

**THE BLINDNESS OF EUROPE: NEW FABRICATIONS
IN THE EUROPEAN EDUCATIONAL SPACE**

ANTÓNIO NÓVOA

novoa@reitoria.ul.pt | Universidade de Lisboa, Portugal

ABSTRACT

After a slow start during the 70s and 80s, education took on a new importance after the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. From that date onwards, numerous texts and documents would gradually build a «European educational space». The Lisbon Strategy of 2000 is an important milestone in this process. The main reference point of the 21st century is the Education & Training 2010 Work Program, which sets a clear framework at the European level for education and training. Recently, there was a new turning point of great significance, with the approval of Europe 2020 and especially with the launching of the Rethinking Education strategy.

We are facing continuities and changes that need to be analyzed carefully. That is what I intend to do in this article entitled «The Blindness of Europe: New Fabrications in the European Educational Space». In the first section, I will recall the major turning points in educational policies in the last two decades. In the second section, the analysis will focus on the new Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020) program and the Rethinking Education strategy launched in November of 2012. The final considerations seek to promote a broader reflection on the new fabrications that are taking place in the European educational space: i) Is Europe a solution or a problem?; ii) What education for what Europe? iii) How to study educational policies in Europe?

KEY WORDS

Education and training 2010; Europe 2020; European educational space; Lifelong learning; Rethinking education.



SISYPHUS

JOURNAL OF EDUCATION

VOLUME 1, ISSUE 1,

2013, 104-123

The Blindness of Europe: New Fabrications in the European Educational Space

António Nóvoa

INTRODUCTION

My earlier work on educational policies in the European Union dates back to the late 80s (Nóvoa, 1993, 1996). At that time, every idea proposed was inevitably contested with reference to the fact that education was excluded from EU policies, while remaining under the full responsibility of each Member State.

As time went on and as the European authorities were increasingly intervening in the educational arena, the questions were becoming less and less frequent. Today, nobody is surprised by this discussion, such is the importance attached to educational policies by the European Union. And even the official texts no longer hide this fact, despite the prudence of the language.

The answer given to one of the FAQs on the site about the Europe 2020 strategy speaks for itself: «Why does Europe 2020 propose action in areas run by national governments, e.g. education and employment? Because the crusade to keep Europe competitive can benefit from coordination at the EU level.»¹

In fact, after a slow start during the 70s and 80s, education took on a new importance after the adoption of the Maastricht Treaty in 1992. From that date onwards, numerous texts and documents would gradually build a «European educational space». The Lisbon Strategy of 2000 is an important

1 http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/services/faqs/index_en.htm (Retrieved on December 17th, 2012).

milestone in this process. The main reference point of the 21st century is the Education & Training 2010 Work Program, which sets a clear framework at the European level for education and training. Recently, there was a new turning point of great significance with the approval of Europe 2020, and especially with the launching of the Rethinking Education strategy.

We are facing continuities and changes that need to be analyzed carefully. This is the principal aim of this article entitled «The Blindness of Europe: New Fabrications in the European Educational Space». In the first section, I will recall the major turning points of educational policies in the last two decades. In the second section, the analysis will focus on the new Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020) program and the Rethinking Education strategy launched in November of 2012. The final considerations seek to foster broader reflection on the new fabrications that are taking place in the European educational space.

FROM MAASTRICHT (1992) TO LISBON (2000) TO EUROPE 2020

MAASTRICHT (1992): A FIRST TURNING POINT

The first phase of European cooperation in the field of education was very cautious and restrained. It was accomplished through several «programs», organized around voluntary or temporary agreements. Most of the documents issued after 1992 begin by asserting the need to develop *quality education*, a principle introduced by the Maastricht Treaty as a way to legitimize European initiatives in this field.

Throughout this period, it is important to highlight three tendencies:

First, a recurrent discourse concerning the European dimension of education. This is condensed in Green and White Papers, mobilizing significant groups around this theme, namely in the fields of history and literature.

Second, the emphasis on the concept of lifelong learning, which was not only invoked with reference to education and schooling, but also as a way to solve the problems of unemployment and preparation for the job market. The year 1996 was named as the «European Year of Lifelong Learning», and since then, the term has permeated all the European educational policies.

Finally, we may refer to an impressive series of papers and reports, published for the purpose of identifying issues for «future policies» in the educational field:

Teaching and learning: Towards the learning society (1995), *Accomplishing Europe through Education and Training* (1997), *Towards a Europe of Knowledge* (1997), *Learning for Active Citizenship* (1998), etc. These documents are part of a political construction which imposes powerful «ways of thinking» about education in Europe (Nóvoa, 2002).

LISBON (2000): A SECOND TURNING POINT

In the year 2000 in Lisbon, two important decisions were made: to move towards a knowledge-based economy as the way forward towards Unionization and to foster European policies through the open method of coordination. The means to achieve a knowledge society was described in terms of «investment in people», by placing education at the forefront of European initiatives.

Therefore, it is not surprising that the European Council requested that the Education Council «undertake a general reflection on the concrete future objectives of education systems, focusing on common concerns and priorities while respecting national diversity» (European Council, 2000, § 27). Important changes took place, reflecting an intention to establish common objectives, as well as common indicators to monitor and assess European educational systems.

It is worth underlining the relevance of the *Memorandum on Lifelong Learning* (2000) and the *European Report on the Quality of School Education* (2000). Lifelong learning is considered a key factor in creating an «active employment policy» and the main strategy for enhancing employability and «promote quality in employment». As for the development of quality education, this entitled the European Commission to set up a series of indicators and benchmarks in order «to learn from each other, to share our successes and failures, and to use education together to advance European citizens and European society into the new millennium» (CEC, 2001, § 37).

Hence, it has been impossible to ignore European educational policies, which were not to be devised through legislation or compulsion, but rather through emulation, cooperation and participation. Nevertheless, it is difficult to imagine a Member State opting out of this game of «freely adhering» to shared guidelines.

THE EDUCATION & TRAINING 2010 WORK PROGRAM: A NEW TEMPO FOR EUROPEAN EDUCATIONAL POLICIES

The Barcelona European Council (March 2002) agreed upon a program to be achieved by 2010, which would focus on education and training systems. The



same goal is systematically repeated in all EU documents: to make the European Union the leading knowledge-based economy in the world. To achieve this goal requires «the crucial contribution from education and training as factors of economic growth, innovation, sustainable employability and social cohesion» (CEU, 2002, p. 5).

The Education & Training 2010 Work Program delineates three strategic objectives: improved quality, facilitation of universal access and opening-up to the wider world. It returns recurrently to the same issues in a narrative construction that is intentionally circular and redundant (CEU, 2002).

«Improving quality and effectiveness» is the first strategic objective, focusing on key competencies for the so called «knowledge society». Scientific, communicational and technological competencies are prioritized, and the exclusion of the humanities, in the broader sense of the term, is accompanied by a psychosociological and entrepreneurial discourse. The desire to ensure and monitor quality education leads to the evaluation of progress and achievement through comparable benchmarks and indicators. Issues of quality, determined through the politics of comparison, are underpinned by an expert discourse that is developed on a global scale, but which is reinforced at the European level by an effort to integrate national policies. We can say that «the challenge of data and comparability» – to quote the words of the *European Report on the Quality of School Education* (2000) – establishes a policy without specifically formulating it.

«Facilitating the access of all» is the second strategic objective of the Education & Training 2010 Work Program. It articulates the conventional discourse concerning lifelong learning in European institutions by, on the one hand, redefining «employment» as a learning problem that should be solved by each individual and, on the other hand, creating the illusion that the «crisis of schooling» will be solved if individuals simply continue to expose themselves to education and training throughout their entire lifetimes. In all of the European guidelines for improving employability, the emphasis is placed on education and training for young people, as well as on lifelong learning. In fact, the concept of employability is reinvented as a way to link employment to education, or to interpret unemployment as a problem of «uneducated» people. The consequences are that responsibility for solving the crisis of the Welfare State shifts from the political system to citizens, who are invited to become responsible for «constantly updating their knowledge» in order to enhance their employability.

«Opening up education and training systems to the wider world» is the third strategic objective. The intention is to create an open «European area for edu-

cation» and to promote the «European dimension of teaching and training». Mobility within the European space is described as not simply movement, but rather as a process which develops awareness of what it means to be a citizen of Europe. The idea of «experiencing Europe» is concurrent with programs of mobility and the project of reinforcing European citizenship. The politics of identity is formulated in terms of qualification and disqualification, leading to the formation of «new educated subjects» to populate the «knowledge society». Such a policy includes and excludes at the same time. The Education & Training 2010 Work Program seeks to attract «students, academics and researchers from other world regions», in the hope that European educational institutions will be «recognized worldwide as centres of excellence» (CEU, 2002, p. 16). This objective is formulated against a background in which the United States of America is regarded as the primary competitor in the educational market.

AN APPRAISAL OF THE EDUCATION & TRAINING 2010 WORK PROGRAM

Analyzing the Education & Training 2010 Work Program, it is possible to discern two recurrent themes. The first has to do with a systematic reference to the «new knowledge-based economy» and to principles of competitiveness and entrepreneurship. The second is the frequent use of psychological concepts applied to educational situations, which is clear in the different uses of the concept of «learning» throughout the document.

The European Commission publishes a detailed report annually analyzing the progress made on an agreed set of statistical indicators and benchmarks. It is impossible to analyze these lengthy reports in detail. They are justified by the rationale that EU institutions «need to use evidence-based policy and practice, including robust evaluation instruments, to identify which reforms and practices are the most effective, and to implement them most successfully» (CEC, 2007, p. 3).

Despite the frequent changes, a substantial proportion of the reports are based on the five EU benchmarks for 2010: i) no more than 10% early school leavers; ii) decrease of at least 20% in the percentage of low-achieving pupils in reading literacy; iii) at least 85% of young people should have completed upper secondary education; iv) increase of at least 15% in the number of tertiary graduates in mathematics, science and technology (MST), with a simultaneous decrease in the gender imbalance; v) 12.5% of the adult population should participate in lifelong learning (CEU, 2003).



As time passed, it became clear that these objectives would not be achieved by the year 2010. Worse still, it became clear that in some cases there had been very slow progress or no progress at all.

In the last annual report pertaining to the years 2010 and 2011, the European Commission recognized that «the benchmarks will not be achieved, apart from the benchmark on increasing the number of math, science and technology graduates» (CEC, 2011, p. 7). Furthermore – and this is very important in light of the ambitions set out by the Lisbon Strategy in 2000 – the distance to the main international competitors has not diminished, and in some cases has even widened.

The Commission's appraisal is especially critical of the fact that too little progress has been made regarding the benchmarks most closely related to social inclusion. It is an important point, since there is a clear need for a new generation of policies to respond to the economic and social crisis.

There is a growing sentiment in European bodies that the first decade of the 21st century was a lost decade in terms of educational policies. This feeling is obviously enhanced by the acute awareness that Europe is in the throes of an extremely profound crisis.

A sense of discouragement and especially of misunderstanding is taking over Europe. Why are the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy (2000) so far from being accomplished? Why weren't the objectives of the Education & Training 2010 Work Program achieved? Worse yet, how is it possible that this overriding European ambition has translated into a crisis as deep as the one we are facing today?

Strangely or not, instead of promoting critical reflection and seeking alternative orientations, the European Commission is launching a new program called Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020), which relies heavily on the logic of the past. There is no significant change, there is no new perspective, only repetition and rehashing of the Education & Training 2010 Work Program.

Again, five EU benchmarks are set for 2020: i) at least 95% of children between 4 years old and the age for starting compulsory primary education should participate in early childhood education; ii) the share of early leavers from education and training should be less than 10%; iii) the share of low-achieving 15-years olds in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15%; iv) the share of 30-34 year olds with tertiary educational attainment should be at least 40%; v) an average of at least 15% of adults should participate in lifelong learning (CEC, 2011; CEU, 2011).

Greater relevance is given to two of these five benchmarks – to reduce the

number of early school leavers and to increase the share of young adults holding tertiary education qualifications – that are selected as headline targets for the Europe 2020 strategy.

The more light that is cast on Europe – through indicators, benchmarks, objectives, strategies, programs, etc. – the more blindness seems to govern the policy guidelines. There is a kind of rush forward, instead of fresh, critical thinking regarding the future of Europe. The reasoning is: «if the previous program failed, it was not because of lack of lucidity, but rather because of lack of determination». So, the new program should maintain and strengthen the same policies.

Thus, after a period of adjustment created by the launch, in 2010, of the Europe 2020 strategy, a set of new guidelines for European educational policies was adopted in November of 2012 under a new Education and Training 2020 (ET 2020) program. That is what I will analyze in the second section of this article.

THE EUROPE 2020 STRATEGY AND THE NEW ET 2020 PROGRAM

Intense debates have taken place in the 2010-2012 period within the European Union. The deep crisis affecting Europe has led to questions that go to the heart of the Unionization process. On one hand, there is a return to national fractures and divisions, particularly between the South (most affected by the crisis) and the North. On the other hand, there are emerging voices demanding greater European integration and even the construction of a European federation (or confederation).

The evidence makes it undeniable that the Lisbon Strategy (2000) has failed, particularly with regard to the education and training objectives. The idea that Europe would become the most competitive, dynamic, knowledge-based economy in the world has now clearly been abandoned. Not only has this ambition fallen far short of being achieved but progress in this direction has been extremely limited. And, needless to say, the expansion of emerging countries (Brazil, India, China, etc.) has begun to undermine the dominant position Europe has occupied for many centuries.

It is this background of crisis and a certain disorientation that define the Europe 2020 strategy and its corollary in the education field, ET 2020 (CEU, 2009). Rather than a sound reflection, there are more continuities



than changes in the way European construction is conceptualised. And the changes that occur contribute more to narrowing the debate than to opening up new ideas and perspectives.

From the political point of view, the analysis is reactive. It entails a defensive logic, which has translated into a lack of ambition and an awareness that Europe's recovery will likely be very slow and perhaps lead to a permanent loss in wealth and potential for future growth.

From the point of view of the methods of action, the documents approved in 2010-2012 repeat the same rationale, even though there are pressures for greater European integration. These pressures are overly cautious, which makes responses more difficult and untimely. Faced with a major crisis, Europe seems unable to change its methods of action and foster new dynamics, either towards greater federative efforts or new types of relationships among European countries.

In education, – the field in which the European Commission had placed so much hope in 2000 – there has been an inflation in discourse that seeks to compensate for the shortage of results. Education is once again placed at the core of all solutions, both in Europe 2020 as in its deployments. But when you look at the long list of goals and priorities in detail, it is clear that the central points of the ET 2020 program are based on economics, on-the-job-training, employability and a set of initiatives to tackle youth unemployment. There is a tendency to reduce the educational issues to the «needs of the economy» and to the preparation of professionals capable of joining the job market.

It is in this atmosphere, that albeit socially and politically unpromising, is very interesting to analyze from a theoretical and analytical perspective, that I will present a critical view of the Europe 2020 strategy and the ET 2020 program.

EUROPE 2020: A STRATEGY FOR SMART, SUSTAINABLE AND INCLUSIVE GROWTH

The President of the European Commission, José Manuel Barroso, writes an interesting preface to the Communication from the Commission, Europe 2020:

2010 must mark a new beginning. I want Europe to emerge stronger from the economic and financial crisis. (...) This crisis is a wake-up call, the moment we recognize that *business as usual* would consign us to a gradual decline, to the second rank of the new global order. This is Europe's moment of truth. It



is the time to be bold and ambitious (EC, 2010, p. 2).

The purpose of the preface is to recognize that «Europe needs to get back on track». And for this, it is necessary that Europe «acts collectively, as a Union». The Europe 2020 strategy sets out a vision of Europe's social market economy, introducing the following headline targets: i) 75% of the population aged 20-64 should be employed; ii) 3% of the EU's GDP should be invested in R&D; iii) the 20/20/20 climate/energy targets should be met; iv) the share of early school leavers should be under 10% and at least 40% of the younger generation should have a tertiary degree; v) 20 million fewer people should be at risk of poverty (EC, 2010, p. 5).

Throughout the document it is consistently pointed out that these targets are interrelated and critical to the overall success of the strategy. Furthermore, to ensure that each Member State tailors the Europe 2020 strategy to its particular situation, the Commission proposes that EU goals be translated into national targets and trajectories: «The Commission will monitor progress towards the targets, facilitate policy exchange and make the necessary proposal to steer action and advance the EU flagship initiatives» (EC, 2010, p. 6).

We are facing a change of some significance, with the European Commission taking on greater control in monitoring national policies. This new step towards stronger involvement of European institutions is justified by the exceptional nature of the European crisis and the need to take urgent action: «In so doing, our exit from the crisis must be the point of entry into a new economy» (EC, 2010, p. 10).

Once again, education policies occupy a prominent place in the making of the new European strategy (EC, 2010): increasing employment rates (first target) is directly related to training for employability; intensifying the investment in R&D (second target) involves primarily universities; objectives in the area of climate and energy (third target) depend heavily on technology and deeper awareness of new generations; the fourth target is specifically related to compulsory and higher education; and even the fight against poverty (fifth target) is defined based on a new relationship with work and people's ability to acquire the skills needed to integrate themselves into society and the labour market.

EDUCATION AND TRAINING 2020: RETHINKING EDUCATION STRATEGY

My message is clear: Europe will only resume growth by producing highly skilled



workers who can contribute to innovation and entrepreneurship. Efficient investment in education and training is fundamental to this (Vassiliou, 2012, p. 1).

These words uttered by European Commissioner Androulla Vassiliou at the press conference where she presented the outlines of the Rethinking Education strategy are very interesting. The central idea is that «Europe must respond». And to organize this response, it is necessary to provide «the right skills for employability» and to work «with business or employers to bring the learning experience closer to the reality of the working environment» (EC, 2012a, p. 2).

The whole strategy is built on the need to supply Europe with «highly skilled workers», and this approach marks a significant difference in European priorities. Obviously, throughout the document, there are a number of additional references and recommendations concerning themes such as literacy, numeracy and basic mathematics and science as key foundations for further learning; early childhood education and care; high quality, adult basic skills; and language learning (EC, 2012a).

Furthermore, two themes are always present: learning outcomes and the need to harness «the power of assessment» and the potential of ICT and the importance of the digital revolution. The role of teachers and the urgency of defining cost-sharing schemes for funding education are also addressed in this Communication from the European Commission.

But the main foci of the document, which serves as the reading frame for all orientations, are undoubtedly issues related to the economy and employability. The subtitle of the Communication is a good illustration of this fact: *Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes*.

All educational policies are presented in light of the need to acquire better jobs, to open «a gateway to employment», to foster competitiveness, to increase levels of employability, or to enhance the «skills needed to function in the global marketplace». In short, the whole line of argument is based on the need for young people to «get the right skills to enter the labour market or create their own businesses».

The atmosphere of crisis and in particular the fight against youth unemployment pervades the entire Rethinking Education strategy, approaching educational policies from the perspective of addressing «the needs of the economy» (EC, 2012a, p. 2).

Among the four areas covered by the Communication, three are directly related to this rationale: developing world-class vocational education and

training to raise the quality of vocational skills; promoting work-based learning including quality traineeships, apprenticeships and dual learning models to help the transition from learning to work; promoting partnerships between public and private institutions (to ensure appropriate curricula and skills provision).

We are witnessing a major turning point in educational policies in Europe. These policies do not embody a new way of thinking about education, but mainly embrace the overarching presence of economic and unemployment issues. In a sense, the same logic that has always guided European policies, at least since Maastricht (1992), prevails; but it has been compressed to dimensions related to skills that will «generate growth and competitiveness» and concentrates on the «development of entrepreneurial skills».

LIFELONG LEARNING TRANSLATED INTO «THE RIGHT SKILLS FOR THE LABOUR MARKET»

European Union documents always centre on rhetoric regarding the «great past» and the «great future» of Europe. But today, there is a strong sentiment that we are experiencing what is indeed a «small present», and the feeling has begun to raise doubts about Europe's ability to overcome the current crisis.

The grandiloquent statements of European documents are in stark contrast with Europe's inability to think of itself in a new international context or account for the fact that societies that are undergoing profound transformation. In the case of educational policies, rather than openness to new perspectives, we are witnessing a narrowing of vision and an impoverished understanding of how education should function in contemporary societies.

From the late 90s, and especially after the Lisbon Strategy (2000), European documents placed lifelong learning at the centre of educational policy. The response to social and educational problems would be found in the capability of each person to learn throughout his or her life, to undertake the journey toward endless training and re-training.

With the expansion of the concept of employability, lifelong learning was increasingly defined as the aptitude to embrace a life of constant adaptation to new jobs and careers. The logic of continuing education was gradually transformed into the logic of adaptation to a life of permanent new jobs, a euphemism that often meant precarious work or no labour rights. This transition meant that the challenges of the Welfare State became less the responsi-



bility of political entities, and more the responsibility of the individual.

The new ET 2020 or Rethinking Education strategy goes a step further in this direction by virtually abandoning the concept of lifelong learning – up to now dominant in European texts – and concentrating pointedly on issues of employment, jobs and occupations.

We are witnessing the emergence of a new vision of education that overlooks important social and cultural dimensions and emphasizes points of view focusing primarily on economic dimensions. The way concepts of learning outcomes, entrepreneurial skills, work-based learning, IT skills and even «entrepreneurial teachers» are mobilized, shows the extent to which the educational space has been restructured.

Simultaneously – and this point deserves to be stressed – the European Commission decided to follow up on the Rethinking Education strategy with monitoring devices at the level of each Member State: «The Education and Training Monitor is a new analytical tool that provides the empirical evidence to underpin this reform agenda. It is a succinct yet comprehensive overview of the core indicators regarding education and training systems in Europe, enabling the reader to compare and contrast recent progress as well as to identify the immediate challenges for Member States» (EC, 2012b, p. 3).

It is clear that this policy is consistent with the usual forms of European action, heavily based on the open method of coordination. But one realizes that this decision constitutes an important step towards further European interference in national policies. The «reader» spoken of in the document is, first of all, the European Commission, which will take actions regarding each Member State based on its «reading».

In this respect, the detailed reports presented by each country are a very strong indicator of the policies to be pursued at the national level (EC, 2012c). In a previous text, I called this approach «governing without governing», that is, elaborating sophisticated ways of producing policies in each Member State and at the European level, but always pretending that no policy is being implemented (Nóvoa, 2010). There is continuity in this method of political action but now the European Commission is taking a new step towards stronger coordination of European policies on education.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS



These concluding remarks will be organized around three main themes: Europe in times of crisis; the meaning of education policies in today's Europe; and the need to revise our analytical and theoretical tools to study educational policies in the European context.

It is from this triple reflection that the *new fabrications* that are taking place in Europe can be gleaned, particularly within the European educational space. These new fabrications seek to rediscover a place for Europe but have proved incapable of responding to a crisis that is far more than a mere cyclical difficulty.

Without a historical perspective situating European reality in time and space, we will not be able to free ourselves from the swamp into which Europe has fallen. We are locked into narrow, short-range views and lack the capacity to mobilize European energies or create a new vision of education. Is Europe condemned, like Paul Valéry (1919) wrote almost a century ago, to be merely a «small promontory of the Asian landmass»? Or is Europe destined to be no more than a poor imitation of America and nothing else?

IS EUROPE A SOLUTION OR A PROBLEM?

European integration has been seen, over recent decades, as a solution to the problems of peace and development, not only within the region but also at the global level. In twenty years, the European Union has evolved from 12 countries to the current 27 Member States. For most of these countries, particularly from Southern and Eastern Europe, EU membership was seen as a solution to national problems. The loss of national sovereignty would be offset by belonging to a stable, cohesive, supportive Europe, which would offer protection to its countries and their citizens. This expectation was particularly evident in countries belonging to the Eurozone.

The current crisis has cast doubt on these beliefs (and expectations), creating a problem of legitimacy in the process of European integration. There is a growing misunderstanding about the crisis and there are increasing worries about Europe's ability to respond politically to the crisis. The resurgence of national tensions in Europe shows the fragility of an alliance that can disintegrate quicker than one might imagine. What took decades to build can take just a few months to dissolve.

Once the illusion of Europe as the centre of the world has disappeared, what remains may only be a project to imitate America. But, as a leading European philosopher, Eduardo Lourenço, states, «our current existence as a



second rank pseudo-America is the worst of deaths» (2011, p. 51). What transformed Europe from a solution into a problem?

Many countries, notably some peripheral countries, have resumed old identities and connections with America, Asia and Africa as an alternative to facing the difficulties they feel within Europe. It could be seen as a process of openness but it is not. In effect, it is a process of division and separation that can only be tackled by creating a new concept of Europe, built from the bottom up, not from the core European institutions or «eurocrats» down. Instead of the survival rationale that has guided the European bodies' response to the crisis, it seems that the time has come to promote a «response from the bottom up» that joins movements, cultures and peoples. Inherent in this process is the opportunity to create new concepts and practices of living in Europe that are necessarily more democratic – not only within the political space of the nation-states – but also at the European level. This is the only way to create a stronger legitimacy that fosters new answers to the problematic situation Europe is grappling with today.

WHAT EDUCATION FOR WHAT EUROPE?

Traditionally, the European Union has approached educational issues with prudence. At first, the EU adopted mechanisms of soft regulation. Then, gradually, new layers of action were accepted and implemented. The same thing can be said, as is evident today, of the field of economic policies: «We do not see how coordination can succeed when the coordinator is primarily constituted by an assembly of those who are the target entities of the coordination effort» (Enderlein *et al.*, 2012, p. 17).

Appropos of this view, the report from the *Notre Europe* think tank presents the following observation:

A stronger economic policy of the EU can emerge only if the actor of the policy is the EU itself and not the assembly of Member States. This implies a significant transfer of sovereignty. The EU level would have to be recognized as a full-fledged and autonomous actor in economic policy-making, based on appropriate sources of legitimacy (Enderlein *et al.*, 2012, p. 17).

The same holds true for educational policies. Progressively, there is an emerging awareness of the fact that educational issues should be regulated

at the European level, even if education remains the responsibility of each Member State.

A central element in this process is the burgeoning development of a body of European experts in the field of education. These experts, from various countries and backgrounds, have been building a theoretical, methodological and statistical apparatus that influences EU documents and, ultimately, national policies.

We are faced with discourses that carry powerful ideological concepts regarding education, yet they always tacitly appear – and seek – to impose themselves under the guise of being «obvious», «natural» and «inevitable». The most recurrent of these concepts are the «human capital theories», even though they have acquired new forms since the early 60s.

In this regard, it is useful to recall, once again, the criticism made by Spanish philosopher Ortega y Gasset in *The Mission of the University*:

These clichés rest upon a fundamental error which we shall simply have to get out of our heads. It consists of supposing that nations are great because their schools are good. (...) It ascribes to the school a force which it neither has nor can have. (...) Certainly when a nation is great, so will be its schools. There is no great nation without great schools. But the same holds for its religion, its statesmanship, its economy and a thousand other things. A nation's greatness is the integration of many elements (1930, p. 19).

Saying the same thing, but in a different way: education is a more «totalized» than «totalizing» universe. It is not worth repeating, program after program, a «narrative of salvation» regarding education or the idea that education is the primary condition underpinning development. Education and development must be understood in equilibrium, without cause and effect, but in the light of a strong interaction and balance between the investment in education and the social and economic development of societies.

In this respect, the dogged continuity of European beliefs, from the documents of the 90s to the Education & Training 2010 Work Program and ET 2020, constitutes a kind of «blindness» that can hardly bring new light to European education.

But what is even worse, echoing this ideology, ET 2020 tends in effect to narrow the field of educational wisdom. It entails a return to the old concepts of vocational education and training, now clothed in new technologies and

appeals to the entrepreneurial spirit. As stated in the Rethinking Education document: «Europe will only resume growth through higher productivity and the supply of highly skilled workers, and it is the reform of education and training systems which is essential to achieving this» (EC, 2012a, p. 17).

We are seeing a short-term response, when «in the context of crisis, long-term matters are urgent matters» (Enderlein *et al.*, 2012, p. 3). In fact, the crisis will not be overcome without radically new conceptions of education, devoid of time-worn theories on human capital or with views cloistered within a narrow interpretation of educational opportunities and possibilities.

HOW TO STUDY EDUCATIONAL POLICIES IN EUROPE?

Throughout this article, I have tried to demonstrate how the European Union has progressively proposed and imposed educational policies in Europe. The analytical tools at our disposal are useful, but insufficient in explaining the European educational space and the reciprocal influences that exist between the European level (bodies and experts) and the national level (Member States).

Over recent decades, comparative education has been enriched by new theories and methods, among which is the world-system approach and research on educational transfer. World-system approaches provide a stimulating interpretative framework for the diffusion of standardized models of educational organization on a global scale. Its contribution is fundamental to understanding the expansion of mass schooling and to explaining why a certain degree of homogeneity is present in the development of national educational systems worldwide (Meyer, Ramirez & Soysal, 1992; Ramirez & Ventresca, 1992). Despite their importance, the prospects opened by these authors are insufficient in explaining the situation in Europe, which comprises its own specificity. European political integration requires different analytical tools that take into account the processes of power balance and power sharing between national states and European institutions.

Research into educational transfer – borrowing and lending, externalization and internalization, diffusion and reception, etc. – has undergone significant progress in the last decade (Popkewitz, 2000; Schriewer, 2000; Steiner-Khamsi, 2012). The globalization of education has led to the conclusion that many changes were similar throughout the world, raising questions about the processes of transfer among countries and regions. Needless to say, these same

processes are also active within the European area, not only in the relationship between Europe and America, but also in the way Europe influences and is influenced worldwide. Yet the European political situation has its own configurations which cannot be accurately analyzed solely through these approaches.

Thus, it is necessary to adopt analytical models that take into account the role that each Member State plays inside the «European Union» entity while simultaneously fostering an understanding of how and why autonomous discourses and practices have been created inside the European Union itself. These times of crisis are leading to stronger European governance through regular monitoring of national policies and the Commission is steering the process using the new instruments introduced by the Lisbon treaty: recommendations, policy warnings where necessary, and the possibility of penalties for serious delays.

Understanding how the convergence processes are defined in the European space is a major challenge for comparative education. As in economics, in education it is also necessary «to solve the paradox of preserving strong domestic political cultures while building a strongly integrated framework and allowing the European level to become an economic actor on its own» (Enderlein *et al.*, 2012, p. 21).

With this statement we come to the core of the debate that Europe – in today’s context and more than ever – must have on how to deepen democracy. Philosophers like Jürgen Habermas (2001) have been saying something similar for many years, especially those who have viewed Europe as a non-state, supranational, democratic order: nothing will be achieved without greater participation of the people and social movements to counterbalance the decisions taken by experts and European bodies.

Power relations within the EU, both between states and between individual states and European institutions, are crucial to lending clarity to educational policies. The way each Member State contributes to influencing European decisions and, in turn, the way the EU is establishing itself as a tier of policymaking, leaves the field wide open for analysis and interpretation. In order to attain a clearer view of the future, we need to remove the blinkers that have narrowed Europe’s field of vision and prevented education from fulfilling its personal and social potential in contemporary society.



REFERENCES

- CEC (2001) – Commission of the European Communities. *Report from the Commission: The concrete future objectives of education systems*. Brussels: COM(2001) 59 final.
- CEC (2007) – Commission of the European Communities. *Commission staff working document: Towards more knowledge-based policy and practice in education and training*. Brussels: SEC(2007) 1098.
- CEC (2011) – Commission of the European Communities. *Commission staff working document: Progress towards the common European objectives in education and training*. Brussels: SEC(2011) 526.
- CEU (2002) – Council of the European Union. Detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe (2002/C 142/01). Published in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*, 14.6.2002.
- CEU (2003) – Council of the European Union. *Council conclusions on Reference levels of European average performance in education and training (benchmarks)*. Brussels: EDUC 83 8981/03.
- CEU (2009) – Council of the European Union. Council conclusions on 12 May 2009 on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training ('ET 2020') (2009/C 119/02). Published in the *Official Journal of the European Communities*, 28.5.2009.
- CEU (2011) – Council of the European Union. Council conclusions on the role of education and training in the implementation of the 'Europe 2020' strategy. Published in the *Official Journal of the European Union*, 4.3.2011.
- EC (2010) – European Commission. *Communication from the Commission: Europe 2020 – A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth*. Brussels: COM(2010) 2020 final.
- EC (2012a) – European Commission. *Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions: Rethinking Education – Investing in skills for better socio-economic outcomes*. Brussels: COM(2012) 669 final.
- EC (2012b) – European Commission. *Commission staff working document: Education and Training Monitor 2012*. Strasbourg: SWD(2012) 373 final.
- EC (2012c) – European Commission. *Commission staff working document: Rethinking Education – Country analysis*. Strasbourg: SWD(2012) 377 final.
- ENDERLEIN, H. et al. (2012). *Completing the Euro: A road map towards fiscal union in Europe (Report of the «Tomaso Padoa-Schioppa Group»)*. Nanterre: Notre Europe.
- EUROPEAN COUNCIL (2000). *Lisbon European Council: Presidency Conclusions*. Lisbon: March 23rd-24th.



- HABERMAS, J. (2001). Why Europe needs a Constitution. *New Left Review*, 11, 5-26.
- LOURENÇO, E. (2011). Breve meditação europeia. *Visão*, August 4th, 2011, pp. 50-51.
- MEYER, J., RAMIREZ, F., & SOYSAL, Y. (1992). World Expansion of Mass Education, 1870-1980. *Sociology of Education*, 65(2), 128-149.
- NÓVOA, A. (1993). The Portuguese State and Teacher Educational Reform. In T. S. POPKEWITZ (Ed.), *Changing Patterns of Power: Social Regulation and Teacher Education Reform* (pp. 53-86). New York: State University of New York Press.
- NÓVOA, A. (1996). The construction of the European: Changing patterns of identity through education. In H. SIMOLA & T. POPKEWITZ (Eds.), *Professionalization and Education* (pp. 28-51). Helsinki: University of Helsinki.
- NÓVOA, A. (2002). Ways of thinking about education in Europe. In A. NÓVOA & M. LAWN (Eds.), *Fabricating Europe – The formation of an education space* (pp. 131-155). Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers.
- NÓVOA, A. (2010). Governing without governing – The formation of a European educational space. In M. W. APPLE, S. J. BALL & L. A. Gandin (Eds.), *The Routledge International Handbook of the Sociology of Education* (pp. 264-273). Oxon: Routledge.
- ORTEGA Y GASSET, J. (1992 [1930]). *Mission of the University*. New Jersey: Transaction Publishers.
- POPKEWITZ, T. (Ed.) (2000). *Educational Knowledge – Changing relationships between the state, civil society, and the educational community*. New York: State University of New York Press.
- RAMIREZ, F., & VENTRESCA, M. (1992). Building the Institution of Mass Schooling: Isomorphism in the Modern World. In B. Fuller & R. Rubinson (Eds.), *The Political Construction of Education – The State, School Expansion, and Economic Change* (pp. 47-59). New York: Praeger.
- SCHRIEWER, J. (Ed.) (2000). *Discourse Formation in Comparative Education*. Frankfurt: Peter Lang.
- STEINER-KHAMSI, G. (2012). Understanding policy borrowing and lending: building comparative policy studies. In G. Steiner-Khamsi & F. Waldow (Eds.), *World Yearbook of Education 2012: Policy Borrowing and Lending in Education* (pp. 1-17). London: Routledge.
- VALÉRY, P. (1919). The crisis of the mind. *The Athenaeum*, London, April & May 1919.
- VASSILIOU, A. (2012). Press statement on *Rethinking Education*. Strasbourg: November 20th, 2012.

