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Neoliberal Capitalism, the Modern State and the Governance of Education

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Abstract

The fundamental argument of this paper is, in a nutshell, that the discourse and institutions of modernity are no longer the best possible shell (Jessop, 1978) for the current phase of neoliberal globalisation, and that this has a number of implications for Education as a sector in advanced capitalist countries. In the first section of the paper I will elaborate very briefly on the nature and consequences of neoliberal globalisation and some of the ways that it relates to education. I will then discuss further the tools of modernity, why they are not adequate to comprehend the current phase, and especially how they frame the changes we are currently witnessing. Following that, I will briefly discuss existing conceptualisations of education as a sector, before concluding the paper with a discussion of possible changes to the education sector and their consequences for generating new forms of governance and subjectivity in education.

1. ‘Neoliberal Globalisation’ and the Need to Rethink Education

The fundamental argument of this paper is, in a nutshell, that the discourse and institutions of modernity are no longer the best possible shell (Jessop, 1978) for the current phase of neoliberal globalisation, and that this has a number of implications for education as a sector in advanced capitalist countries. The central elements of what has constituted education as a sector – its technology, its governance and the ways that it is represented – on the basis of which our understanding of education rests, are placed under increasing pressure to change in response to the nature of neoliberal globalisation. This pressure is experienced in two ways, as a result of pressures on the state, which has historically been massively imbricated with education, and changes in the expectations of education itself as a sector. I shall also suggest that these new, post-modern, expectations of education cannot be adequately addressed by the tools of modernity. In particular, the methodological nationalism, statism and educationism

(Dale & Robertson, forthcoming) that have characterised the study of education (and of other social sciences) cease to be helpful and threaten to become misleading in the face of the changes that are getting under way.

In the first section of the paper I will elaborate very briefly on the nature and consequences of neoliberal globalisation and some of the ways that it relates to education. I will then discuss further the tools of modernity, why they are not adequate to comprehend the current phase, and especially how they frame the changes we are currently witnessing. Following that, I will briefly discuss existing conceptualisations of education as a sector, before concluding the paper with a discussion of possible changes to the education sector and their consequences for generating new forms of governance and subjectivity in education.

In developing the fundamental argument, I follow Boaventura de Sousa Santos in suggesting that it is crucial to the understanding of the current global predicaments to distinguish between the trajectories of capitalism (as found currently in the form of neo-liberal globalisation) and modernity and to examine the relationships between them. As he puts it,

Western modernity and capitalism are two different and autonomous historical processes ... [that] have converged and interpenetrated each other. ... It is my contention that we are living in a time of paradigmatic transition, and, consequently, that the sociocultural paradigm of modernity ... will eventually disappear before capitalism ceases to be dominant ... partly from a process of supersession and partly from a process of obsolescence. It entails supersession to the extent that modernity has fulfilled some of its promises, in some cases even in excess. It results from obsolescence to the extent that modernity is no longer capable of fulfilling some of its other promises (Santos, 2002, p. 1 f.).

He goes on, “Modernity is grounded on a dynamic tension between the pillar of regulation ([which] guarantees order in a society as it exists in a given moment and place) and emancipation ... the aspiration for a good order and good society in the future” (ibid. p. 2). However, he argues that “what most strongly characterises the sociocultural condition at the beginning of the century is the collapse of the pillar of emancipation into the pillar of regulation, as a result of the reconstructive management of the excesses and deficits of modernity which have been entrusted to modern science and, as a second best, to modern law” (ibid. p. 7). Further, these two pillars have now ceased to be in tension but have become almost fused, as a result of the “reduction of modern emancipation to the cognitive-instrumental rationality of science and the reduction of modern regulation to the principle of the market” (ibid. p. 9).

There are two main points of relevance to this paper to be drawn from this rather curtailed and abstract exegesis – which may also be considered extreme, but if it is, it is for a purpose. First, it is clear that historically – and today – education has been associated with both pillars; it has been incorporated as a tool of both emancipation and regulation. And, if, as Santos argues, these are now fused, what does this mean for education as a sector today?

Second, efforts to reconstitute modernity by addressing its excesses and deficits through science (very broadly conceived, in which education as a deliberate attempt to change people and institutions might be included) have failed, as emancipation means more of the same remedy and regulation is ceded to the market. And if this is the case, is education capable of offering a solution or is it confined to modifying the problem? We will seek answers to this question too, in considering the possible shape of a new education sector. Does that ‘reconstitution’ allow it to contribute to repairing the deficits, or to moving beyond them?

2. Changing Relations in Embedding the State

The most relevant and effective way of beginning to ground these questions is to focus initially on states, since arguably the state is one of the key institutions where capitalism and modernity meet. The state is simultaneously the means by which the conditions of existence of capitalism are most fully assured and a key *institution* of modernity. However, following Santos, the state that was to implement regulation is itself incorporated into the project of neo-liberalism, as regulation is ceded to the market, and emancipation is reduced to market freedom.

This is hugely intensified as a result of the particular relationship between the state, modernity and capitalism in the project of neo-liberal globalisation – whose central assumption is the need for the removal of all barriers to free trade, but whose central governing device is to achieve this through harnessing the apparatuses of the state to its own purposes in place of the decommodifying and ‘market-taming’ role the state had played under social democracy. While neo-liberalism still needs points of fixity where the values of its flows can be realized, it also needs these points of fixity not to obstruct the flows, as is perceived to have been the case with the social democratic state. Rather than merely reforming ‘government through minimising regulation’, it seeks to construct new ways of reducing transaction costs without resorting to *laissez faire*. Stephen Gill has characterised as new constitutionalism “... to separate economic policies from broad political accountability in order to make governments more responsive to the discipline of market forces and correspondingly less responsive to popular-democratic forces and processes ... Central objectives in this discourse are security of property rights and investor freedoms, and market discipline on the state and on labour to secure credibility in the eyes of private investors, e.g. those in both the global currency and capital markets” (Gill, 1998, p. 5).

In order to do this it needs not just to ‘reform’ existing states but to transform them by constructing new spaces and sectors of *governance*.

Thus, the social-democratic model of the state that was earlier seen as the protector of the principles of modernity and nationhood, and the best possible shell for capitalism (see Jessop, 1978) is now seen as a barrier to free trade, and no more the institutional base that capitalism needs to embed and monitor ‘the rules of global economic

governance'. Thus, the state is increasingly unable to manage the tensions intrinsic to its role as the key institution of both modernity and capitalism. It had been able to manage these tensions largely through its capacity to regulate to protect forms of emancipation that did not rely on the market, to 'decommodify' particular institutions and practices, an approach that reached its high water mark in the *trente glorieuses*, the exceptional 30 years that followed (at least in the West) WW II. However, as Santos puts it, following the iconic fall of the Berlin Wall, "the state ceased to be the controlling agency over the articulations among the three pillars of modern regulation (State, market and community) to become the servant of the market and redesign the community to become the same" (2002, p. 154).

3. Neoliberal Approaches to the Solution of the Shortcomings of Modernity

Here, we look at the particular elements of modernity that are seen as obstacles to the free movement of labour, capital, and goods and services, and what makes it less than an ideal shell for neoliberal capitalism. As Gill suggests, what characterises neoliberalism is that it seeks to not just nullify states as obstacles to free movements but to transform them into institutions that positively promote free movements. We have seen that the state's ability to discharge this requirement has been fundamentally transformed by the pressures of neo-liberal capitalism to make it a more effective and efficient point of fixity for capital realisation. This has come about through (a) the decline of the national state as the basis of the economy; (without a national economy it is more difficult to build a national welfare state, for instance) with the reversal of the relationship between the economic and the social, from one where the former served the latter to its opposite and consequently (b) the declining influence of borders, especially as constraints on the movement of capital, as well as the growth of international organizations that carry out many of what were formerly regarded as 'national' prerogatives and responsibilities; (c) the recognition (in the form of the New Public Management see, e.g. Kettl, 1997; Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2004) that many of what had come to be seen as 'obviously' state activities, could, and should, be funded and provided by other, often private, bodies, with benefits to both state expenditure and quality of service; (d) the dominant role of the state becoming the promotion of national economic prosperity, on the assumption that the wealth so created would trickle down so that all would eventually benefit from it; the associated shift of state activity towards economic activity; (e) a shift from state to individual responsibility for security and risk, especially in the area of employment.

All this involved a major transformation of the state itself. Thus while the 'historical' form and trappings of the state are apparently still 'the same' as before, their fundamental meanings have been changed (see Dale & Robertson, forthcoming).

4. Beyond the Tools of Modernity

As Santos (2002) points out, it is not possible to tackle the problems of post modernity with the tools of modernity. There have been crucial changes here, in both the nature and roles of states and in relations between national and supranational scales of educational governance. Here, I shall focus on two ‘tools of modernity’ that have been commonly used in the analysis of education, what I refer to as *methodological nationalism* and *methodological statism* (see Dale, 2005; Dale & Robertson, forthcoming), but which are less helpful, even misleading, in the analysis of educational issues generated by the advance of neoliberalism and the associated erosion of the institutions of modernity. Since the first is probably the better known, I will focus mainly on the second.

Methodological nationalism is, simply put, the taken for granted assumption that nation states and their boundaries are the ‘natural’ containers of societies and hence the appropriate unit of analysis for social sciences. It is clearly a product of modernity, which “was cast in the iron cage of nationalized states that confined and limited our own analytic capacities” (Wimmer & Glick Schiller, 2002, p. 302) while “the epistemic structures and programmes of mainstream social science have been closely attached to, and shaped by the experience of modern state formation” (ibid., p. 303). Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller further argue “that nationalist forms of inclusion and exclusion bind our societies together served as an invisible background even to the most sophisticated theorizing about the modern condition. The social sciences were captured by the apparent naturalness and givenness of a world divided into societies along the lines of nation states” (ibid., p. 304). Here, states are both containers of societies and the basic institutions of the world beyond their own boundaries. Both these things have clear consequences for our focus on Governance and Education. They make it difficult both to see other possible containers of social action and recognise a supranational rather than an international level of which the only components are states. This division of scales also makes it difficult to conceive of their relations in any other than a zero sum (‘either national or international’) way. This is, for instance, why I find the suggestion of introducing a form of ‘regime theory’ as a means of resolving some of the issues of inter scalar relations unconvincing, since it rests on a traditional International Relations basis of states as the only actors at an international level.

By *methodological statism*, I refer to the assumption that the state is the source and means of all governing activity, which, though it is typically taken for granted, is essentially contingent not necessary. Fundamental to methodological statism is the idea that it is the state that (necessarily) governs ‘its’ society. This idea is common to both Weberian and Marxist theories of the state. As Bratsis (2002, p. 249) puts it, “all state theory proceeds ‘as if’ the state were indeed a universal a priori predicate to our social existence rather than a product of our social existence. This ‘as if’ act by state theory is

a fetishizing act (and thus reifies the state) because it endows the state with ontological qualities of its own and abstracts its existence from the realm of social relations”. Thus, it is important to consider the assumption of embedded statism, to question rather than to assume, the ability of the state to act. One implication of methodological statism is the assumption that the state continues to govern not only the same territory, but the same things and in the same ways that it has done historically – which in this case might be taken to be the post war social democratic state form found in Western Europe until its gradual and accelerating erosion that began in around 1975 (Zürn & Leibfried, 2005, p. 11). Central – and, we might argue, unique – to this conception was that all four dimensions of the state distinguished by Zürn and Leibfried (resources, law, legitimacy and welfare) converged in national constellations, and national institutions. What Zürn and Leibfried make clear, however, is that “... the changes over the past 40 years are not merely creases in the fabric of the nation state, but rather an unravelling of the finely woven national constellation of its Golden Age” (ibid., p. 1). As Edgar Grande puts it, “with the new forms of complex governance, the state *form* [emphasis in original] ... loses its monopoly position in the production of collective solutions to collective problems. Collectively binding decisions are no longer taken by the state alone, or among sovereign states, but rather with the involvement of various types of societal actors, sometimes even without governments” (2006, p. 92).

While this was pre-eminently a national state, the scope of state activity was very wide, from intervention in the economy, to the monopoly of provision of welfare services. The state would mitigate the worst excesses of capitalism and ensure at least a minimum of social protection. It governed, from above, implicitly alone, and primarily through policy making. What is surprising is that despite the thorough critiques of this view of the state, some of these central assumptions continue to inform academic accounts, especially perhaps the idea that the state governs through policy; if things are to be changed, it is to the state that we expect to look to bring about those changes.

None of these things hold in the current era. For instance, the state can no longer be assumed to hold sovereignty over ‘its’ territory; sovereignty and territory no longer reinforce each other. The state now governs through means other than ‘policy’ and in concert with a range of other institutions rather than alone. This has given rise to the term ‘governance without rather than government’. And this leads to a need to make the state explanans rather than explanandum in our analyses.

Several consequences of methodological nationalism and statism are apparent in discussions around the relationships between globalisation and education. They tend to polarise scales of activity, with a zero-sum relationship between globalisation and (taken for grantedly) national education systems, which leads to examinations of the relationship being largely confined to the ‘effects on’ activities at one scale of activities at another; this is seen in the frequency of analyses that focus on the ‘effects’ of globalisation on national education systems, or how national systems are ‘converging’

as a result of globalisation, or what kinds of ‘hybrid’ forms are produced by the coming together of activities at different scales. It should be noted that there is nothing inherently inappropriate about seeking to identify effects of globalisation on national education systems, but nevertheless a number of caveats have to be out in place. First, it is crucial to bear in mind that the ‘nation-state’ under discussion is not the nation-state of the social democratic era. Second, what is meant by globalisation cannot be taken as self-evident, but always has to be spelled out in detail. Third, it is never sufficient to focus only on ‘effects on’, if only, fourth, because many of the most significant consequences of globalisation can not be registered in terms of ‘effects on’; we return to this below. However, there are two other crucial consequences of ‘effects on’ approaches. One is that analyses to be concentrated on *institutions* and what they produce, at the expense of examining two other crucial elements of social sectors, their technologies and their representation. The other is that we are led to think of the relationship between scales as one of forms of imposition/resistance, rather than contemplating the possibility of activities at different scales taking the form of ‘parallel universes’ (see Dale, 2006).

5. Education in ‘High Modernity’

In the next section of this paper we will focus briefly on the institutions, representations and technology of education in the period of what has been called ‘high modernity’, which might be equated with the *trente glorieuses*. We might see the three elements coming together in what will be referred to as an ‘education sector settlement’ (see Dale, 2003, where the elements were referred to as ‘governance’, ‘mandate’, and ‘capacity’ respectively). The conditions under which these began to change, both in their individual composition and their relative priority have been very briefly sketched out above (see also Dale, 1989, chap. 6).

In *terms of the representation* of education, there has been extensive discussion of education under modernity, led by the world polity group at Stanford around John Meyer, which has been characterized as built around a notion of a common world education culture built on the assumptions of Western modernity (see, e.g., Meyer, Benavot & Kamens, 1992) As John W. Meyer, who may be seen as the intellectual inspiration of this group, puts it, “the two main goals of the proper modern national state – individual equality and collective progress – come together in an extraordinary worldwide wave of astonishingly homogeneous educational expansion” (2001, p. 4). Elsewhere, Meyer and his colleagues have supplied compelling evidence of this homogeneous expansion, that has come to include effectively all the countries of the world, certainly at a formal level (see Meyer et al., 1992). The spread of the model, however, is not as ‘spontaneous’ as may sometimes be implied – and indeed this relationship between the model and its sponsors points us very clearly to the need not to consider modernity in isolation from the nature of the links with capitalism. Third, the

world polity theorists emphasise the importance of science, and the rationalization, 'scientisation' and professionalisation of an ever increasing range of social issues and problems. These either cease to be subject to, or to be seen as beyond the capacities of, 'local' interpretations and remedies.

A further key element of the representation of and discourses around education is their relationship to 'the national'. Education systems are the major means by which societies seek to define, replicate and ensure their national distinctiveness; to strengthen their national economies, to address their social problems; to influence the distribution of individual life chances. It is this image of 'Education' that most people have in mind when they think about the issue. It provides the grist for national education politics. These national traditions and issues grow from nationally specific path dependencies (policies and practices that take their form from what has gone before); one especially interesting path dependency derives from whether a national education system preceded or followed industrialization, for instance. Another important area where national path dependencies are significant is in the definition of a national education 'sector'.

In *terms of the technology* of the education sector, that has been powerfully framed historically by what has been called the grammar of schooling. This term (see Tyack & Tobin, 1994) is used to refer to the set of organizational assumptions and practices that have grown up around the development of mass schooling and have come to be seen as defining it, to become, in effect, education as practiced, though it is crucial to note the more fundamental point that is implicit here, that 'education' is seen as 'schooling'. The existence of these conventions and of the practices associated with them may become apparent only when breached or threatened. Thus, the spatial separation of 'the school' becomes 'strange' or problematic only when challenged, for instance by current calls for 'any time, any place' learning to replace the current spatially and temporally restricted forms of education. The temporal basis of education is particularly deeply embedded into the fabric, rhythms and even the calendar of contemporary societies, through the conception of the 'school (or academic) year', with its effects on such unconnected items as the cost of holidays, for instance. Schooling is universalist in a number of ways. Universal Primary Education is considered a key step towards eliminating poverty through the Millenium Development Goals. Participation in education is the only compulsory requirement of citizens, and the expectation that all will be treated at least formally equally is deeply embedded in the institutional forms of schooling. Finally, education is typically seen as a job for professional experts, with a dedicated teaching force. We can see how these characteristics of the grammar of education persisted, *mutatis mutandis*, to the final half of the last century, when they became increasingly involved in the project of social democracy, which saw education systems making specific and identifiable contributions in particular areas of society.

6. Education as a Sector

By ‘education sector’, I refer to the set of activities collected together and political-administratively classified (and typically assembled under common statistical rubrics) as comprising ‘Education’ (for important accounts of the growth of nation-state education sectors, see Archer, 1979; De Swaan, 1988; Green, 1990). What is significant about these accounts is that they all see the creation of education sectors as central to the development of states. Almost universally, nation-states have Ministries of Education. As analysts of education we tend to take for granted the existence, the boundaries and the scope of education as a sector. We take those limits as ‘pristine’, ‘intact’, ‘natural’, and theoretically unproblematic. The existence of an education sector and of what it implies is one of our most deeply embedded *ceteris paribus* assumptions. We do, of course, sometimes acknowledge that different nation-states may mean something rather different from what ‘we’ mean by the education sector – for instance, that in some countries the Ministry of Education has other responsibilities attached to it, such as ‘Religious Affairs’ – and it would be inappropriate in this setting to omit mention to the DG Education, Culture and Sport.

However, it is also crucial to recognise that there is no universal and natural division of labour between sectors, or that these different divisions of labour do not have significant effects, both historically and as the bases for further reconstitution of sectors. A very clear empirical example of the changing relationship of an education sector with other national sectors, and the consequences for its shape and scope, that came about in response to the activities of international organisations, has been provided by Jutta Allmendinger and Stephan Leibfried (2003). They have shown how changes to the German education system have been seen as necessary because of the perceived shortcomings of the sector’s relationship with other social sectors, in the light of the ‘shift to a knowledge society’ (a shift that has been very heavily promoted by international organisations such as the OECD and the EU). They point out that while “in Anglo-Saxon countries education policy is usually seen as part of ‘social policy’ ... [and] an integrated view of social policy and education lies at the roots of the UK welfare state reform right after the Second World War ... in Germany, as in other countries, education and social policy are still separated by some traditional feudal notion of class ... [and] education reform came in from the dark only in the 1970s and was seen to take place in a universe quite distant from social policy” (ibid., p. 63). They go on to add that “at the start of the 21st century – with the shift to a knowledge society – this 19th century constellation may turn into a massive competitive advantage for the Anglo-Saxon world” (ibid.).

7. Towards a new European Education Sector?

The attempt in this final section will be to sketch out a possible form for a ‘new’ education sector that is not based on such tools of modernity as methodological nationalism, statism and educationism.

We might begin by considering consequences of bracketing the ‘nation-state’ assumptions of that frame education sectors. These have been nicely revealed in a discussion of the scale and nature of governance of social policy, by Savio and Palola (2004), who make clear that such tools do not reveal that the object of social policy has changed, in this case following the entry on to the scene of the EU:

[Soft social policy instruments] were excluded from social policy because they did not fit with the comparative welfare research orientation and its theoretical frameworks [the welfare regimes and concepts in use]. We argue that this welfare research tradition produced certain harmful implications. Comparative research restricted the academic interests towards the EU soft methods by means of its hegemonic position, truth-statements and knowledge production. The lack of serious inquiry on ‘the soft’ has influenced the considerations of EU social policy; its importance is still considered only in its capacity to regulate welfare even though during the latest decade “social policy has not happened in social policy. Instead, it has been *a question of how to govern the social*” (Eräsaari, 1995, p. 169). ... We [suggest] that the Lisbon strategy and the open method of co-ordination (OMC) can be regarded as signs which show us that the EU social policy has left its customary place and has *become a project to invent the social within the confines of the European Union* (Savio & Palola, 2004, p. 4).

And they go on, “after Lisbon, it has no longer been relevant to make a distinction between EU-level and national level social policy, as this division, based on the Treaties’ definition of competences in the area of social policy, is not recognised in the efforts to modernise social protection by means of the OMC” (ibid.).

Given this, it will be useful to concentrate in this section on the construction of a possible ‘European education sector’, that will be seen as having distinct representations, technologies and governance, and that will be conceived of as existing *in parallel with*, rather than in opposition to, or in combination with (though both these forms of relationship are possible, I will not consider them here) national sectors, and enjoying a particular functional and scalar division of labour between the two sectors (see Dale & Robertson, forthcoming), with issues around economic competitiveness shifting ‘upwards’, and issues around education’s role in the distribution of opportunities within national societies remaining at the national level, or moving ‘downwards’. The key difference here concerns the nature and status of the representation, governance and technology of the respective education sectors. At national and sub-national level they continue to form the terrain on which the political disputes about the distribution of opportunities, etc., are carried out. At the supranational level, however, they become themselves what is at stake, as they are perceived to be ‘unfit for purpose’ in a global knowledge economy. It is for this reason that we see not just the rise of supranational organisations in education, but their rise with a particular agenda to reform, reconstruct

or transform the representation, the governance and the technology of education. And the way in which we might imagine this being carried out is through the effective construction of parallel, or mutually imbricated but distinct, education sectors.

The construction of ‘new’ and distinct sectors has been a significant feature of the EU’s attempts to create new spaces in which it can be active. Strategically, this may be seen as a setting up an opportunity structure within which to establish a distinctively ‘European’ presence, and to develop distinctively different ‘European’ sectors and policies, while tactically it can be seen as an attempt to skirt the subsidiarity rules by constructing ‘sectors’ that are not found at national level, and hence not subject to subsidiarity. As Mary Daly (2006, p. 465 f.) puts it, again talking about social policy, but in terms that represent the ambition, if not yet the achievement, of the education area, “the significance of EU social policy lies in how it serves to construct and create a social sphere or space for EU action which in turn has dynamic effects on European identity and European society”. She goes on to elaborate how this has been achieved:

In effect, the distinctiveness of EU social policy stands out, especially in relation to national welfare states. For a start its purpose is different: not part of state-building and group identity and placement as at national level, but providing the underpinnings for a European integration project that is envisaged foremost as market integration. The distinctiveness of the key values underlying EU social policy is also noteworthy – for example the importance attributed to both subsidiarity and a competitive form of solidarity marks it out as quite unique. In terms of substance or content, EU social policy lacks the core notions of social protection and redistribution that are synonymous with social policy at national level (ibid., p. 464).

There are three points to be made here. The first concerns the different purpose of EU and national state social policy; it is oriented around a regional agenda that is not reducible to the (traditional) national agendas of its members. Second, it is marked by the creation of a particular relationship between Member States – competitive solidarity (see Streeck, 1999). The third concerns its scope – it is not involved with the activities that are at the core of national states. That is to say, in the terms we are using here, the representation of the sector, what it is seen as ‘being for’ has changed; the way that it is governed has changed; and while its technology is not mentioned, it seems clear that what was appropriate to the scope of the national would be inappropriate for the proposed scope of the regional.

8. Representation, Governance and Technology

So, this paper might be most sensibly concluded by suggesting some ways that the possible formulation of a European education sector might alter governance spaces and opportunities for new subjectivities in education across the continent.

In terms of representation, we may point to two features in particular: the emphasis on the European, rather than national, dimension; and the emphasis on Lifelong Learning rather than ‘schooling’. The key way in which the ground is prepared for a transna-

tional representation of education is not through the specification of policies to be followed, or even policy transfer, but through a process of apparently consensual, non-binding joint problem identification. This is achieved through a number of devices. One is the use of common benchmarks, indicators and so on, which are such a central part and tool of the EC's work in education. These are at the basis of the effort to ensure that member states follow EU guidelines, for instance in the reports on the degree to which the targets have been met. A key feature of these measurements is their presentation; figures are presented under the headings of EU average, EU best and worst achievers – and these columns are followed by the average achievement on the dimension of the USA and Japan, reinforcing the sense of a joint competitor. However, here as elsewhere, the precise achievement of MS is not as important as the fact that they subscribe to and take part in the collective task. This kind of process has been felicitously referred to as moving the European project 'From Integration by Law to Europeanisation by Figures' (see Bruno, Jacquot & Mandin, 2004).

Much has been written in this context about the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), the key means of 'policy-making' especially in the social sectors of the EU (and hence as much a part of the governance of the new sector as its representation; indeed, the potential of the OMC lies very much in this conjunction). The first point to be made about the OMC is, indeed, that it is sector based, and we would add, thereby to a degree sector defining at the European level (see the comments from Daly (2006) above). The OMC process in education is not so much involved with merely its major responsibilities – fixing guidelines, establishing indicators and benchmarks, translating these into policy by target setting and identification and sharing of good practice – but with a process of assembling a separate set of common definitions and roles, not reducible to the aggregate or average of MS practices. It is thus the key means of demonstrating EU competence in education, of identifying European level problems (or redefining existing problems by shifting their scale) that can only be addressed at European level.

In the case of Lifelong Learning (LLL), we may discern two intertwined strands. The first is related to the strategy forced upon the EU in an area like education which is subject to subsidiarity (i.e., a national responsibility). The EU cannot intervene in such areas, and so one strategy is indeed to produce 'parallel' discourses, or representations. This is clearly evident in the case of the OMC, and perhaps even more so in the case of the LLL, which is clearly not part of any MS compulsory education sector. At the same time, it clearly includes the compulsory sector. Here, it is not without significance that the new generation of EU education programmes is being coordinated under the heading of LLL (see, e.g., Commission of the European Communities, 2004).

However, it is in the area of the purpose of the policy that we see the direction to be taken by the new construction of the sector most clearly. Rather, it is a response to the

Lisbon goals and especially the competitiveness agenda, particularly as it has been further prioritised following the Mid Term Review¹ of the Lisbon process, with a heavy emphasis on the need for Europe to move towards becoming a Knowledge Economy – indeed, it is useful to see the new sector as framed by LLL and driven by the Knowledge Economy, so that it may be more useful to call it the KnELL (Knowledge Economy and Lifelong Learning) sector. The responsibility for reaching these goals is not divided by sector but is clearly, if quite implicitly, regarded as a cross sector problem. It is important to note here that the Lisbon summit “does not acknowledge education as a ‘teleological’ policy area, an area in itself ... [it] is part of social policy, labour market and overall economic policy” (Gornitzka, 2005, p. 17). A key element of the KnELL agenda was seen in its capacity to weld together the competitiveness and social cohesion components of the Lisbon agenda through the encouraging and embedding of the policy of ‘productive social policy’.

Thus both the scale and the sector of the response are shifted from the national level. The European KnELL sector overlaps with but is separate from and not reducible to the institutional forms, discourses and practices of any individual national education sector or any combination or distillation of them. It differs from the national sectors in several respects:

- Learning not education,
- Competence not content,
- Particular (just for me) not universal,
- The nature of its involvement of/with ICT,
- Specific, employment related focus rather than comprehensive social policy, nation building etc. scope,
- (in both these latter cases it makes the most of the EU’s independence and lack of need for electoral accountability).

9. Governance

The governance of the new sector is driven by much the same strategic considerations as the representations. In terms of process, the construction of new sectors benefits from the EU’s independence and lack of need for electoral accountability. The process is largely depoliticised, with the OMC providing a managed consensus over the aims of the sector and the means of achieving them, as opposed to highly politicised national education debates. There is no possibility of the EU intervening in the governance of national education sectors, and so once again, a parallel form is set in place. It is in these process issues as much as more obviously narrower ‘curriculum’ issues that we see the basis of the division of labour of educational governance between Europe and its MS national education systems. In essence, education politics in MS education systems do not revolve around their contribution to the development of a Knowledge

Economy; however frequently this may be invoked and used as a slogan to justify particular education policies, the ‘real’ national education politics are played out around education’s functions of screening and sorting, guardianship and socialisation, none of which are direct concerns of the European education sector.

This strategy is by no means confined to education, and its parallel quality and difference is underlined by small but effective strategies such as having its own distinctive timetable and annual schedule, and the recruitment of cadres of ‘a-national’ experts rather than national representatives (see Jacobsson, 2004). This confirms the independence and autonomy of the European level. One especially interesting example of ‘scale hopping’ in this area is that of the Bologna process, where problems of national sovereignty are to a degree overcome by making the individual institutions the level for effective action.

In the area of technology, as might be inferred from expectations of the KnELL, the major problem is replacing the existing grammar of schooling, which is clearly found wanting, and regarded as an obstacle to the development of a new sector fashioned around the ideas and principles of the KnELL (indeed, the quotation from Rodrigues is as applicable to technology as to representation).

The existing grammar of schooling is also seen as intrinsically associated with national education systems, which creates a link between technology and governance. MS education systems have been castigated for their backsliding and the slow pace of their response to the goals set them by the EC, with the explicit threat that this endangers the achievement of the Lisbon goals (Commission of the European Communities, 2006) Education systems are seen as having stagnated; as an OECD document puts it “forward-looking methodologies have been developed in only rudimentary fashion in education compared with many other sectors” (OECD, 2001, p. 3).

Worse than this, existing education systems seem often to be regarded as obstacles to the achievement of economic goals, part of the problem rather than the solution. Such a view is implicit in the whole EU education policy, which is premised on improving those systems, with a focus on economically relevant aspects. It has also been especially prominent in the OECD, whose four scenarios for future education systems, which might be seen to be at the heart of their programme for improving education’s contribution to the development of Knowledge Economies, plainly rest on an assumption of the multiple areas of inefficiency and ineffectiveness that characterise its members’ education sectors (OECD, 2001).

This very clear manifesto for the reconstitution of an area suffering from the obsolescence of modernity takes us back to the questions posed in the first section of this paper, to which brief answers might now be attempted.

In terms of the possibilities for emancipation and regulation, we might say that the new sector does not challenge the market, indeed is more closely harnessed to it, and it does not at present appear to present any challenge to the dominant epistemology. The

division of labour between national and regional scales of education governance would confine the regional scale to market advancing activities, and would leave at the national level the issues traditionally associated with emancipation, in Santos' terms. We should not, however, assume a complete division of labour between scales, with, to put it simply, 'regulation' via the market at one level, and emancipation at the other, for the national retains a powerful commitment to regulation as well as emancipation. In terms of the second, we might say that the reconstitution is based on a recognition of the nature of (at least some of) the deficits of modernity, but that it does not show a way to move beyond them. Rather, it might almost be seen as a form of ultra modernity, using its very latest tools to provide the best possible shell for capitalism's latest form, rather than as a form of postmodernity, or a means of looking beyond modernity.

Note

1. A 'main political orientation' following the 2005 mid term review of the Lisbon process is that "new priorities [be] defined for national education policies, i.e., turning schools into open learning centres, providing support to [all] population groups, using the Internet and multimedia" (Rodrigues, 2004, p. 5).

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