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INTRODUCTION

The PRESTiGE Network: Contexts for Research in EU Education and Training Policies

In 1997 the Commission of the European Union granted the Centre for Comparative Studies in Education in Oxford funding as participant in a four-year EU Training and Mobility of Researchers (TMR) Network, involving Oxford (Centre for Comparative Studies in Education), Berlin (Humboldt University), Stockholm (Institute for International Education, University of Stockholm), Dijon (Université de Bourgogne), Madrid (Universidad Complutense) and Lisbon University. This project (PRESTiGE: Problems of Educational Standardisation and Transition in a Global Environment) was among twelve successful applications that year (out of a total of 97) and was the only award in the field of education.

The Oxford part of the project is concerned with detailed analysis of the interpretation and implementation of European Union (EU) education and training policies in four Member States: France (as an exemplar of a centralised education system), Germany (as an exemplar of a federalised education system), Sweden (as a comparatively new EU Member State, representing the Scandinavian educational tradition), and the United Kingdom (as an exemplar of a traditionally decentralised education system) (cf. Phillips & Economou, 1999, p. 305). This volume presents the main findings of the Oxford PRESTiGE team.

The aim of the Oxford project has been to examine the processes of transmission of EU policies from supranational to national, regional and local levels. The explanations for the dichotomy between the acceptance of EU education and training policy in the four Member States and its actual implementation are investigated, and an attempt is made to explain differences in the interpretation and implementation of the policies in the four countries.

One major focus of the project is the different ways in which the two main EU programmes for education and training, SOCRATES and LEONARDO DA VINCI, are implemented. In a situation in which the sovereignty of individual Member States concerning their educational affairs is protected to a high degree by EU Treaties (especially in Articles 126 and 127 of the Maastricht Treaty), EU programmes are bound to affect national education systems in very different ways. The Oxford team has examined the aspects which affect implementation.

In order to test the possibilities for interpretation and implementation of the spirit of EU policy as outlined in the Maastricht Treaty, the Oxford team explores questions in the following two main areas:

1. How far is EU policy in education and training being dealt with largely outside of the realm of direct government (i.e. ministry) intervention?

There are advantages to be seen in the reduction of dependence on national ministries of education, especially in higher education, where there might as a result be greater impetus for change (Field, 1998, p. 109).

To what extent does this conflict with the competences and authorities of ministries?

Where agencies exist within countries to facilitate EU programmes like SOCRATES and LEONARDO DA VINCI (both launched on the basis of the Maastricht Treaty) how have these agencies come into existence or developed competences? Have they been established by ministries as a 'European branch' of themselves, or have they sprung up *de facto* in response to the reality that the EU is funding the programmes in question?

How far have sub-national authorities and agencies 'started to develop effective transnational coalitions and alliances ... [which] may be helping to destabilise existing relationships and balances of power?' (Field, 1998, p. 191).

2. Could more active involvement at the top level of government by ministries and agencies accelerate the process of integration?

Koch (1998) argues that there has been a tendency since the mid-1980s of increased integration in the area of education, stimulated by the bottom-up approach of educational programmes which spread 'best practice' solutions to common challenges throughout the Member States.

There is at present an absence of mechanisms to help institutions learn from the experience of 'bypassing' or 'contracting-out' (Field, 1998, p. 112). What mechanisms might be devised to assess such procedures and what combination of actors could most effectively develop such mechanisms?

Hantrais (1995, pp. 56ff.) contends that there is a limited and uneven impact of EU programmes for education and training because national ministries and/or agencies have reacted to programme directives differently.

How can the relationship between ministries, local authorities and agencies be redefined to reverse this situation?

Research Hypotheses

As well as questions about the implementation and interpretation of the two framework programmes SOCRATES and LEONARDO, the main policy issue investigated is the concept of a 'European dimension' in education and training.

This frequently mentioned concept plays an important role as an interpretative framework for the investigation of the programmes. The Oxford team attempts to identify and explain differences in the interpretation of the concept in selected Member States.

The European dimension in education and training is given prominence in EU legislation, for example in Article 126 of the Maastricht Treaty, and is further specified in EU policy documents, such as the Green Paper of the Commission of the European Communities (1993). This concept provides a powerful example of the

relative effectiveness of policy interpretation and transmission in the Member States. Research on the European dimension in the UK and elsewhere, however, shows that effective awareness and implementation in this area is very patchy (Ryba, 1992, 1995, 1997; Hörner, 1997). Comparative research within the UK (comprising analysis of England, Wales and Scotland) demonstrates wide diversity (Phillips & Economou, 1999 and Economou, Savvides, in this present volume). This research suggests that such diversity has to do with various combinations of the following:

- cultural traditions (including what some comparativists have called 'national character') and national political will will significantly affect interpretation;
- vested interests at all (political and administrative) levels will affect transmission and implementation by creating resistances;
- commitment of 'significant actors' contributes to effective implementation at various levels of the transmission of policy;
- institutional ignorance will impede all processes of interpretation, transmission and implementation;
- processes of reception of policy will inevitably result in a transformation (distortion) of the original policy as conceived at supranational level; and
- standardisation of policy within the Member States is likely to prove unrealistic in theory and unworkable in practice (Phillips & Economou, 1999, pp. 305f.).

Methodological Considerations

The hypotheses are tested through an analysis of the organisation and competence of ministries and agencies in the four countries covered by the project as well as their interaction with EU institutions. The main research methods applied are analysis of documents and relevant literature and semi-structured interviews at education ministries and national agencies involved in the implementation of EU policies and programmes in the field of education and training in the four countries. The findings of the analysis of relevant literature and documents provides the background for the identification of the topics for the interviews. During the interviews conducted at ministries and agencies in Paris, Bonn, Berlin, Munich, London and Stockholm questions on three interrelated areas of interest were asked:

1. The perception of the European dimension in education and training and its potential inclusion in school and training provision (curricula, training programmes, teacher training);
2. The implementation and administration of the two EU framework programmes for education and training in the national context as well as the impact of the programmes on the national provisions; and
3. The role and status of government and (semi-)private agencies in the implementation of EU policies in the field.

Following the interviews, the data have been systematically evaluated and compared with the results of the documentary and literature analysis.

The establishment of close contacts with officials and practitioners has been seen as an objective throughout all stages of the study. Current developments are also taken into account as they influence the emphases in the ongoing research process. An example of such an event that influenced the study was the vote of no confidence in and the subsequent resignation of the EU Commission in 1999. A further instance was the implementation of the new generation of EU programmes in education and training, SOCRATES and LEONARDO, at the beginning of the year 2000.

A number of specific case studies extends and deepens the research project of the Oxford team. These case studies include a comparison of the interpretation of the European dimension in education within the United Kingdom (cf. Phillips & Economou, 1999 and Economou, 2001), an investigation of the role of EU programmes in the transition of vocational training in eastern Germany (Ertl, 1999a, 2000b and 2000d), a discussion of the structures and functions of secondary and pre-vocational education in Germany (Ertl & Phillips, 2000 and Ertl, 2001b), a comparison of modular structures in vocational education in a number of EU countries (Ertl, 2000a and 2001a), and an investigation of the Nordic dimension in education and its impact on EU educational policies (Dahl, in this present volume).

TMR Networks

The work reported in this present volume has been undertaken within the framework of an international research project that determines the general research interest, research questions and scientific orientation. The TMR framework holds the work of the individual researchers together.

A TMR network is a group of researchers. There must be at least five research teams from at least three countries who develop a common research and training proposal. The primary objective of a TMR network is to provide training-through-research, especially for young researchers, at both doctoral and post-doctoral level, within the framework of a transnational collaborative research project. The young researchers must be 35 years of age or younger. They must be willing to move to another EU country, since they cannot be employed in their country of origin or in a foreign country if they have already lived there for more than twelve months during the two years preceding their appointment (Commission, 2001a).

Each TMR network starts formally with the establishment of a contract between the network participants and the European Commission. A network co-ordinator acts as the link between the network participants and the Commission and is required to prepare a number of reports on the progress of the network (Commission, 2001b).

In 1990, the EU initiated the predecessors of TMR networks in its Third Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development within the action 'Human Capital and Mobility' (HCM). In the Fourth Framework Programme the title 'Training and Mobility of Researchers' was introduced. The first networks that received funding on the basis of the Fourth Framework Programme began in 1996. The TMR network described in this paper was funded by the Fourth Framework Programme. The last of the approximately 250 networks under the

Fourth Framework Programme reached the end of their contract with the European Commission in 2002.

In the Fifth Framework Programme this kind of network is called a 'Research Training Network'. This Framework includes a 'Human Potential Programme' which co-ordinates and supports activities concerning the improvement of human research potential throughout the Fifth Framework Programme (Commission, 2000, p. 3). Therefore, the funding of research training networks by the EU has been expanded: Between 2000 and 2006 the European Commission expects to fund approximately 340 networks under the Fifth Framework Programme.¹ The EU supports networks from a wide range of disciplines (Commission, 1998). In the Fifth Framework Programme, for instance, networks cover areas including chemistry, economics, social and human sciences, engineering, environmental science and geosciences, life sciences, mathematics, information technology, and physics (Commission, 2001c).

TMR networks are funded for up to four years and normally receive a maximum of EURO 1.5 million. Funding for TMR networks is primarily provided for the appointment and employment of young researchers in each research team and also for overheads and certain direct costs (Commission, 2001d).

While the specific emphasis of TMR networks has shifted in the course of the three Framework Programmes, the main aims of the European Commission regarding TMR networks have remained the same. They can be summarised as follows:²

- to create linkages between research institutions in Europe,
- to reduce the fragmentation of research potential,
- to build up research resources in order to maximise the competitiveness of research and learning generated in Europe in the global context,
- to train young European researchers to the highest standard,
- to contribute to the development of a 'European research community', and
- to integrate young researches into this research community.

The research topics are chosen by the researchers themselves and the European Commission does not impose research priorities (bottom-up approach). This differs from so-called 'Key Action Research Programmes' in which the subjects to be funded are chosen in advance by the European Commission and proposals are invited only on those topics (top-down approach). While for TMR networks the training of young researchers is central, Key Action Research Projects provide financial support for established researchers.

¹ Email correspondence with the Chief Network Supervisor at the European Commission, March 2001.

² Email correspondence with the Chief Network Supervisor at the European Commission, March 2001.

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