Chapter 3

Neoliberal and inclusive themes in European lifelong learning policy

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When lifelong learning emerged as a key theme of educational policy in the 1990s, international organisations played a decisive role. Some, particularly the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations' Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), had a 'track record': in the 1970s UNESCO had enthused about 'lifelong education' (Faure *et al*. 1973), the OECD about 'recurrent education' (OECD 1973). In contrast, the European Union had no such pedigree. Although the Council of Europe had advocated 'permanent education' as early as 1966 (Council of Europe 1970), the EU itself[3] had been silent. Yet, as Field (2006) suggests, in the 1990s the EU's role was decisive.

Since then, lifelong learning has developed from a policy concept popular among international organisations into a central feature in educational, welfare and labour market policies – and a key element in private and 'third' sector activity – across the 'developed' world. This chapter is concerned with the development and nature of the EU's thinking on lifelong learning, with the part this plays in shaping public policy within member states, and with how the EU interacts with other 'actors' in relation to lifelong learning.

The core of the chapter is an historical account of the evolution of the EU's thinking and practice on lifelong learning. We pursue this chiefly through the continuing tension between two policy themes: education (and training and learning) for productivity, efficiency and competitiveness on the one hand, and education for broader personal development and 'social inclusion' on the other. However, we begin by outlining three areas of debate within the academic literature. The historical account will, we believe, serve to illuminate these debates.

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Areas of Debate

Economic and Social Aims

In a much-cited phrase, Boshier described lifelong learning as 'human resource development in drag' (1998, p. 4). His point was the contrast between the broad, humanistic approach of the Faure Report and the vocational character of the language used around lifelong learning in the 1990s. The broad thrust of his critique has been widely accepted. As Rizvi and Lingard argue, a 'particular social imaginary of globalization, namely neoliberalism, has underpinned educational policy shifts around the world over the last two decades' (2010, p. 184). They see this as linked to attempts to reshape the nature of the individual, quoting approvingly Rose's argument that 'a new set of educational obligations' requires the citizen 'to engage in a ceaseless work of training and retraining, skilling and reskilling …: life is to become a continuous economic capitalization of the self' (Rose 1999, 161).

Some (e.g., Edwards 2004, Edwards and Boreham 2002) have seen the European Union's approach through a prism similar to Rose's. The particular approach based on Foucault has been subjected to some theoretical critique (e.g., Holford 2006); nevertheless, a widespread consensus now exists that the European Union's approach to lifelong learning is strongly vocational. As Field writes, lifelong learning is regarded in the European Commission 'primarily as a source of competitive advantage' (2006, p. 17; see also Ertl 2006, Dehmel 2006).

The EU itself, however, has long stressed that lifelong learning has a range of non-economic justifications. Its 1995 white paper, for instance, set out five 'general objectives' designed 'to put Europe on the road to the learning society'. These included not only closer links between schools and business, and encouraging investment in training, but combating exclusion and developing proficiency in three European languages. Lifelong learning was seen in a wider perspective:

> Education and training provide the reference points needed to affirm collective identity, while at the same time permitting further advances in science and technology. The independence they give, if shared by everyone, strengthens the sense of cohesion and anchors the feeling of belonging. Europe's cultural diversity, its long existence and the mobility between different cultures are invaluable assets for adapting to the new world on the horizon. (CEC 1995, p. 54)

The white paper's recommendations would

> help to show that the future of Europe and its place in the world depend on its ability to give as much room for the personal fulfilment of its citizens, men and women alike, as it has up to now given to economic and monetary issues. (CEC 1995, p. 54)

Subsequent EU statements have continued to emphasise non-economic aims for lifelong learning. The Lisbon strategy set 'a new strategic goal for the next decade [2001-2010]: to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world ... with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion' (CEC 2000). A decade later the Council of the European Union asserted:

> Education and training systems contribute significantly to fostering social cohesion, active citizenship and personal fulfilment in European societies. They have the potential to

promote upward social mobility and to break the cycle of poverty, social disadvantage and exclusion. Their role could be further enhanced by adapting them to the diversity of citizens' backgrounds in terms of cultural richness, existing knowledge and competences, and learning needs. (Council of the EU 11 May 2010 (2010/C 135/02): Official Journal of the European Union 26 May 2010)

Jarring as this does with the academic consensus on the vocational and neoliberal nature of the EU's aims in lifelong learning, the question arises: to what extent are non-economic themes – equity, social inclusion, social cohesion, citizenship, and so forth – genuine priorities in EU lifelong learning policy?

Policy Processes and Spaces

The second principal area of debate has been over the nature of policy-making in European lifelong learning. Although the European Union's policy processes have for many years been a focus of research interest in areas such as Political Science and Social Policy, policy-making in education and lifelong learning has seldom been a focus. The fifth edition of the major Oxford University Press textbook on *Policy Making in the European Union* (Wallace, Wallace and Pollack 2005), for example has whole chapters on virtually every area of policy (social, agricultural, employment, biotechnology, fisheries, trade, foreign and security, etc.) – but mentioned education only in passing on *one* of its 570 pages; the sixth edition (Wallace, Pollack and Young 2010) contains passing references to education on four of 597 pages. (Neither the learning society nor lifelong learning is mentioned at all in either edition.) In fact, however, European educational policy had become a focus of attention for a few educational researchers rather before this. Lawn has argued that the notion of a European educational 'space' – a favoured term in some areas of the European Commission – was not only rhetoric, but contained the germ of a new approach to educational governance. In particular, he has argued, it empowered a new range of actors through 'soft governance' by a 'range of particular governing devices (networking, seminars, reviews, expert groups, etc)' (Lawn 2006: 272). Lawn's argument is that, in the EU, a 'new space for education' now exists within the dominant, market, discourse (Lawn 2002, p. 20). The space is 'fluid, heterogeneous and polymorphic', existing 'within the daily work of teachers and policy-makers, within shared regulations and funded projects, within curriculum networks and pupil assignments, and in city collaborations and university pressure groups'. It represents, he argues, a significantly new approach to policy-making, involving the creation of a 'new cultural space' in which 'new European meanings in education are constructed' (p. 5) – though not that it necessarily leads to radically different agendas.

A key question, therefore, is whether a new European space exists for education or lifelong learning in any meaningful sense – and to the extent that it does, what difference this makes. Lawn's initial framing of the argument implied, even where it did not explicitly state, that within this new European educational space, concerns about equity and the social could be more effectively asserted – in contrast with the predominantly economic discourse in other educational policy circles. More recently, however, an alternative approach has been promoted, by a group of scholars who acknowledge the EU's role in educational policy, and even accept the existence of an educational space, but question its nature, direction and significance. The principal statement of this position is Dale and Robertson (2009). The root of their argument is that Europeanisation – '"doing" and

"making" Europe' (Dale 2009, p. 8) – should be seen principally as a subspecies of globalisation: that the EU 'is involved in the construction of globalisation and that globalisation frames economic, political, cultural (etc.) possibilities for Europe' (Dale 2009, p. 25). Globalisation, in their view, comprises considerably more than economic competition, but competitiveness is very much the 'master discourse' (Dale 2009, p. 26).

They do not see the European project, however, as reducible to globalisation – if that is construed as economic competition: 'there is a distinct "Europe-centred" project whose aim is to "thicken" the discourses and institutions of Europe, irrespective of economic competition' (Dale 2009, p. 27); the EU is unusual among international organisations 'in having more than economic ambitions, and seeing its project spreading wider and deeper than short-term collective economic benefit' (Dale 2009, p. 28). So far, this seems to chime with Lawn's view, and the idea of Europe as protector of social rights. But this is not what Dale and Robertson have in mind when they refer to 'thickened' European discourses and institutions. The Lisbon goals were not just about responding to global competition, they were about competing with specific competitors (the US, Japan and so forth). Educational strategies – the European Higher Education Area, the Bologna Process and related projects – are in their view 'ambitious global strategies' (Robertson 2009, p. 77). The Bologna Process is not simply a mechanism to achieve uniformity within Europe, but a model to transform higher education globally in the European image and the European interest. 'While for a long time Europe has legitimated its activities by presenting itself as a civilising rather than imperialising presence, its more explicit economic and transnational interests open it up to charges of modern-day colonialism and imperialism' (Robertson 2009, p. 78).

The European Union and its Member States

The formation of EU thinking on lifelong learning has coincided with the EU's most substantial period of expansion. In 1994, when the white paper *Growth, Competitiveness, Employment* (CEC 1994) first thrust lifelong learning to the centre of European policy, the Maastricht Treaty was in the recent past; the EU comprised twelve member states with a population of 350 millions. By 2007 there were 27 member states, and a population of over 500 millions. Many of the new member states had formerly been to the east of the 'iron curtain'; the remainder were principally to the south; their political and economic histories were diverse, encompassing various forms of authoritarian and democratic governments, economic planning and markets. With a population of 38 millions, Poland was very much the largest; the remainder had populations below – many well below – 12 millions. Perhaps more important, 86 per cent of the EU's GDP in 2010 was generated within the twelve countries which had entered the EU before 1995[4]: the 25 per cent of the population who live within the 'post-1995' countries generate only 14 per cent of EU GDP. After 1995, therefore, EU institutions (and in particular the Commission) were grappling with major challenges of development and cohesion within an increasingly diverse polity.[5]

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[4] Calculated from IMF World Economic Outlook Database:
http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2010/02/weodata/index.aspx: accessed 8 May 2011.
[5] Viewed through a different lens, nearly half of EU member states (12 out of 27) now have populations smaller than its largest city's (London: 7.75m in 2010: http://data.london.gov.uk/datastore/applications/focus-london-population-and-migration).

In this light, European lifelong learning policies appear as mechanisms not for the social and economic development of a stable geographical region (analogous to a national government's formulating policy for its regions and local governments), but similar in many respects to the challenges facing the government of a nascent imperial power (cf Holford 2005). New populations and cultures must be incorporated; new colonial leaders (and their established political institutions) engaged with; a new imperial economy created – while at the same time the new polity and economy engage with the challenges of a turbulent external environment. The parallel is not, of course, exact: the EU's member states have legal national sovereignty, and participate on a basis formally equivalent to other member states in the EU's decision-making processes. It is, however, instructive.

The work of Dale and Robertson relates to this. There is, they argue, a 'hegemonic project' of 'constructing Europe, economically, politically, culturally'. This involves, *inter alia*, an extensive project of reconstructing governance, and it is in this context that developments in European education policy are to be understood. 'Europe', in their view, is a willing collaborator in the processes of neoliberal globalisation. Neoliberal globalisation involves 'harnessing the apparatuses of the state to its own purposes in place of the decommodifying and "market-taming" role the state had under social democracy' (Dale 2009, p. 29). They see the EU not only as a *location* in which this process plays out, but as a *mechanism* by which nation-states within the EU are educated or disciplined to this end: the open method of co-ordination, fundamental to the Lisbon Process, for instance, enables the EU to intervene in and shape national policy agendas. According to this argument, therefore, the EU's role in education is not defensive, a protective rampart for discourses of 'equity' and 'social inclusion', but a division of the neoliberal army.

In relation to this, Dale distinguishes between a European education *space* and European education *policy*. The former, he says, is an 'opportunity structure' framed by treaties, policy frameworks and community history. The latter is comes not only of the Commission and its Directorates-General, but also from member states' policies and preferences and from 'existing conceptions of the nature and capacity of "education"' (Dale 2009, p. 32). European education policy is not, therefore, concerned only with the national level: to understand the growing role of Europe in educational governance, we must, in Dale's view, dispense with 'methodologically nationalist and statist assumptions' (Dale 2009, p. 32). In this vein, Robertson argues that the 'revamped Lisbon strategy' has strengthened 'neo-liberal language of economic competitiveness' in European higher education policies. Higher education, she suggests, is now 'strategically important' for the EU, playing a key part in 'creating both "minds" and "markets" for the European knowledge-economy' (Robertson 2008, p. 1). From this perspective, therefore, the EU is closely allied with the interests of private capital: the EU recruits markets in the interests of European business, while business recruits the EU in support of the extension of market opportunities both within the EU (for instance, by weakening the walls between public to private sector in education) and across the globe.

Education and lifelong learning in the EU

Education played a trivial role in the origins of the European Union. The EU began in the 1950s as the European Common *Market*; it had a subsequent incarnation as the European *Economic* Community.

Its founding treaties and fundamental institutions placed discourses of markets and economic competitiveness at its heart. Discussion of education was 'taboo' in European-level debates until the early 1970s – with very minor exceptions (Blitz 2003, p. 4). The 1970s saw only a few educational toes dipped in the policy pond: in 1971 Education Ministers agreed a non-binding resolution 'to provide the population as a whole with the opportunities for general education, vocational training and life-long learning' (Blitz 2003, 5); in 1974 – influenced by the first enlargement ministers encouraged 'co-operation' in various priority sectors, while preserving 'the originality of educational traditions and policies in each country' (CEC 1979, 2).

The themes of co-operation and diversity enabled the Commission to advance, albeit slowly, on educational policy, largely avoiding conflict with member states. During the 1970s EU policy tended to confuse – perhaps deliberately – education as a universal value with the economic requirements of the single market. However, neither Commission nor Community put much emphasis on *lifelong* learning at that stage, in the adult or post-compulsory sense,[6] perhaps because the Common Market's economic focus was so distant from the strongly humanistic framing of lifelong education at that time (cf Faure *et al*. 1972). During the 1980s development remained incremental. Two features stand out: European Court of Justice decisions which permitted the Community to develop its educational role, and the establishment within the Commission of a *de facto* directorate responsible for education.[7] However, the focus continued to be narrow – chiefly in support of improved school curricula and quality, and on European content. Concern with *lifelong* learning (in the post-compulsory sense) remained limited.[8]

As we have seen, when lifelong learning re-emerged in national and international policies in the 1990s, the emphasis was firmly on supporting economic performance, whether individual or societal (Boshier 1998; Field 2006). Arguably, however, within the EU this provided space for expansion of non-economically-oriented policies: the form which the renewed lifelong learning agenda took was much closer to the EU's mainstream concerns. At the same time, until 1992 the Community's legal 'competence' in education was restricted; and the principle of subsidiarity meant most educational activities were organised and governed by member states. Any EU attempt to intervene in national educational affairs had to be closely related to its core aims, as expressed in the founding treaties:

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[6] Two limited exceptions concerned education for migrant workers and transitions from school to working life – both of which clearly related to the single market.

[7] The Task Force on Human Resources, Education, Training and Youth (TFRH), established under Jacques Delors's Presidency of the Commission in March 1989. During the 1980s, education had fallen under the Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs. The TFRH was formally transformed into Directorate-General XXII (Education, training and youth) in January 1995, and reformed (incorporating culture and audiovisual policy) as the Directorate General for Education and Culture (DG-EAC) in September 1999 (Pépin et al. 2006).

[8] According to Dehmel, the low profile given to 'lifelong' or adult concerns in Community education policy in the 1980s was mirrored in attitudes of most international organisations: from the mid-1970s to the early 1990s, international and inter-governmental bodies 'said relatively little' about lifelong learning; and the notion of lifelong education as formulated in the early 1970s (Faure 1972) 'almost disappeared' from policy agendas (Dehmel 2006, 51). Lee, Thayer and Madyun (2008), however, argue that although scholarly debates on lifelong learning diminished during the 1980s, within international policy communities 'international discourse on lifelong learning was still ongoing during this period, albeit in a new neoliberal context', and that this was 'an important formative period out of which emerged a neo-liberal discourse on lifelong learning' (p. 448).

this meant educational measures had to be specifically justifiable as furthering the common *market*. Vocational education clearly fitted this aim; but wider desires to create a 'people's Europe' had to be 'subservient to economic concerns' (Blitz 2003, 9). Action programmes in the 1980s, such as 'Erasmus', were therefore based on the need to strengthen the Community's economic position.

Maastricht gave the EU clear, if limited, 'competence' in education: to make 'a contribution to education and training of quality and to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States' (Treaty of Maastricht, Article G). This general aim was also subject to the principle of subsidiarity. A number of specific Community aims were also set out (chiefly relating to initial education), such as developing a 'European dimension' in education by strengthening language teaching, encouraging student and teacher mobility and recognition of qualifications, 'promoting cooperation between educational establishments', exchanging 'information and experience' on common educational issues, and encouraging youth exchanges, 'exchanges of socio- educational instructors', and distance education. (Article G).

Maastricht did, however, explicitly address lifelong (*qua* post-school or post-initial) education – to a limited degree, and with a clear emphasis on the economic. The Community was to 'implement a vocational training policy' which should:

> facilitate adaptation to industrial changes, in particular through vocational training and retraining; improve initial and continuing vocational training in order to facilitate vocational integration and reintegration into the labour market; facilitate access to vocational training and encourage mobility of instructors and trainees and particularly young people; stimulate cooperation on training between educational or training establishments and firms; develop exchanges of information and experience on issues common to the training systems of the Member States. (Article G)

From an educational policy perspective Maastricht was both modest and significant. It provided general authority for the EU (and its Commission) to contribute to 'education and training of quality', authorising policy development in areas not specifically itemised – although this general authority was circumscribed by the general principle of subsidiarity. Following Maastricht, therefore, those who sought to develop lifelong learning policy were newly empowered: member states could not object on principle to Commission activity in education. However, clear boundaries were set to activity: initial education or schooling was to the fore, as was the 'European' dimension; and insofar as post-school learning was specified, the focus was vocational.

Given the legal framework, when lifelong learning re-emerged in the early 1990s, the Directorate-General for Education developed policy chiefly in support of economic needs. *Growth, Competitiveness, Employment* (CEC 1994) emphasised globalisation, information and communication technology, and competition from Asia and the USA. The unemployment which would arise if Europe did not achieve and maintain economic growth and competitiveness was also a concern: learning was essential throughout life. Based on the competitiveness white paper, lifelong learning was now central to EU policy (and entirely consistent with the educational objectives of the Maastricht Treaty). The education White Paper, *Teaching and Learning: Towards a Learning Society* (1995) elaborated within this framework, and played a 'crucial role in establishing lifelong learning as a guiding strategy in EU policies' (Dehmel 2006, p. 53).

From the mid-1990s, the 'primarily utilitarian, economic objectives' which brought lifelong learning to centre-stage in international policy debates began to be complemented by 'more integrated policies' involving 'social and cultural objectives' (Dehmel 2006, p. 52). In the Socrates and Leonardo da Vinci programmes, for example, lifelong learning was a strong theme; 1996 was designated the European Year of Lifelong Learning. An implicit theme was building European identity and European citizenship.

The Lisbon Strategy

Adopting the language of Rizvi and Lingard, the Lisbon Strategy, launched in 2000, was predicated on 'imaginaries' of neoliberal globalisation and the knowledge economy. The EU set itself 'a new strategic goal for the next decade: to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth …'. It was not, however, simply about the economy and competition: innovation, competition and growth were to deliver 'more and better jobs and greater social cohesion' (CEC 2000). This aim included 'modernising' the European social model and building an 'active welfare state'.

So far as education and training was concerned, this meant Europe's systems must 'adapt both to the demands of the knowledge society and to the need for an improved level and quality of employment'. Within this, adults were given a central role: in particular, 'unemployed adults' and employed people 'at risk of seeing their skills overtaken by rapid change' (CEC 2000). Other objectives, such as increased 'investment in human resources', a European lifelong learning framework for IT skills, foreign languages, entrepreneurship, social skills and the like, better mechanisms for student, teacher and researcher mobility, and greater transparency and recognition of qualifications, were also very much in the spirit of Maastricht (CEC 2000).

The Lisbon Strategy also brought a key change in policy: the Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC), a product of employment policy in the 1990s (Hantrais 2007), was applied in education. Subsidiarity remained important, but the OMC emphasised agreed timetables and goals, indicators and benchmarks, 'monitoring, evaluation and peer review' (CEC 2000). This meant – despite subsidiarity – increased intervention by the EU in member states. By 'setting specific targets and adopting measures', European guidelines would be 'translated' into national and regional policies and supported by the 'mutual learning processes' of monitoring, evaluation and peer review (CEC 2000). As part of the Lisbon process, as we shall see, the volume and detail of education and lifelong learning policy has increased markedly, and formulating and elaborating 'benchmarks' and 'indicators' to measure progress in lifelong learning (and education and training) consistently across member states has become a major Commission activity.

Lisbon in Crisis

By 2003 it was clear that the EU would fall short of the Lisbon goals. This was clear in education: all European countries were making 'efforts' to adapt their education and training systems to 'the knowledge-driven society and economy', but the reforms were clearly insufficient and the pace of change too slow to enable the EU to attain the Lisbon objectives (CEC 2003, p. 3). But education's problems were part of a wider malaise. A High Level Group, appointed in 2004 jointly by the

European Commission and Council (and chaired by Wim Kok), suggested that Europe's 'growth gap with North America and Asia' had widened (High Level Group 2004, p. 6):

> if we are to deliver the Lisbon goals of growth and employment then we must all take action. To achieve them ... means more delivery from the European institutions and Member States through greater political commitment, broader and deeper engagement of Europe's citizens, and a recognition that by working together Europe's nations benefit all their citizens.

In Robertson's view, Kok helped construct a 'crisis discourse' and, from around 2005, to the EU's forming

> a set of globally-oriented 'education' policies and programmes shaped by a new set of ideas about the production of a European knowledge economy. Together, these policies and programmes mark a significant shift away from a social market/'fortress Europe' as the means to create a knowledge-based economy toward a newer vision; a more open, globally-oriented, freer market Europe.

Neoliberal though its 'imaginary' may have been, the Kok report retained some 'social Europe' rhetoric. It was 'sustaining Europe's social model' which required 'higher growth and increased employment', and 'far more emphasis ... on involving European social partners and engaging Europe's citizens' (High Level Group 2004, p. 7). The emphasis on 'delivery from the European institutions and Member States' (p. 6) remained – so the OMC and indicators continued to be central. Quantitative measurement of outcomes against targets has therefore strengthened.

Indicators and politics

From around 2004 – roughly coincident with the Kok report –regular measurement and reporting of progress against Lisbon benchmarks began. Probably this has privileged economically-related outcomes: by and large, indicators related to vocational learning and participation are better developed than those related to 'softer' aims. However, although measurement tends to privilege the economic, it is not the end of the matter. Within the Commission, and more broadly within the European 'educational space', there have been political processes as well as political outcomes. As early as 2001, very shortly after Lisbon, elements within DG-EAC took advantage of the OMC to establish objectives for European education and training. In an important paper, a key Commission civil servant argued that Lisbon's call for Ministers of Education to 'undertake a general reflection on the concrete future objectives of education systems, focusing on common concerns and priorities while respecting national diversity' (Council of the EU 2001, p. 4) in the light of the Lisbon goals was 'revolutionary' (Hingel 2001, p. 15). This gave the EU a 'mandate to develop a "common interest approach" in education going beyond national diversities' increasing 'the European dimension of national educational policies' and extending the 'community dimension to education policy co-operation between the Member States'. Mechanisms to measure progress and ensure compliance could only be based on a high degree of consensus in the setting of objectives and targets.

This led to a set of 'concrete future objectives of education and training systems' being adopted by the EU Council in 2001. These covered improving education and training for teachers and trainers, developing skills for the knowledge society, increasing the recruitment to scientific and technical

studies, making the best use of resources, open learning environment, making learning attractive, improving foreign language learning, and increasing mobility and exchange. In 2002, DG-EAC set up a Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks (SGIB). This issued a 'final list of indicators' for education and training in July 2003: 29 were proposed, spread across the eight Lisbon objectives (an average of 3.6 per objective; one objective had a single indicator, one had six) (CEC DG-EAC 2003a). Identifying and developing indicators proved both technically and politically challenging. In 2004, Council and Commission emphasised 'the need to improve the quality and comparability of existing indicators'. A 'lack of relevant and comparable data' caused difficulties (Council of the EU 2004). Gradually, however, a range of indicators was established. Those for 'increasing mobility and exchange' are typical:

- Inward and outward mobility of teachers and trainers within the Socrates (Erasmus, Comenius, Lingua and Grundtvig) and Leonardo da Vinci programmes;

- Inward and outward mobility of Erasmus students and Leonardo da Vinci trainees;

- Foreign students enrolled in tertiary education (ISCED 5 and 6) as a percentage of all students enrolled in the country of destination, by nationality (European country or other countries);

- Percentage of students (ISCED 5-6) of the country of origin enrolled abroad (in a European country or other countries). (DG-EAC 2003a).

Neither Kok nor the 'crisis of Lisbon' brought an end to political struggles within the European educational space. Holford (2008) has shown how 'policy actors' took advantage of the Open Method of Co-ordination, attempting to ensure that citizenship remained on the EU's policy agenda. Key policy documents in lifelong learning in the years after Kok continued to give emphasis to discourses of equity. *Efficiency and Equity in European Education and Training Systems* (CEC 2006a) argued that in vocational education and training the less well-qualified 'are least likely to participate in further learning and so to improve their employment prospects' (p. 9). Courses for 'the unemployed and those who have not succeeded in the compulsory education system' were therefore seen as 'important' in 'equity terms'. *Adult Learning: It is never too late to learn* (CEC 2006b) addressed the increasingly diverse range of member states, stressing that to achieve the Lisbon benchmarks four million additional adults would have to participate in lifelong learning. It posed adult learning as relevant not only to competitiveness, but also to demographic change (ageing and migration), and social inclusion. Barriers to participation had to be lowered; member states were called upon to invest in improved quality of provision, including for older people and migrants; 'validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning' (within the European Qualifications Framework) and data for indicators and benchmarks should be improved. *Key Competences for Lifelong Learning: European Reference Framework* (CEC 2007), a technical document designed to 'provide a European-level reference tool for policy-makers, education providers, employers, and learners themselves to facilitate national- and European-level efforts towards commonly agreed objectives' (p. 3), specified knowledge, skills and attitudes across eight areas: communication in mother tongue and foreign languages, mathematical and digital competence, learning to learn and sense of initiative and entrepreneurship, social and civic

competences and cultural awareness and expression. Not all of these are transparently elements of a 'neoliberal imaginary' of competitiveness and globalisation.

And indeed, more evidence of sustained efforts to bolster non-economic purposes in lifelong learning is to be found in the Council of the European Union's 2010 Conclusions 'on the social dimension of education and training'. This began by rehearsing eleven policy statements (decisions of the EU Council, the European Parliament, and EU government representatives), beginning with the Council conclusions on 'equity and efficiency in education and training' in November 2006, which in various ways emphasised the social importance of education and training. It gave 'particular regard' to:

> The Council conclusions of 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) , which identified the promotion of equity, social cohesion and active citizenship as one of its four strategic objectives and which defined five reference levels of European average performance (European benchmarks) that also place a strong emphasis on achieving equity. (OJEU 26 May 2010, C135/2)

In the context of the intensifying economic crisis, restating existing policies is not without value. But the 2010 Council Conclusions on the education's social dimension did not do this alone. It made a number of statements of principle. For instance:

> Education and training systems contribute significantly to fostering social cohesion, active citizenship and personal fulfilment in European societies. They have the potential to promote upward social mobility and to break the cycle of poverty, social disadvantage and exclusion. Their role could be further enhanced by adapting them to the diversity of citizens' backgrounds in terms of cultural richness, existing knowledge and competences, and learning needs. (OJEU 26 May 2010, C135/2)

And:

> As the social effects of the economic crisis continue to unfold — and in the context of the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (2010) (12) — it is clear that the downturn has hit hard the most disadvantaged, while at the same time jeopardising budgetary efforts which target these groups. (OJEU 26 May 2010, C135/2)

In addition, it made various recommendations, some of which have specific application in relation to adult learning. 'Expanding access to adult education,' it asserted, 'can create new possibilities for active inclusion and enhanced social participation, especially for the low-skilled, the unemployed, adults with special needs, the elderly, and migrants' (OJEU 26 May 2010, C135/2). Inter-generational learning was 'a means of sharing knowledge and expertise, and of encouraging communication and solidarity between … generations, bridging the growing digital divide and reducing social isolation' (OJEU 26 May 2010, C135/2). It called on ('invited') member states to widen access to higher education, and to promote 'specific programmes for adult students and other non-traditional learners' within the HE sector (OJEU 26 May 2010, C135/2). In relation to adult education, it called on them to:

> Strengthen policies to enable the low-skilled, unemployed adults and, where appropriate, citizens with a migrant background to gain a qualification or take their skills a step further (one step up), and broaden the provision of second chance education for young adults. (OJEU 26 May 2010, C135/2)

It argued for 'collection of data on outcomes, drop-out rates and on learners' socio-economic backgrounds, particularly in vocational education and training, higher education and adult education' (OJEU 26 May 2010, C135/2). And it 'invited' member states and the Commission to:

> Pursue cooperation on the strategic priority of promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship, by actively using the open method of coordination within the context of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training (ET 2020) and by implementing the social dimension of the Bologna and Copenhagen processes and adopting measures in line with the 2008 Council conclusions on adult learning. (OJEU 26 May 2010, C135/2).

These excerpts give only a flavour of the Council Conclusions 'on the social dimension of education and training'. They range over all levels of education, seeking to 'promote the role of education and training as key instruments for the achievement of the objectives of the social inclusion and social protection process'. (OJEU 26 May 2010, C135/2). They are testament to the continuing presence, within the European educational space, of influential political actors, and of their effectiveness in sustaining discourses of social purpose.

Lifelong learning in 'Europe 2020'

Education is, of course, only one aspect of the EU's policy concern. If the Kok report spoke to (and about) a 'crisis' of the Lisbon strategy, the years since 2008 have seen a far more profound and general economic and political crisis in Europe. In the words of *Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*,

> The recent economic crisis has no precedent in our generation. The steady gains in economic growth and job creation witnessed over the last decade have been wiped out – our GDP fell by 4% in 2009, our industrial production dropped back to the levels of the 1990s and 23 million people - or 10% of our active population - are now unemployed. The crisis has been a huge shock for millions of citizens and it has exposed some fundamental weaknesses of our economy. (CEC 2010, p. 5)

The economic crisis coincided with the closing years of the Lisbon strategy; at a technical level, therefore we see in the EU's responses both the impact of immediate pressures and the outcomes of evaluation of the Lisbon years. The heart of the Commission's proposed solution to the unprecedented crisis was 'growth':

- Smart growth – developing an economy based on knowledge and innovation.

- Sustainable growth – promoting a more resource efficient, greener and more competitive economy.

- Inclusive growth – fostering a high-employment economy delivering economic, social and territorial cohesion. (CEC 2010, p. 8)

Education and training were to play a part in achieving this; but it was far from the leading role. *Europe 2020: A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth* focusses on strategies for the financial sector, for competition and innovation, for investment, employment and the single market. At its heart are six 'flagship initiatives'. In terms of specific aims for education, it repeated well-established prescriptions. The Commission should

> give a strong impetus to the strategic framework for cooperation in education and training involving all stakeholders. This should notably result in the implementation of life-long learning principles (in cooperation with Member States, social partners, experts) including through flexible learning pathways between different education and training sectors and levels and by reinforcing the attractiveness of vocational education and training (CEC 2010, p. 17),

while member states were encouraged to work hard to establish national qualifications frameworks (linked to the European Qualifications Framework), and to ensure more widespread acquisition and recognition of 'the competences required to engage in further learning and the labour market' (CEC 2010, p. 17) . Not surprisingly, in a document focussing on economic crisis and growth, the emphasis is firmly on skills and vocational learning.

There is, however, a further – and vital – dimension to *Europe 2020:* 'stronger governance' – but in very much the spirit of the Lisbon strategy. To achieve the 'transformational change' required in the EU's economy, Europe 2020 would need 'more focus, clear goals and transparent benchmarks for assessing progress' (CEC 2010, p. 25). Indicators and benchmarks would still be central, but there would be a 'thematic approach', focussing 'in particular' on the delivery of five 'headline targets' (p. 25). This would be accompanied by 'country reporting': this was described chiefly in economic terms ('helping Member States define and implement exit strategies, to restore macroeconomic stability, identify national bottlenecks and return their economies to sustainable growth and public finances' (p. 25)), but it clearly represented a shift in policy development and implementation methodology toward greater focus and integration.

This more focussed approach would seem to imply that the emphasis on skills and vocational training would be carried through more centrally across EU lifelong learning policy. There is some evidence of this in the first major education policy statement made in the light of *Europe 2020*, 'Council [of the EU] conclusions on the role of education and training in the implementation of the "Europe 2020" strategy' (OJEU 2011/C 70/01, 4 March 2011). This began by

> UNDERLINING [*sic*] its full readiness to put the Council's expertise on education and training policies at the service of the European Council and actively to contribute to the successful implementation of the 'Europe 2020' strategy for jobs and growth and the European Semester[9] …. (OJEU 2011/C 70/01, 4 March 2011)

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[9] 'The so-called European semester is one of the first initiatives to emerge from a task force on economic governance set up at the request of the European Council in March [2010] and chaired by the President of the

It proceeded to make a number of rather predictable assertions: education and training, and especially vocational education and training, had a 'fundamental role' in 'achieving the "Europe 2020" objectives of smart, sustainable and inclusive growth'; the Council was committed to ensuring that 'issues such as policy measures and reforms in the field of education and training, their contribution to the European targets and the exchange of good policy and practice are fully addressed'. Education and training had 'special relevance' to the 'flagship initiatives' (particularly 'youth on the move' and 'agenda for new skills and jobs'). But among these confessions of loyalty to the new régime, we find reassertions, perhaps *sotto voce*, of long-held commitments. Thus there was a reference to – though no quotation of – 'the "ET 2020" framework and its four strategic objectives', which continued to 'constitute a solid foundation for European cooperation in the field of education and training', and could 'thus make a significant contribution towards achieving the "Europe 2020" objectives' (OJEU 2011/C 70/01, 4 March 2011). One of the four strategic objectives was, of course, 'Promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship' (OJEU 2009/C 119/02, 28 May 2009). And within the parameters of *Europe 2020* concerns, we find such concerns stated: 'the situation of young women and young men who face exceptional difficulties in entering the labour market due to the severity of the crisis' should be addressed 'as a matter of urgency'; education and training systems must provide 'the right mix of skills and competences … to promote sustainable development and active citizenship'; strengthening 'lifelong learning opportunities for all and at every level of education and training is essential, notably by improving the attractiveness and relevance of VET and by increasing the participation in, and the relevance of, adult learning' (OJEU 2011/C 70/01, 4 March 2011).

Efforts to maintain an 'inclusion' theme within the new *Europe 2020* order seem clear; and some success in this, albeit partial, should be acknowledged. However, the neoliberal, 'competitiveness', agenda dominates, and appears to be reinforced by the new OMC 'architecture'. In particular, the 'Council conclusions on the role of education and training in the implementation of the "Europe 2020" strategy' focus attention not on the Lisbon benchmarks, though these remain, but on 'increased efforts … to achieve

> the two EU headline targets in education and training — i.e. reducing the share of early school leavers to less than 10 %, and increasing the proportion of 30-34 year olds having completed tertiary or equivalent education to at least 40 % — [which] will have a positive effect on jobs and growth. Moreover, measures taken in the education and training sector will contribute to achieving the targets in other areas, such as increasing employment rates, promoting research and development, and reducing poverty. (OJEU 2011/C 70/01, 4 March 2011)

European Council, Herman Van Rompuy. The aim is to boost coordination of the member states' economic policies on the basis of expected results. … The new six-month cycle will start each year in March when, on the basis of a report from the Commission, the European Council will identify the main economic challenges and give strategic advice on policies. Taking this advice into account, in April the member states will review their medium-term budgetary strategies and at the same time draw up national reform programmes setting out the action they will undertake in areas such as employment and social inclusion. In June and July, the European Council and the Council will provide policy advice before the member states finalise their budgets for the following year.' (Council of the EU 2010b)

The new focus on 'headline targets' is now clear. To this end (at least principally), members states are encouraged to adopt 'National Reform Programmes (NRPs) which are targeted and action-based, and which will contribute to achieving the objectives of the "Europe 2020" strategy, including the EU headline targets', and to take 'policy actions in line with national targets' (OJEU 2011/C 70/01, 4 March 2011). The Commission, in turn, is asked to

> Further strengthen — in full agreement with the Member States — links between the implementation arrangements for the 'ET 2020' strategic framework and those for the 'Europe 2020' Strategy, notably as regards work cycles, reporting and objective setting. Particular account should be taken of the headline targets and of appropriate measures taken under the 'Youth on the Move' and 'Agenda for New Skills and Jobs' initiatives, when proposing the mid-term priorities for the next cycle of 'ET 2020'. (OJEU 2011/C 70/01, 4 March 2011)

Various other policy-co-ordination measures are proposed. On the whole, these are focussed on the *Europe 2020* targets. However, even here some space is retained. For example, 'as the basis for an exchange of views in Council in the course of each European Semester' the Commission is to provide 'a thorough analysis of the progress made' not only 'towards the headline targets', but also toward 'the "ET 2020" benchmarks' (OJEU 2011/C 70/01, 4 March 2011)) – that is, towards the broader range of targets developed for education and training, which encompass non-economic objectives.

The extent to which 'neoliberal' and 'inclusive' purposes will be reflected in the practice of *Europe 2020* remains to be seen – though a renewed emphasis on the former seems likely. There remains clear evidence of efforts, within the European educational space, to sustain citizenship and social cohesion concerns. However, EU education policy has always been principally vocational – to a large degree because competition and the free market were central to its founding treaties.

Conclusion: Europe's educational policy and the contours of its educational space

During the 1960s and 1970s, many on the British Left regarded the (then) European Common Market) as a 'capitalist club'. To join would 'prevent a Labour government delivering a Socialist manifesto' (Forster 2002, p. 135); 'public ownership', Tony Benn believed, 'is ruled out by the Rome Treaty' (quoted Mullan 2005, p. 129). Though such attitudes now seem dated – 'social Europe' proved decidedly preferable to unfettered 'Thatcherism' – the European Union *has* deeply capitalist roots. It is a truism, but an important one, that the single market has set the boundaries for European educational policy since the 1950s. A more 'inclusive' agenda – equity, social inclusion and cohesion, active citizenship – was progressively developed during the 1980s and 1990s, allied with the pursuit of the 'European ideal'; they have been defended since with some success; but they have always operated within parameters set by the centrality of the single market in the EU's founding treaties.

At this point, we can usefully return to Dale's (2009) distinction between a European education *space* (the opportunity structure framed by treaties, policy frameworks, history, etc.) and European education *policy* (the policies of the EU and its member states). From this perspective, in order to understand the direction of educational development in Europe, we should consider not only the policies of the EU, but also those of member states. But we also need to attend to changing nature

of the educational space itself: to the actors within it; the ideological frameworks within which they operate, and on which they draw; and their relative capacity to exercise power – whether economic, political or normative. In this sense, the educational space in Europe has changed significantly over the decade of the Lisbon Strategy. In particular, it has been opened to a wider range of actors drawn from the private sector, and often from substantial international corporations; it has seen a significant expansion of the role of the market in the provision of education and related services; it has seen an erosion of discourses of education, and a strengthening of language related to learning and training; we see the growth of qualifications frameworks, indicators, benchmarks and so forth. While some of these changes may appear technical, there seems little doubt that they are generally biased in favour of neoliberal, rather than inclusive, approaches.

Robertson explores this in relation to higher education and public-private partnerships. The impact of *Europe 2020* seems likely to strengthen the neoliberalisation of the European education space. *Europe 2020* calls for 'well functioning and well-connected markets where competition and consumer access stimulate growth and innovation' and an 'open single market for services' (CEC 2010a, p. 19). This seems likely to further encourage the breaking down of 'barriers' to the involvement of private corporations in educational provision and services. Arguably we can see the impact of this already in the Council 'conclusions on the role of education and training in the implementation of the "Europe 2020" strategy': for example, member states are encouraged to promote 'reinforced cooperation between higher education institutions, research institutes and enterprises', while there is a general call for incentives 'to establish … partnerships with businesses and research' (OJEU 2011/C 70/01, 4 March 2011). But this is no more than arguable: with respect to its 'competitive' language, this key education policy document is little different from the EU mainstream.

The invasion of education by private sector actors is a world-wide phenomenon. What sets Europe apart within this global trend is the architecture of EU governance and policy-making: partly how this architecture mediates between global pressures and the activities of national governments (to both inclusive and neoliberal ends); partly the number and range of actors involved in educational processes (and the diversity of their cultural and institutional experiences); partly the sheer multiplicity of national and sub-national governments engaged in educational policy formation and implementation both within their own borders and at a EU level. This does not make the EU exempt from the forces of neoliberal globalisation; as Dale, Robertson and others have argued, in some respects the EU is actively complicit in furthering them. But the EU's impact on European education is to be measured not only by advocacy of neoliberalism. The EU is also both a vast organisation and a major institution, 'the most successful example of institutionalised international policy co-ordination in the modern world' developed through 'a series of celebrated intergovernmental bargains' (Moravcsik 1993, p. 473). Institutions and organisations demand sociological analysis. In the work of Dale and Robertson, we see the value of one such perspective: Marxism's emphasis on relations of domination. But the sociology of organisation and bureaucracy is not written in the language of Marx alone. Weber's emphasis on the dynamics of conflict and 'party' within organisations and on the informal as well as the formal and (as Jenson & Mérand 2010 argue) Durkheim's exploration of 'the links between social practices, symbolic representations and institutional forms, and the methods for analysing them that his students developed through ethnography' (p. 75) are also important:

just as greater attention to social relations of power can enrich the analysis of the EU's institutional development, the study of social practices draws a more compelling picture of how symbolic representations, norms and ideas are instantiated in European dynamics, and in turn shape patterns of behaviour (Jenson & Mérand 2010, pp. 85-6).

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