"Who marks the bench?" A critical review of the neo-European "paradigm shift" through higher education policies and discourses.

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> *"Sed quis custodiet ipsos custodes"*
> Iuvenalis, Satura VI, lines 347–8, p. 325

> "*To be governed is to be watched, inspected, spied upon, directed, law-driven, numbered, regulated, enrolled, indoctrinated, preached at, controlled, checked, estimated, valued, censured, commanded; all by creatures who have neither the right nor the wisdom nor the virtue to do so*". Proudhon, 1923: 293.

Abstract

This paper attempts to critically analyze the educational discourses and policies of the European Union over the last decade (2000-2010) in the context of the Lisbon Strategy initiatives (Council of the EU, 2000) and provide an account on "The Shape of Things to Come"[1]. It will be argued that the symbolic and actual construction of the "Europe of knowledge" has been dominated by "audit culture"[2] discourses and practices (such as governmentality, performativity and accountability) which have been influenced by the new imaginary ideotypes of globalization, and knowledge economy / society, and which draw heavily on the neoliberal/technocratic rationalities of the emergent risk societies[3]. In this context, it is argued, the changes in the EU educational paradigm construct new "geographies of knowledge" and "geometries of power" (Epstein, 2007: 6) within Europe, which inflict new, top-down knowledge/power divisions upon the EU member-states' educational planning and

[1] The title of a famous science fiction work of H.G. Wells, originally published in 1933 (Wells, 2005).
[2] For a critical account of "audit culture" with reference to (mainly, higher) education, see, among others, Shore, 2008, and Apple, 2005.
[3] The term "risk society" is used here to denote global-scale changes in the political and economic sovereignty and govermentality of the State, which are reinforced by neoliberal orthodoxies, (see, for example, Ren, 2010) and have profound effects on the established social arrangements of modernity, e.g. leading to the destabilization of the middle class, resulting, in Ulrich Beck's words to "a world of uncontrollable risk" (Beck, 2002: 41).

policies, literally establishing a modern Panopticon of a "measurable" Europe of knowledge, "governed by numbers"[4].

1. Restructuring the European Context: New Imaginary Ideotypes and Regimes of Truth

In the context of the significant global-scale challenges and transformations affecting Europe at the economic, geopolitical, social and technological levels, the symbolic and actual construction of the "Europe of knowledge", has acquired increased significance for the future of the EU. The discourses of the stakeholders advocating the "Europe of Knowledge" (i.e. the EU institutional apparatus and certain political, economic and intellectual Euro-elites) encompass and project contemporary imaginary "ideotypes" such as globalization, network society, knowledge economy / society, discussed by scholars such as Castells, (1998), Held and McGrew (2000), in a European "risk society" scenery (Adam, Beck, and van Loon, 2000). The practices used for the accomplishment of this particular "Europe of Knowledge" seem to have been colonized by the neoliberal / technocratic rationales of "marketization", "privatization", "governmentality" and "performativity" rationalities put forward by international economic organizations (OECD, World Bank, IMF and WTO) and TNCs' (Lynch 2006, Ball 2009), which have a casting opinion on educational issues, often in a covert / disguised fashion (see Mattheou, 2004). In this context, the "Europe of Knowledge" has been elevated to a hegemonic discourse (Gramsi, 1971, Giroux, 1992), an undisputable "regime of truth" (Foucault, 1979), largely dictating what can or cannot be done in European education.

During the first decade of the new century, the "Europe of Knowledge" and its concomitant "regimes of truth" have inflicted new knowledge/power divisions and have constructed new "*geographies of knowledge"* and "*geometries of power"*, establishing new "relations of power that are spatial, historic and economic" (Epstein, 2007: 2), clearly identifiable in the EU educational discourses and policies. As a result, it is argued, a significant 'governance turn' (Ball 2009), along with the prevalence of an 'audit culture' (Shore 2008) and a persistent 'quality shift' (Grek et al. 2009, Ozga et al. 2011) occupy an emblematic position in these discourses. Taken together, these developments hypostasize, both in symbolic and substantial terms, a substantial "paradigm shift" in the current European Union's educational politics and policies. They mark the trend towards greater convergence and centralized control of the member states' education planning and policies, which seems to lead to the establishment of a 'measurable' Europe of knowledge, governed by data, indicators and benchmarks (Lawn 2006, Grek 2008, Ozga 2009, Pasias & Roussakis 2009). Arguing that developments in the higher education sector are exemplary of this "paradigm shift", we will review the discourses and policies that make up the emergent landscape of European Higher Education.

[4] As Nikolas Rose points out, "[Neoliberal rationalities of government] require a numericized environment in which these free, choosing actors may govern themselves by numbers." (Rose, 1991: 691).

2. Mapping the power/knowledge nexus in European higher education

The construction of a 'Europe of Knowledge' has been one of the most prominent programmatic statements of the EU since the 1990s, in its effort to effectively respond to the changes to the post-industrial economies and societies brought about by economic globalization and international techno-scientific and digital communication developments. Based on the assumption that *"real wealth creation will be linked to the production and dissemination of knowledge"*, and that it depends *"first and foremost"* on the Union's *"efforts in the field of research, education and training and on its capacity to promote innovation"* (CEC, 1997: 1), the 'Europe of Knowledge' ideotype became a constituent element of the European educational 'policyscape'. Higher education, an item that had already been on the Community agenda since the late 1980s (see CEC, 1991), traditionally, brought together the five policies (innovation, research, education, training and employment, CEC, 1997:1) through which, in the EU Commission's view, the creation of a 'Europe of Knowledge' would become possible. Thus it was the area of education most affected by the relevant policy changes.

Dale (2008) notes that the two constituent pillars of 'Europe of knowledge' as it pertains to higher education are the European Higher Education Area (EHEA, see Vienna-Budapest Declaration, 2010), and the European Research Area (ERA, see European Commission 2000). The European Higher Education Area is a project that was accomplished through the Bologna Process[5] (Bologna Declaration 1999), one of the most ambitious intergovernmental processes ever launched, initially aiming at increasing the international competitiveness of the European higher education systems[6]. , are The European Research Area was sponsored by the Lisbon Process (European Council 2000) which aspired for the European Union *"to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion"* (European Council, 2000).

Together, these processes have initiated a number of changes in the EU policies both at the member-states and the Union levels, which aimed at making higher education the steam-engine of economic growth, enhancing the competitiveness of the European Universities in the international arena and developing the human capital capable of achieving the task. These policies acknowledge the importance of what is called the 'knowledge triangle' (education, research, innovation,European Commission 2006), reiterating a European version of the 'triple helix' model of knowledge capitalization, which calls for the collaboration between the university, government and industry (Etzkowitz 2002).which reinforces the decisive role of the EU institutions in the 'knowledge industries' Moreover, education has been recently referred to as the **"**5th Freedom" of the EU, and it has been assigned the role to "remove barriers to the free

[5] Although the European Commission became actively involved in the Bologna Process after 2001, it has been the only non-State entity that was a voting member of the Bologna Follow-Up Group and also a member of the Secretariat, the two bodies responsible for the day-to-day monitoring of the Bologna Process, a fact that *de facto* made it one of the most influential stakeholders.

[6] For a detailed record of the Bologna Process and the basic tenets of the EHEA, visit its website at http://www.ehea.info.

movement of knowledge" (European Council 2008: 5) throughout Europe, and put Europe on the map of global 'knowledge flows' which had previously been (and still largely is) American-dominated (Marginson 2007),

It is evident, from the above, that the EU discourses on EHEA and ERA, draw heavily on a 'market driven' economic rationale , which favours liberalization of markets and trade, in tandem with WTO and GATS regulations for education services (see Robertson, Bonal & Dale 2002, Verger 2007) rather than reinforce education as a public good. They promote a what can be described as a Freirean "banking concept" of knowledge (Freire, 1970) viewing it a capital asset in the global economic competitiveness game, which has to be profitably invested, coinciding with the educational visions of international economic organizations such as the OECD, the World Bank and the IMF (Rinne 2008). These discourses also opt out for new forms of "human resources management", justifying their preference on the "rapid changes" of the modes of production and the international division of labour, which they often describe in terms of competitiveness, pliability, high specialization, flexible production forms and "flexicure" work relationships (OECD 2000, Bonal 2003, Olssen 2004, Hill 2005).

Additionally, they project forms of lifelong learning in a way that signifies what has been called the "Totally Pedagogised Society" (Bonal & Rambla 2003), a society dominated by "competence/ performance-based" instrumental / technocratic rationalities, which emphasize new modes of evaluation and assessment and promote audit and accountability procedures of every aspect of education (Gleeson & Husbands 2001, Ball 2003).

Figure 1:
Geographies of knowledge

These discourses and policy practices render "Europe of Knowledge" as a hegemonic-discursive policyscape (reviewed in Figure 1), in which the 'knowledge policies' of member-states, economic interests, political formations and social groups are coordinated (convinced for its benefits rather than coerced), producing new forms of 'educational Europeaness'.

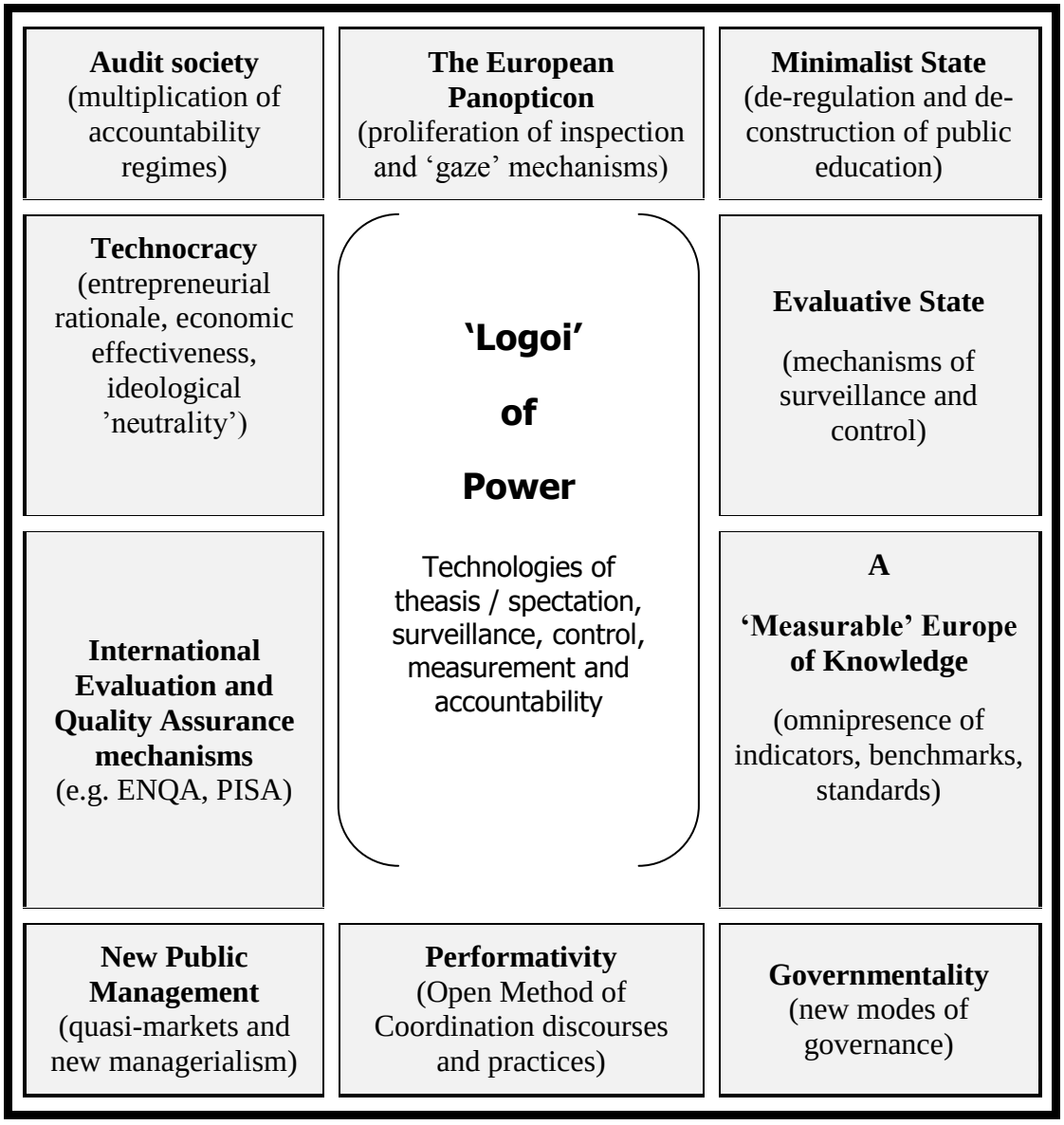
In addition to the significant changes in the European 'knowledge policyscape', higher education is also affected by the changes in power structures in Europe. For example, the on-going demolition of the welfare state is accompanied by limitations of state/government provisions and spending cuts or under funding of public services such as the health and pension systems as well as education (Daun & Siminou 2005) and the transfer of these services to the private or (in some cases) to a quasi-public

sector, through "choice policies" (Whitty & Power, 2002). But, on the other hand, one can observe an undeniable prevalence of what Guy Neave has called *"a present-day version of governmental 'New Theology'"* referring to *"quality, efficiency and enterprise"* (Neave, 1988: 7) and their consequences for higher education institutions. In Neave's analysis this "New Theology" reinforced of the evaluative role of the state, through a constellation of auditing and steering agencies. In this way, modes of "regulatory regionalism" (Jayasuriya, 2008) practices are introduced, giving rise to new governance instruments. For example, in a proposal for a recommendation *"on further European cooperation in quality assurance in higher education"*, the European Commission required member states to urge *"all higher education institutions active within their territory to introduce or develop rigorous internal quality assurance mechanisms"* and furthermore to *"accept the assessments made by all quality assurance and accreditation agencies listed in the European Register as a basis for decisions on licensing or funding of higher education institutions, including as regards such matters as eligibility for student grants and loans"* (European Commission, 2004: 8). The sheer emphasis on accountability procedures in the narrowed public sector is based on, New Public Management approaches, in fact establish the "evaluative state" in higher education give rise to new modes of governance of European Universities and trigger significant changes in their perceived aims, mission[7] (Bleiklie 1998, Deem 2001, Ranson 2003).

Following this pattern, traditional forms of academic research and knowledge, especially in humanities, but not confined to these academic fields, are being questioned by 'market-driven' discourses and are challenged by claims of ''performativity' which emphasize and prioritize learning outcomes, instrumental knowledge production and easily comparable accredited qualifications (Cowen 1996, Magalhaes & Stoer 2003, Besley & Peters 2005). As is the case with the aforementioned 'knowledge policies', the 'neoliberal/technocratic' educational rationales of international organizations such as the World Bank, the OECD and the IMF (Ilon, 2002, Henry et al., 2001 Marcussen 2003) secure the widest publicity of these ideas and undermine alternatives. The shifting "geometries of power" between the public and the private and between the national and the global, on the one hand, and the increasing role of the market and the extra-national institutional (i.e. European) edifice on the other, create a new 'powerscape' for European higher education (reviewed in Figure 2). It is then conspicuously faced with privatization and individualization processes (Ball 2009). It is increasingly treated as a 'service' and an arena of 'entrepreneurial' activity, thus being gradually transformed into a marketable commodity in an environment of "academic capitalism" (Slaughter & Leslie 1997, Aronowitz 2000, Giroux 2003), which is audited in terms of a 'market economy' (Shore 2008).

[7] See, for example, Bleiklie's analysis of the views that through the "evaluative state" policies universities move away *"from the cultural argument towards the utilitarian argument"* (Bleiklie, 1998: 300).

Figure 2:
Geometries of power



3. The Governance Turn and the Audit/ Quality nexus

The 'audit culture' and the 'quality-evaluation' nexus described in the previous section, have gained particular significance in the construction of the 'European policyscape' (Novoa & Lawn 2002, Grek et al. 2009) which are not confined to higher education. The Lisbon Process initiated changes in the EU educational policy model as a whole. First and foremost, it initiated a significant shift, from the European Commission's "action program approach" to the Council's "member competence-based model" (Pasias & Roussakis 2009). This constitutes a major "governance turn", which is firmly based on the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), a form of the

aforementioned "regulatory regionalism" (Jayasuriya, 2008, Cammack, 2007), entailing new policy formation processes, which view education as a "soft" form of governance. It also involves new policy tools such as an outcome-based, target-driven "standards" agenda, which deploys indicators and benchmarks, exchange of relevant expertise, peer reviews and dissemination of best practices (Lawn 2006, Alexiadou 2007). Such a 'policy as numbers' approach, can be understood as a crucial part of the 'audit culture': It uses the OMC as a steering process of "governing at a distance" (Lawn 2009) together with other, well-established methods in the arsenal of the EU, such as networking, academic mobility, 'collective' deliberation for opening-up 'choice' and other non-coercive processes and concomitant procedural norms. It is backed-up by new 'policy-knowledge' relations (Ozga 2008) created in the well-subsidised transnational networks of experts and by the designated (and transient) groups of scientists and technocrats, the same people who are also deployed by other international organizations like the OECD (Lawn & Lingard 2002, Normand 2010). As a result, a concrete set of standards, indicators and benchmarks is now part of the heart and soul of the European policy process and new governance technologies for education: As Grek notes on the developments of this past decade, "*...new categories of educational structures were being invented, and a different European education space was in the making; it would be governed by numbers and quality standards*" (Grek 2008:213).

In this context, this 'audit/quality' model has become both a major policy instrument and a strongly stated objective and priority of the European Commission policy initiatives. It has expanded to include various aspects of education, such as: 'school indicators' (2000), 'concrete future objectives' (2001), 'quality assurance standards' (2005), 'competences framework' (2006), 'European qualifications framework' (EQF) (2007). In this sense, prevalent quality and audit processes are considered as the two sides of the coin, both controlled by the same kind of "techno-managerial" discourses and practices (Strathern 2000). In 'policy talk', quality has been linked to "quality assurance" discourses, while in 'policy practice' it has been linked to "quality assessment" processes (Van Damme 2000).

Summing up, it has become apparent that the 'audit/quality' discourse in education has fully adopted the economic / technocratic vocabulary of competitiveness, adaptability, flexicurity, effectiveness and performativity. It advocates validation and evaluation processes based on benchmarking, assessment procedures and forms of accountability; and, it promotes technologies of spectation / gaze and mechanisms of surveillance and control, which are closely linked with quality assurance, accreditation and effectiveness of knowledge practices (Pasias 2005, Room 2005, King 2007, Ozga et al. 2011).

Epilogue: Politics vs. Numbers.

Considering the power / knowledge shifts in higher education 'policyscaples' and their significance for European education systems, listening to their 'language of numbers', what can we learn about the discourses which seem to govern the relations between numbers and politics? How can we respond to the emerging reality that, the domain of "numbers" of education becomes predominantly political and the domain of "politics" of education becomes increasingly numerical?

The Lisbon agenda and its successor, "Europe 2020" initiative (European Commission 2010), through their distinctive neo-liberal rationale, push the emergent 'Europe of knowledge' towards quantifiable and measurable norms. This 'policy as numbers' mentality marks a 'policy learning' shift that can be attributed to the Lisbon-Strategy era[8], which, as Fisher et al argue, was created during "the golden age of neoliberalism" (Fischer et al, 2010: 17) the first years of the previous decade. Following a predominantly market-liberal orientation, these initiative 'agendas' tend to replace the political debate with techno-scientific discourses and they downplay the role of social formations in favor of expert technocratic elites, thus significantly changing the basis for education policy formulation. 'Standardization', then, becomes not only the norm for knowledge production, but also a means of governance, a technology of surveillance, and a technocratic education policy advocacy tool. 'Comparable' data is being used not only as a way of knowing and / or legitimizing, but mainly as a way of governing. As Ozga et al argue, "*Data is now the lifeblood of education governance*" (Ozga et al 2011). The practices of benchmarking, auditing and accountability disguise political power to technical formalities and consensual processes, and have become the main tools for providing policy makers with reference anchors, firmly based on the 'undisputable' numerical truths of data, indicators and benchmarks. Lawn eloquently describes the uses of such instruments in European education:

> Measuring units, benchmarks and standards are the new essentials of Europeanization, created by private and public agents, including academics. They are not fixed, they are not easily discernible, they are not an interesting or peripheral factor in the system; they are the new system of education. They are essential for governing the new economy of education (Lawn 2011: 270).

The growing reliance on such an 'audit culture' and its instruments, increasingly leads towards expanding the 'techno-economic' rationale not only to all levels and manifestations of education, but also to the broader social and civil spheres. As Bernstein has argued, the way a society selects, classifies, transmits and evaluates educational knowledge, reflects "both the distribution of power and the principles of social control" (Bernstein, 1971: 47). By analogy, in the context of a measurable 'Europe of knowledge', these actions of social and educational quantification are deeply politicized as political judgments are implicit in the choice of what to measure, how to measure it, how often to measure it and how to present and interpret the results. Deakin Crick is saying exactly that, when referring to the much debated education-acquired competences:

> defining 'competences' as an educational outcome for learners as well as developing indicators and assessment tools to evaluate and measure competence is even more of a political and ideological act because they constitute the technology of control
>
> (Deakin Crick, 2008: 313).

[8] Albeit a 'policy learning' (defined here as the choices about the course of policy action to be taken based on previous policy experience) which stems from a much-criticized -even accused of "failure"- policy process, as has been the Lisbon Process (see, for example, Erixen, 2010, Fischer et al, 2010).

The neo-European education policy space created by the discourses and practices discussed above, is being steadily de-socialized, and, as Kazamias (2009) argues "de-humanized". The wide array of strategies used –benchmarking, target-setting, peer review, expert networks, performance indicators, etc.– are actually distracting discussion from crucial political and social issues that should concern education: The soaring economic crisis and its impact on peoples' lives, the depoliticized instrumentalization and sterilization of active citizenship (see, for example, Biesta, 2009), the demolition of social cohesion, the decreasing policy legitimacy and the increasing democratic deficit, the narrowing of information plurality, and the elaborate opacity in public affairs. Instead, EU initiatives are re-framing discourses at the more diffuse and obscure level of the Eurocratic governance. Shore notes that,

> the danger with this new regime of EU governmentality is that it is profoundly de-politicising. European governance thus acts as an 'anti-politics machine' in which accountability becomes progressively blurred, decision making increasingly remote and obtuse, and the citizens of Europe—in whose name the EU claims to speak—ever-more voiceless
>
> (Shore, 2008 : 302-303).

As it was argued, using the "paradigm shift" in European Higher Education discourses and practices, tt is becoming more apparent than ever that the European educational landscape is increasingly colonized by specific 'regimes of truth' and 'systems of knowledge', which introduce, reproduce and legitimize the technocratic / market-driven rationales and establish a modern European Panopticon of a "measurable" Europe of knowledge, governed by numbers and based on technologies of 'theasis/gaze', 'performativity', 'surveillance' and 'control' (Pasias & Roussakis 2009). The crucial question, then, becomes: ***who marks the bench?***

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