OECD as a site of co-production: European education governance and the new politics of ‘policy mobilisation’

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Europe, travel and prejudice

• ‘Europe’ has always been created through the movement and mobility of ideas and people...

• ...but has also been divided by prejudice, stereotyping and cultural ‘otherness’;

• I would suggest that this dialectical relationship is a very productive context for the study of the policy making process...

...and start with two problems and a proposition
Two dominant assumptions...

• Methodological nationalism in education research; in addition to that, limiting focus of education as applied science;

• European integration/ political science research agenda for the study of Europe, which often excludes other disciplines and traditions as irrelevant or of lesser explanatory potential
...and a proposition

- **Education is a productive area of research for the study of Europe**
  - Historical baggage – education the primary means of building the nation-state in the 19th century, plus education and culture the first tools in building Europe as a common demos in the 1960s-70s
  
  But more importantly today
  
  - (lifelong) Learning as an economic resource
  - Learning as the key means to promote social cohesion and equity

And

- **Policy learning** as the primary means of governing Europe.
Today’s argument

• The OECD became a key Europeanising actor in the field of education because ‘Europe’ wanted it to;

• International comparative testing and expertocracy – the Babel-like discussions perhaps an advantage?

• OECD as a site of co-production of knowledge and policy and the politics of policy mobilisation.
Dialogue with Hugh Heclo

• ‘[Heclo] privileges sound over source, emphasizing –if perhaps inadvertently- the movement by which it is sustained rather than any fixed point of origin or orientation’ (Freeman 2012 p.13)

• ‘for what we think of as policy to move, then, shared understandings formed in one place must be reproduced in another’ (p.13)

• ‘shared understandings develop (are developed) in two ways, in meetings and documents’ (p14)
• using Heclo’s idea of ‘collective puzzling’ for the making of policy, “this puzzling entails multiple acts of translation, but only to the extent that we can think of translation as generative, an active process of the production of meaning (Freeman 2009). It seems impossible to ask, at any given moment, ‘Where is policy?’ for it seems to be always incipient, mobile, somewhere between.” (p.17)

• ‘Mobility is an inherent characteristic of policy...policy changes as it moves, and the more it moves the more it seems to change’. (p.20)
Questions...

• Is this an ‘ideal-type’ of the policy making process?
• To what extent is this the policy process and
• if indeed it is, how can we account for and explain the almost fusion of the knowledge and policy processes in the settings we are investigating?

• What is the role of the OECD as a site of co-production of knowledge and policy?
International comparative testing and the use of experts

• Story beginnings somewhere in the ‘60s when the OECD develops its education research arm in order to inform economists –and then in the 1990s international comparative testing is first conceptualised and delivered;

• Numerous expert working groups, expert panels, research organisations consortia etc drawn together not only to offer expertise but largely legitimacy to the recommendations for policy reforms;

• These groups work ‘together’ for many years in the preparation of each study –PIAAC was launched in 2011 for the first time but experts have been part of its preparation at least since 2006;

• Collaboration and networking, ‘learning by meeting’ (Freeman 2009) –always?
The role of experts

• An examination of not only the movement of policy but of those who move it
• Experts are highly-mobile; they are numerous; their expert knowledge makes them always objective yet invisible;
• They offer evidence for policy, yet their role is symbolic; that is, they legitimise knowledge.
The role of the OECD

- Quantification, measurability, simplicity

- it defines the limits of the possible by suggesting what can be measured, hence what can be ‘done’;
- it carries no political jurisdiction therefore it carries no external threats to national policymaking;
- it now has the experience, networks and the technical and material resources to speed the policy process up;
- it carries all the ‘right’ ideological messages for education systems in the 21st century -that is, it connects learning directly to labour market outcomes and human capital.
New loves…:

‘So around 2003-2004, we started becoming far more involved. Meetings all over the world, I don’t know how many countries I visited but what is important is that the Commission is there…. The European member states should see that the Commission is there because one of the criticisms of the Commission since all this started was that we didn’t take into account all the good work of the OECD. Which was wrong but they said it. The way of showing them was to actually be there –not an empty chair.’ (EC4)
...and love is power

‘When the OECD started speaking about TALIS it attracted the attention of the member states, that all this is very good but it is expensive. ...So we managed, I managed to convince my Director General of supporting (the OECD) with an awful lot of millions of euros. And I went back to the OECD with that message and said that of course if we pay we want influence’. (EC7)
Expert wars

• On the IEA and OECD ‘war’:

‘The main reason is that they are competitors and both in scientific and in financial terms it is getting more and more difficult to conduct these surveys. There was a message from member states to the OECD and the IEA – get together, sit down and discuss it and do it. Now, 6 months later, we all come together and we ask what was the result of that meeting and the answer was that we didn’t find a date. They don’t work together because they don’t like each other’. (EC9)
Expert wars cont.

‘And they didn’t invite us to some national expert groups and so on that are in development—and they did very little use of our work because they wanted to do something that was different and specific so that they could sell it to the member states—this is my interpretation, of course. But I think that there is this kind of competition, differentiation between European institutions because we are in competition for funding’. (EC3)
Expertocracy rules – and collapses:

‘We create an expert group, we do the same as the OECD, we ask member states to designate experts.... actually member states are represented by different people who have different views around the same questions. Very often I would almost kill myself at the meetings because I would say, well that is what we’ve just decided with the member states yesterday. And the member states were sitting there, saying we’ve never heard of it. And we don’t agree. ...What you discover ...is that people don’t know each other – they don’t even know the others exist. They have never heard of them. They come from different institutions, different backgrounds, different interests, policies, objectives. The member states are not even aware of these contradictions. The result of it is that they don’t have any influence’. (EC10)
... I am not sure if it is in the interest of the OECD or the Commission to solve that problem — because these institutions will benefit from that — the more they contradict each other, the more the institutions decide. .... And with OECD, surely it is the same. This is so obvious — that’s what they do — OECD is Andreas. We always have a joke with Andreas — where he is brilliant, is to conclude. He is fantastic in this — conclusions! He is the conclusions expert — they are in before the meeting (laughs). ... It is very convenient (EC10)
An unlikely actor?

‘The Commission thought, and I fought for this for years, that the OECD had to adopt the same agenda as we had developed in Brussels. So van der Pas, the Director General, went to meetings with the OECD and argued for their work, the annual work of the OECD should be the same as the one we have. He argued for and pushed that what we have as a policy agenda should also be relevant for the OECD’. (EC10)
From policy mobility to policy competition: the rise of ‘competitive cooperation’?

‘We ended up inspiring OECD to adopt a policy agenda – and that they did with member states. They see the member states and have meetings with the ministers...... So they [member states] go to the institution which they are most influenced by or more easy to work with, or it is more convenient in terms of the political context in the country – which puts the European Commission in a weak situation because in fact we are the threat to the member states despite of the fact that we follow the Treaty etc. and we are a policy organisation. The OECD isn’t. That shift has weakened the Commission and signals the need strongly for the Commission and the OECD to work together. The more you do that the more you have the need to have close cooperation between us, a competitive cooperation, a cooperation of influence, who decides, who draws conclusions’. (EC10)
In conclusion

- **Relationship between knowledge and policy**: from knowledge *informing* policy, to knowledge *forming* policy, to an almost complete *fusion* of the two realms

- Transnational expert institutions and ‘boundary work’: their ability to produce not only knowledge but social orders:

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

• OECD: the boundary organisation par excellence in European education governance
• The OECD a central node in the structuring of the European (global?) education policy field

But why is boundary work necessary?

- nature and history of education policy making in Europe
- Lack of dynamic by the DG EAC

• Policy mobilisation and policy competition

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