Congrès AFSP Strasbourg 2011

Universités et recherche face à la réforme
ST 24

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Inception and institutionalization of the OMC education, the Bologna Process and the OMC research: From coordination templates to new policy arenas?

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Abstract

This paper presents a comparative analysis of three cases located in knowledge policy domain at the European level: education, higher education, and research policies. To what extent do the Open method of coordination (OMC) education, the OMC research and the Bologna Process represent a radical departure from existing practices and existing political arenas within the three policy domains? Our central hypothesis is the following: The way in which an organizational template is picked up and processed in a political order depends on the nature of existing institutionalized practices. The more elaborated and dominating the extant official structures in a given sector, the more likely that a new specific template will be absorbed by it in the preference in the creation of new ones. This hypothesis is confirmed by the comparative analysis of the cases. In the case of higher education, following an initial situation of relative institutional emptiness, we observe quick institutional crystallization and then institutionalization of the Bologna process. In the case of education policy, there was a loose and weak initial institutional setting, existing practices of coordination were traditionally less dense, and the application of OMC has implied that a new political space has been added, OMC has become the centerpiece of European approach to education. In the case of research policy finally, the starting point is closer to institutional saturation, and we observe a weak institutionalization of the OMC process, lighter and more at the margins, and blended with existing procedures

Keywords: Bologna process, education, Europe of knowledge, European governance, institutionalization, higher education, Lisbon strategy, OMC education, OMC research, research.

Résumé

Cet article compare trois cas de politiques de l'Europe de la connaissance. Dans quelle mesure la méthode ouverte de coordination (MOC) Education, le processus de Bologne et la MOC recherche représentent-elles une rupture avec les pratiques et les arènes de gouvernance existantes ?
Notre hypothèse centrale est la suivante : la façon dont une nouvelle forme organisationnelle transforme un ordre politique dépend des pratiques et structures institutionnalisées. Plus les structures existantes dans un secteur sont élaborées et reconnues, plus on pourra à s'attendre à ce qu'un nouveau mode de coordination soit absorbé par elles (plutôt que de donner lieu à la création d'une nouvelle arène). La comparaison vient confirmer cette hypothèse. Pour le cas de l'enseignement supérieur, dans une situation initiale de relatif vide institutionnel, on observe une cristallisation et une institutionnalisation rapide du processus de Bologne. Dans le cas de l'éducation, l'arrangement institutionnel initial était lâche, la coordination peu dense, la mise en place de la MOC a impliqué la création d'un nouvelle espace politique et la MOC est devenue la pièce maîtresse de politique européenne d'éducation. Dans le cas de la recherche enfin, le point de départ est proche de la saturation institutionnelle, et l'on observe une faible institutionnalisation de la MOC, plus à la marge et entremêlée à d'autres procédures.

1. Introduction

Processes as European integration has entailed a proliferation of new governance arrangements at the level beyond the nation state. This paper addresses the question of the extent to which the application of new coordination templates leads to the institutionalization of new policy arenas at the European level. We take as a starting point that introducing new coordination devices takes place within an existing institutional order and that the way an organizational template leads to the institutionalization of a policy arena (or not) depends on how thickly institutionalized the existing formal arrangement and practices are.

This is a study of institutionalization processes in an area outside the formal transfer of legal competencies to the European subject to "third party enforcement", i.e. these are soft governance arrangements. We will discuss this question relying on the comparative analysis of three cases located in what one could refer to as the knowledge policy domain at the European level, education, higher education, and research policies. All three cases represent some measure of innovation in the governance arrangement at the European level in these policy areas.. We start with the premise that the establishment and evolution of these new governance arrangements at the European level can be understood as processes of institutionalization. In the case of the OMC education and OMC research the genesis can be linked to the general introduction of a new template for organising governance arrangements that through the Lisbon Process "was littered around the social landscape" of the EU whereas the Bologna process was an instance of political innovation that initially occurred without the reference to such an overall concept of governance.

Why is it of interest to compare these three policy domains? First, from a substantive point of view, these cases can contribute to the systematic insight of how "new Europe" have been added governance capacity at the European level. Although they are positioned in each other's neighbourhood, involve close and sometimes similar types of actors, address similar institutional spheres, they have not been analysed comparatively. The choice of cases reflects "a most similar cases" research design as the actors that were involved in these processes have been quite the same, the time that these processes have unfolded have been about the same, yet the process and outcome of these processes have not been identical. Of particular relevance here is the possibility to address whether the larger institutional context matters for the process towards establishing a new and viable governance arrangement, i.e. two of the cases (OMC for research and OMC education) are inside the larger architecture of the EU whereas the Bologna process is a non-EU method of voluntary monitored coordination -and it relation to the EU and connection to Lisbon strategy subject to question-. This comparison between most similar cases which evolved along contrasted trajectories allows us to identify some of the underlying conditions under which institutionalization of governance arrangements takes place.

In terms of method, the approach has a process focus and relies upon the use of interviews with key actors and archive data. On the basis of in depth qualitative research that we have conducted on the three cases autonomously in the last years (Gornitzka, 2007, 2008, 2009; Ravinet, 2007, 2008, 2009, 2010), we have been able to unravel the micro processes from the birth and evolution of these soft governance arenas at the European level. The collected material constitutes a unique and complete whole set of data on the Europe of Knowledge policies. This allows us to develop a strong comparative analysis but also to take into account the contact points and interactions between the cases within the Europe of knowledge dynamics (mutual transfer of ideas and instruments, cooperation and influence, competition

and defence reactions...). Also important in our approach was the assumption that the pathways of institutionalization in the Europe of knowledge are multiple: as shall be detailed in this article, the possibility of non institutionalization, of partial institutionalization or of de institutionalization are taken seriously.

After this first introductory section, the remaining of the paper is organised as follows: the second section will elaborate on the analytical framework and position our question on institutionalization of European policy arenas both vis-à-vis literature on European governance and classical institutional literature; the third and core section will successively present the three cases (OMC Education, OMC Research and Bologna process); the fourth and final section will be dedicated to conclusive remarks back on our central question and evaluation our main hypothesis.

2. Theory and research design

Institutionalization and European policy literature

On the question of the institutionalization of a European policy space, *The institutionalization of Europe*, the book edited by Stone Sweet, Sandholtz and Fligstein (2001b) remains the main reference point. In this piece, they state that the quick and intense institutionalization of Europe is an "institutionalist challenge for political science" (p.3), and call for a new institutionalist perspective to analyze the formation of a European political and policy space, defined as "a complex of policy arenas, structured by rules and managed by EU organizations" (Stone Sweet et al. 2001a: 21). The nature and extent of institutionalization of Europe in different policy arenas constitutes their dependent variable, and they develop a research design relying on three sets of questions about (1) the object, (2) the degree, and (3) the mechanisms of institutionalization of Europe (p. 22). In our comparative approach, we back up with their definition of European policy space as a complex of arenas. Our central questioning on the institutionalization of these arenas is also quite similar.

Nevertheless, we do not share their hypothesis about the key mechanism of institutionalization: "European political space is becoming more institutionalized as the capacity of European organizations to govern is consolidated […] Institutionalization in Europe has generally meant more rules, more procedures, and more formality" (Stone Sweet et al. 2001a: 21). By "rules", they do not refer to any rule, but mainly *legal* rules: they argue that the institutionalization of a European policy arena is associated to a process of "hardening of EU law" (p. 24). A new European policy arena therefore corresponds to a "new institutional space created by the Treaty" (p. 25). To put it simply, in this perspective, the process of institutionalization of Europe is a process of juridicization. This hypothesis is convincing to assess the institutionalization of Europe till the 1990s. However, they might be less relevant for understanding the 2000s European new modes of governance. If in highly integrated domains, *hardening* of EU law remains observable, and the increase in the production of legal rules continues (Pollack 2008), some European developments in new policy domains (such as social policies, employment policies, education policies) are rather remarkable for the *soft* modes of governance put in place. European policy-making has there corresponded to the setting of tools and procedures in order to manage cooperation between members states around common objectives and to favour best practices and learning mechanisms. This has not necessarily resulted in a formal transfer of competence and

hardening of EU law, and one can wonder if it ever will. Consequently, there are good reasons to test out whether the arguments that have been put forward as concerns the institutionalization of "hard modes of governance" are portable to the contexts of soft governance arrangements.

The other way round, with the "governance turn" experienced in European policy literature, soft governance has attracted a lot attention, but the question of institutionalization has remained secondary. Most often, the micro analysis of specific European governance devices [ref] is not sufficiently articulated to broader theoretical debates on the emergence and institutionalization of a European political and policy space. In recent debates in European policy literature, scholarly attention has been focused on the questions whether European new modes of governance are really new (or not), really participative (or not) and do have a policy impact (or not), and not so often explicitly on the question of what is getting institutionalized (or not) in this process (see e.g. Borrás and Radaelli 2010; Citi and Rhodes 2007) But the institutionalization question was not completely overlooked: we must mention here work such as Laffan's study of the EUs Court of Auditors (Laffan 1999) McNamara's study of the European Central Bank (McNamara 2001). Both point to key aspects of going from "legal letter to life" that moves the understanding of what it takes to establish and develop new political institutions that are viable and gaining a (partly) autonomous position within the EU governance system. Also the studies of establishment and evolution of EU agencies add insight into institutionalization processes at the European level (Groenleer 2006; 2009) as does the article by Peters and Pierre (2009) addressing quite a similar question on institutionalization, looking at the aviation regulation sector, and its transformation "from a club to a bureaucracy". As our central argument opposes theirs, it is important to introduce their perspective more in detail.

Peters and Pierre analyze the transformation of the JAA ("an informal club of senior civil servants integrating transnational informal agreements with domestic regulatory systems which is not under the authority of the Commission") to the EASA ("a EU agency which can use legal regulatory muscle to ensure compliance among its member states"), and qualify it as an institutionalization process. This article is of great interest, and we do share its statement of the "importance of the environment of the potential institution in its creation and deepening through process of institutionalization". The study of institutionalization mechanisms is actually essential to understand new modes of governance (without institutionalized values and concerns for appropriateness leading to compliance, soft instruments would have no effect). Nevertheless, several of their general points appear contestable to us.

First, Peters and Pierre are hitting off target in stating that classical discussion of institutionalization disregards external environment: for instance, in Huntington's classical piece on institutionalization (1968), two dimensions do refer to relation to external environment: autonomy and adaptability (the two others refer to the internal aspect of institutionalization: complexity and coherence). In the same way, Selznick's seminal work on institutionalization as a process of infusion with value beyond functional requirements also clearly mentions that it is a process of adaptation to the environment (1957, p. 16-17)[1]. He in particular underlines the role of exogenous forces in the transformation from expendable technical organization to a living organism. Developing an external, distinct "clientele" is an essential source of organizational stability "that comes with a secure source of support, an

[1] "Institutionalization is a *process*. It is something that happens to an organization over time, reflecting the organization's own distinctive history, the people who have been in it, the groups it embodies and the vested interests they have created, and the way it has adapted to its environment" (Selznick 1966)page 18.

easy channel of communication" (Selznick 1957, p. 7). This aspect is also made relevant to the EU's institutional development by Stone Sweet et al.'s 2001 piece on the "Institutionalization of Europe" -a contribution that Peters and Pierre fail to refer to- as it takes the environment into account when they define a European space as a "complex of policy arenas", studying the institutionalization of a given arena includes analyzing its relation vis-à-vis this complex. Peters and Pierre's overlook of Stone Sweet et al.'s piece seems even less understandable that their conclusion is close to Stone Sweet et al.'s: institutionalization is a process of juridicization / hardening of EU laws. .

Second, and as we shall demonstrate below, our own findings lead us to oppose their main argument. The relation which they establish between the institutionalization process and the environment is the following: "if the environment is itself loosely structured with few constraints [...], then a less completely institutional structure may be sufficient, while functioning in a more strictly defined environment [...]may ultimately require much more complete institutionalization" (p. 339). Below we spell out our argument as exactly the reverse, but let us first see what we see as institutionalization.

Dimensions and conditions of institutionalization

Following Olsen (2001; 2009), institutionalization implies establishing rules and repertoires of standard operating procedures attaching capabilities and resources to it, and that practices and procedures come to be seen as appropriate and legitimate. This speaks to how enduring and autonomous organizational practices become. The underlying understanding of institutions to see them as "..collections of structures, rules, and standard operating procedures that have a partly autonomous role, in political life" (March and Olsen 2006: 4). In our case the more the governance structures are being institutionalised the more one should be able to observe the following: 1) Actors developing standards of acceptable conduct, impersonal roles, rules and standard operating procedures 2) organizational capabilities in as far as resources, such as staff and budgets, are assigned to uphold the governance structures 3) practices and procedures of soft governance are valued i.e. that they acquire a self-legitimated and taken for granted character, where their existence is not continuously questioned or subject to "cost-benefit" calculation, or not seen as what Selznick refers to as an "expendable tool"(Selznick 1966: 5). So we will handle those traits as signs of governance arrangement becoming institutionalised. However, an account of institutionalization will have to include arguments concerning the conditions under which such a process would take place.

Our central assumption is the following and exactly the reverse to the claim by Peters and Pierre: the way an organizational template leads to the institutionalization of a policy arena depends on how thickly institutionalized the existing formal arrangement and practices are (in the environment). In what way can we expect an organizational template is picked up and processed in a political order depends on the nature of existing institutionalized practices? The more elaborated and dominating the extant official structures in a given sector, the more likely that a new specific template will be absorbed by it, rather than becoming the spur for creating a new one. In fact, if this is the case, we would expect the speed and depth with which coordination template is established to depend on the density of institutionalised practices in the policy domain, i.e. its institutional saturation. This means that we have an opposite view to Peters and Pierre's concerning the preconditions for institutionalization. They seem to rely on the principle that in order to have institutionalization, the new institution has to "fight" down the existing one so that you have a pattern of deinstitutionalization and then institutionalization. Our argument is more about "finding a place" through a layering process

(Thelen 2004): new arrangements add and eventually blend to existing ones without having to build on the ruins of the previous ones.

This harks back to core concept in historical institutionalism where Pierson and others with him, argue that inertia of political institutions is fundamentally anchored in institutional density and the positive reinforcement that existing institutional arrangements provide. That constitutes the core of path dependency. Institutions encourage individuals and organizations to invest in specialised skills, in sustained relationship to their environment, and to develop particular political and social identities. Due to positive feedback mechanisms these activities will, Pierson argues, make established activities more attractive relative to hypothetical alternative (Pierson 2004: 35). Adding an organizational perspective, the effect of institutional saturation is not only a question of positive feedback but of how organizational capacity, ingrained day to day routines, and allocation of organizational attention (Cyert and March 1992) make the jump from one path to another unlikely.

The argument above underlines the resilience to change and innovation. Institutional theory, however, suggests both inter- and intra-institutional dynamics through which change and innovation occur, and in this way escapes the endogenous-deterministic perspective on institutional change (March and Olsen 2006). First, agency matters in processes of establishing new organizational arrangements. Institutional entrepreneurs are actors who intentionally and purposefully work towards changing existing and creating new institutions (Perkmann and Spicer 2008: 816), i.e. actors capable of "skilled action" (Stone-Sweet et al. 2001: 11). Rather than assuming that heroic qualities of individual actors are a determining factor in institutionalization processes, an organizational perspective on political life, would see the entrepreneurial actor to have an organizational basis for action, i.e. that their organizational roles and resources enable and define the entrepreneurial role they can play. Embedding structures do not simply generate constraints on agency but, instead, provide a platform for the unfolding of entrepreneurial activities (Garud et al. 2007, p. 961).

Second, institutions exist within a larger institutional setting and order – as is indeed the case with EU institutions. As argued by March and Olsen (1989) institutions do not represent perfect equilibriums and unambiguous and consistent frames for action in complex settings. Inherent tensions within a political arena can be conductive to innovation. Institutional innovations and change can occur in the interface between different orders of institutions and interactions that exist between them (Holm 1995). Friction may occur when different institutional spheres collide with each other thereby triggering institutional change (Olsen 2001). In order to understand how new governance arrangements come into place and is given a sustainable existence we have to pay attention the larger institutional and political order into which it enters and evolves as these involve potential rivalry between new and established governance arrangements (Laffan 1999) as well as relating and legitimising new arrangements to a wider normative environment (McNamara 2001). The learning process of establishing tasks, methods and organizational forms, that we assume are essential for institutionalization, takes place in the interface with the established institutional setting, learning its place in this order (Olsen 2007: 108-112).

Third, we would expect to see more *radical and swift change* at "critical moments" and in periods of system failure. They provide opportunities for significant change. Such change may be induced by skilled action of entrepreneurs that "create or manipulate frames, that make sense of institutional or policy problems and offer persuasive solutions" (Stone-Sweet et al. 2001: 12). We can thus expect to observe entrepreneurs that give voice to the translation

of the new governance template and that are able to define crises and breakdowns and use them as opportunities to promote the template in the established order. It can be argued that a breakdown in exterior legitimacy can spur deinstitutionalization (Stone-Sweet et al. 2001: 15). A related argument is the need to pay attention to timing and sequencing of events in order to understand how paths are set, new governance arrangements arise and are maintained (cf. Pierson 2004, p. 44).

3. Empirical study: connected but contrasted cases of institutionalization

European intervention in the three domains up to Lisbon

Before addressing the introduction of new governance arrangements with Lisbon, it is of course essential to give the historical and legal background for European intervention in the three domains. Research and education have long traditions as policy areas for the EU, although especially for the education –and even more higher education-, on the margins of that history (Corbett 2005; Guzzetti 1995). Though related to separate institutional spheres, both research and education have been perceived as naturally prone to exchange and mobility at EU level (students, researchers, professors), higher education being concerned programs supporting mobility in both sectors.

The Amsterdam Treaty contains an elaborated chapter on research and technological development (art. 169/173) giving the EU complementary competence in the field of R&D. Although a coordinated research policy is legally possible (de Elera 2006: 571), the use of binding measures has been very limited (Shaw and Laffan 2006). It is also noteworthy that the Treaty, established a reference to the coordination of national and European research policies long before it came on the agenda in the 2000s. In practice this element of European research policies was overshadowed by the distributive politics of the Framework Programmes (FP), that produced a policy "lock-in" (Banchoff 2002). The EU institutions had most of their political energy attached to decisions about the level of funding and profile of the R&D framework programmes following the elaborate rules spelled out in the Treaty. EU's research policy, established as a Commission portfolio in 1967, gradually evolved to become a very dense area of activities. The supranational executive and the set of committees and working groups in this policy area developed strong, established procedures for executing and shaping the R&D programmes. These were primarily a "FP machinery" (Gornitzka 2009) (The legitimacy of the EU action in the area of education has been much more contested (De Wit and Verhoeven 2001). The main Treaty article on education, art. 165-166 TFEU/ explicitly rules out "the harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the member states". There is considerable national sensitivity attached to the system diversity of European education, especially when education is seen in its socialising, cultural function, rather than in its social and economic role. Nevertheless, there has been a institutionalization of the policy area over time (Beukel 2001), marked by policy entrepreneurship at the European level (Corbett 2005). The educational programmes encouraging mobility have been the main instrument of the EU, even though financially they are not in the same league as the R&D FPs. In addition the education programmes have a much more decentralised implementation structure compared to the Framework programmes.

As for higher education, it is still another case. Formally, higher education has never been recognised as a specific area of intervention in the treaties. This does not mean that there was

no interest for university at the beginning of European integration (Corbett for instance documented very precisely the competing ideas of a Europe of universities and a European university back to 1950s (Corbett 2005)); but this moment can rather be interpreted as a "rendez vous manqué" (mainly because of member states' reluctance) which had enduring consequences, first of all locating most European cooperation in higher education up to the 1970s within the Council of Europe. This does not mean either that there were no EC initiative concerning higher education between the 1970s and the 1990s. On the contrary, as a subsystem of European education policy, higher education even played the role of a locomotive. It was actually at the blurred boundary between vocational training and higher education that intervention in the field of education gained a legal recognition that allowed for the adoption of big education programmes of the 1980s; and within those mobility and exchange programs, an important (and most famous) part dealt with higher education (cf. Erasmus). The difficulty of recognising higher education as a domain for European intervention *per se* was confirmed at the beginning of the 1990s when an ambitious *Memorandum on higher education* by the European Commission proposing to expand European competences over the sector provoked hostile reactions from the members states, which resulted in "freezing" any capacity of the Commission to formulate specific objectives for higher education in the following years (Ravinet 2007 2009).

As substantial developments in European governance literature have been dedicated to analysing the Lisbon strategy, we will not elaborate on this context at length. As very much commented, the European Council summit that took place in Lisbon in March 2000 has been a key moment for Europe. The launching of the eponym Lisbon strategy can be considered as the definition of a new "governance architecture" for Europe (Borras, Radaelli, 2011) that has both a substantive (to become "the world's most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy by 2010) and a procedural dimension (introduction of new governance procedures such as the Open Method of Coordination). If the importance of this new context is certainly true for someone interested in European governance in general, it is considerable for the knowledge policies we are focusing on here. The Lisbon strategy as an overarching frame actually pushed knowledge policy areas to the centre of the EU agenda, as knowledge sectors became in some sort transversal "problem solvers" for economic growth in general, for regional development, for the environmental agenda, for labour market policy etc. (Gornitzka 2010: 540).

We shall now explore in detail the development of new governance arrangements within the three domains: To what extent do OMC education, OMC research and Bologna represent a radical departure from existing practices? Have they led to the institutionalization of new policy arenas?

Case I: How OMC education became the mainframe of the European approach to education policy

Initially the OMC process in education materialised as what was referred to as the "objectives process", spurred by the Lisbon European Council invitation to the Education Ministers of Europe to formulate the future goals for the education sector. The Lisbon summit also provided a diagnosis of a Europe challenged by globalization and the new knowledge-driven economy: more investments in human resources, increasing education attainment levels, and

development of basic skills and mobility[2] were the solution. The modernization of European education became linked to an overhaul of Europe envisaged in the Lisbon strategy.

In 2001 three strategic objectives were adopted that concerned the improved quality and effectiveness of education, access to education and to the goal of opening up national education and training systems to society and "the wider world"[3]. This was turned into a 10 year work programme containing 13 specified objectives,[4] followed by the identification of 5 European benchmarks in 2003. The Education Council was remarkably agile in coming to an agreement on these strategic goals. This was done on the basis of the Commission's preparatory work. These goals were very general and hardly touched any overtly controversial or sensitive issues. Nonetheless, the establishment of OMC education did indicate a change of attitude towards European coordinating efforts among European Ministers of Education. Over time having common targets and specifying benchmarks came to be seen as acceptable and dealing with these objectives became a regular part of the agenda for European education ministers.

From early 2004 two other parallel processes, the intergovernmental process towards establishing the European Higher Education Area ("The Bologna Process") and the EU's "Copenhagen Process" for vocational education and training, were professedly added to the in order to include in the whole range and forms of education. From then on the OMC process in education was referred to as "Education and Training 2010" (ET2010). The existing cooperation procedures were in this respect added to the OMC mainframe for the cooperation in the field and also the process moved beyond the qualified approach that had in the early stages been the main focus. The kinds and areas of cooperation had with the OMC moved well beyond what the education programmes as the template of cooperation had offered in the period before 2000.

Lisbon message got in the DG EAC, there was a ready translator of the OMC concept. DG EAC prepared, organised and orchestrated the practical implementation of the OMC education, with a set of working groups, a group for benchmarks and indicators. Yet, especially in the beginning the national experts who were sent to Brussels for working group meetings described the experience as sitting there with the OMC "landing in their lap"[5] or being part of an "extreme sport"[6], where participants had very little idea what this was supposed to be. But meetings were held, time schedules were set up and slowly working groups and later on peer learning activities became a political-administrative habit in the European arena (what was done at the national level was another matter). Yet, not all working groups under the OMC procedure had strong energy levels attached to them – some were killed softly by waning energy from the participants and the DG's informal assessment of their operations. Furthermore not all parts of the OMC template became institutionalised at equal speed. *The quantified aspects* of the OMC process were most deeply institutionalized. Especially, in the inception stage one unit within DG EAC pushed for quantification. The core policy "theory" drew its vocabulary from an output/performance based understanding of education policy, which matched the performance based governance philosophy that the

[2] Lisbon European Council 2000, Presidency conclusions paragraphs 25-27
[3] Adopted by the European Council, Stockholm 2001 (Presidency conclusions 23/24 March 2001).
[4] Cf. "Detailed work programme on the follow-up of the objectives of education and training systems in Europe", adopted by the Education Council and the Commission 14.02.02. OJ C 142. Brussels 14 June 2002). Work programme approved by the European Council 2002 (Presidency Conclusions 15/16 March, 2002)
[5] Informant interview, May 2005/05.
[6] Informant interview, May 2005/11.

OMC template entailed. The ET 2010 programme needed quantification in order to provide a "strong policy relevant messages"[7], was the argument. Quantification was further institutionalized when CRELL (part of Commission Joint Research Centre) was established in 2005 in order to support the EU's indicator development in the area of lifelong learning. In the same year the Council decided on new indicators and the following year the legal basis for EUROSTATs education statistics was strengthened. The EU entered deeper into the order of educational indicators and statistics, using existing EUROSTAT/OECD indictors but also establishing new metrics adjusted to the political ambitions of education within the Lisbon strategy.[8] By the continuous refinement of the indicator framework underpinning the OMC process the quantification of the entire education system, from pre-school education to university graduates, became an enduring feature of European education policy cooperation.

Reporting structure of the OMC template had more of a feeble start. In the beginning OMC education was far from having a routinized national reporting system similar to the NAP of the European Employment Strategy (EES). However, by 2005 all national Ministries of Education produced national progress reports on the implementation of the ET 2010 programme following a standard set up by the DG EAC. These reports were provided independently of the reporting for the national Lisbon programmes. The reporting system was also reaffirmed by the Council as a feature to be continued also for the OMC in the coming decade.[9]

The organization and practices for *learning and peer reviewing* lived in a tensile balance between institutionalization, experimentation and disintegration. Participants in working groups, which encompassed a range of core sectors actors (national administrations, European stakeholder organizations, and education policy experts), did not immediately display an obvious understanding of what it meant to practice peer learning. Lack of systematic assessments and peer reviewing made it difficult to establish "good practice". There was no obvious established and certified "curriculum" and no readymade and accepted criteria for certifying the experiences of other countries as good examples to guide national policy reform or adjustment. Several years into the ET 2010 ambiguities of practicing organised learning and peer reviewing were predominant. When DG EAC reorganised the OMC infrastructure in 2005/6, providing what they assumed was a clearer working methodology for learning was a major concern. It also introduced a format for how to practice learning through the so-called PLAs (Peer Learning Activities).[10] The PLAs have over time found a fairly stable format for how to organise mutual learning aspects of the OMC template, and one of the building blocks for how the OMC was carried into the ET2020. Two new organizational elements were added that further institutionalised the OMC: a high level group (only national administrations represented) charged with maintaining stronger links to national administrations and produce input to the reporting processes, and a large ET 2010 coordination group, that also included the social partners.

How can this change be accounted for? Several factors contributed to shaping the OMC as practice in this case. First, we have seen how modes of cooperation had developed around the education programmes and had made some regularised interaction at the European level. Attitudes towards convening at this level had been made tender through years of cooperation

[7] SGIB minutes from 3rd July 2002, first meeting: p.5
[8] Commission 2007: A coherent framework of indicators and benchmarks for monitoring progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training. COM(2007) 61 final.
[9] Council Conclusions of 12.05.09 on 'ET 2020', 2009/C 119/02.
[11] 2224th Council meeting – Education 13453/99 (Press 378), p. 8.

at the ministerial level and at the level of director generals of member states' education ministries. Yet, by the end of the 1990s the Council configuration for education had shown some frustration over a lack of a common and sustained agenda. Issues were raised and lowered according to the Council Presidencies' varying priorities. Similar frustrations were noted within the DG EAC. During the Finnish presidency (fall 1999), the Education Council had already made a resolution to introduce what was referred to as the "rolling agenda model".[11] So in this respect the existing "thin" institutional arrangements for political cooperation were being questioned at the time when the larger Lisbon strategy was launched and a coordination template that came with it.

Second, shocks and other coinciding events played a role preparing the ground for inception and institutionalization of a new template. Several of the national ministries of education were "in shock" over the loss of face from results of the PISA 2000 study made public December 2001. National education systems had an internationally announced performance failure to deal with. The competitiveness failure that was pinned on the European economy at large added to the sense of crisis. DG EAC in its follow up to the Lisbon Strategy used a dramatic language to accentuate the need for common action to modernise European education – it "hinges on urgent reform". Also the OMC concept was picked up within the DG and promoted by "OMC-champions". This was also the actor that had some resources – staff and budget line in the SOCRATES budget – that would practically support the institutionalization of the new template.

A third element in the institutionalization process was the sector defence mechanisms that were triggered within the education sector. Prior to the Lisbon European Council, the EES had already included lifelong learning as an area of cooperation (Pochet 2005: 47). This implied that education as a policy area was defined as part of the employment strategy and the decisions with implications for core educational issues were not decided by European ministers of education, but by national ministers running the employment portfolios, and prepared by DG Employment and not the DG EAC.[12] The skills and educational "elements" of the EES were then also followed up nationally (in the National Action Plans) primarily by the Ministries of Labour, not the Ministries of Education. The OMC process became a way of reclaiming European cooperation in the area of lifelong learning from the EES. The establishment of OMC education could then be read as a sector defence enacted by the core European institutions in the field of education. The "collision" between the cognitive and normative understanding of "education and training" as part of labour market policy, rather than framed as education policy contributed to creating a new governance arrangement based on the OMC template. Education ministers and the DG EAC headed the defence of the sectoral logics by the opportunity provided by the concept of the OMC.

Surviving post-Lisbon? Towards the end of the first decade of the 21st century OMC Education had settled to become a fairly regularized activity at the EU level, extending its activities to the national level with the PLAs and national reporting. Signs of output legitimacy in terms of domestic impact of the 8-10 year old governance site are scant (Alexiadou et al. 2010; Lange and Alexiadou 2010). Still the arena had expanded its territory. In addition to the annual progress reports in the progress towards the Lisbon objectives in education and training, it produced the backup and input to a string of Commission

[11] 2224th Council meeting – Education 13453/99 (Press 378), p. 8.
[12] Informant interview, December 2005.

communications and recommendations that made it into the regular decision making procedures of the EU institutions in this area, such as issuing educational standards (European Qualifications Framework), and guidelines for quality in vocational education and training (EQAVET), work on the modernization agenda of the European Universities (Gornitzka 2010). The governance mechanism had institutionalized as a sectoral specific process within the broader Lisbon strategy. When in June 2010, EU leaders adopted the "Europe 2020" strategy, to replace the Lisbon strategy. the education sectors still hung on the overall political project of the EU and retained its place. One of the seven "flagship initiatives" for growth and employment of the Europe2020 agenda, "Youth on the Move", was aimed at improving "the performance and international attractiveness of our higher education institutions and raise the quality of all levels of education and training in the EU."[13] This does not mean that sensitivity of education cooperation disappeared - e.g. attempts of the Commission to issue explicit country specific recommendations on education targets met with mixed reception from national ministries, including overt defiance (UK)[14] and dismissal as "unrealistic" (Hungary)[15]. Still the policy arena established on the basis of the OMC seems to have survived the economic crisis, performance failures and transition from one decennial deadline to another. It seems to have been further strengthened as part of the new Europe2020 strategy. Actors inside or outside the education domain did not use the failed deadline as an opportunity to question and deinstitutionalize OMC-style governance. The assertiveness of the sector so far seems to have been enhanced in the context of the new overall strategy, pushing even further its ideational message of what education can do for the economy and the labour market.

Case II: OMC research as one element among others inside the European research policy tool-box

Also on the other knowledge policy "silo" OMC template made its mark. The Lisbon Conclusions specifically encouraged the development OMC R&D policies and packed the use of the OMC into the ambition of developing a European Research Area (ERA). Yet already from the start the practicing of the OMC was set in a complex web of various efforts and means of co-ordination within the framework of the ERA[16]. Identifying the OMC process in research is not a straightforward task as several processes especially linked to the ERA activities were referred to as "OMC". In the year following the Lisbon Council, the

[13] Commission 2010: COM (2010) 2020 final, EUROPE 2020 – A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Brussels,3.3.2010.

[14]The UK (both minister and Permanent Representation to the EU) conveyed that it did agree with the European Commission's interpretation of how the 'Europe 2020' strategy should be implemented in the field of education. The UK insisted that the headline targets agreed by the European Council in June 2010 were not formally binding on member states. The UK representative argued that individual countries should "set their own level of ambition" when it comes to translating these targets into national policies, in order for the specific characteristics of different education systems can be taken into account. Euractiv 15-16/02/2011.

[15] Euractiv 21/07/2010

[16] This comprises the Community Framework programmes (including Networks of Excellence and Integrated projects), technology platforms, coordination of national research council programmes (ERA-NET) and the establishment of a European Research Council.

Commission worked on several versions of OMC for research policy coordination[17]. After the Barcelona Council in 2002 the application of the OMC became explicitly linked to research policy as the means to achieve the ambitious goal of increasing investments in R&D to 3 per cent of EU GDP from the 2000-level of 1,9 per cent, also an item on the general Competitiveness agenda of the Lisbon strategy.

This was the first time a commitment was made to a quantitative target for research at such a high level (Caracostas 2003). Here the gap of Europe relative to the US and Japan was blatant, especially the European lag in private sector R&D investments. For most Member States this target was very far from being within reach in 2000 (Archibugi and Coco 2005). The Commission started working out the plans for how this objective could be realised. This work culminated in the Commission staff working paper "Investing in Research – an Action Plan for Europe"[18]. European guidelines were given for how to work towards the 3-per cent target, but the actual procedural prescriptions for how to apply the OMC were weak.[19] Later the Competitiveness Council (member states research ministers included) accentuated the need to push the use of the OMC forward[20] and the Scientific and Technical Research Committee (CREST)[21] was given a key role in the organization of the "3%-OMC process."

Given the mandate and composition of CREST the orchestration of the OMC was thus placed in the interface between the Member States and the Commission. Yet the Commission representative in CREST clearly stated that the 3% OMC was to be seen as an operation driven by the member states where the Commission would be "offering assistance as a facilitator."[22] The burden of keeping this OMC organization alive was left to the member states' representatives in CREST. The coordination of national research policies was part of CREST's original and revised mandate[23], but despite Treaty backup and member states' professed shared interest, the actual coordination of research policies had suffered a history of setbacks (Guzzetti 1995).

CREST started setting up a work organization for the OMC with five expert groups on issues that had been identified in the Commission's paper on research investment target. So initially the Commission's ideas for boosting Europe's research investment structured the process thematically. The focus was put on core research policy issues: public research spending and policy mixes; links between public research institutions and industry, fiscal measures for

[17] Commission 2000, Development of an open method of co-ordination for benchmarking national research policies – Objectives, methodology and indicators. Working document from the Commission services. Brussels, 3 November 2000. SEC (2000) 1842.

[18] Commission 2003: Investing in research – an action plan for Europe. Communication from the Commission. Brussels 4/6.2003.: COM (2003) 226 final/2. Final version issued in April 2003

[19] Commission 2002More Research for Europe – Towards 3% of GDP. Communication from the Commission, Brussels, 11.9.2002, COM(2002) 499 final.

[20] Council 2002 Council Conclusions. 2467th Council meeting – Competitiveness (Internal Market, Industry, Research) – Brussels, 26 November 2002. 14365/02 (Press 360).

[21] CREST organises the consultation with national governments as a permanent, advisory committee with member states representatives (top civil servants from national research ministries or related ministries) and representation from DG research.

[22] CREST 2003 Draft summary conclusions of the 287th meeting of the scientific and technical research committee (CREST) held in Brussels on 14 January 2003. CREST 1201/03, page 8

[23] Council Resolution of 28 September 1995 on Crest (95/C 264/02)

research (such as use of tax incentives); intellectual property rights, and the relationship between SMEs and research. The members of the working groups were by and large from the national administrations, from Ministries of research, economic affairs or industry or national agencies/directorates.[24] Organised interest groups, NGOs and regional authorities did not take part in the core of the OMC work organization.

Each subject area was headed by member states' CREST members that volunteered to take the lead in the organization of CREST's working groups, i.e. this OMC process had (at best) part time staff of national administrators assigned to these processes. The Commission did not take a front-stage role in the work organization of this OMC process. By end of 2008 CREST had organised four "cycles" of the 3% target OMC. The issue of applying the OMC for research policy purposes and the pivotal role of CREST in this was not disputed, but infrastructure to do so was subject to continuous discussions and change (See review of OMC 3% target 2009[25]).

Experimenting with the OMC concept: CREST organised this process overtly recognising that the OMC template is not a "fixed model for application."[26] Since the start-up in 2003, the process underwent revisions of its operational set-up to deal with its "teething problems".[27] As the OMC reporting requirements disturbed daily bureaucratic lives, the practice of OMC was resisted, not because of ill will or resistance to the idea of European policy coordination, but as a result of reporting fatigue and tight time schedules of national ministries and agencies. The predominant OMC methodology in research policy was a "learning-by-doing" with very little streamlining across the different expert groups. The thematic structure was also revised, and CREST further loosened the thematic ties to the Commissions' original Communication on research investment and established the coordination activities around themes of CREST's own choice, such as the internationalization of R&D. Hence the agenda of the OMC reflected more the general items of interest to the national ministries of research, than issues directly linked to the ERA or the 3 per cent investment target. The way to organise learning and peer reviewing was not standardised across groups and OMC cycles. The overarching guideline was the Barcelona target, and that did have a clear and established indicator that could be used to monitor the process. The OMC process organised by CREST did not operate within a logic of quantification. The development of new indicators and use of the established ones hardly featured as a concern in this setting. The R&D indicators lived an intense life outside this process[28]. Besides, EUROSTAT had long before Lisbon process been active in the development of R&D statistics, and in this sense the Lisbon process did not entail carving out a new role for Europe in the international and national world of R&D statistics and indicator. The role of EUROSTAT in the international statistical order (esp. vs OECD) was already in a settled position before the Lisbon process was launched (Godin 2002; 2003).

[24] All expert groups produced their final report to CREST in June 2004 and all of them clearly identified their work as part of the OMC 3 % Action Plan.
[25] http://ec.europa.eu/invest-in-research/pdf/download_en/eur_23874_texte_web.pdf

[26] CREST On the application of the open method of coordination in favour of the Barcelona research investment objective. Brussels: European Union, CREST report 1.10.2004. Council doc. CREST 1206/04
[27] Report from the CREST expert group on SME and Research (Final report June 2004: 14).
[28] R&D indicators are also a core part of the general horizontally coordinated Lisbon reform programmes under the chapter "microeconomic policy".

Approaching the 2010 deadline, the whole of the ERA idea was "relaunched", including establishing a framework for stronger governance of the process. The ERA was also enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty. Several other initiatives and innovations were introduced as part of the FP7 and also outside of it. The organised anchor of the OMC in research, the CREST committee, was reorganised, renamed (ERAC – European Research Area Committee) and given a revised mission. This seems to have had implications for the institutionalization of OMC mechanisms in this policy domain making, confirming how this is only a small part of the governance site. Elements of the OMC process has been confirmed as a method of governance (McGuiness and Caroll 2010), yet the ERAC seems to have a different kind of role carved out that does not make OMC its main modus operandi[29]: Hence the OMC did not become the mainframe of the European approach to research policy. The FPs and the many innovations that took place within the FPs and outside of them relegated the OMC template and its ambiguous practices to becoming only one element of the battery of measures.

Case III: how the Bologna process became central in the European governance of higher education

1990s up to Lisbon: a paradoxical decade for higher education

As mentioned above, the situation of higher education in the 1990s was rather ambivalent: on the one hand, higher education was not recognised as a sector *per se*; but on the other hand, it appeared as the most natural field for the implementation of the 1980S and 1990s European education programs (Pépin 2006, 108-130), -Erasmus even becoming a sort of emblem of European education policy-. In the absence of any *formal* competence, in 1994 an *informal* cooperation structure modelled on the Education Committee (created in 1976, see Pépin 2006, 88-89) was established. Though weak, this committee was where high officials from national ministries got socialised to cooperation (Corbett 2005). Over the years, and with the construction of a common working culture, the Higher education committee (as well as the older Education committee) have became reference points and "natural" organizational models for European cooperation in these domains.

The decade has also been very paradoxical for higher education from an ideational perspective. This pre-Lisbon period is characterised by the growing momentum of the knowledge economy discourse. Higher education should of course be concerned by this new ideational context (can one imagine a Europe of knowledge without higher education?). Yet, after the strong national reactions to the *Memorandum on higher education* in 1991, the European Commission has remained cautious: its different documents setting the basis for a Europe of knowledge[30] deal with education and life long learning but not expressly with higher education; they mention research and innovation, but not clearly university research; they reflect upon skills and aptitudes but carefully avoid the notion of degrees.

[29] For ERAC the OMC has become an additional activity: "In addition to its main mission, the Committee shall also stimulate the voluntary evaluation of national policy mix and promote mutual learning exercises relevant to the ERA. For these activities it may arrange for the set-up of voluntary ad-hoc temporary groups which shall carry out their work under the guidance of the Committee" (Resolution on the developments in the governance of the European Research Area) 3016th COMPETITIVENESS Council meeting, Brussels, 26 May 2010, page 4.

[30] In 1993 the White Paper *Growth, Competitiveness, Employment : The Challenges and Ways Forward into the 21st Century*, in 1996, the White Paper *Teaching and learning: towards the learning society*, in 1997 the Communication from the Commission *Towards a Europe of Knowledge*.

The end of the decade goes on paradoxical. The 1998-2000 period is characterised by both the making of an unexpected ambitious call for the building of a European higher education area *and* the enduring invisibility of the higher education sector in the Lisbon strategy.

In May 1998, the German, French, Italian, and British ministers in charge of higher education met on the occasion of the 800th anniversary of the Sorbonne University. They called on all European countries to join them in building a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) based on comparable degrees and a two-cycle system, in order to improve European students' mobility and employability and to make European higher education more attractive. This meeting organised at the initiative of the French minister came as a surprise: participating countries were historically among the most reluctant about a European intervention in the domain, and the central objective of the declaration (first formulated as *harmonization* of degree structure) was going far beyond what European states could have accepted from the European Commission. (for details on the Sorbonne, see Ravinet 2009a). The Sorbonne call was heard, although not without first provoking strong reactions from 'small' EU Member States who did not appreciate the 'big 4' imposing their model (Ravinet 2007 : 227-247). It was in June 1999 that ministers from 29 European countries signed the Bologna Declaration, thus expressing their commitment to coordinate their national policies based on 6 common objectives[31] to create an EHEA by 2010. If the core of a policy vision has already crystallised at this stage, there was not any *coordination template* as such yet. The notion of "coordination" remained a general political intention: not only was there no legal obligation to comply with common objectives, but also no organizational specification about the steering and animation of this coordination project. The one organizational structure that was created in 1998, the Sorbonne Follow-up Group (SFUG), was meant as an operational provisory working group for the organization of the Bologna event (and not as a European governance arena). What is nevertheless interesting is that the main players at that time opted for the first satisfactory solution and imitated the way in which they were used to working at the European level (i.e. the Higher education committee, whose design and composition influenced the SFUG one).

This La Sorbonne – Bologna sequence mostly took place at the margins of the EU. If we come back to the developments *at the EU level*, the end of the decade is of course marked by the Lisbon strategy. A detailed analysis of the main text defining this strategy (the conclusions of the European Council Presidency, March 2000) reveals that no section of the document is dedicated to higher education and that initiatives concerning the sector are rare and diluted in between the education and training section and the research and innovation one. This quasi absence of higher education in the first version of the Lisbon strategy can be understood in continuity with the previous period: Higher education still is not recognised as a sector *per se*. It could also be understood as a sort of division of policy work: while European coordination of education falls under the Lisbon umbrella, European coordination for higher education would be steered by the Bologna process[32].

[31] The 6 common objectives are the following: adoption of a system of readable and comparable degrees; adoption of a system based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate; establishment of a credits system, like the ECTS system; promotion of mobility; promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance; promotion of a European dimension of higher education)

[32] This hypothesis is even more plausible that the actor responsible for the writing of the education section of the Lisbon conclusions was also and simultaneously a key actor within the Bologna process, pleading for a rationalisation of its management. He was not at all opposing both processes but assuming to launch them on separate tracks (Ravinet, forthcoming)

The inception and institutionalization of a coordination template for higher education

The logics behind the conception of a coordination template for higher education therefore appear as distinct from both the education and the research cases. Unlike the education case, the Lisbon strategy in itself did not really constitute a turning point: Lisbon conclusions did not formulate explicit vision and objectives for the sector nor recommend a specific and related governance method, which could serve as a new frame for collective action. Unlike the research case, the pre-Lisbon European institutional landscape was far from dense (there was little more than the informal higher education committee above mentioned), and the new coordination template did not have to find a place in between many existing institutional practices. Rather, the inception and of a coordination template during the 2000-2005 period is to be understood by looking at the Bologna process own dynamics.

Since Bologna in 1999, the ministers of the signatory States have actually met every two years for a ministerial conference to track progress and establish additional action lines[33]. But the Bologna process is much more than a series of ministerial meetings: an original template has been developed to steer coordination and became the central point of European higher education policy. This template can basically be defined as an institutional structure equipped with a set of tools. This template was not negotiated on one day and written down as an explicit rule for the participants to conform with then on. Rather its development consisted in a succession of operations of design and redesign, which was iterative and initially uncoordinated, institutional innovations only being validated once in place.

Once the Bologna conference held, the provisory SFUG was dissolved. A more elaborate (but still inspired by the Higher education committee architecture) structure was set up in 1999 for the organization of the next meeting. The features of this structure were again redesigned in 2001 and the institutional skeleton of the Bologna process stabilized around 2003 (Ravinet 2008 and 2010): it is an intergovernmental structure of coordination, in which ministers give mandate to a big follow-up group (the BFUG), gathering representatives of participating countries, one representative of the European Commission, and representatives of nongovernmental stakeholders as consultative members. A smaller executive structure, the Board, is in charge of the overall steering; its composition mixes a EU inspiration –role of EU presidencies- and a Bolognese specificity –role of Bologna welcoming countries-. This structure is supported by a secretariat located in the country hosting the next conference.

The Bologna institutional structure is not an empty shell: it is equipped with a whole set of tools and procedures. These tools first developed in an unconnected manner. Most interesting for our study of Bologna institutionalization is the development of the reporting activity. In this process of soft coordination relying upon collective will to realise common objectives, soon emerged the conscience that to get feedback on national and institutional developments was essential to keep the momentum, and all types of participants started a reporting activity: reports on national developments from ministries, *Trends* reports from European university association, Bologna with students' eyes from European students union. As long as the data from all these reports was not crosscut, and national reports were not standardized, reports have remained information tools (as well as the expression of a symbolic competition: each actor demonstrating its legitimacy within the Bologna process by this reporting work). But things changed between 2003 and 2005 with the introduction of the stocktaking exercise. This instrument takes stock of the progress accomplished and gives countries a score (with an

[33] They met in Prague in 2001, in Berlin in 2003, on Bergen in 2005, in London in 2007, in Leuven in 2009

arborescence of priorities and benchmarks) on the basis of the information collected in the different reports. Information on national situation is now given under a codified and simplified form that allows for comparison between countries. Though the process remains voluntary and non binding, the stocktaking and the score card representing national scores with colours introduces a sort of informal sanction relying upon a reputation mechanism –no one wants to be designated as the bad pupil of the Bologna class.

Together with this process of equipment with tools, a process of cognitive convergence is also at work. National officials have got more and more involved into Bologna activities of course *during* the ministerial meetings where national delegations meet and exchange, but most of all *between* the meetings: thematic seminars on a wide range of higher education issues have proliferated. They represent places for both socialization and learning; in those seminars, national officials have got used to Bologna objectives, tools and procedures. Over time, this has had cognitive convergence effects comparable to those observable in the case of the OMC (Radaelli 2003: 9; Bruno & al. 2006): causal mechanisms are more and more appreciated and interpreted in the same way; as for the definition of desirable or inacceptable policies, and shared beliefs about how policy works, national actors use more and more the same frames and the same vocabulary – an official lexicon was even created in order to settle down common definitions for fundamental notions of this Bolognese vernacular-. Unravelling this cognitive convergence effect is central to understanding the institutionalization of the coordination template. First converging ideas and frames make Bologna requirements more acceptable and legitimate in such a way that they become less and less questionable for the actors involved. Second, they contribute to the development and consolidation of a specific identity and working culture.

Between "Lisbonization" and consolidation of autonomy

Relation vis-à-vis the EU is a key question to understand the Bologna process, and it was so since its very beginning. The initial posture of the Bologna process vis-à-vis the EU has evolved (Muller and Ravinet 2009) from resistance to a form of "vigilant cooperation" (getting open to EU resources in terms of funding, expertise and savoir faire, but remaining vigilant to keep a relative autonomy). Symmetrically, Commission actors had to learn to adjust their ambition over higher education reckoning with the more and more institutionalised Bologna process. In the relaunch of the Lisbon strategy in 2005, and then in the definition of the Europe2020 strategy, Bologna has indeed open the way for a comeback of the Commission on higher education[34], but this comeback operates in a new context in which a new arena has emerged. Besides participating to the Bologna process, the ways for the Commission to catch up have been double: inserting higher education objectives in an extended OMC education (see education case), and developing a specific vision and agenda for higher education institutions and their role within the Lisbon strategy ("the modernisation agenda"). Yet, from an organizational perspective, it is clear that this modernization agenda did not result in the emergence and even institutionalization of a specific governance arena as did the Bologna process.

Some authors have interpreted this movement as a "lisbonization" of higher education, i. e. the "absorption of the Bologna process within the Lisbon stream" (Capano, Piattoni, 2011). This lisbonization argument is partly relevant: the convergence of some of the EHEA

[34] to this respect, the numerous documents of the European Commission on higher education and the role of universities since 2003 clearly contrasts with the invisibility of higher education in the documents of the 1990s.

objectives and the Lisbon agenda contributes to explain the quick crystallization of the Bologna process; and higher education holds a bigger place within education in the Lisbon strategy revisited in 2005 and 2010. A more organizational perspective over European governance nevertheless suggests a more subtle interpretation. Once the template into place, it cannot be erased or merely absorbed. In the actual tightening of the articulation with Lisbon, Bolognese rules, routines, activities and identities that have developed since 1998-1999 are part of the picture. First, observers have certainly overestimated the role of the European Commission and too quickly concluded to its overtake. As demonstrated by Corbett and Lazetic (forthcoming), to understand European higher education governance –and therefore the connection Bologna/Lisbon- it is also essential to look at the role of council presidencies. In addition, recent work has emphasized the enduring specific identity and culture of the Bologna process: "[its] disconnect from EU structures seems to be the cornerstone of its organisational and political identity" (Lazetic 2010: 549). Finally, a more micro analysis shows that the influence between Bologna and Lisbon is not unidirectional: Bologna also has been a "source of inspiration, competition and support for the Lisbon process in Education" (Gornitzka 2007, 2010: 542).

In sum, with this process, higher education has become a policy sector per se. European policy now means coordination of national policies, whereas it used to be limited to the development of exchanges between autonomous national systems. The Bologna process can be considered as both the triggering factor and the nodal point of European higher education policy. European higher education policy is not only Bolognese, it is more to be understood as a structure of networks (Gornitzka, 2006, 2010) which encompassing the central Bologna arena, but also the initiatives of the Commission dedicated to higher education within the Lisbon agenda, the role of council presidencies, of European associations of higher education actors, and also of non-EU European institution (the Council of Europe). The institutionalization of the Bologna process as a European policy arena has been quick and strong. Recent developments show that the internal aspect of this dynamics is not easily reversible: Bologna has become what is appropriate for European coordination in the sector. As for the external aspect and relation to the EU, it will certainly evolve: Bologna is not completely independent from the EU, and will most probably never be. But Bologna was not either "absorbed". What will become the pattern of interaction (consolidation of a relative autonomy or more EUzation?) is still subject to question.

4. Conclusive Comparative analysis

Summary of the cases

In research as a policy domain the concept of OMC entered a very dense set of governance arrangements. The existing institutions were well-endowed with political and administrative capabilities, but geared towards the practices of FP. It became established as a practice and recognised as working method, but the OMC template was blended with existing procedures, practised in lighter, ambiguous versions and much more at the margins than in the case of OMC in education. The handling of the OMC template in the research policy domain did not imply dismantling the "FP" routines, practices and understandings that existed among actors. Consequently the adoption of OMC template did not imply major change. This supports the observation that the construction of new governance architectures does not take place unencumbered by the frictions of existing institutional arrangements.

The education policy domain, on the other hand, erected new governance arrangements that entered an (incremental) process of institutionalization. The actors involved developed standard operating procedures for handling goals, benchmarks, indicators, reporting and monitoring, and eventually also for learning activities. A confluence of factors has affected this pattern of applying the OMC template. First, these processes could draw on the organizational capabilities of the sectoral DG as the existing practices were less dense than in EU research policy. Second. a dynamic of sectoral self-assertion and defence in the wider context of the EU and its Lisbon process, together with considerable, and collective performance crisis legitimated the animation of the OMC template and enlisted the political consensus for identifying common goals and benchmarks. In this sector the OMC became the new mainframe of European cooperation, and seemingly continues to be so for the next decade.

As for higher education, the new governance arrangements do not originate from the Lisbon strategy. Rather, they developed on the margins of the EU, within the Bologna process towards a European higher education area. Institutional practices in the domain in the pre-Lisbon/Bologna context were really weak (higher education did not exist as a sector *per se*, but rather as a part of education policy programmes). In this relative institutional emptiness, Bologna coordination template institutionalized quickly. The emergence of an autonomous follow-up structure, of specific policy tools and the development of a Bolognese language and working culture favoured the emergence of a distinct governance arena. This Bologna arena has become the nodal point for European higher education policy. Bologna has open the way for new ambitions and initiatives of the EU for higher education, yet the 'lisbonization' of the domain was limited: Bologna specific routines, practices and identities are now institutionalised.

What can we learn from the comparison of the three cases?

In spite of different procedures, different paths and degrees of institutionalization, clear communalities between the three cases can be identified, for instance a same way to emphasize challenges of the knowledge based economy; a same stronger legitimacy for using quantified objectives and quantification instruments; a common underlining of the need for « mutual policy learning »; a common diagnosis of performance crises (cf. language of urgency) etc. Yet what is most interesting lies in the contrasted trajectories of institutionalization for the education, research and higher education cases and how this confirms our initial hypothesis.

In the introduction, we stated that introducing new coordination devices takes place within an existing institutional order and that the way an organizational template leads to the institutionalization of a policy arena (or not) depends on how thickly institutionalized the existing formal arrangements and practices are. Contrary to Peters and Pierre's (2009), the relation between the existing institutional arrangement and the institutionalization of the new organizational template that we make is the following: the more elaborated and dominating the extant official structures in a given sector, the more likely that a new specific template will be absorbed by it, rather than spurring the creation of new ones. In other words, one can expect the speed and depth with which a coordination template is established to depend on the density of institutionalized practices in the policy domain, i.e. its institutional saturation. We also expect frictions and tensions to play an important role in such a way that the institutionalization of a new arrangement is more about finding a place in the existing order

than about fighting down the previous institutional arrangement. Both aspects of our hypothesis are confirmed by the comparison of the three cases.

First, we do observe a great importance of inter institutional tensions in the cases: the more tensions, the more the institutionalization of a new policy arena. In the case of higher education: competition between the Bologna process and the EU is not only a condition, it is a main constituent element of the process. We have shown how the relation of Bologna vis-à-vis the EU evolved from autonomy to vigilant cooperation, and how the Commission tried to catch up on a territory that occupied but the Bologna process with a limited success only. The tension and distinction with the EU is also of course an essential component of the Bologna institutional identity and working culture. For education, we have seen that the collision with the European Employment Strategy (with lifelong learning, education policy could be defined as an appendix to labour market policy) is key to understanding the institutionalization of the new template: OMC institutionalized as a framework for collective action; its introduction constituted an opportunity for both ministers and DG EAC to defend the education sector exist and survive at the European level. As for research, the situation was different: there was a superposition of governance devices within the sector (but there no such intersectoral, institutional collision. The competitiveness/innovation understanding was already well embedded and the place of research in the Lisbon strategy as core element of competitiveness undisputed. The normative and ideational underpinning of the existing EU research policy was not radically challenged by the introduction of OMC

Second, for the three cases analysed in this article, we observe a clear relation between the initial institutional setting and the institutionalization of the policy arena: the closer the initial institutional setting to saturation, the less the degree and speed of institutionalization of the policy arena. To this respect, our three cases represent a neat continuum between quasi institutional emptiness to quasi institutional saturation. In the case of higher education, the initial situation is close to emptiness. As we have shown, higher education was not completely absent from EU policies, but it was invisible because diluted between education and research. What we have observed in this context is a quick institutional crystallization of an unexpected intergovernmental project at the margins of the EU and then its relatively strong institutionalization as a new European governance arena. At the other extreme, in the research case, the initial setting was rather characterized by institutional saturation: OMC elements spread across many activities, and the new template has been more important for giving a label to procedures that were already there than for tailoring new political arena. The OMC process are lighter and more at the margins, and blended with existing procedures and used for a diverse set of purposes. We cannot conclude to the institutionalization of a new policy space in the case of EU education policy. The case is located in a middle position of this continuum. The initial situation was nor empty nor saturated, the initial institutional setting was loose and weak. Contrary to the higher education case, education was a constituted sector for European intervention, and different programmes did exist. The introduction of OMC has implied that a new political space has been added to the existing ones. But contrary to the research case, existing practices of coordination were traditionally less dense and institutionalised, and OMC education was not one tool among others in a tool box, but rather a magnet that attracted and enrolled other coordination processes and EU instruments. OMC now constitutes the centrepiece of European approach to education and a template for change, OMC education representing one package and one program. OMC practices can be recognised as new and autonomous space that did not exist prior to 2000.

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