

**THE UNDERSTORIES OF EUROPEAN EDUCATION:  
THE CONTEMPORARY LIFE OF EXPERTS AND PROFESSIONALS**

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**ABSTRACT**

The European Space for Education exists in different forms; for example, as policy documents, regulations, projects, Ministers Meetings. In the last ten years or fifteen years, there has been an important growth in the work of experts and professionals, constructing the infrastructure of this Space. Their associations, created at a European level, are enmeshed and embedded in this work of construction. This is undramatic but essential work, and they have steadily engaged with the governance of Europe. But they live life in the shade, without summit meetings or media headlines, but with an essential place in the ecology of new European education.

**KEY WORDS**

Associations; Experts; Professionals; Governance.



**SISYPHUS**

JOURNAL OF EDUCATION

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1,

2013, 18-35

# The Understories of European Education: The Contemporary Life of Experts and Professionals

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## INTRODUCTION

The European Union is faced with dramatic crises as a result of its own contradictions, national failings and breakdowns in the banking system. Melodramatic summits, tight financial regulations and complex political solutions have fragmented the continuing growth and consolidation of the EU. Its institutions and procedures look very fragile. Yet there are other stories existing in this time and space, and the assemblage of a European education space or area continues in low key, unspectacular, expert and professional ways. This is an understory in the EU. The tall trees in the European forest make themselves visible, but underneath them, sustaining their growth, are the microclimates of the understory. Beneath the canopy of the forest, the life of the understory is lived in the shade but in favourable conditions for growth. It is a form of mutual, cooperative, voluntary and even specialized life.

The governance of Europe has specific forms and it is viewed here as a system in which private and public actors at the transnational, national and local level deal with the problem of an apparent lack of a central authority and the dispersal of resources. A sign of their value as actors, was an early invitation to them, given in the *Governance White Paper*:

Expertise, however, is usually organized at a national level. It is essential that resources be put together and work better in the common interest of EU citizens. Such structured and open networks should form a scientific reference system to support EU policy-making (Commission of the European Communities, 2001, p. 19).

But a range of partners at different levels of government then emerged; they existed within complex networks, which span intergovernmental, producer, professional and expert forms (Bellier & Wilson, 2000; Shore 2000). They may represent highly organized industry, voluntary sector groups or loosely-knit but important specialized academic associations. Increasingly, it appears that these networks, woven into sets of linked relations, represent a form of governance unique in Europe, crossing state boundaries, old government divisions and traditions of work and administration. The informality of their organization, the complexity of their knowledge relations and exchanges, the hybridity of their institutional association, combine with their overall inter-dependence to produce a distinctive form of governance in Europe. This form of governance in education cannot be understood as simply instrumental in transmitting policy or in mediating it. Policy is made in this process, within the web of its decentred and plural forms (Mayntz, 1994, p. 5). Taken as a whole, this educational space can be described as being composed of organizing networks, where territorial proximity has been replaced by network [virtual] proximity, in which the actors exchange information and expertise within relationships marked by trust (Hannerz, 1996).

For my purposes, the understory will be viewed as the environment where governance in Europe is developed through these public-private partnerships, knowledge-based organizations, agencies, associations and markets. The governing of Europe depends on the activity taking place in the understory. This activity is often out of sight and excludes politics. It thrives among a new elite of technocrats, professionals and academics, with expert knowledge or skills, who are working in public or private organizations. They meet in associations or through projects or networks. They are solving problems, problems in the governing of Europe, through the collection, classification, and analysis of data, the parallel creation of standards or the accumulation of knowledge about problems and development. The microclimates in which these technocrats flourish have their own imaginaries, combine technical possibilities and software-driven visions, professional associations, expert

networks and embedded common sense meanings and values. Since the turn of the millennium, data collection activity has grown very fast, and the Lisbon Open Method of Coordination (OMC) process has driven it along with its targets, benchmarks and indicators. It is rhizomatic, in that it is continually spreading and thickening by incorporating related discourses and integrating numerical data. Standards are an extension of market growth and a tool for enforcing /encouraging harmonization, and they are seen as a very particular European way of governing the market. Standards grow by interlocking, they are interoperable, and they develop ambitious formations quite quickly, driven by a range of actors and demand in the market.

The field of education, a minor but politically sensitive policy area in the past, avoided by tall tree activity, has grown in the understory. This is a reflection on the new organization and purposes set for European education, embedded in EU governing processes, and the related Europeanization of professional activity in the fields of education. The fact that understories exist in European education is a result of the gradual formation of an influential policy space, a governing rationale and manner, and the opportunities offered by the wide range of relations and flows that have been encouraged. Constant rhizomatic activity has produced a new landscape of standardized objects, reams of data, and professional knowledge activity across education. Often it is not visible and one only becomes aware of it through the reports coming out of groups and conferences.

In various asymmetrical ways, people, policies, knowledge and data are on the move within the different areas of European education. They are manifested through networks, conferences, expert groups, standards, statistics and products (Lawn, 2006). Although the thickness and extent of the understory has grown since the turn of the millennium, the understory lacks visibility and thus, immediate significance. It exists as a consequence of soft power (Nye, 2004) and is used as a governing device within Europe. Professionals and experts are mobilized through attraction, support and opportunity, and the creation of meaning, produced by shared understandings or devices, commerce and even their common desire for a 'European education space'. The creation of regional meaning and of common European meanings involves expertise, deliberation, collective actors and regular procedures (Lamy & Laidi, 2002, p. 6). This is a governing process, but a governing that attracts as much as it disciplines and controls. Networks of loosely-organized interest-driven actors are working together, in greater



or lesser-disciplined forms, focusing their relations of work, and remodeling their associations to engage in policy action (Mayntz, 1994). Voluntary, expert, professional and community groups and associations in Europe are being mobilized through consultations and the opportunity to offer advice or technical support, which they find attractive (Cram, 1998).

There is a wide variety of ways in which the understory has flourished. It is coupled with regulatory movements developed from the Bologna and Lisbon processes; governing modes, with extensive use of data and standards; commercial 'learning' activities; research and evaluation projects and networks; and community-wide movements – school-to-school, and institution-to-institution. The foundation of professional and expert engagement in these areas is often financial, drawn from EU contracts and bilateral actions, but associations and networks can be self-financing (at least in part) as well.

This is not to be viewed just as busywork, activity or flows. This is a place of meaning and knowledge construction. The consequence of the growth of the understory is that new professional meanings and expert skills are produced. Public and private actors can be viewed as constructing and transforming policy making, and not just transmitting or mediating it. As Europe does not exist as a place separate from the national, the process is multilateral, spiral and cross-border. For the actor, this is not a separate activity, divorced from the local context. For example, expertise in developing indicators in education in a specific field or at the national level becomes intertwined with expert work at the European policy level. It would be difficult to separate this knowledge process into national and European parts.

More and more, information, standards and classifications are produced at the European level, often through the close involvement of national agencies, (such as Eurostat and Eurydice) in support of policy objectives such as the Lifelong Learning Area. The Understory is formed by activity but also by knowledge, meaning and data. Out of political and practical necessity, governing European education uses a persuasive and attracting power which draws actors in, across a range of levels, places and spaces, to community engagement at micro and meso scales (Lawn, 2006). Generally, they work with the flow of interest and needs and draw actors and agencies into governance partnerships and associations. Standardization is a very useful governing tool, as it enables education to be controlled at a distance; but in order for this to occur, the actors' behaviours must change, and so

(...) professional and organizational knowledge-practices are reinvented in increasingly formalized, universalized and standardized ways (Higgins & Larner, 2010, p. 1).

To illuminate the ways that the understory expands and thickens, how standardization occurs and knowledge is generated, the work of European associations in education is explored here. We shall first examine the European Educational Research Association (EERA) and second, the Standing International Conference of Inspectorates (SICI).

## THE EUROPEAN EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH ASSOCIATION

The EERA was founded in Strasbourg in 1994 by a group made up of members from a number of national associations and eminent professors, following an initiative taken by the Dutch National Association of Educational Researchers. The initiative was inspired by the signing of the 1992 Maastricht Treaty and its introduction of education into EU policy. The meeting was funded by a feasibility study on the state of educational research in Europe, was paid for by the EU, and was accompanied by a declaration stating that a «new educational policy is emerging in Europe» and that educational research needs to «broaden its perspective» within the European framework. The study (Plomp, 1991) used contacts made through the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) and set the goal to provide a platform for European associations of specialists in this field and to forge links with the European Commission.

Earlier pilot meetings involved individuals from Belgium, England, Italy, Netherlands, Portugal, Scotland, Switzerland, Spain, the Czech Republic and Hungary, and from a range of national and specialist associations active in the area of educational research in Europe. Eventually, a group made up of members from the UK, Sweden, Spain, Portugal, Italy, Hungary, the Czech Republic and the Netherlands decided to form the EERA, with the support of a wider group of European representatives. They decided to form the EERA quickly for several reasons: that strong associations should help the weak through exchange and transfer; that Europe was moving from uncoordinated to coherent activity in research; there was a need for an umbrella organization across Europe rather than specialized or area specific associations; the Council of Europe and the OECD asked for a single organization across the whole of education research;



and Eastern Europe needed to be brought into the fold. As part of the EERA's activities, the organization decided to create a journal, train researchers, organize cross-national research projects and improve the public profile of educational research in Europe. One of the EERA's first acts was to encourage the construction and publication of an overview of educational research in Europe.

In its first years, prior to 2000, the EERA Council was focused on strengthening the organization—its networks, links with national associations and Brussels; making alliances; building up its communications, including a website; and organizing annual conferences and events. But the Association that began as an idealistic, innovative idea for Europe soon became embroiled in financial problems. Organizing conferences to pay for its office became a constant, destabilizing task. A continuing problem was the lack of representation from swathes of Europe, and it was decided to allow each eligible European country onto its Council. After 2000, the EERA grew rapidly. In 1996, it had 12 national affiliates and in 2012, 35 associations. Its annual conferences in the late 1990s were attended by about 600 delegates, while in 2012, 2700 academics attended.

While its conferences, internal organization and journal have all flourished, its attempts to investigate and improve European research infrastructure has been more difficult. It gained EU funding to link the information in national research centres and create a European database and repository of open-access papers, but neither initiative matured into a stable system. However, the EERA's goal of supporting new researchers did produce a regular series of summer schools dealing with general and specific areas of educational research.

It now had to recognize that, in order to contribute effectively to the European Research Area (ERA), it had to support educational researchers across Europe at a new level. It had to model a new stage of maturity, with the formation of a professional community in associative, ordered and manageable relationships; it had to develop a collective capacity for reflection and an infrastructure for articulating and supporting flows of knowledge and expertise. Facilitating the work of new, emerging associations across Europe to network and support each other via this common platform was the logical next stage of development for the EERA, and continued its longstanding civic and professional aims. But members within the EERA began to feel thwarted by the gap between the organic growth of professional and focused networking, which it espoused, and the low quality of support infrastructures across Europe, which was hindering the organisation's constructive contribution to the crucial policy area, the 'European Space of Educational

Research'. The EERA's new engagement with the Commission had meant that it had a problem overcoming the raised expectations of what educational research could deliver in Europe. A proposal on citation and research literature repositories (Design: CRISS, 2004) was produced in 2004 that explained the situation.

Before educational research can contribute to a wider European scientific area, it has to be brought into concert, its insularities surmounted, its networking supported and reinforced and its overall value realized. In particular, fragmentation has to be overcome before consistent knowledge management and research quality can be developed (Design-Criss, 2004, p. 5).

The EERA already had an EU programme that was receiving funding, «Pedagogical and Educational Research Information Network for Europe» (PERINE), that was based on the work of EERA Net 12 – Information Centres and Libraries in Educational Research – that aimed to integrate national information infrastructures that supported educational research; interrogate their nature, accessibility and content; and establish a multilingual, freely accessible Internet resource catalogue. These initiatives were designed to support knowledge creation, policy-making and practice.

This project will ensure that originators and users of research-related information are aware of the national and international options available to them for dissemination of, and access to, information supporting their work. It will do this by connecting existing national agencies to each other and developing a European network which they will undertake to grow [PERINE website – [www.perine.eu](http://www.perine.eu)]

Creating new cross European standards from the national agency standards needed expert work, which was provided by Network 12.

In 2008, the EERA and its partners received funding from the EU Framework 7 Programme for a three year project to create European research quality indicators (EERQI – European Educational Research Quality Indicators). This was an attempt to provide a new system of European scientific quality evaluation in education. Research quality is the main determinant of research funding, thus the manner in which quality is measured is crucial to many educational researchers. It would be multilingual and mixed method. In effect, the EERQI was an attempt to create a new European standard to match the powerful US model of citation counting.



Since 2000 and the Lisbon process, many education experts involved with benchmarks, indicators, school effectiveness and assessment within the EERA have been consulted on specialised issues. Within a relatively short period of time, the EERA, an association of national associations, has gone from being a series of informal meetings of primarily Western European countries to a well organized, efficient association with legal structures, elected officers, a solid financial structure and clear procedures. Its annual conference is a major hub for European educational researchers. It is organized into thematic or disciplinary networks, with participants co-presenting and increasingly publishing jointly (although contributors from many other countries also take part). Through the standards provided by its most powerful associations, organisations from Britain, the Nordic countries and Germany, it has achieved a solid standing among European academia. New associations are joining from the outer reaches of Europe, like Belarus and Turkey. As an association, it is reliably European, but the complexity and asymmetries of policy and governance in Europe sometimes defeat its aims. It is part of a flourishing understory, but it is difficult to thicken and grow except horizontally.

#### THE STANDING INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE OF INSPECTORATES

Initially founded in 1985 as the Conference of School Inspectorates in Europe by the OECD, at the instigation of the Netherlands' Inspectorate, the Standing International Conference turned into a modern association in the mid-1990s. It started with the heads of the main European inspectorates meeting and recognising the mutual benefit of having a series of regular meetings over time. The countries involved were Scotland, England, Portugal, France, the Netherlands and the Czech Republic. So, it began as an informal series of meetings. The Dutch Inspectorate was the 'driving force' in its formation; they worked closely with their Ministry of Education, and were offered funding to support their international work. By 1995, the group had become a legal association headquartered in the Netherlands. In its by-laws, the Conference stated the following aims: to share experiences; remain updated on developments regarding education systems; find ways to improve working methods; and establish a basis for cooperation among the various school authorities. In 2011, after 16 years of association, the SICI had developed into an association of 29 members.



The association has grown through a mode of professional cooperation. Member inspectorates work together because they are faced with common pressures. However, they exist within different national systems and policies. The SICI grew through the organisation of workshops, develop a descriptive study on the supervision and inspection of schools in Europe and encourage mutual projects based on joint visits and joint inspections. Since 1995, the SICI has been involved in a number of joint studies and exchanges of expertise among inspectorates across Europe. These events «provide opportunities to discuss and analyse key aspects of education and inspection... [they] also provide opportunities to develop the valuable personal contacts that can be built into partnerships» (SICI, 2003, p. 6). The SICI has also produced and constantly updated a Blue Book, the 'Inspectorates of Education in Europe' publication, which aims to provide a quick overview of European inspectorates. The effort began in 1998 and the descriptive mapping covered the 14 original SICI members. Some of the themes covered in the book are the organisation of the inspectorate, its areas of responsibility, the process of inspection and its methods (frameworks, indicators and criteria for data gathering), the relationship between inspectorate evaluation and school self-evaluation and instruments and methods – the way inspectors collect information and the approaches they use when carrying out their work. In short, the SICI began to serve as a hub for inspectors, inspection systems and evaluation methodologies in education across Europe.

Since the start of the Lisbon (OMC) Process in 2000, the volume and scope of these semi-formal, cross-border events have increased, as has its formal collaboration with the European Commission and the OECD. In 2001, an Education Policy Unit officer of the EU Directorate-General for Education and Culture outlined to SICI members the new era, beginning with the Open Method of Coordination and the launch of indicators and benchmarking for education policy in Europe. He argued that it would be a «new frontier for European integration», comparing it to the completion of the internal market, the introduction of the Euro and the enlargement of the Union (Tersmette, 2001). Tersmette emphasised the new significance given to Education by the Lisbon Treaty, suggesting that the work of associations such as the SICI was crucial in this process, as there was a need «not only to close performance gaps between countries, but rather to close communication gaps» (Tersmette, 2001, p. 51). A clear indication had been given by Commission officials that the SICI has been fulfilling a vital role in the Lisbon process. It had begun to work quite closely with Commission staff who were either present or continuously



informed about the activities of the association. The growth of activity in SICI highlights a significant response by national inspectorates to hierarchical, bureaucratic forms and relations, to cross border professional cooperation, and national pressures on education performance.

For its part, the SICI has viewed its work as helping to shape the modernisation of European education systems, and by 2005, it called for inspections across Europe to play a role in encouraging transparency, quality evaluation and self-evaluation (SICI Report, 2005). A final report provided guidelines for conducting evaluation visits and using their framework of quality indicators. It explored the balance between internal and external evaluation and contained country reports which set out the strengths in self-evaluation in the countries/ regions that participated in the project.

One of the main elements of the SICI Academy, the professional development arm of SICI that carries out intensive courses around Europe, was to focus on school self-evaluation as a driver of SICI professional identity and a defence against data-driven management. The idea had been culled from one of its member associations and turned into a tool to be shared by the other participating inspectorates.

## ASSOCIATING IN EUROPE

Looking at the growth of both associations since their foundation, which took place roughly at the same time, one sees patterns of similar development. Firstly, they both had an early focus on cooperation, discussion and the benefits of working together:

We learn from one another through discussion. We learn even more about the principles and processes of inspection by working alongside one another in schools on real inspections. As inspectors we have a key contribution to make and this will be much valued by educational policy makers (SICI, 2001, p. 23).

Europe was an opportunity, newly available because of cheaper travel and better communication technologies, and the founding of national associations of educational experts in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century.



Around the year 2000, policy initiatives in the EU pushed regulation, standards and data forward as the technologies underpinning the new initiatives in governing the EU. In education, a range of programmes and projects began in life-long learning, software standards, e-learning, data and benchmarking, all of which involved many different kinds of professionals of different nationalities. The pace of change grew so rapidly that the associations felt that new opportunities and their policy concerns needed better organization on their part. The EERA tried to mobilize its expert groups to engage with research infrastructure issues, policy discussions and innovation meetings. The SICI felt that constructive engagement with the EU had come when innovations in system evaluation placed inspections in danger. This was particularly the case with data-based evaluations and large scale data collections. The expectations upon inspectors increased following the scope and usage of the OECD PISA project. As a result, the SICI, and its Academy became highly organized, proficient in providing bilateral workshops, and adept at garnering funds at the national and European level. The EERA for its part became well organized internally and proficient at staging conference/summer school programmes; but it still had difficulty in representing educational research when it came to Brussels.

Since 1995, how to navigate through the ‘stages’ of improving fraternal relations and how to organise effectively at the Europe-wide level, by solidifying close relations with Brussels, dealing with the pressures of promoting professional development, and the managing of opportunities and threats posed by fast-moving policies have characterised their development.

## THE UNDERSTORIES

A new governing architecture of public and private experts and other actors has built European education through arrays of interlocking standards. Governing by standards excludes politics and relies on experts, while offering workable solutions to governing and being governed in Europe. Since the 1990s, the governing of European education has depended on the production of abstract and commensurable units, enabling exchange across borders and places, and producing a newly-transparent domain. The production of standards in the EU has been developed through inclusive, expert and technical processes such as networking, seminars, reviews, expert groups, etc. It has produced an intertwined and captivated Europeanized population of experts, practitioners and professionals, especially within



the field of education. Its virtue is that power is not wielded, if anything it aims to attract, and uses 'incentive acts' (Brunsson & Jacobsson, 2000, p. 13).

The term 'expert' is ubiquitous in the field of EU education. It started with the Janne report in 1972, which was devised around the responses of senior scholars, researchers and other European actors, and foreshadowed a Community education policy.

It also regularly supported many organisations and associations working at European level (teachers' unions, student and other organisations). Various working groups were set up consisting of national experts and stakeholders, giving them the opportunity to share best practice and experience (Pepin, 2006, p. 36).

These embedded experts assist policy makers in the preparation of working documents to support the European Commission's directives and recommendations.

In addition, European policy makers mobilize informal networks to develop scientific knowledge about the effectiveness and quality of educational systems. This expertise contributes to the construction of indicators and benchmarks supporting the open method of coordination. This knowledge is very useful for the European Commission, which looks for efficiency in the implementation of its strategy of lifelong learning, while member states retain the control of their national systems in education and training (Normand, 2010, p. 407).

In a decentralised, information-rich society, governance needs to use 'science' more actively to minimise risk, or to minimise anxiety about risk (Bauman, 1992). Thus, newly-participating technocratic actors constitute a new policy instrument that knits together a complex space of flows of agents and data, with the aim of imposing its logic over scattered, segmented places.

The governance of the European Education Policy Space appears to be managed through building relations among professionals and experts in groups/nations/ networks/ communities. The project of Europeanization seems increasingly dependent upon the cooperation and joint resource mobilisation of national policy actors who sometimes lie outside governmental hierarchical control. Further, policy networks accommodate the blurring of state/civil society boundaries that is such a feature of current policy-making –especially in England – with the growth of cooperation or dispersed responsibilities among state and non-state agencies, and engagement of actors from the private and voluntary sectors in

the delivery of services. The term ‘policy community’ (Rhodes, 1996) denotes a network with high levels of stability and continuity, longer-term agendas and interests beyond the sectoral or issue-based.

The discourse is one of translation, uneven in influence and effect, these system actors moved between Brussels and the home state, and between states, interpreting one to the other, and easing the path of change (Lawn & Lingard, 2002). They have acted as translators between sites, turning information into powerful knowledge, re-imagining the project of Europe and re-positioning national stances. They circulated an explicit language of comparison and evaluation, new generic skills and ‘learning’ which surpass Europe in scope and usage, but appeared in their particular forms in the European space.

A wide range of actors are at work in the new European policy space, spanning commercial, professional and expert forms, and representing highly organized sectors, like higher education or specialist academic associations. They are often funded directly by the EU and its programmes or indirectly by professional associations and national organizations like universities. Non-territorial, horizontal networks involving actors drawn from outside governmental organizations, are visibly at work, creating a space around their interests and trying to overcome problems of legitimacy. They appear to be self-governing networks of actors mobilizing capacities for action, appearing autonomous yet often relying, at some level, on governmental power.

To create and manage policy, a range of partners, at different levels of government, has to be negotiated with; they exist within complex networks, which span intergovernmental, producer, professional and expert forms. Increasingly, networks of various kinds made up of combinations of interlinking relations, have become a common form of governance in Europe. They cross national boundaries, old government divisions and traditional structures of work and administration. The informality of their organization, the complexity of their knowledge relations and exchanges, the hybrid nature of their institutional association, combined with their overall inter-dependence, produce a distinctive form of governance in Europe. But their relationship to the construction of the education space is complex and varied; the range of their work and interests is broad, and the spaces in which they work and deliberate are heterogeneous. They are attracted to the European space yet vary in their contributions, their expertise, their purposes and their opportunities. As an area of governance, it may not be visible or even disciplining to its members, who are nevertheless creating it. For example, you may have a statistician travelling across borders



from university to university for expert group meetings on indicators, referring to it as just 'working with a network of academics in her area'. Yet she is producing a crucial element in the formation of the benchmarking process. Or members of a Socrates network, which may be fruitful in social contact but low in productivity during its short life, later go on to establish a European association sub-network in a growing, common area of work. In both cases, there are people contributing to the foundation of a new policy space in education, and building it through a series of necessary but almost invisible steps.

In effect, academics and experts, often through their associations, act as new political actors. They are the transmitters and mediators of European Union or European socialization logics that encompass new procedures, institutional priorities and networking discourses which they incorporate into their associational identities and strategies. Professional associations are becoming crucial in the governance of many areas of EU policy, especially ICT (Knull, 2001) where they act to provide expertise in areas where the Commission is weak, and where intervention involves a range of heterogeneous actors. Associations have begun to alter their structures, from federalist and national, to European and individual membership, to cope with the new demands upon them in providing expertise, acting as policy mediators between the national and the trans-national, and supporting ambitious European goals. Education is not immune to this as Europe-wide educational associations struggle to achieve influence, provide their members with information and cope with Commission expectations with regard to their stability and expertise. They engage with a range of partially or fully funded networking organizations that have arisen from Europe's new governance (regions, transnational programmes, EU Declarations, etc) and related funding providers (Socrates, Thematic Networks, EU-based research projects, work groups on benchmarking, etc).

There is a close fit between the ordering of this space and the activities of associations and networks, and individual actors. It operates in a dynamic market, where the usefulness of the system is validated in different contexts in which several types of specialized knowledge are required. Socially distributed knowledge has fluid forms of production: it is produced in an array of sites, often linked together, across private and public organizations, with a range of skill levels and applications. Experts work with an expertise which is portable. They act as points of distribution for the ideas of Europeanization, creating, imagining and transmitting within a framing of work networks, which exist within and outwith varieties of steered partnerships. Significant

system actors act as symbolic analysts (Reich, 1991), dealing with abstract Europeanization ideas for educational policy and building experimental or analytical policy networks. Conferences are a major way of reporting their work and creating communities of shared concepts and aims.

## CONCLUDING

As Europe is being fabricated as a common project and a process, it is also an ordering. The soft governance of Europe education, and its understory of professional, commercial and expert connections and work, has been a fertile ground for networks and associations. They found a welcoming environment, a chance to develop European institutions and gather financial support, which was also happening, independently, to a significant number of their members. The understory offered new meanings to their work, contrastive experiences and wider knowledge. But the governance of the European Union changed rapidly as the associations began to organize within it. Europe and the European Union became conflated, and the understory of thickening contacts, events and projects was dealing with new fraternal and sororal associates, at the same time as it had to engage with swift policy changes.

Since the time they were formed the EERA and the SICI were forced to come to grips with a post-comparative European educational space. They had to find new ways of understanding the present of its partners and the rapidly changing visible and opaque policies of the policy space it inhabited and had to act within. They had a very short time to negotiate the cultural diversity of their members, while managing the rapid funding, policy and organizational features of the Educational or Learning Spaces emerging within the EU.

Their entry into the understory of Europe was fraught with difficult organizational strategies and improvement aims, ambitious development plans, the coordination of a variety of member initiatives and large programme operations. As they wove sets of linked relations, and engaged with European 'opportunities', they were both constructing and being constructed by this new policy space.

The understory hasn't always been a comfortable place for these often unstable, wilful, loosely-knit associations that depend on part time officers. The assembling of a policy area in virtual and material form, with its own means of calculation, categories and standards, has moved very fast since 2000. It has also moved quite silently and invisibly (if one did not recognize the significance of



these areas of work in education) to shape a field of governance and behaviour. The creation of standards, related to their different areas of work, is a striking element of their work, and common to both of them. The development of their expertise in the new Europe meant that they instituted and coded it within standards their members required and the EU needed. Research infrastructure and modernized education systems needed their assistance, developed out of their interests and helped to fabricate European education space or area as well. This did not, and does not, happen in the surface or visible events of the EU but in the under-story, and most of all in the education arena, the understory needs watching.

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