THE EUROPEAN GOVERNANCE OF EDUCATION POLICY: CRISSES, COLLISIONS AND SECTORAL DEFENCE

Åse Gornitzka
Ase.gornitzka@stv.uio.no

INTRODUCTION

Few, if any, governance sites operate in splendid isolation but are part of larger political orders, that is the set of political institutions that make and implement collective decisions. Some are centrally placed and tightly connected to other elements of such an order, whereas as other areas are in the periphery and loosely connected other governance sites. In the context of the emerging European political order, the governance of education and training has been far from the centre. This stands in contrast to the central position of governance of education in national politics, i.e. the states’ ability to make and enforce rules regulating teaching and learning and to deliver services in education. Public education systems have traditionally played a key role in the state and nation building. Historically, education governance has been contested and often a battleground for the clash between the state and the Church, between centre and periphery, or between levels of government. The timing and dynamics of institutionalising mass education systems have also varied considerably (Rokkan 1966, Soysal and Strang 1989).

The emerging European political order entails serious challenges to the state-centred order. Shifts in authority and development of governance capacity lead to fuzzy demarcations between the responsibilities of territorial levels in formulating, deciding on and implementing rules and policies (Egeberg 2005). This challenge, however, has not formally been present in education governance – which has remained an area where the EU Treaties only assign a supporting role for the EU. In some respect we could argue that compulsory education stays within the realm of ‘core state powers’, although this term had not been used in this way (Rittberger et al. 2013). What we can observe, nonetheless, is a soft challenge to the nation state prerogative in education, higher education and vocational training when national political orders in Europe have been Europeanised.
At the turn of the century the Lisbon Summit and later the EU’s strategy for growth and jobs had important repercussions for cooperation in the field of education. It represented in several respects a critical juncture. A new governance site in education was established with the concept of the Open method of coordination (OMC) as its mainframe (Gornitzka 2007). It created a platform for profiling the sector in the wider context of the EU, and for legitimating its place in European integration. The new cooperation within the education policy came to be known as ‘Education and Training 2010, and later Education and Training 2020’ work programme, by insiders referred to simply as ‘ET’.

The introduction of OMC can also be seen as an instance of innovation that brought a new template for organising governance in the EU within this sector. In this respect is a relevant case for examining how new governance sites emerge and evolve. The latter is the main concern in this contribution. Building on the previous study of the emergence of this governance sites (Gornitzka 2006, 2007), this chapter examine how crisis and exogenous events shape how governance sites develop. Consequently, I trace the trajectory that this site has followed over a 15 year period through different stages: from its prehistory before the launch of the EU’s Lisbon strategy; its initial stage where the education sector picked up the OMC concept and started building the new governance site (inception); the consolidation phase; and finally to the stage where we can expect such a governance site to be challenged by the general systemic crisis, i.e. the context and wake of the EUROZONE crisis.

The processes involved in developing new governance sites we can safely assume are multi-dynamic and most likely cannot be fully understood by reference to one theoretical account. Two main arguments drawn from institutional scholarship are especially explored in this chapter: One argument concerning performance crisis and exogenous shocks as catalysts for institutional change, and another argument that concerns the horizontal dynamics of change where different sectors of society collide and challenge each other. On the basis of these two arguments I explore three possible scenarios for how governance sites develop:

- First scenario: we could expect a weak and marginal governance site to be crushed by ruptures in its surroundings leading to institutional decay and even ‘death’.

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The second scenario: If the governance site is loosely coupled to the overall political-administrative order (Cohen et al. 2012), then is relatively invariant to crises, be it performance or legitimacy crisis, in other parts of the system and can continue to operate relatively independently. The impact of crises is cushioned.

The third scenario: actors can in times of crisis and turbulence use the established governance site as a platform to defend their interests, values and ideas and in doing so confirming its effectiveness and legitimacy, what can be referred to as a dynamic of sectoral defence, i.e. crisis leads to stronger governance capacity.

Below these theoretical arguments are spelled out. The chapter then proceeds to follow the case of Education and Training 2010/2020 through different stages, before I conclude by identifying what this case can tell us about the dynamics of education governance in a Europeanised political order.

INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE AND RESILIENCE: THEORETICAL EXPECTATIONS

According to an institutional perspective, institutional arrangements will be path dependent and not readily be changed according to shifts in political will and power constellation, deliberate design and reorganisation, or by environmental ‘necessities’ (March and Olsen 1989). As maturity and density of institutional structures grow over time, they gain operational autonomy and become institutionalised, infused with value ‘beyond the technical requirement of the task at hand’ (Selznick 1966: 17), and becoming a:

‘relatively enduring collection of rules and organized practices. Embedded in structures of meaning and resources that are relatively invariant* in the face of turnover of individuals and relatively resilient* to the idiosyncratic preferences and expectations of individuals and changing external circumstances’ (March and Olsen 2006: 3). (*my emphasis)

Institutional and sectoral spheres acquire their own operational logic and principles that legitimise them, and institutional spheres of society become dis-associated from one another (Eisenstadt 1964). Public governance arrangement are specialised according to what societal sectors they address, each with its own organised governance capacity, creating
possible problems of coordination across sectoral divides. A robust finding in the study of public bureaucracies is that coordination within organisational boundaries is significantly easier than coordinating across them (Simon 1976[1945]). To the extent that such sectoral decision making segments share basic ideas and understandings about appropriate policy objectives and legitimate concerns in a policy domain, sectorally differentiated institutions carry and perpetuate policy paradigms and legacies. These are relatively predictable frames for action within a policy domain defining what are appropriate problems and solutions and relevant actors.

Such insights underline how institutional spheres are relatively closed and ‘sticky’, not easily changed by people who come and go and changing circumstances. Yet it does not mean that they are static. There are dynamics of change even within institutionalised system, three of which are the special focus of this chapter.

First, let’s consider how institutions exist within a larger institutional setting and order that are rarely in a state of equilibrium. Change can occur in the interface and interaction between institutions (Holm 1995) and can be understood in terms of ‘interaction and collisions among competing institutional structures, norms, rules, identities and practices’ (March and Olsen 2006: 14-15). It can result in radical change if goals, interests, understandings and actors from one sphere invade another. Paradigmatic change would be observed if the fundamental understanding of the purposes of societal institutions embodied in public policy were replaced by another. Less dramatic cases of the effects of inter-sectoral interaction are the gradual change in understanding of the constitutive principles of societal spheres, as when market-like solutions are imported to adjust the governance mechanisms in the social policy sphere without changing the overall policy paradigm or threatening the constitutive principles of a policy or the societal institutions it addresses (Hall 1993). When the logics and governing arrangements of one sector are perceived to be challenged by another, it may trigger contestation and sectoral defence mechanisms (Gornitzka and Olsen 2006, Olsen 1997, Olsen 2007). From this idea about institutional change, we can then expect to see developments in other neighbouring sectors to be important for how governance sites develop.
Secondly, once established organised governance capacity tend to gain relative independence. This is especially the case when the capacity for coordination between governance sits is weak. Resulting in a piecemeal and departmental ‘silo approach’ to governance. In loosely coupled systems (Orton and Weick 1990) governance sites can live semi-parallel lives. The downside is lack of coordination and contradictory policies, e.g. competition policies directly contradict environmental regulations or agricultural policy contradicts health policy. The upside can be that crisis in one part of the system doesn’t cause much trouble for other parts of the system. Under such conditions a break-down, for instance, in EU economic governance would then be of weak, indirect and belated consequences for governance of other parts of the EU. Loose couplings insulate against the immediate onset of a domino-effect of crisis in a system.

Thirdly, we would expect to see radical change at ‘critical moments’ of performance failure and crisis. They are occasions for questioning normative and causal beliefs: the effectiveness and legitimacy of existing governance arrangements, upsetting fundamental understandings of what constitutes appropriate problems and solutions, resource distributions and legitimate actors in a policy domain. Performance crisis is thus a key determinant for de-institutionalisation (Oliver 1992). Interventions and changes that at other times are unacceptable become possible in times of performance and legitimacy crises (Olsen 2009). This was for instance the case when the EU governance of food safety was changed in the wake of the BSE crisis (Ugland and Veggeland 2006) and when the wave of emigrants brought about by the collapse of the Soviet Union made migration and policing policy enter the EU agenda and into the Maastricht Treaty (Turnbull and Sandholtz 2001). This does not imply, however, that exogenous shocks and performance failure automatically trigger institutional change. Crises and dramatic external events will have to be translated and acted out (Stone Sweet et al 2001:12). Similar argument have been put forward to account for how in the Europe’s Economic and Monetary Union the EU appears to be responding to the failures of incremental reforms by taking new steps to expand the scope and intensity of integration (EU “failing forward”) {Jones, 2016 #2893}. 
If we are attempting to account for how governance sites develop with reference to these three arguments about institutional change, then this has implications for how we study them. Firstly it requires a diachronic approach where the establishment and fate of a governance site can be followed and traced in a sequence of events. Second, given that the focus here is on the role of contingent events and environments that surround new governance sites, the process of creation and institutionalisation has to be placed in time and context. This chapter is thus structured according to such an approach, identifying the main stages. The analysis is based on 18 semi-structured interviews conducted during 2005-7 with people (Commission officers, participants from national ministries and independent experts) who have been involved in these processes at the European level, as well as on document analysis. The latter include analysis of reports/publications that have been produced by working groups and expert groups, and official documentary records from the EU Consilium (Minutes from European Council and Council of the EU’s (education) meetings). The latter kind of data has been particularly important for the analysis of the final stage and most recent developments.

Stage I: European Governance Level in Education Before the Turn of the Century

Much of the history of the EU/EC’s involvement in education as a policy area has been described as the national defence of the systemic borders and the sovereignty of nation-state systemic control (Corbett 2006, De Wit and Verhoeven 2001, Murphy 2003). Education has been perceived as an area of legitimate national diversity. In Europe considerable national systemic diversity – both in terms of structure and content - reflects national traditions and links between education and the nation state. Schools and universities are also key socialising institutions of the modern nation-state. In their democratic role, schools and higher education institutions provide youth with civic education which is a necessary component of a well-functioning democracy and a critical public sphere. At the level of tertiary education, one of the basic functions of the university has traditionally been to educate national elites and prepare them for entry into core national institutions, in particular the civil service and the national legal system. In the development of the welfare state, access to education at all levels has been seen as an instrument for social equity. And notably national policy for education
has a strong economic rationale as educational attainment has been seen as a core factor for national labour markets, industrial modernisation, economic development and innovation.

Efforts to establish a European dimension to education and a common policy approach to education have encountered fundamental challenges. Integration of education systems has been off limits in terms of legal harmonisation and regarded as of marginal interest for the European integration labelled as ‘other matters’ (Corbett 2005: 133-141). The boundaries of education systems and the public responsibility for education by and large coincided with the boundaries of the nation state, especially as regards compulsory education. Also with respect to higher education and vocational training, the idea of ‘national systems’ has been strong. The European level’s responsibility has been focused on mobility, i.e. dealing with the implications of and encouraging the crossing of systemic boundaries. The decisions to establish the EU’s education programmes were core events. Education was also seen as least nationally sensitive in its economic rationale and more sensitive when seen as a carrier of cultural and social values. The EC/EU’s stronger legal foundation in the area of vocational training compared to other areas of education illustrates how this policy area and the issue of free flow of skilled manpower, with its link to European integration as a market building project, have historically been seen as an appropriate part of European integration (Shaw 1999).

A gradual institutionalisation of the policy area took place prior to 2000s (Beukel 2001). The supranational level institutionalised education as a policy area through the establishment of the European Commission’s DG for education (now DG EAC). With it education became subject to sustained attention and policy making capacity at the European level. Even though, in terms of European budgets, the European Union still was according ‘more importance to a cow than a hundred students’\(^2\), the education programmes expanded in scope and size. They became the basis for establishing many of the networks the Commission forged with national administrations, transnational and sub-national levels actors (Gornitzka 2009). At the European level the Commission’s DG for education has been far from the only actor in education policy. The DG for education has been in interplay with other European institutions, with the Education Council and the Education Committee and the parallel committee in the
European Parliament. Also the European Court has played a very important role in defining the role of the European level (Beerkens 2008, Shaw 1999).

In sum the European governance level showed signs of sectoral differentiation and capacity building. EU’s capacity for action in education did not rival that of most other policy areas of the EU and was of course completely dwarfed by the legal and financial means of governance nation states had at their disposal.

**STAGE II: THE INCEPTION OF A NEW GOVERNANCE SITE IN EUROPEAN EDUCATION POLICY: 2000-4**

As we have seen the EU’s involvement in European education was not an invention of the Lisbon European Council. Nonetheless, the Lisbon process is a landmark for European education policy: In the context of the Lisbon process the education sector was linked to and influenced by developments in other policy areas. It placed education is in the interface with the EUs economic policy and social policy. Education received attention in Lisbon as part of a much larger agenda and political project. The whole knowledge and skills area was defined in Lisbon as a necessary component of an economic and social reform strategy. Especially the Commission pitched the education sector’s contribution to the Lisbon strategy in an urgent tone of voice. Already in the early stage of the Lisbon strategy it was clear that this process implied a strengthening of the visibility of the education sector at the Education, higher education and training were defined as part of a set of policy areas for ‘competitiveness’. The Lisbon strategy expressed at an ideational level greater expectations of coordination not only between territorial levels but across sectors, an opportunity for horizontal integration that could trigger the kind of collisions and interaction between policy sectors that had been operated largely independent of each other. The reference that the Lisbon Spring Council (heads of state in the EU member states) in 2000 made to the OMC also opened up a procedural way forward for how the education sector actors could organise in a different way, i.e. a new governance template to match the new ideas about EUs transition to the knowledge economy.
Lisbon European Council invited the Education Ministers of Europe to formulate the future goals for the education sector. The Lisbon summit provided a diagnosis of a Europe challenged by globalisation and the new knowledge-driven economy. The modernisation of European education became linked to an overhaul of Europe envisaged in the Lisbon strategy. These goals were so broad that it left the entire policy domain open.

In 2001 three strategic objectives were adopted that concerned the improved quality and effectiveness of education, access to education and to the goal of opening up national education and training systems to society and ‘the wider world’. This was turned into a 10 year work programme containing 13 specified objectives. The Commission’s prepared the documents and the Education Council quickly agreed on these strategic goals. The goals that education ministers agreed on were very general and hardly touched any overtly controversial or sensitive issues. Nonetheless, the establishment of OMC education indicates a change of attitude towards European coordinating efforts among European Ministers of Education. A change described by one informant as going from education ministers ‘meeting to celebrate national diversity to acknowledging common challenges’.

The Commission started setting up an institutional model for the OMC. From early 2004 two other parallel processes, the intergovernmental process towards establishing the European Higher Education Area (‘The Bologna Process’), and the EU’s ‘Copenhagen Process’ for vocational education and training, were added in order to include in the whole range and forms of education. From then on the OMC process in education was referred to as ‘Education and Training 2010’.

The political agreement, anchored in the Education Council and legitimised by the European Council, on the content of the new cooperation was at the base of development. This was in some respect unexpected, given the sensitive nature of the education domain and the
historical legacies in this sector with respect to the will and interests of national education ministers in EU cooperation.

Two types of exogenous shocks inside the sector but outside of the EU added to this dynamic. In 1999, the same ministers who had agreed to revise their ways of cooperating within the EU had put their signatures on the Bologna declaration. These signatures made them embark on the process towards establishing a European higher education area, notably as an outside EU process where the actors within the sector were in the driver’s seat, and supranational institutions (read the Commission) were initially not invited to join the decision making table (Ravinet 2008). Still this was an unprecedented initiative in the history of European integration and (higher) education and a surprising procedural innovation in European governance of higher education. The second (and more painful) shock came from OECD and the education expert community: In December 2001 the results of the PISA 2000 comparative study of school children’s basic skills were made public. Notably, several of the national ministries of education were in shock over the loss of face. Moreover, the role of Education Council/Education Committee notwithstanding, the inception of the OMC into EU education policy was from the very start marked by active role of the Commission’s DG. The DG EAC acted as procedural and ideational entrepreneur for creating a new governance site and maintaining it. DG EAC in its follow up to the Lisbon Strategy used a dramatic language to accentuate the need for common action to modernise European education.

**Stage III: Consolidating a Sector Specific Governance Site**

DG EAC prepared, organised and orchestrated the practical implementation of the OMC governance site. DG EAC also provided organisational capacities to the process and found a budget line in the SOCRATES programme to finance the OMC activities at the European level. The DG’s officials were crucial in determining the content and working procedures of the OMC groups. Not all working groups under the OMC procedure had strong energy levels attached to it – especially those groups that were characterised by unclear cognitive structures and little common understanding of the agenda were killed softly by waning energy from the participants and the DG’s informal assessment of their operations. Other groups could operate
on the basis of strong cognitive and normative structures and were able to perform stocktaking, provide information and ‘deliver’.

The national experts that served on these working groups were predominantly drawn from national Ministries of Education; few came from national agencies or expert/academic communities. The way in which the OMC was practiced in this sector brought the Commission close to national political-administrative leadership in some of the sub-policy areas. In addition over 30 different social partners and stakeholder organisations were represented, and in some cases, the secretariats of international organisations, most notably the OECD and the Council of Europe. These actors were brought together in the new governance site in iterative interaction at the European level in most areas of education policy: access, approaches to teaching and learning basic skills, funding and organisational issues, counselling, ICT and so on. The new governance site was filled with the core actors in the field and enhanced and expanded the European networks of national administrations and stakeholders.

In 2005 the OMC structure was partly reorganised and new areas of attention were included. Two new organisational elements were added that further institutionalised the OMC: a high level group (only national administrations represented) charged with maintaining stronger links to national administrations and produce input to the reporting processes, and a large ET 2010 coordination group, that also included the social partners. A new governance site was undoubtedly being institutionalised, but not all elements were equally ‘taken for granted’.

In this period – half way into the Lisbon strategy – the OMC approach to European integration came under fire (see Tholontiat 2010: for a summary of this period). The list of grievances directed at the governance approach was long: member states’ refusal to report, non-committal to agreed objectives, wishful thinking, the gap between ambition and performance, etc. The High Level Group led by Win Kok spoke of cheap talk that came with heavy administrative reporting burdens and processes dominated by technocrats. The aura that had
surrounded the OMC as a new method seemingly lost some of its glow. Some of the smaller OMCs did not survive this ‘public attack’. The OMC governance site in education did. Yet, it felt the impact of the revised Lisbon strategy. The reorganisation that was instituted in this period was in line with the overall revision and relaunch of the Lisbon strategy. Furthermore, in substantive terms the process towards the modernised European education system that was heralded in the beginning of the Lisbon process was with one major exception (increasing graduates in maths, sciences and engineering) very far from being attained and no major evidence to suggest that the workings of this governance site had produced substantive outcomes at in national education policy. Nonetheless, several of the elements of the new governance site increasingly showed signs of institutionalisation in this consolidation phase.

The quantified aspects of the OMC process were most deeply institutionalised. The quantification of European cooperation in education policy was persistently pushed in order to provide a ‘strong policy relevant messages’. After its establishment the Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks gained acceptance from the Member States and also within the DG EAC, and to date it continues to have a strong position within the OMC structure with high attendance rates and a legitimated and visible role in the ET 2010 programme. The significance attached to indicators was confirmed by the establishment of a centre (CRELL) as part of a Commission Joint Research Centre in Italy in 2005 in order to support the EU’s indicator development in the area of lifelong learning. Furthermore, in 2005 the Council decided on new indicators and the following year the legal basis for EUROSTATs education statistics was strengthened. CRELL still continues to monitor the EU 2020 headline targets in education and training and conducts analysis to feed policy decisions at the EU level.

Reporting from the implementation of ET 2010 became fairly well established as a routine. However, the organisation and practices for policy learning and peer reviewing lived in a tensile balance between institutionalisation, experimentation and disintegration. There were no obvious established and accepted criteria for certifying the experiences of other countries as good examples to guide national policy reform or adjustment. When DG EAC reorganised the OMC infrastructure in 2005/6, providing what they assumed was a clearer working methodology for learning was a major concern. The DG EAC set up eight ‘clusters’ that corresponded to key priorities identified in the ET 2010 work programme.
states could participate in each cluster according to their own priorities. Each cluster was coordinated by an official from DG EAC. The format for the ‘clusters’ implied organising learning through the so-called PLAs (Peer Learning Activities) (Lange and Alexiadou 2010).

**STAGE IV: NAVIGATING THE CRISIS?**

Towards the end of the first decade of the 21st century this governance site had settled to become a fairly regularised activity at the EU level, extending its activities to the national level with the PLAs and national reporting. Signs of output legitimacy in terms of domestic impact of the 8-10 year old governance site were scant (Alexiadou et al. 2010, Lange and Alexiadou 2010). Yet, the governance site had expanded its territory. In addition to the annual progress reports in the progress towards the common European objectives in education and training, it produced the backup and input to a string of Commission communications and recommendations that made it into the regular decision making procedures of the EU institutions in this area, such as issuing educational standards (European Qualifications Framework (EQF), adopted 2008) (Elken 2015), and guidelines for quality in vocational education and training (EQAVET), work on the modernisation agenda of the European Universities (Gornitzka 2010).

In June 2010, EU leaders adopted the ‘Europe 2020’ strategy, to replace the Lisbon strategy with the aim of creating jobs and promoting ‘smart, sustainable and inclusive growth’. This also implied a major overhaul of the governance architecture. This overhaul should be seen against the backdrop of the acute financial and sovereign debt crisis in the EU, a crisis that rocked the foundations of the EU’s political, economic and social order. What the implications were for the governance architecture of the EU is still under debate. Still, one major change in the governance architecture is particularly relevant here: the introduction of the European semester in 2011, which combines governance instruments in economic and social governance of the EU within one single annual policy coordination cycle (Zeitlin and Vanhercke 2014). The aim of the European Semester was to improve economic policy coordination in the Union and push towards implementation of the EU’s economic rules. The European
Semester set-up gave a clearer and stronger role of the Commission in policy coordination – not only would the Commission in autumn each year set out the EU priorities for the coming year (Annual Growth Survey) but it should also publish its opinions on each country’s draft budgetary plan. Moreover, the Commission took on a new role in issuing Country-Specific Recommendations (CSRs) for budgetary and economic policies, after each country has presented its Stability/Convergence Programme and its National Reform Programme (later, in the spring). The latter sets out the member states budgetary and economic policies respectively. The Council discusses these recommendations, amends them if deemed appropriate and adopts them (Darvas and Leandro 2015: 4).

What were the implications of this and connected arrangements for EU education governance?

The education sectors still hung on the overall political project of the EU and retained its place. One of the seven ‘flagship initiatives’ for growth and employment of the Europe2020 agenda was the ‘Youth on the Move’, aiming to ‘improve the performance and international attractiveness of our higher education institutions and raise the quality of all levels of education and training in the EU, combining both excellence and equity.’ Moreover, the 2020 strategy proposed five headline targets, amongst them one centred on two heartland education policy issues: cutting the school dropout rate from 15 per cent to below 10 percent and increasing the number of young people with a university degree or diploma from less than a third to at least 40 percent. In May 2010 the EU’s education ministers agreed to recommend the numerical average targets that the Commission had proposed as part of the Europe 2020 strategy. These had met with considerable resistance from Germany, especially from the federal states. The Commission’s purported attempts to pushing the envelope with respect to the member states by issuing country specific recommendations met with mixed reception from national ministries. For instance UK responded with overt defiance whereas Hungary dismissed the target for dropout rates as ‘unrealistic.’ After years of operating within an OMC style governance site at the European level, these initiatives were perceived as attempts to step outside the formal remit of the Commission in education. This rekindled traditional territorial conflict lines between the supranational and the national/federal/state levels. Yet
within the framework of the European semester, the Commission did issue country specific recommendations which frequently encompassed recommendations with respect to education policy. In fact all country recommendations that the Commission issued in 2013 contained recommendations on education, with the exception of the recommendation for the Netherlands, urging in many cases the member states to exempt education from budget cuts in order to pursue ‘growth friendly consolidation paths’ (Bekker 2014: 8, 13).

The numerical target connected to education also implied continued or increasing investments in education. Being an area of heavy public spending, such an emphasis was not entirely self-evident, in light of the financial difficulties that most of the member states were facing in the wake of the financial and economic crisis at the time. The Commission’s approach to this was not to abandon the ideational support to continued and renewed emphasis on the education and skills sector.

Moreover, the crisis did not seem to spur a withdrawal on the part of the Commission’s support for common EU education governance. Rather the opposite was the case – in its subsequent reporting on the ET 2020. The DG EAC’s response was to use the economic crisis and recession to further underline the need for an EU concerted action and common strategy, as it had done in the inception of the ET 2010. The sector’s input to the Europe 2020 strategy actively referred to both skills and education as the main solution of Europe’s economic predicament and the need to for investment in the education sector. The assertiveness of the sector so far seems to have been enhanced in the context of the new overall strategy, pushing even further its message of what education can do for the economy and the labour market. The sector specific governance site is still in operative modus. Actors inside the education domain and outside of it did not use the general crisis as an opportunity to question and deinstitutionalise this governance site.

Since 2011 the Commission’s DG EAC has published an annual Education and Training Monitor with in-depth country reports accompanying it. Ideationally, education has over the past 15 years become more strongly embedded as an instrument for other social and economic
goals and the need for horizontal coordination. Overall the governance site established on the basis of the OMC survived the economic crisis and been further strengthened as part of the Europe 2020 strategy. Also the Council of the EU education, youth, culture and sports (EYCS) continues to pursue a sectoral defence approach, e.g. European education ministers stated the following with respect to the 2014 European semester:

‘With a view to increasing the visibility of education and training in the 2014 European Semester, the Council agreed to focus on: facilitating long-term investment in the modernisation of education and training and the development of skills, equipping people in all age groups with better and more relevant skills, smoothing the transition from school to work, notably by promoting work-based schemes, continuing to modernise and improve educational methods and making full use of the digital learning opportunities.’ (PRESS RELEASE, 3296th Council meeting, Education, Youth, Culture and Sport, Brussels, 24 February 2014)

The extent to which European talk results in national action, however, is another matter – from 2000 to 2013 the spending on education dropped at and EU average and in the majority of the member states. This fact has been bemoaned both in the overall country recommendation as part of the European semester and in the comments and communications from DG EAC specifically. Clearly this is a case of sectoral defence that takes place at the European level. The transversal problem solver approach has not been less relevant in the wake of the crisis: e.g. The Council adopted in 2016 a resolution on promoting socio-economic development and inclusiveness in the EU through education (5685/1/16 REV 1) again calling for ‘targeted reforms and prioritised investment in education systems and for education to work more closely with the employment sector.

The 2016 New skills agenda for Europe also illustrates the continued interplay between labour market policy and the education policy sphere. Here the new organisational setup of the Commission with stronger coordination of policy approaches at the political level (new super-Commissioners initiated by the Juncker Commission) is an interesting development. The Commissioners’ perspectives – ‘sector goggles’ – demonstrate how framing of education/labour market policy items remains a constant feature of the discussions.

The horizontalisation of education is increasingly visible at the EU level in more ways than within the framework of ET, the European semester and economic and social policy
coordination. It is visible in areas such as the EU-US trade negotiations and the disputed role of education as tradable service, and in the collision between national higher education policy and implementation of the EU’s service directive.

The security and migration crisis also illustrates a similar cross-sectoral dynamic: The emphasis on ‘skills for life’, and not only for work, becomes an instrument in the policy for integration, fight against extremism and a tool for de-radicalisation of youth (Council meeting 24.02.16). The traditional role of education as socialising institution installing fundamental European values and democracy is rekindled at this governance site. Once again the Commission and the Council in the education sector responded to the crisis situation by offering the use of education and training strategies for integrating recently arrived immigrants (Council 23-11-15). As argued by the French minister of education during Council meeting in 2015: ‘Education and training must be a bulwark against fanaticism’ (Vallaud-Belkacem 23.11.15). The latter emphasis is added to the adjusted Work programme of ET 2020 from 2015 which reads as follows:

“... ensuring that education and training systems promote employability, skills and innovation, increase social mobility and equality, help to prevent radicalisation and lay the foundations for democratic values and active citizenship.” Background document, Press, Brussels, 19 November 2015 for Education, youth, culture and sport council, Brussels, 23-24 November 2015

CONCLUSION

The larger context of the Lisbon process and later on the EUs strategy for growth and jobs (Europe 2020) had important repercussions for cooperation in the field of education and represented in several respect a critical juncture. A new site of voluntary policy coordination in education was established that created a platform for profiling the sector in the wider context of the EU, and for legitimating its place in European integration. The story of education policy and the Lisbon and EU 2020 strategy also demonstrates how at the European level a nationally sensitive policy domain was (re)framed in substantive terms within an economic competitiveness agenda and as an instrument for facing the challenges of the globalised knowledge economy. A more prominent place on the political agenda came together with
demands that education should be integrated with the overall political and economic objectives of the EU. Hence the new governance site was placed in an area of tension between different policy sectors and ideas about the role of education (economic, cultural, democratic and social roles) in a changing political and economic order.

How this purportedly fragile site for voluntary policy coordination developed cannot be accounted for unless we factor in the larger context of the European political order. Faced with exogenous shocks and key events actors within the EU education policy domain actively used these external conditions to defend the educational domain (especially against the ‘intrusion’ of employment policy) and also couple the governance of education and training to the wide ambitions of the EU. Neither the overt crisis in EU governance, policy failures within education policy domain and even more so outside this domain, and resistance from member states guarding their education policy prerogative have (so far) led to a decay of this governance site.

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1 See (Gornitzka 2007) for a broader account and comparative analysis of the first phases of ‘knowledge governance’ sites in the EU’s Lisbon strategy.

2 Comment made by the Commissioner Marin in connection with the Erasmus decision in 1986-87, quoted in Corbett 2005: 140.

3 Lisbon European Council 2000, Presidency conclusions paragraphs 25-27


6 Informant interview December 2005.

7 Informant interview December 2005

8 Informant interview August 2006

9 Most notably European level associations such as UNICE, ETUCE/Education International, European School Heads Association, European Parent’s Association, European University Association, National Union of Students in Europe.

10 Cluster on Modernisation of higher education, on Teachers and Trainers in VET, on making best use of resources, on Maths, Science and Technology, on Access and Social Inclusion in LLL, on Key Competencies, and ICT, on Recognition of learning outcomes, Adult learning, and lifelong guide policy network. Most of these were continuation of the working groups that had been established in the infancy of the OMC.

11 SGB minutes from 3rd July 2002, first meeting: p.5

12 Council Conclusions of 12.05.09 on ‘ET 2020’, 2009/C 119/02.

13 PLAs are organised by the Clusters and includes site visits and in situ peer reviewing.

14 The Stability and Growth Pact (SGP) and the Macroeconomic Imbalance Procedure (MIP).


16 Euractiv 18/08/2010

17 The UK (both minister and Permanent Representation to the EU) conveyed that it did agree with the European Commission’s interpretation of how the ‘Europe 2020’ strategy should be implemented in the field of education. The UK insisted that the headline targets agreed by the European Council in June 2010 were not formally binding on member states. The UK representative argued that individual countries should "set their own level of ambition" when it comes to translating these targets into national policies, in order for the specific characteristics of different education systems can be taken into account. Euractiv 15-16/02/2011.

18 Euractiv 21/07/2010