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7 The Crafting of a European Education Space and Europeanization

The Role of the EU and the OECD

Katja Brøgger and Christian Ydesen

Introduction

The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the European Union (EU) are built on precursor institutions established to maintain peace and support economic integration of the continent in the aftermath of World War II. However, their influence turned out to reach well beyond the original scope. Through their work, and by closely linking education to economic growth, they became some of the most significant actors influencing the crafting of a European education space.¹

Education came on the agenda of the European Economic Community (the EEC, the precursor to the European Community and, later, the EU) in the 1970s, but it remained a contentious area because of national fears of cross-border effects and that the EEC would develop a new imperialism because of gradual transfer of sovereignty to Brussels (Lawn and Grek 2012). Even today, education remains the legal responsibility of the nation states. Nevertheless, the European Commission exercises great influence on European education policy² by using its supporting competences.³

For decades the EEC, and later the EU, has formed a partnership with the OECD in the realm of education (Dakowska and Velarde 2018; Grek 2016; Normand 2016). The center of gravity in this partnership has been the connection between economy and education. To pursue this connection, the EU and the OECD have collaborated in terms of data, education statistics, indicators and standards, evidence-based policies, evaluations, and international comparisons. Underpinned by interactions at both the organizational and network levels, these areas are all vital in the construction and shaping of the Europeanization of education. More specifically, the new European education space has been created through extensive educational harmonization, using regulatory technologies such as European qualification frameworks, European standards for quality assurance systems, OECD Economic Surveys, Education at a Glance, and the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) (Brøgger 2019; Lawn 2011; Gornitzka and Stensaker 2014; Brøgger and Madsen 2022). Meanwhile, previous studies on the Bologna Process have shown significant gaps between official reports and the reality of implementation, and documented culture-specific diversifications in the implementation of

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the Bologna goals. They have also shown that the ambition to harmonize education in Europe has led to national counter-reactions and opposition against what has been considered a market-oriented approach to higher education, based on Anglo-American standards (Brøgger 2016, 2019; Robertson 2018; Magalhães and Amaral 2009; Lawn and Grek 2012). As pointed out by Grek (2014), European policy actors are faced with strong local pedagogies and traditions, which for some are still seen as the cornerstone of the idea of the nation state itself. In addition, the so-called new nationalisms rising up in opposition to the tightening of the European project in the post-Cold War period (Brøgger 2023) and the multiple crises recently afflicting Europe and the EU, such as the 2008 financial crisis, the migration crisis in 2015, the Brexit referendum in 2016, the COVID-19 pandemic crisis in 2020 and 2021, and most recently the Russian invasion of Ukraine, seem to have influenced the European integration project and may have the power to disintegrate the European education space.

In this way, European education represents an interesting case for exploring how a supranational community may develop in formally unregulated international policy spaces, but also how it may be affected by reawakened nationalist protectionisms and crises. It is the purpose of this chapter to: (1) explore the historical crafting of a European education space in general and the role of the EU–OECD partnership in particular; and (2) add to our knowledge about the trajectories and possible futures of European education, as viewed through the lens of EU–OECD collaboration.

Theory, Methodology, and Chapter Structure

In this chapter, we seek to explore the emergence of a supranational education community through the governance modes used by the European Commission and the OECD. Both the European Commission and the OECD have been successful in influencing a formally unregulated international education policy space.

Taking inspiration from theory on the rise of network governance, which has been thoroughly fleshed out and substantiated in public policy studies (Hwang and Moon 2009; Klijn 2008; Klijn and Koppenjan 2012; Rhodes 2007; Torfing and Marcussen 2007), we treat the EU and the OECD as actors in policy networks by focusing on their capacity building, including their discursive and administrative power. Governance theory offers a fruitful reservoir for investigating the modes of “soft”, network-based steering mechanisms that seem to constitute the current conditions for the European education space (Bach *et al.* 2016; Brøgger 2019; Börzel and Heard-Lauréote 2009; Schäfer 2004). Governance embraces government institutions, but refers to the horizontal interactions by which various public (and sometimes also private) actors of government coordinate their interdependencies in order to realize public policies (Klijn and Koppenjan 2012, 594). In this respect, governance denotes the self-regulation of actors within networks: so-called networking. Meanwhile, since governance networks are often facilitated, initiated, and even designed by governing bodies such as the European Commission, the concept also encompasses “network management” or “meta-governance”, which

refers to the “governance of (self)-governance” (Klijn and Koppenjan 2012; Torfing and Sørensen 2014; Kooiman 2003). In many ways, European education governance seems to be characterized by this meta-governance, through on one hand the European Commission’s coordinating competences operationalized through facilitating network processes and establishing collaborative platforms that enable the Commission to govern (self-)governance across Europe, and on the other hand via the OECD’s cognitive and normative governance based on agreed values and underlying epistemological assumptions, such as governing by numbers, governing by comparison, governing by example, governing by “what works”, and governing by futures (Zhu *et al.* 2020; Sellar and Lingard 2013; Woodward 2009; Robertson 2022). All these “softer” modes of governance rely on interdependency, self-enrolment (Rhodes 2007), and policy tools such as standardization and benchmarking (Brøgger 2018). In the context of the EU, softer modes of governance are often referred to as the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), which will be elaborated further in the section on the EU.⁴ Within the OECD arena, a similar mode of governance is denoted as “multilateral surveillance” (Krejsler 2019).

The chapter draws on research literature, publicly accessible policy documents, and archival sources harvested in the Danish National Archive and the OECD archive in Paris. The Danish National Archive is used as a purposive sample to gain insights into the correspondence surrounding OECD policy instruments with member states. Denmark has a long history of engaging actively in most OECD education programs (Ydesen, 2021). EU treatises, memoranda, whitepapers, and strategies have been located through the EUR-Lex Access to European Union Law and The European Council’s online archives. Declarations and communiques related to the Bologna Process have been harvested from the official European Higher Education Area website (www.ehea.eu). The archival OECD documents consist of program descriptions, reports, records, discussion papers, education committee minutes, and country reports. The material has been selected from a database of OECD archival documents, consisting of a sample of some 1,908 documents on various programs and activities in education written between 1961 and 2018. The search criteria in the database have been that “European Union”, “Europe”, “European”, or “European Commission” should occur in the document.

The chapter is structured both chronologically and thematically. The first two sections offer a historically informed introduction to the two organizations and their setup regarding education. The purpose is to provide orientation about the prevalent approaches and understandings of education that have been built into the organizations’ policy instruments, and how their respective governance modes have evolved. Based on these findings, the following section explores the key features of the EU–OECD collaboration in education from the 1990s onwards, and their implications in terms of Europeanization processes. The concluding discussion delves into the possibilities and challenges of European education while weighing the explanatory power of the analytical components and elucidating the contributions of the chapter to the research field on education governance in general and Europeanization in particular.

The Emergence of the European Union as an Education Actor

The EEC was established with the Treaty of Rome in 1957 and the EU as we know it today was established with the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 (entering into force in 1993). With its supranational features, the EU is generally considered a highly complex political system with a multi-layered political and administrative configuration and a decentralized implementation structure. The center of the EU governance system is the European Commission, assisted by the General Directorates (DG) and a plethora of expert committees (Dakowska 2019a; Krick and Gornitzka 2019; Egeberg 2016). The Commission serves as the EU's executive arm, and it is responsible for drawing up proposals for new European legislation (the right of initiative) and for overseeing member states' compliance with the treaty framework (Egeberg 2016; Bussière *et al.* 2014). Education policy is placed under the DG Education and Culture (EAC) – the Commission department responsible for EU policy on education, culture, youth, languages, and sport. The DG EAC has played a major role in building up an EU knowledge base on education through the development of especially quantitative data used to produce and operationalize indicators for benchmarking, recommendations, guidelines, standards, and, not least, periodic monitoring and evaluation (Brøgger 2019; Grek 2016).

Even though the European Community's concern with education dates back to the very beginnings of the European integration process, the strategic focus on education, in particular higher education, did not gain momentum until the 1990s (Brøgger 2023). By putting forward basic principles for cooperation in education in 1974, the Resolution of the Ministers of Education is widely understood as the beginning of the history of European Community education policy⁵ (Neave 1984; Dakowska and Velarde 2018; Grek 2016; Brøgger 2023). By creating a political space for European action within the arena of education policy, the resolution laid the groundwork for what later became the Erasmus exchange program in 1987, and an extensive harmonization of higher education systems across European countries following the Bologna Declaration in 1999 and the Lisbon Agenda in 2000.⁶

By launching the European Single Market and by recognizing education as an area of EU competency, the Maastricht Treaty served as a tightening of the European integration process and a starting signal for cross-border education reforms. In the early days of community cooperation in the 1970s and early 1980s, the European Commission had anchored education in employment and social affairs (Pépin 2006). Together with the Maastricht Treaty, the European Commission's Memorandum on Higher Education from 1991 further stressed that higher education had become part of the European Community's broader agenda on harmonization of economic and social policies (Huisman and Van der Wende 2004). It also showed that harmonization of higher education in Europe had proven critical to the realization of the internal market, since free movement of persons and services depended on the ability to recognize qualifications and diplomas across European borders⁷ (Brøgger 2016, 2019; Lawn and Grek 2012). In this way, education became closely connected to the labor market and the economic needs of Europe, links that had already been affirmed at the OECD level and in community

texts by the 1970s (Huisman and Van der Wende 2004; Neave and Maassen 2007; Robertson and Keeling 2008; Brøgger 2016; Dakowska 2019b; Pépin 2007). The memorandum and the treaty were followed by the European Commission's white paper on education and training, teaching, and learning, emphasizing the idea of lifelong learning and thus promoting education as an individual necessity⁸ (Grek 2016). Thus, the 1990s constituted the first stages of development of the knowledge society and lifelong learning (Pépin 2006), and the EU began to strongly manifest as an education actor. Meanwhile, extensive transformations and concrete actions would emerge only following the Bologna Declaration in 1999 and the Lisbon European Council in 2000.

In 1999 and 2000, the Bologna Declaration and the Lisbon Agenda ushered in a decade of extensive educational harmonization designed to change the entire architecture and organization of European higher education systems, despite national counter-reactions and opposition, as has already been mentioned in the introduction. The Bologna Declaration closely mirrored the main objectives from the 1991 memorandum. The Bologna Process initiated by the Bologna Declaration was, and still is, an intergovernmental voluntary process, currently involving 48 countries and the European Commission, with the aims of educational harmonization, comparability, mobility, and flexibility (Brøgger 2019). With the Lisbon Agenda, universities also became part of the European agenda, and the EU Lisbon Agenda and the Bologna Process almost converged into one policy framework. The Lisbon Agenda's strategic goal for the EU to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world became a turning point for higher education and research policies and for the establishing of EU power in the field of higher education⁹ (Dakowska and Velarde 2018; Brøgger 2016, 2019; Dakowska 2019b; Pépin 2007). In this way, the Commission managed to support its initial ambitions, dating back to the 1970s, to harmonize European education. The Commission's capacity to enroll stakeholders, such as member states, that depend on its financial resources, data, and legitimizing power as part of its meta-governance is of paramount importance to the successful expansion of its competences in the field of higher education (Dakowska and Velarde 2018, 268; Brøgger 2019).

The 2000s became the decade in which the EU refined and cultivated its *modus operandi* for governing European education through meta-governance, despite its lack of a legal mandate. The subsidiary character of education gave rise to a new mode of governance, the so-called Open Method of Coordination (OMC).¹⁰ The introduction of the OMC prompted a shift in the Commission's role from its right to take the initiative to its right to evaluate and monitor. Some of the instruments involved in this new method of coordination, such as the use of benchmarking, indicators, measurements, and monitoring exercises, also became part of the monitored coordination of the Bologna Process through which the Commission exercises part of its coordinating role within the field of higher education¹¹ (Radaelli 2009; Dakowska and Velarde 2018; Brøgger 2019; Lawn 2011; Ertl 2006; Dakowska 2019b). European higher education had now arrived center stage for achieving the ambitions of the Single Market through harmonization of

education systems and the complex goal of a unified Europe, and thus became key to combining economic and labor market policy with education and research policy.

Recently, the EU has strengthened its ambition to pursue a united Europe with the “European Universities Initiative” and the new strategy “Towards a European Education Area by 2025”. With the “European Universities Initiative”, the Commission actively mobilizes the universities by encouraging them to commit to cross-border university alliances, and thereby strengthen European collaboration in higher education (placing the institutions themselves in the driver’s seat rather than the nation states). With the European Education Area initiative, sculptured around the establishing of the European *Higher* Education Area, the Commission has expanded the Bologna goals to the entire education system.¹² The strategy of developing the European Education Area ties in with Next Generation EU and the EU’s long-term budget for 2021–2027 (European Commission 2020, 1). The ambition is further supported by the European Council’s New Strategic Agenda for the EU for 2019–2024, stressing that member states “must step up investment in people’s skills and education”.¹³ In light of this development, the period following 2020 will possibly include a focus on expanding and thus further cultivating the ambition of forging EU unity and integration through education.

In sum, the European Commission has successfully connected education with the economic needs of Europe and labor market demands. In particular, education has played a major role in supporting the realization and maintenance of the internal market. Because of the subsidiarity character of education, the soft power OMC was introduced in order to support reform processes in higher education, which have now been expanded to the remainder of the education system. Coordination supported by “soft” monitoring became the Commission’s *modus operandi* in matters concerning education, a mode of governance that did not compromise domestic policy-making (Brøgger 2019, 2016). The Commission’s capacity to enroll member states as part of the Commission’s meta-governance remains key in understanding the successful expansion of its competences in the field of higher education.

The Emergence of the OECD as an Education Actor

The OECD was originally established as the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC) in 1948 to administer the US-financed Marshall Plan for reconstruction of the European continent (Leimgruber and Schmelzer 2017). Education became a solid topic on the OECD agenda shortly after the launch of the Sputnik satellite in 1957 had created shock waves in the Western world (Eide 1990). There was immediate attention to investment in education, education planning, and the increase of engineers and technical personnel. These elements were seen as necessary conditions for winning the space race with the Soviet bloc (Elfert and Ydesen 2023). Nevertheless, Bürgi (2019) has shown that the OECD’s predecessor – the OEEC – sparked considerable educational activities under the auspices of the European Productivity Agency (EPA), which essentially sought

to disseminate the American way of doing business to Western Europe by educating change agents and getting involved in management education and vocational education.

The OEEC Committee for Scientific and Technical Personnel (CSTP) launched the Mediterranean Regional Project (MRP) in 1960, and this was continued when the OEEC morphed into the OECD in 1961 (Ydesen and Grek 2019). The aim of the MRP was to draw up “a planning framework for the allocation of resources to education in Greece, Italy, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, and Yugoslavia in relation to the requirements arising out of economic, demographic, and social development up to 1975” (Lyons 1964, 12). In this sense, the MRP is an early example of Europeanization, because the project worked with indicators establishing comparability between the Southern European countries, assuming that such a comparison would be meaningful.

In the autumn of 1961, the second OECD conference on education was held in Washington, DC. The title of the conference was “Economic Growth and Investment in Education”, which is a strong pointer about the OECD approach to education, characterized by a close bond between education and the economy. In 1968, with funding from the Ford Foundation and Royal Dutch Shell, the OECD set up its Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI). The establishment of CERI signaled a clear and unequivocal commitment to working with education, although staff members working on educational matters sometimes still had to argue their relevance in the face of more hardcore economic areas (Papadopoulos 1994).

The OECD underwent significant organizational changes in 1970, allowing it to focus more on the interrelated aspects of economic policy (Spring 2015). In the field of education, the CSTP, founded in 1958 under the OEEC, became the Education Committee. The Education Committee worked in the field of education policy and was populated by officials from member countries, while CERI was an autonomous and academic body dedicated to innovation in education (Vejlaskov 1979). Both bodies were part of the Directorate for Scientific Affairs until 1975, when they became part of the Directorate for Social Affairs, Manpower and Education (Morgan 2009; Papadopoulos 1994).

The broader remit of the Education Committee, compared with that of the CSTP, reflected a stronger focus on education, and the role of education was equally expanded, functioning as a bridge between economic and social concerns (Bürgi 2015; Morgan 2009). For instance, OECD programs in education paid close attention to the labor market, the issues of equal access and lifelong learning – or “recurrent education” as it was called in the OECD arena – and the publication of country reports (Papadopoulos 1994).

In the 1960s and 1970s – in keeping with Keynesian theory – the frame of reference among OECD specialists was the state. Key questions that they grappled with related to how states could optimize “manpower” investments to improve economic growth and how mathematical models could be developed to forecast these needs (Lyons 1964). In trying to solve some of these emergent challenges, work began on developing educational indicators. The production of knowledge

around education performance was deemed necessary for conducting valid economic growth forecasts, as well as in guiding governmental decision-making (Resnik 2006).

Around 1980, the OECD began to reorient its center of gravity from the state to the individual, as evidenced by the increase in new public management recommendations. Lundgren contends that, as a general characteristic of this decade, “Education became the arena for consultants with ambitions to increase efficiency and restructure management” (Lundgren 2011, 21). These changes indicate a shift towards a more market-oriented approach to education (Kallo 2020). Recurrent education was still a key focus for the organization, only now with more attention directed specifically towards the individual as the nucleus.

In terms of policies, it is possible to identify a shift from manpower planning and forecasting in the 1960s to a more encompassing approach covering social concerns in the 1970s, before moving to a more hardcore human capital approach in the 1980s (Heynemann 2019). By the mid-1980s, a shift from inputs and processes to output in education was evident. Within CERI, this discursive shift was not easy. CERI came under severe pressure from the United States to develop international comparative output indicators, since studies by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) had shown the United States lagging behind the other participating nations in terms of performance (Morgan 2009). The U.S. Department of Education raised questions about the quality of the indicators hitherto used. Henry *et al.* (2001), drawing on interview data, reveal how President Reagan’s administration drove the OECD to launch a program aimed at improving the international indicators of education in order to make transnational comparisons more reliable and valid. Hence, the so-called International Educational Indicators (INES) project was launched in 1988 (Grek and Ydesen 2021).

The end of the Cold War meant that many Western organizations and countries increasingly pursued market-driven economic policies of privatization and governance through incentives. The OECD was no exception. Martens (2007) has argued that there emerged a “comparative turn” around this time. Discursively, education was positioned as an economic production factor tasked with providing human capital to sustain national economic competitiveness in an emerging knowledge economy (Xiaomin and Auld 2020).

In 2011, the OECD Vision Statement was released on the organization’s 50th anniversary. With this statement and subsequent programs of the 2010s, the OECD expanded its ambitions in education. This is clearly reflected in the Learning Framework 2030 aiming to develop and improve the practical applicability of the OECD’s competence framework. As argued by Xiaomin and Auld (2020), the OECD has taken “a humanitarian turn”, which reflects a blend between economic competitiveness and social inclusion. This turn is reflected in PISA’s ongoing development to encompass a broader set of skills and competences and “establish [PISA] as a truly global metric” (Xiaomin and Auld 2020, 7). Although the scope has been broadened among OECD policies in education, the cultivation of talent and human capital as a vehicle for providing competencies and skills to the labor market remains a vital purpose of education in the OECD discourse.

In sum, the OECD's approach to education across the five decades covered in this brief historical characteristic indicates a marked consistency in retaining an economic outlook vis-à-vis education. Even so, agendas and priorities have shifted over the decades. These shifts and movements must be understood as a reflection of the OECD's great responsiveness to the needs and ideas of its member states, as well as strategic priorities. Nevertheless, development, progress, and welfare have been recurring points of orientation, as key policy programs have sought to achieve efficiency, optimization, and investment in education, as well as the provision of skills matching identified or projected labor market needs. In terms of governance, the OECD operates with a range of soft governance mechanisms such as data gathering, instrument development, policy evaluation, enrolment and participation in OECD-led programs, and the creation of a space of multilateral surveillance among member and participating states. But the organization also wields a marked meta-governance component vis-à-vis member states and participating economies, due to the organization's symbolic position as the guarantor of having the right tools and solutions for "economies" to be able to adopt the right path of development and prosperity. In education, participation in international large-scale assessment programs has been presented as a guarantee of being on the right track in the global competition race and in terms of education quality assurance (Rasmussen and Ydesen 2020).

The EU–OECD Collaboration in Education

In her empirical work, Grek has described the EU–OECD relationship after 1990 as a case of "alliance-building and a collaboration that would 'gradually strengthen and eventually become the sine qua non for the governing of European education systems'" (Grek 2014, 9). In this section, we will explore key features and actors of the EU–OECD collaboration in education, with a main focus on the 1990s onwards and the implications in terms of Europeanization processes.

A core area in which the EEC – and later the EU – and the OECD have developed collaboration in education is vocational education. The first stepping stone for the collaborative relationship in this area reaches back to the 1960s, when the OECD and the EEC were joint contributors and participants in the Programme Committee of the International Vocational Training Information and Research Centre.¹⁴ The background to the center came from a project jointly carried out by the OEEC/EPA and the International Labour Organization (ILO) during 1955–1956.¹⁵ The center was formally established as part of the 1960 Arrangement between the ILO and the Council of Europe (Gött 2020). The function of the center was to "collect and disseminate information on, and to conduct research into, all aspects of vocational training".¹⁶ The OECD was a proposer of projects for the new center, but refrained from contributing financially. But in a 1962 letter from the center to the OECD it was pointed out that "the OECD has been enjoying the rights of a member without bearing its share of the obligations".¹⁷ In an accompanying letter, OECD officials described the situation as "embarrassing", and the OECD eventually decided to contribute financially with USD 10,000, equaling the contribution of the EEC.

Testifying to the OECD–EEC alignment in the area of vocational education, the two organizations jointly proposed a project for the center about the “influence of technical changes on the job descriptions, training syllabuses, and examination requirements in selected industrial operations”. In this sense, the center came to serve as a coordinating and inspirational space where stakeholders – not least international organizations – were invited to participate and where they could find a forum of collaboration.

As demonstrated by this early start-up example of OECD–EEC collaboration and agenda alignment in education, the collaboration between the two organizations centered on joint concerns and agendas. Both organizations were dedicated to dealing with problems experienced in the shared member states. For instance, in the 1980s a key concern was youth unemployment. The archival sources reveal that Mr. Baroncelli, Directorate General for Employment and Social Affairs in the EEC, participated in the OECD Steering Group on Youth Unemployment under the Manpower and Social Affairs Committee,¹⁸ while the Irish member of the CERI governing board, Mr. Sean MacCartheigh, also served as National Liaison Officer for EEC education projects.¹⁹ In this sense, it is possible to establish connections between the EEC and the OECD at the actor level around a key policy issue. But that does not mean that everything was coordinated and aligned. Clearly, there is also evidence of inter-organizational rivalries in terms of overlaps between programs, and thus also funding. In a 1984 report about the work of OECD–CERI from the Danish member of the CERI board, Professor Hans Vejleskov, to the Danish Ministry of Education, it is stated that “Denmark does not participate in this work [a CERI project entitled ‘Cultural-Linguistic Pluralism’] because we find undesirable overlaps with the work taking place in the Council of Europe and the EEC”.²⁰ This point resonates with Grek’s analysis of a later period in which she emphasizes how the OECD–EU field has sometimes been, “riddled with internal and external competition for funding, especially in times of reducing national budgets in an era of austerity” (Grek 2014, 11).

The 1990s is a key decennium in the OECD’s work and role in education, not least because of the launch of the INES project, which produced the indicator-based annual “Education at a Glance” reports from 1992 onwards and served as the precursor of PISA. As reflected in the conclusions from an INES planning meeting in February 1990, the European Commission took a keen interest in the project. A note from the Secretariat tells us that

Related activities at the EC and in international educational assessment programs were discussed. Coordination with EC activities in educational statistics is being handled by the OECD Secretariat. Strong interest and support for the INES project continue to be present.

(cited in Grek and Ydesen 2021, 11)

In this sense, we see clear tendencies towards increased collaboration and coordination around education programs and activities between the OECD and the EU,

but the perspective in terms of international organizations was even broader. At the July 1992 meeting of the OECD Education Committee, the year of the Maastricht Treaty and one year after the European Commission's memorandum on higher education, Mr. Tom Alexander, director of CERI, explained that talks had taken place between the OECD Directorate for Education, Employment, Labour and Social Affairs (DEELSA), the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), the European Commission, and the Council of Europe "to ensure that there was appropriate cooperation in the planning and execution of the respective work programmes".²¹ One example is the "Schooling for Tomorrow" project run by CERI from the late 1990s, in which the European Commission took part (OECD 2003).

Another key development of the 1990s was UNESCO, OECD, and Eurostat joining forces in collecting data on key aspects of education in 1995 (Elfert and Ydesen 2023).²² This collaboration managed to explore common definitions, the use of criteria for quality control, and improved data documentation to improve international comparisons of educational statistics. At this point, as previously indicated and elaborated in Chapter 9 of this volume, ambitious plans for a future transformation of the European higher education systems were already part of the European Commission's plan for further supporting the realization of the internal market.

The collaboration between the EU and the OECD seems to have gained further momentum in the 2000s following PISA, the Bologna Process, and the Lisbon Agenda. In the main directions for the "Mandate for OECD education activities over the period 2002–2006" it called for "... specific reference to... UNESCO, Council of Europe, and the EU Commission".²³ And the feelings seem to have been mutual. As explained by a high-level DG EAC policy actor:

So, around 2003–04, we [OECD and Commission] started becoming far more involved. Meetings all over the world, I don't know how many countries I visited but what is important is that the Commission is there... . The European member states should see that the Commission is there because one of the criticisms of the Commission since all this started was that we didn't take into account all the good work of the OECD. Which was wrong but they said it. The way of showing them was to actually be there – not an empty chair.

(cited in Grek 2014, 9)

An important part of the collaboration between international organizations working in education in the early 2000s seems to have revolved around the development of indicators and the extraction of data. The INES program was a key feature in that respect.²⁴ Grek and Ydesen (2021, 2) argue that INES "became the flagship international collaborative initiative that directed both minds and datasets towards solidifying a commensurate global education policy field". One of the conclusions of the fifth meeting of the INES strategic management group held in Paris, 17–18 March 2003, was that

Given recognised institutional obstacles..., INES SMG RECOMMENDED to the Joint Session of CERI Governing Board and the Education Committee (inter alia): that the possibility of soliciting contributions from the EU Commission and other international bodies be pursued.²⁵

In a 2007 policy document the mandate of the INES working party was, among other things, described as to “manage the implementation of data collections necessary to support the consolidation and development of indicators, notably the UNESCO/OECD/EU data collection on education systems (in collaboration with UNESCO and Eurostat)”²⁶. Grek argues that the DG EAC “found in the OECD not only a great resource of data to govern (which it did not have before), but also a player who would be pushing the Commission’s own policy agenda forward, albeit leaving the old subsidiarity rule intact” (Grek 2014, 2).

Another key area for EU–OECD collaborations was the Bologna Process. The OECD seems to have viewed the Bologna Process as an opportunity for collaboration and taking an arbiter’s role in the work with transnational qualifications. In the summary record of a 2002 DEELSA session, the Bologna Process was discussed:

The idea was put forward of creating a Bologna Process on the recognition of non-formal and informal learning. The Secretariat replied that it could explore this with the EC and perhaps CEDEFOP [the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training], as they have previously done work on levels of vocational qualifications.²⁷

More specifically, the OECD viewed their competency-based Definition and Selection of Key Competencies curriculum framework (DeSeCo),²⁸ developed since 1997 (OECD 2005), as something that could “...play a role in facilitating the European Union’s new Bologna Process”.²⁹ On occasion, the OECD/CERI also provided stakeholder contributions for discussions relating to the ministerial conferences of the Bologna Process, held every two years. At the Bergen Conference in 2005, OECD/CERI, represented by Tom Schuller, Head of CERI, advocated in favor of granting lifelong learning higher priority in the Bologna Process, and emphasized the need for establishing means by which the progress could be monitored and measured.³⁰

Notably, the OECD evaluated its work in education in terms of its ability to engage and even influence the policies of, among others, the European Commission. In the methodology section of the 2010 “In-depth Evaluation of the Education Policy Committee”, the evaluation criterion of relevance is defined as “whether a committee is addressing member governments and the European Commission’s policy needs and is likely to continue to do so in the medium term”, while the evaluation criteria of effectiveness relate to the extent to which a committee’s work has had policy impacts and the long-lasting nature of such impacts. This is defined as “whether output results are being widely used and if they are bringing about widespread policy development impacts [and if they are] contributing towards long-lasting changes in member governments’ and the European Commission’s policy”.³¹

In the OECD work program in education in the subsequent years, there is very strong evidence of increasing collaboration between the European Commission and the OECD in numerous areas.³² Two concrete examples are the Assessment of Learning Outcomes in Higher Education (AHELO) project³³ and the CERI project Social Outcomes of Learning, which was conducted with the European Commission and the World Health Organization (WHO).³⁴ In her observations about this period of EU–OECD relations, Grek describes the emergence of a new “...policy stage for the EU, as it involved a new way of working in education and training; numbers would come simultaneously to institutionalize and legitimize this European policy space in the making” (Grek 2016, 713). This is not least reflected in the launch of the European Commission’s annual report on education – “Education and Training Monitor” – from 2011 onwards.

In October 2013, EU–OECD collaboration entered a new turning point with the formal signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the EU and the Education and Skills Directorate of the OECD.³⁵ Under the auspices of this formal agreement, cooperation around skills strategies, country analyses, assessments, and surveys, as well as collaboration on joint data collection, was advanced.³⁶

It seems that the closer bonds between the two organizations led to considerable financial support from the EU to OECD programs, particularly in the areas of skills for productivity, innovation, and growth. For instance, the summary records of the 90th session of the CERI governing board in 2014 reflect that the European Commission supported the PIAAC (Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies) based project of Education and Skills Online, while the OECD’s skills strategy was also offered financial support by the EU. Reflecting on these observations, the minutes from the session state:

Mr. Risto Raivio (European Commission) expressed particular interest in the project on “How Skills Foster Productivity, Innovation and Growth”. This project is closely linked to the debate at the European level on the role of education in growth. Mr. Raivio expressed a wish to collaborate with the OECD on this project, and mentioned that the European Commission would, in principle, be willing to make a voluntary contribution to increase the project’s budget back up to the level in the original proposal.³⁷

The quote is interesting because it clearly signals coordination and collaboration between the two organizations, underpinned by financial support from the EU to the OECD, but also because it indicates a framing and establishment of connection with the EU policy agenda in education centered on growth. In this respect, the EU has found a very engaged, constructive, and understanding partner in the OECD.

Conclusion

In this concluding discussion we will return to our initially stated purposes of the chapter in order to critically discuss our findings concerning the role of the EU–OECD partnership in the historical crafting of a European education space and

the possible futures of European education, as viewed through the lens of EU–OECD collaboration. Finally, we will offer some reflections on the contributions of the chapter to the research field on education governance in general and Europeanization in particular.

Through our analysis, we have seen a clear historical pattern of a rapprochement between the two organizations, which seems in many ways to be hinging on a realization of the mutual benefits associated with the collaboration enjoyed by both organizations. Since the two organizations to a large extent subscribe to the same paradigm about education as the key provider of innovation, social cohesion, competencies needed in the labor market, and essentially economic growth and competitive gains, it is perhaps not surprising that the EU and the OECD work along the same lines, and with a lot of the same priorities and agendas.

More particularly, we have seen how the European Commission has connected education with the economic needs of Europe and labor market demands through the mechanism of soft monitoring of member states, where technologies like the annual report on education, “Education and Training Monitor”, have been important. For the OECD, we have seen the organization’s great responsiveness to the needs and strategic priorities of its member states, and with increasing intensity, also the European Commission – for instance in areas such as the realization and maintenance of the internal market and the Bologna Process. After some evidence of inter-organizational struggle in terms of funding and parallel work in the early years, we have seen increasing coordination between the two organizations, and even funding of OECD programs by the European Commission.

The OECD has a long history of serving as an arena where like-minded countries could come together to discuss policy problems and inspire each other to develop policy solutions. Ever since the Cold War, the OECD has been a forum in which agents from Western capitalist states could meet, seek inspiration, and coordinate policies and positions in the wider global – and at the time highly antagonistic – policy space (Schmelzer 2016). As pointed out in a Danish country response to the OECD in 1980, “The OECD is the only organization where all the advanced industrialized countries can cooperate effectively in education and within which such cooperation takes the unique form of relating education to the broader social and economic context” (cited in Ydesen 2021). In more recent decades, the European Commission has been able to draw on OECD data and indicators as vehicles for the promotion of the idea about a European educational policy space while also engaging with the OECD in the very development of data and indicators.

Nevertheless, the two organizations are very different in terms of mandate and authority – the European Commission pursuing its right to evaluate and monitor member states and the OECD with its symbolic capital of guaranteeing economies to be on the right track if they perform well in OECD programs – while their governance mechanisms differ in terms of terminology (OMC (EU) and Multilateral Surveillance (OECD)). But in terms of governance, their *modus operandi* can be summarized under the headline of meta-governance, where education data, indicators, and statistics offer naturalizations of meaning, orientation, and

direction to actors working to shape education in both local, regional, national, and global contexts. The key point is that the production, standardization, diffusion, and legitimation of policy norms and expertise through collaborative platforms and instruments (e.g., Education at a Glance) create a situation of governance of self-governance. In this sense, the symbiosis between the two organizations lies in the different justifications and legitimations they can provide each other in a shared epistemic and infrastructural *modus operandi* based on meta-governance and the capacity to enroll stakeholders and member states. Both organizations have contributed profoundly to the creation of a “European education space” characterized by common infrastructural standards, assessment methodologies, and measurement technologies.

Relating to the research fields on education governance in general and Europeanization, our findings very much fall in line with Grek when she emphasizes “the role of data and numbers as the material and digital props supporting the very building of Europe” (Grek 2016, 710). We also recognize the point made by Ozga *et al.* (2011), suggesting that European Commission and OECD recommendations are often received at the national level as homogeneous. The reason is that the two organizations operate within the same paradigm of education, lean on each other’s data, and coordinate programs and agendas. It hinges on what has been called network governance in public policy studies.

What is perhaps more surprising is the way that the framing and connection with the EU policy agenda is built into key OECD programs, which means that the European states come to serve as inherent reference societies in many OECD programs. Given that Europe has been a laboratory for the OECD’s education programs and initiatives with a global reach, Europeanization thereby also has a distinct global component, where Europe becomes a (subtle) global reference to countries far beyond the borders of Europe. The implication is that there is a geopolitical governance component associated with Europeanization through the EU–OECD partnership. The other side of the coin is that this canonization of Europe – as a constructed entity in education programs and statistics – also works internally in Europe, as the governing of standards, benchmarks, and averages gain symbolic capital from the globality of these very programs. Our historical lens has demonstrated how Southern Europe was the target of development and modernization ideas in the MRP program in the 1960s. Later the turn came to Central and Eastern Europe. In this sense, we might talk about a changing topography of Europeanization – centered on the idea that someone needs to be remodeled in someone else’s image – cementing how ideas about modernization and development shaped around a notion of Europe as an entity is at the very core of Europeanization.

Notes

- 1 The notion of a “European education space” indicates a European space of education characterized by common *infrastructural standards* (such as qualification frameworks and mobility schemes), *assessment methodologies* (such as PISA), and *measurement*

- technologies* (such as Bologna implementation reports). For a critical discussion of “European education space”, see Varsori’s chapter in this volume.
- 2 The notion of the “European education policy” covers both “soft” and mobilizing policies initiated directly by the European Commission, such as the European Universities Initiative and reform processes within the framework of the intergovernmental Bologna Process.
 - 3 EUR-Lex. Document 02016E/TXT-20200301. Consolidated version of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU). 01.03.2020. Article 6.
 - 4 European Council Conclusions, Lisbon European Council 23–24.03.2000, Presidency Conclusions. Accessed online 19.09.2023: www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21038/lisbon-european-council-presidency-conclusions.pdf
 - 5 EUR-Lex. Document 41974X0820. OJ C 98, 20.8.1974, 2. European Council. Resolution of the Ministers of Education, meeting within the Council, 6.06.1974, on cooperation in the field of education.
 - 6 EUR-Lex. Document 41974X0820. OJ C 98, 20.8.1974, 2. European Council. Resolution of the Ministers of Education, meeting within the Council, 6.06.1974, on cooperation in the field of education. Item II.
 - 7 EUR-Lex. Document 51991DC0349. European Commission. 1991. COM (91) 349 Final: Memorandum on Higher Education in the European Community, Brussels, 5.11.1991.
 - 8 EUR-Lex. Document 51995DC0590. White Paper on education and training: Teaching and learning towards the learning society. COM_1995_0590_FINAL. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
 - 9 European Council Conclusions, Lisbon European Council 23–24.03.2000, Presidency Conclusions. Accessed online 19.09.2023: www.consilium.europa.eu/media/21038/lisbon-european-council-presidency-conclusions.pdf
 - 10 *Ibid.*
 - 11 *Ibid.*; European Parliamentary Research Service. 5.11.2014. “The Open Method of Coordination” Martina Prpic, Members’ Research Service.
 - 12 EUR-Lex. Document 52017DC0673. COM/2017/0673 final. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions. Strengthening European Identity through Education and Culture. The European Commission’s Contribution to the Leaders’ Meeting in Gothenburg, 17.11.2017; EUR-Lex. Document 52020DC0625. COM/2020/625 final. Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of the Regions on achieving the European Education Area by 2025.
 - 13 European Council. 2019. “A new Strategic Agenda 2019–2024”, 4. Accessed online 19.09.2023: www.consilium.europa.eu/media/39914/a-new-strategic-agenda-2019-2024.pdf
 - 14 Danish National Archive (DNA), Department of Education, 3. Afdeling, Det Internationale Kontor/Sager vedr. Internationale Organisationer/OE 2 1965–9 1968, letter from the OECD council “OECD Participation in the work of the Programme Committee of the International Vocational Training Information and Research Centre”, 25.06.1962.
 - 15 *Ibid.*
 - 16 *Ibid.*
 - 17 *Ibid.*, p. 4.

- 18 DNA, Department of Education, 3. Afdeling, Det Internationale Kontor/1981–1987 Journalsager Internationale sager, journalgruppe 8/1983_8 36 04 3_8 42 04 1, Summary record of the MAS Steering Group on Youth Unemployment Fourth Meeting, sent to SVUA [*Sekretariatet vedrørende uddannelsesmæssige foranstaltninger mod arbejdsløsheden*] with note, 03.02.1982.
- 19 DNA, Department of Education, 3. Afdeling, Det Internationale Kontor/1981–1987 Journalsager Internationale sager, journalgruppe 8, 1982_8 41 24 1_8 42 04 1, Appointment of Members of the Governing Board of CERI, 06.04.1982.
- 20 DNA, Department of Education, 3. Afdeling, Det Internationale Kontor/1981–1987 Journalsager Internationale sager, journalgruppe 8, 1982_8 41 24 1_8 42 04 1, Arbejdet i OECD/CERI, 06.04.1982. “Danmark deltager ikke i dette arbejde, fordi vi finder nogle uheldige overlap med arbejdet som finder sted i regi af Europarådet og EF”.
- 21 OECD archive, DEELSA/ED/M(92)2, Education Committee. Summary record of the 48th session, p. 3. The EEC representative present at meeting was Mr. Giuseppe Massangioli from the EEC Task Force Education, 31.07.1992.
- 22 The objective of the joint UNESCO-UIS/OECD/EUROSTAT (UOE) data collection on education statistics was to provide internationally comparable data on key aspects of formal education systems, especially on the participation and completion of education programs, as well as the cost and types of resources dedicated to education.
- 23 OECD Archive, DEELSA/ED/CERI/CD(2001)4, Directorate for Education, Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, Education Committee, Governing board of the CERI, summary record of the 67th session of the education committee and the 64th session of the CERI governing board, 6.
- 24 The INES program was transferred to the Education Policy Committee in 2007 and reinstated in CERI in 2012.
- 25 OECD Archive, EDU/INES/SMG/M(2003)1, Conclusions of the fifth meeting of the INES strategic management group, Paris, 17–18.03.2003.
- 26 OECD Archive, EDU/EDPC(2007)35, Outstanding issues related to the work on special needs and the implementation of governance arrangements for indicators of educational systems (INES), 7.
- 27 OECD Archive, DEELSA/ED/M(2002)1, Directorate for Education, Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, Education Committee, summary record of the 69th session, 8.
- 28 The DeSeCo project was developed by the OECD between 1997 and 2003 with an aim of providing theoretical and conceptual foundations for identifying the competencies needed for a successful life and a well-functioning society, and this later fed into the Education and Skills 2030 project.
- 29 OECD Archive, DEELSA/ED/M(2002)1, Directorate for Education, Employment, Labour and Social Affairs, Education Committee, summary record of 69th session, 7.
- 30 The European Higher Education Area online archive (www.ehea.info): 2005 Bergen WG2 – CERI/OECD. Stakeholder contributions. Ministerial conference Bergen 2005. Retrieved from: <http://ehea.info/page-ministerial-conference-bergen-2005>
- 31 OECD Archive, C(2010)149, In-depth Evaluation of the Education Policy Committee, 73f.
- 32 See, for example, the Secretary General’s Proposed Programme of Work and Budget 2003/04, EDU/CERI/CD(2003)5; EDU Programme of Work and Budget 2009–2010, EDU-2008-6; and Prioritisation of the 2015–16 OECD Education Work Programme, EDU-2014-2.
- 33 In 2009, the European Commission participated in the 6th session of the OECD Education Policy Committee, where the relationship between the AHELO feasibility study and the European multi-dimensional transparency project was discussed. Both organizations

- noted that the two projects were complementary, and “requested that the close association between the two projects should be maintained and extended, including through financial support from the European Commission”. OECD Archive, EDU/EDPC/M(2009)2, Draft Summary Record of the 6th Session of the Education Policy Committee.
- 34 OECD Archive, Proposed Output Result Monitoring Fact Sheet: CERI project update, EDU CERI CD RD 2007, 5.
- 35 OECD Archive, Summary Record of the 88th Session of the CERI Governing Board, EDU/CERI/CD/M(2013)1.
- 36 OECD Archive, Summary Record of the 89th Session of the CERI Governing Board, EDU/CERI/CD/M(2013)2.
- 37 OECD Archive, Summary Record of the 90th Session of the CERI Governing Board, EDU/CERI/CD/M(2014)1, 8–9.

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