as práticas sistemáticas de 'medição' e de estandardização têm na intensificação da convergência entre a Direção-Geral de Educação e Cultura da CE e a OCDE, a qual, por meio do PISA e de outros testes internacionais, tornou-se um ator influente na política educativa em uma escala global. O artigo pretende

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identificar os feitos do 'governo pelos números' nas interdependências criadas entre as duas organizações internacionais.

Palavras-chave: organizações internacionais; medida; Europa; OCDE; PISA.

Acteurs de connaissances et la construction des nouveaux panoramas du gouvernement: le cas de la Direction Générale de l'Éducation et de la Culture de la Comission Européene

RÉSUMÉ: Ce texte se concentre sur le cas de la gouvernance de l'éducation en Europe. Ce domaine a été dominé par les intérêts et les organisations transnationales, parmi lesquelles l'OCDE et la Commission Européenne (CE) sont deux des plus importants. Le texte vise à explorer et expliquer les effets constitutifs de la mesure et des pratiques de standardisation dans l'intensification de la convergence des politiques entre la Direction Générale de l'Éducation et de la Culture (DG EAC) de la CE et l'OCDE; ce dernier - grâce au PISA et à d'autres tests internationaux est devenu un acteur influent dans la politique d'éducation à l'échelle mondiale. L'article vise à identifier les effets de «gouverner par des nombres» dans les relations entre les deux organisations internationales.

Mots-clés: organisations internationales; la mesure; Europe; OCDE; PISA

Introduction

Located in the field of education governance in Europe, this paper focuses on its significant, yet largely disregarded, role in the making of the European Union (EU). Although education has repeatedly — in European Union history but also much earlier — been regarded and mobilized as the cornerstone for building a common European identity and a European *demos*, it has never been an EU "competency". On the contrary, Member States have always retained formal control over education policy: in fact, political sensitivity around the issue has always been such, that education is considered something of a taboo topic in the corridors of the European quarter in Brussels. As Neave (1984, p. 6) suggests, "member states seem to have adopted towards education, the attitude that the French politician, Leon Gambetta, once suggested his compatriots adopt towards the loss of Alsace Lorraine in 1871: Think about it always. But speak of it- never!"

This historical reality has meant that education policy in Europe has primarily been seen as a domestic matter — an image often compounded by a scholarship impressed with the formal rules of subsidiary. Indeed, although education research has increasingly been acknowledging the role and impact of international

policy agendas, the focus is still primarily on what the effects are on the "country". In short, national borders in education still hold strong, irrespective of a sway of social and political developments that may suggest otherwise. How would one expect a European actor, such as European Commission's Directorate General Education and Culture (DG EAC), to navigate through the choppy waters of national sensitivities and traditions, in order to adopt some kind of European policy agenda and a European governing process in the field of education? How has DG EAC managed to adapt to the emergence of the "ever-closer" political union, given the peripheral role of education? Finally, how has DG EAC reacted to the emergence and growing influence of new actors, such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and its data production machinery? These are the main questions that this article aims to address.

This paper, building upon a political sociological approach, argues that education in Europe can and should be seen beyond the usual settled governance levels of "the EU" or "the national". By looking at DG EAC, the paper is not in any way focusing on the formal and official EU policy on education. On the contrary, it is interested in exploring the trans-European mediation, flows, and practices that have contributed to the making of the European education space (LAWN; GREK, 2012). It does that by focusing on two governing phases:

- the early phase, when data, numbers and soft governance developed a new, alternative and - to some at least - more persuasive way to govern European education; and
- the mature phase, where alliance- building with the OECD has been central to this project, since the physical properties of this policy space are not so much formal rules, but the mutual surveillance through performance monitoring and comparison.

Indeed, measurements in all their various forms, the paper contents, create, sustain, and project this space forward. It is over these that we find primary actor interactions and struggle; it is the way in which these conflicts are resolved that determines hierarchy and the political ordering of actors.

To explore these points in detail, the paper builds on theoretical and empirical resources to demonstrate how governing education in Europe can be found and described through the tracing of constructions and "flow of data" and the discussions around them. On the one hand, data stimulate and support constant comparison; on the other, indicators can steer and shape policy from a distance. The paper draws on research developed over the last decade and primarily the projects, namely "Fabricating Quality in European Education" (2006–9); "Knowledge and Policy" (2006–11); and "Transnational Policy Learning" (2010–12). Methodologically, data were collected through qualitative research and more

specifically through the analysis of policy documents and interviews with key DG EAC and OECD policy actors. Both data sources have informed this paper and are used throughout in supporting the argument.

Overall, by stressing the importance of critical studies of quantification — and, in particular, of measurement's constitutive properties — the paper highlights the role of data and numbers as the material and digital props supporting the very building of Europe. In this analysis, Europeans make sense of their worlds through data; they make sense of European education through measuring it. For all these reasons the paper suggests that by studying the governance of education in Europe, we can better understand Europe itself. Within this context, the rise of performance measurement is given meaning through the EU-wide global narrative, of becoming the most competitive knowledge economy in the world. To govern this economy, measurement and comparison are creating a perspective of the world that persistently fabricates, illuminates or defines certain objects while at the same time obscuring and hiding others. From the 1990s onwards, and in particular, first with the rise of lifelong learning, and then with milestones like the Lisbon Strategy in 2000, the Bologna Process and the recurrent OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) study, the trans-European (and global) education flows and exchanges have been of such intensity so as to be considered as important nodes and conduits in the building of the European project. Disregarding such activity because of the "rule" of subsidiary suggests not simply lack of imagination and curiosity; it would be a misrepresentation of an important and ever-growing reality where, despite the EU's competencies or lack thereof, governing is indeed happening.

The paper will begin with an outline of a theoretical frame of the role of numbers in transnational governance. It will move on to discuss the early and mature phases of the governing work of DG EAC in education, in Europe, and will conclude with a discussion of the implications for education governance and democratic politics.

"Governing by numbers" in transnational governance

Scholarship on the role of numbers in governing societies has been abundant and has attracted multiple fields of study, including sociology, history, political science, geography, anthropology, philosophy, Science and Technology Studies (STS), and others. Prominent authors have written lucidly about the role of numbers in the making of modern states and the governing role of measurement regimes in various areas of public policy and social life (ALONSO; STARR, 1987; HACKING, 1990, 2007; PORTER, 1995; POWER, 1997; DESROSIÉRES, 1998; ROSE, 1999; ESPELAND; STEVENS, 2008). Similarly, anthropologies of numbers suggest that "our lives are increasingly governed by – and through – numbers,

indicators, algorithms and audits and the ever-present concerns with the management of risk" (SHORE; WRIGHT, 2015, p. 23) (MERRY, 2011; SAUDER; ESPELAND, 2009; STRATHERN, 2000). Further on, important insights and perspectives on indicators in particular come from STS (BOWKER; STAR, 1999; LAMPLAND; STARR, 2009; LATOUR, 1987; SAETNAN; LOMELL; HAMMEL, 2011), including actor network theory (LATOUR, 2005). Finally, there is a small but growing body of studies relating to specific uses of indicators and quantification in transnational governance contexts (BOGDANDY; DANN; GOLDMANN, 2008; PALAN, 2006; MARTENS, 2007; FOUGNER, 2008; BHUTA, 2012).

Nonetheless, despite the burgeoning number of publications on the global "governing by numbers", our understanding of the relationship of the politics of measurement and the making of transnational governance is less well examined; as Djelic and Sahlin-Andersson (2006) suggest, due to the fluidity and complexity of the intense cross-boundary networks and soft regulation regimes that dominate the transnational space; transnational governance is a particularly productive field of enquiry on the role of numbers in governing. This lack of attention could be due to disciplinary boundaries; for example, scholars of International Relations (IR) and international law have not paid much attention to the field so far, although there is a rise in some interesting literature of the role of numbers in global political economy (PALAN, 2006; MARTENS, 2007; FOUGNER, 2008).

What are the properties of numbers that would suggest such a central role in the production of transnational governance? By contrasting numbers to language, Hansen and Porter (2012) suggests that, although it took scholars a long time to recognize the constitutive nature of discourse, we are now well aware of the role of language in shaping reality. However, they suggest that numbers are characterized by additional qualities that make their influence much more pervasive than words: these elements are order; mobility; stability; combinability; and precision. By using the example of the barcode, they lucidly illustrate "how numerical operations at different levels powerfully contribute to the ordering of the transnational activities of states, businesses and people" (HANSEN; PORTER, 2012, p. 410). They suggest the need to focus not only on the nominal qualities of the numbers themselves but, according to Hacking (2007, p. 295), "the people classified, the experts who classify, study and help them, the institutions within which the experts and their subjects interact, and through which authorities control".

It is precisely on these knowledge actors that this paper focuses upon; following the literature on the capacities of numbers to both be stable yet travel fast and without borders, such analysis aims to cast light on what Latour (1987, p. 245) called "the few obligatory passage points": in their movement, data go through successive reductions of complexity until they reach simplified enough state that can travel back "from the field to the laboratory, from a distant

land to the map-maker's table" (HANSEN; PORTER, 2012, p. 412). Knowledge actors, such as DG EAC or the OECD, constitute such "centers of calculation"; this, however, according to Merry (2011), does not suggest that they are significant only in terms of their knowledge production capacities. By examining specifically the role of indicators in transnational governance, Merry (2011) elucidates their governance effects; consequently, if we consider them as central in the production of knowledge, we can infer that their operation as knowledge gatherers, controllers and distributors must have crucial governing impact. These effects empower knowledge actors and set them in a complex and ever-evolving power game for influence and resources — through an examination of the interplay and interconnectedness of their data apparatuses, it is precisely this power game and its rules that this paper will cast light upon. Indeed, Shore and Wright (2015, p. 433) argue that, "while numbers and 'facts' have both knowledge effects and governance effects, it is also important to consider how these are produced, who designs them, what underlying assumptions about society shape the choice of what to measure, how they deal with missing data, and what interests they serve."

The early phase: toward the creation of a space of comparison

Historically, education policy activity in the EU could be classified in several ways; for example, the Treaty of Rome (1957), the Single Act (1987), and the Maastricht (1992) and Amsterdam (1997) treaties could be seen as its five main stages (1957–87; 1987–93, 1993–99; 1999–2009; 2009–) (BLOMQVIST, 2007; OLLIKAINEN, 1999; SHAW, 1999). Yet this European education policy space has not been determined merely by the geographical boundaries of a common market. As early as the 1960s, it became a shared project and a space of meaning, constructed around common cultural and educational values. Indeed, from the 1960s to the 1970s, the discourse of a common culture and shared histories was slowly being produced as a cluster of facts and myths about the European "imagined community" rising from the ashes of a destructive Second World War. Education policy-making for the "people's Europe" took the forms of cultural cooperation, student mobility, harmonization of qualification systems and vocational training (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2006). It did not constitute a purely discursive construction, adding to the list of European myths. It was concretized and pursued through community programs, such as Comett and Erasmus, involving large numbers of people and ideas that traveled (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2006). Its impact was arguably limited in relation to the ways European education systems constructed their curricula and tools of governance; subsidiary was the rule. However, regardless of its relatively limited effects, the project of a "people's Europe" had a clear ambition: to create a distinct European identity and culture – and to use these resources to enable the governing of a shared cultural and political space.

This brief reminder of the foundational characteristics of this policy space is important; it helps to throw into relief the defining events that would later turn the European education space from a rather idealistic project of cultural cohesion into a much sharper competitive reality. This is because, following these early beginnings, the discourse would change from one of cultural underpinnings to one of measurement.

Indeed, by the turn of the millennium, the goal of a knowledge economy and the problem of governing the market were moving beyond the mobilization, systematization, and collaborations of work in the vocational and higher education arena. Education would now move from out of the shadows of building a common culture and identity to "[the] gradual construction of an open and dynamic European educational area" (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 1997, p. 3). Critically, policy-makers became far more interested in outputs of the education systems, than in inputs. This policy shift focused on European and national system information and progress toward common goals, and it involved a range of new actors in cities, companies and public–private partnerships.

The European Commission's White Paper on education and training, Teaching and learning (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 1995), signaled a major reworking of its goals in the domain of education. The idea of learning (and not education) acquired significance as it led to a powerful drive linking lifelong learning and a knowledge economy, combining citizenship and work. Making the link between knowledge and lifelong learning, was a necessary solution to the problem of invisibility and the lack of formal power over education. In this way, education could be redefined as an individual necessity, rather than as patrimony or as part of community systems.

Comparison across member states was to be the means for achieving European goals. Indeed, the shift to the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) under the Lisbon Process in 2000 signaled the move by the EU into internal and cross-EU (and international) comparison as a form of governance (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2001). This was the first time that the member states acting within the European Council had promoted a clear need for European education systems to converge: the continuation of previous work in the fields of lifelong learning, vocational training, and higher education was encouraged but not demanded. More importantly, the coordination of European education systems at the level of compulsory schooling was a fairly new endeavor. Throughout, Europe's role in education was clearly articulated with the broader goals of Lisbon to establish a competitive economy: indeed, education ministers were appointed with a mission to achieve the Lisbon goals for 2010. This was therefore a new policy stage for the EU, as it involved a new way of working in education and training; numbers would come simultaneously to institutionalize and legitimize this European policy space in the making.

More specifically, these data indicators and benchmarks would define the frontiers of this policy space, imbue it with values and be the source of key actor conflicts. Importantly, the contribution that different data agencies would make in this process, including toward establishing appropriate benchmarks, was taken for granted right from the start. Numerical data require a firm basis for comparison and cross-systemic analysis of the data; developing the discourses for the justification of measuring specific indicators and benchmarking would soon come to fulfil this need. According to Pépin (2006, p. 196–197),

> the objective was not to create new indicators in such a short time but to identify the quality-related problems which were politically most relevant for European countries, and then determine which of the existing indicators – mainly from Eurostat, the OECD, the IEA[International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement] and Eurydice – could shed most light on these problems.

Indicators were not devised from scratch, but were constituted on the basis of triangulating existing data that, at this point were deemed useful; in a sense, most of the work towards establishing a common space of comparison for European education was already in place. What was necessary now was to coordinate data, organizations, and minds toward the requirements of the new knowledge economy.

The OMC created a step change in the scale and speed of the data which the Commission now had available; it began to generate a range of new data tools and processes to govern this new area of work. Beginning with an agreement about the common objectives and key issues, the DG EAC built up an EU knowledge base through the development of a common set of indicators for quantitative benchmarking. This included the engagement of a wide range of experts and stakeholders, both through "projects" and peer reviews. Finally, the process would involve the preparation or adoption of reports and recommendations (LELIE; VANHERCKE, 2013, p. 14-15). Indeed, from 2002 onwards, a Commission-led complex and continuing process of fixing guidelines, establishing quantitative and qualitative indicators and benchmarks, and national and regional targets, and periodic monitoring, evaluation, and peer review (organized as mutual learning processes) was set in motion (LELIE; VANHERCKE, 2013, p. 11). National experts, acting within the various working parties, managed this production process. It is a moot point whether academic experts see themselves as policy or scientific actors in this process (GORNITZKA, 2006, p. 21), but they are seen as partners by the Commission which "sets their agenda, and regularly briefs them on new developments" (LELIE; VANHERCKE, 2013, p. 23). For example, a commissioned report on the "benchmarking of education" was produced by experts from seven countries, mainly drawn from specialist research centres

or universities, who, while scientifically independent, had long experience of national evaluations and commissions. They reviewed the whole field of education quality and indicators, and used data sets from the OECD, the EU, the French Ministry of Education, and a range of national cases in Europe, and ended with recommendations. In other words, they were carefully chosen (probably through the Ministers of Education or Commission sources) to produce a favourable guide to action across the EU. They were not direct government actors but drawn from that growing category of technical experts who exist inside the research community but are dependent on government funding.

DG EAC created a regular series of funding calls which produced exchanges, cooperation, and focused study by experts, especially with regard to benchmarking or evaluation and peer reviews. For DG EAC, working with these actors was to be a stepping stone in a longer process of building European consensus on a topic (and thereby influencing the European policy agenda) – for example, a peer review built on earlier work done in the context of EU and national expert networks. It also provided legitimacy for funding subsequent EU studies, resulting in an EU seminar or a Commission Communication, ultimately followed by a new peer review on the same (or similar) topic – in other words, a virtuous circle of governing (LELIE; VANHERCKE, 2013, p. 39).

As already indicated, the OMC quickly became the stimulus for a series of initiatives to create the basis for the measurement and comparison of European education systems. One of the first initiatives was to set up nine working groups of national experts and a standing group on indicators and benchmarks. Information exchange, study visits and shared ideas of good practice would guide the work of the groups for the next three years (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2013; 2007a; 2007b). This process connected a range of academic and private experts in quality assurance or benchmarking; for example, projects on Benchmarking the Quality of Education involved seven countries and 17 experts (SCHEERENS, 2004), and on the Equity in European Educational Systems, six countries and 19 experts (EGREES, 2005). The latter was a collaboration of six university teams, funded through a Socrates Action, supported (or guided perhaps) by several members of DG EAC Policy division, with the task of measuring and comparing the equity of the education systems in the EU Member States, to enable "decision makers" who are better informed about equity, and to "refine their educational policies".

With the agreement of the ministers, the task of developing the common language, and its practices, became the responsibility of experts. DG EAC has always depended on the use of experts (PÉPIN, 2006; LAWN; GREK, 2012) but the OMC move into data strengthened and mobilized this process. With the "Education and Training 2010" Work Programme, practices, and experience on the common objectives adopted by ministers were exchanged; DG EAC defined

indicators for the monitoring progress, and produced European references to support national reforms. These covered teacher competences and qualifications, efficiency of investment, lifelong guidance, validation of non-formal and informal learning, quality assurance, and mobility. It is clear from the above, therefore, that the work to set indicators was not just technical, but also political and "depended largely on the willingness and commitment of the Member States to take account, at national level, of the common objectives that they had fixed for themselves at European level" (PÉPIN, 2006, p. 32).

One of the key actors who played a major role in the development of this work sums up the growth and focus of work on the development of education data within DG EAC during the period between 2000 and 2010:

> We created a specific unit for the analysis of indicators, statistics and benchmarks … They are researchers and statisticians, econometricians, people that are able to work on data, the data flows … This is a massive change. Apart from that we have also seen a booming of budgets available for it, which means that we are able to co-finance an awful lot of development of new indicators that we do ourselves … We invested also in a European survey on learning to learn skills which is a completely new instrument in development based on the bad experiences in PISA and TIMMS [Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study] and then we support OECD and IEA in carrying out a number of surveys by supporting member states. We pay 80% of the national costs by the budget of the Union. So we have a budget for doing these things – I would believe around 20 million euros a year, it is around that. It is changing from year to year. (Senior EU official, DG EAC, interview, 2010)

The virtuous circle continued to spin throughout the 2000s and still continues. Invited experts draw up reports, reports are adopted and demand funding, subsequent actions create more expert and new policy actors, and throughout, DG EAC grew.

The mature phase: the interplay with the OECD

Nevertheless, another significant actor was also growing in the European education research and policy scene; that was the OECD, which with the spectacle of its international assessment studies, and especially PISA, acquired the status of the objective, "golden standard" knowledge actor, which, as we will see further on, it took one step further into an almost amalgamation of knowledge into policy. Quantification, simplicity, and measurability were the trio of the key ingredients of its success, as slowly yet surely the OECD managed to persuade that its statistical reasoning was not simply the conventional, partially constructed

representation of very complex and different contexts but rather the objective reality. Econometrics became the single methodology for its measurements, whereas questions with regard to the epistemology or ethics of its analyses were never asked. Following Kingdon's (1984) policy soup model, OECD slowly gathered all the ingredients and the know-how in order to produce best-selling "knowledge soup"; through its management and steering of knowledge production, it manages and steers new policy agendas and directions. Similar to Kingdon's (1984) idea of the primeval soup, ideas for research float around for some time; new avenues of researching education performance are always open. Given the expert marketing of the global results of the studies, failures in performance are broadcast widely; thus, the need for immediate action is necessary. Indeed, the persuasive power of the OECD lays in its construction and measurement of education indicators; the quantitative knowledge it produces is knowledge and action simultaneously, as no indicator has any purposeful existence unless it signals action (LAWN; GREK, 2012).

In other words, OECD not only produces evidence quickly and effectively but digests it and offers it to policy makers in the format of policy solutions. In a sense, if we are used to accounts of European policy making as slow, cumbersome and "coming from nowhere" (RICHARDSON, 2001, p. 21), the OECD bypasses these obstacles in four key ways; first, it defines the limits of the possible by suggesting what can be measured, hence what can be "done"; second, it carries no political jurisdiction therefore it carries no external threats to national policy-making, as perhaps the Commission or other EU institutions might have done; it now has the experience, networks and the technical and material resources to speed up the policy process, so that it can show "results" within the usually short timeframe that policy makers are in power; and last but not the least, it carries all the "right" ideological messages for education systems in the 21st century – that is, it connects learning directly to labour market outcomes and human capital.

Nonetheless, how has the OECD become such a powerful player in education governance in Europe? As some of the people who work there might have argued, the Education Directorate staff who are based in Paris take few decisions, if any; the OECD, as they argue, is none other than the participant countries and the national actors and experts sent to the OECD committees and meetings. Therefore, how has the OECD achieved such a dominant role not only in the production of knowledge but also in the production of education policy in Europe? The answer surprisingly may lie within the DG EAC corridors:

> So around 2003-2004, we [OECD and Commission] started becoming far more involved. Meetings all over the world, I don't know how many countries I visited but what is important is that the Commission is there…. The European member states should see that the Commission is there because one of the criticisms of the Commission since all this started was that we didn't

> take into account all the good work of the OECD. Which was wrong but they said it. The way of showing them was to actually be there – not an empty chair. (European official, former DG EAC, 2012)

Indeed, although the Commission and the OECD had been leading quite separate ideological paths, a new love affair began emerging – this relationship would gradually strengthen and eventually become the *sine qua non* for the governing of European education systems. Another interviewee was even more eloquent in his discussion of this flourishing relationship:

> We used to have great competition between the two institutions [OECD and the EC] which was, that they were research-based, we were policy-based. And we needed that. They needed the policy aspect to mobilise the European consciousness…it was in their interest working with us …We had some differences but we are working closer and closer together, we are very very good friends now, there is no conflict. (European official, former DG EAC, 2012)

And of course love is power:

> When the OECD started speaking about TALIS [survey on teachers] it attracted the attention of the member states, that all this is very good but it is expensive. …So I managed to convince my Director General of supporting (the OECD) with an awful lot of millions of euros. And I went back to the OECD with that message and said that of course if we pay we want influence. (Senior European official, DG EAC, 2011)

On the other hand, OECD actors appear also as quite open to the Commission, stressing from their own point of view, the reasons that the DG Education would work closely with them:

> First of all I think we've been very lucky that on the Commission side, that they've given a lot of emphasis to skills recently and they have this "New skills for new jobs" initiative and so I think we were fortunate that the work that we decided to do on PIAAC corresponded extremely well with their areas of interest and research priorities….I think they have been attending these international expert meetings that have taken place developing the proposal for PIAAC and so they were already on board at that stage and then when it looked like the project was going to go ahead and they had always been participating in these meetings, we went out to speak to them and get them to agree to also provide some funding. So they made a direct contribution, an actual contribution to the international costs and also

> eventually agreed to subsidise EU countries, the cost that they had to pay as well to the OECD. So we got just a block of direct funding and indirect funding to countries that they then had to pay us for the international costs. That made a big contribution in financial terms and therefore of course enhanced interest in the project. (OECD staff, Education, 2010)

Another OECD actor also suggested the way that the relationship has been much more close recently, in fact "hand in hand" rather than hostile:

> We have the same perceptions like other international organisations that it is important that we work together and that we avoid duplication of effort and that we know what the other organisations are doing and that there are often occasions that jointly we can do more than what we can do individually. I think we were always aware of that but I think that has become increasingly important that we work hand in hand; and inevitably because we have some common goals. The OECD has had for some time its own job strategy, the Commission has its own employment strategy and its Lisbon goals and there is a lot of overlap. So I think it is quite normal that we can cooperate on a lot of areas (OECD staff, Education, 2010).

This love affair became official marriage in 2013, when DG EAC signed the "Education and Skills Cooperation Arrangement" between the European Commission and the OECD. According to this document,

> The Commission coordinates political cooperation with and between the Member States, supported by the relevant EU programmes and funds, and is currently developing its country analysis capacity within the Europe 2020 process. The OECD values the Commission's expertise and capacity for analysing and assessing education systems. The OECD's work also comprises countries outside Europe which are of strategic importance for the EU as partners and peers. The aim is to align efforts in order to help both organisations to provide a better service for member countries, and enable the avoidance of duplications.

Intensified cooperation is foreseen in three key areas:

- Skills strategies, to support countries or regions to put in place, together with key stakeholders, concrete plans to improve the supply and use of skills;
- Country analyses, to help countries to identify challenges and opportunities in the fields of education and training and to initiate appropriate reforms;

- Assessments and surveys, to provide internationally comparable information for evidence based policy making." (EUROPEAN COMMISSION, 2013)

Therefore, since 2013, DG EAC is officially funding OECD international assessment surveys, such as PISA, the Programme for the International Assessment for Adult Competencies (PIAAC), and TALIS; on the other hand, according to the Joint Report of the Council and the Commission of the Strategic Framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET2020), "evidence building" has been strengthened through the development of "strong analytical evidence and progress monitoring" (European Comission, 2015, p.6). According to the report, and alongside the Commission founded and funded research organizations, such as Eurostat, Eurydice, Cedefop, the OECD is mentioned as a key partner in the monitoring of education performance in Europe.

In order to close this section, I will briefly return to the beginning: there we argued that the education policy arena is a key perspective in understanding Europe, not only because it has become central in the discourses and policy direction followed by the Commission but also, and perhaps more importantly, because of the rise of knowledge actors in the making of education governance. The paper showed how the education policy agenda in Europe was not simply assembled at the Madou corridors and meeting rooms of the DG Education and Culture; on the contrary, an unlikely actor, given its global and (mostly U.S. resourced) research agenda, became influential and soon arose to dominate the field. But how did this come about?

> The OECD didn't have an agenda on education policy … [So] the Commission thought, and I fought this for years, that the OECD had to adopt the same agenda as we had developed in Brussels. So van der Pas, the Director General, went to meetings with the OECD and argued for their work, the annual work of the OECD should be the same as the one we have. He argued for and pushed that what we have as a policy agenda should also be relevant for the OECD. (Senior European official, DG EAC, 2012)

And he continues:

> We ended up inspiring OECD to adopt a policy agenda – and that they did with member states. They see the member states and have meetings with the ministers…. So they [member states] go to the institution which they are most influenced by or more easy to work with, or it is more convenient in terms of the political context in the country – which puts the European Commission in a weak situation because in fact we are the threat to the member states despite the fact that

> we follow the Treaty etc. and we are a policy organisation. The OECD isn't. So if you want to weaken the European Commission then you go to the OECD and discuss the same subject matters there. That shift has weakened the Commission and signals the need strongly for the Commission and the OECD to work together. The more you do that the more you have the need to have close cooperation between us, a competitive cooperation, a cooperation of influence, which decides, which draws conclusions. (Senior European official, DG EAC, 2012)

The case of the OECD adopting a policy agenda is a case of an international knowledge actor being mobilized to become a policy actor in itself. This is not simply a case of knowledge informing policy, as is most commonly the case; it is in fact a fusion of the two realms in such a conscious and strategic manner that raises interesting questions regarding the extent of the technicalization and de-politicization of education problems in particular and perhaps governing problems more broadly. In a way, it signals a shift from knowledge and policy to knowledge *becoming* policy – where expertise and the selling of policy solutions drift into one single entity and function. The next and final section will attempt a preliminary theorization of these ideas in order to broaden understanding with regard to the role of transnational knowledge actors in education governance, and governance in more general terms.

Conclusion

In summary, the paper has sought to show the various ways that data and their continuous measurement and comparison have produced significant policy effects in the governance of European education. Above all, the paper evidenced a substantial growth in exchanges and negotiations for policy objectives which suggested a much higher degree of Europeanization than education had ever seen before. This is demonstrated through an account of the history of the development of indicators and benchmarks, an overview of the problems and difficulties of pushing reform through the OMC, and also through the role of and interplay with other key actors, such as the OECD. In particular, the paper has shown how in a short timeframe a large governing panorama unfolded. And whereas, of course, its effects on domestic education systems are arguably diverse, its impact on constructing a new single and governable European education space has been immense.

This is not to suggest that this has been a conflict-free process. On the contrary, despite the apparent dominance of quantification, the translation of information needs and conduits, into a distinctively European form of governance, was not without difficulty. Policy objectives and their benchmarking frameworks were often barely realized (CODAGNONE; LUPIAÑEZ-

VILLANUEVA, 2011, p. 9); rather, data became the means of formulating policy and influencing reform on member states, despite the fact that targets were almost never achieved. The data produced were sometimes of intermittent quality, ritualistic, and eventually often became an end in itself. There were problems too, making comparisons with elements of the education system within one country, and certainly between countries. A method which was used to avoid political conflict began to cause problems: member states wanted to be compared according to strengths of their education particularities. Choosing performance indicators was not a technical process. Ministers of Education did not demur in European meetings from agreeing indicators but then lobbied hard for indicators which would be preferable nationally. The task of making indicators comparable would arguably suggest choosing those more straightforward valid measures for comparison. Units of measurement had to be uncomplicated, easy to monitor, locally and regionally valid, and therefore easily comparable and interpreted.

Over time there came the recognition that choosing an indicator, and collecting data, would also shape the object or phenomenon studied; as a result, political decisions proposed certain areas of emerging political interest to be included for performance audit. In addition, indicators could create an area or bring it into operation. Education as a policy space was slowly being re-imagined; it was simplified and re-arranged and this had intended and unintended effects. As Felouzis and Hanhart (2011) put it:

> the important thing here is to stress that while becoming essential as the bond which links the public policies on the one hand and their concrete realisation in teaching devices on the other, the evaluation became, much more than one external and ex post measurement of the educational action, a tool for modelling its form and its direction.

A central issue arising from this analysis is the relationship between the production of knowledge and policy. There is a vast literature on the knowledge and policy continuum as well as on their co-production, especially in the field of "hard" science. Analyses from the field of studies of science and technology have explored the new regulatory role of transnational knowledge actors that are meant to possess both the knowledge base and the expert networks to produce scientific evidence for policy making. In an interesting analysis of the World Bank, in producing policy to combat global poverty, St. Clair (2006, p. 59) has masterfully shown the negotiated nature of the "objective" data offered by such institutions: "definitions and assessments are not accounts of facts, but rather 'fact-surrogates,' well-structured parts of an ill-structured and complex whole." St Clair draws on Désrosieres to discuss the relativity of statistics in the pursuit of knowledge for policy making; she shows how the choice of what and who counts, as expert in producing evidence for policy is not only a methodological question, but also an

epistemological and a moral one. Applying insights from science and technology studies, St. Clair (2006) suggests that the transnational expert organizations have to be analyzed on the basis of their "boundary work"; that is, in relation to their ability not only to produce knowledge but also new social orders. She discusses the problematic and self-fulfilling nature of what she calls the "circular dynamics" of expert knowledge, since – she suggests – the audiences that are meant to legitimate the knowledge produced, which are in fact audiences that have, to a large extent, been generated by the expert organization itself. Finally, she uses the work of Jasanoff (2004) and Guston (2000) to make a case for the role of international knowledge actors as "boundary organizations":

> The crucial role of these institutions is, then, to assure the stability between the domains of science and politics, to speak to principals in both domains and to do so in a way that integrity and productivity can be assured. Speaking differently to different audiences, boundary organisations can bring stability to usually controversial issues. … [they] may be a way to avoid the politicisation of science as well as the scientification of politics. (ST. CLAIR, 2006, p. 68)

Through a focus on the work of DG EAC over the last 20 years, and its likely and less likely allies, the paper has showed the significance of the technicalization, de-politicization as well as the "circular dynamics," that quantification has lent so powerfully to education governance; the paper showed how both key knowledge actors, the OECD and DG EAC have been seeking legitimization for the knowledge and policy they produce from continuously turning to one another. The rise of the revolving knowledge and policy doors prompts us to ask important questions about the project of quantification and its political and historical significance, not only for understanding the emergence of new governing panoramas, but for thinking about democratic politics *per se*.

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