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**Changing Governance/Changing Equality? Understanding the Politics of
Public-Private-Partnerships in Education in Europe**

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Abstract:

This paper seeks to instantiate the claims referred to by Dale (2002) that a new functional and scalar division of labour is emerging in education through an analysis of a key mechanism of governance proposed by the European Commission—the development of public-private partnerships (PPPs) as the means to develop the eEurope/eSociety/eLearning strategy. In the view of the Commission, a viable education strategy **must** involve the business sector if it is to respond to the demands of a knowledge economy. In this paper I argue that the Commission and key economic actors are engaged in promoting public-private-partnerships, discursively and materially, as a means to embed a particular configuration of interests in the development of a European education space to accelerate the European knowledge economy. The Commission's interest is in generating an economic and political space that can be governed legitimately. For key economic actors, like the large transnational firms IBM, Cisco and Nokia, among others, participating in the creation a European educational space means generating the conditions for their investment in the lucrative education market without the impediments of existing institutional arrangements. This claim is explored through, in the first instance an analysis of the eLearning policy documents, and in the second instance Career Space - an embryonic PPP in the eEurope/eSociety/eLearning strategy, and PPPs in education in England. It will be argued that the mechanisms for regulating private interests in the investment of education at the European level are not sufficiently developed to be able to protect social equality, despite the weight given to it by the EU. It is, therefore, unlikely that the eLearning strategy will generate outcomes that will contribute to the Lisbon goals of social cohesion.

Introduction

Those following European Union education policymaking are familiar with the strategic goals for Europe as set out in the 2000 Lisbon Council – *to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion* (para 5). We are also likely familiar with the Commission's strategy to generate structural reform and develop its policymaking capacity, as well as the development of actions around lifelong learning and ICT. These goals, strategies and actions are, in the words of the Commission, a European response to the challenges posed by globalisation, specifically the means to ensure the transition to a digital, knowledge-based economy and society (cf. Lisbon European Council, 2000; Designing Tomorrow's Education, 2001a). As a number of papers at this workshop have observed (cf. Dale, 2002; Fredriksson, 2002), these initiatives have, for the first time in the history of the EU, placed education and education opportunity high on the political agenda of the Union, with the specification of the Concrete Future Objectives for Education (2001b) and subsequent translations into actions around a series of indicators to benchmark quality (2001c). At the same time, the Commission has challenged Member States to review and renovate their national education and training systems to deliver "...high educational standards, and to embed a culture of lifelong learning to respond to evolving skills requirements" (eLearning Summit Taskforce, 2001: 2). As Dale observes in his paper, these developments represent "...a very significant sea change in the direction, form and purpose of the relationship between national education systems and the European level." More particularly, he argues, "...these changes may lead to the development of not only a separate and distinctive agendas at national and European levels, but to new functional and scalar divisions of the labour of coordination of these educational agendas" (op.Cit: 2).

This paper seeks to instantiate the claims referred to by Dale (2002) through an analysis of a key mechanism of governance proposed by the European Commission—the development of public-private partnerships (PPPs) as the means to develop the eSociety/eLearning strategy. In the view of the Commission, a viable education strategy **must** involve the business sector if it is to respond to the demands of a knowledge economy. In this paper I argue that in the eLearning strategy, public private partnerships are discursively promoted and embedded by the Commission and key economic actors. The consequence of this type of governance arrangement is that a particular configuration of interests are embedded in the development of a particular type of European education space to accelerate the emergence of European knowledge economy. This claim is explored, first, through a close reading of key eLearning policy documents, and second, through an analysis of an embryonic PPP within the eEurope eLearning strategy—Career Space, and selective models of PPPs in the education sector in England. It is suggested .the eEurope/eLearning strategy, with its rearrangement of relationships horizontally and vertically, produces social relations that are tension ridden and contradictory. In the final section of the paper I argue that the

mechanisms for regulating private interests in the investment of education at the European level are not sufficiently developed to be able to protect social equality, despite the weight given to it by the various EU bodies. It is therefore unlikely that the eLearning strategy will generate outcomes that contribute to the Lisbon goals of social cohesion.

The European eLearning Summit and PPPs

In the Summit Declaration held in La Hulpe Belgium on May 10th and 11th 2001, the eLearning Summit Taskforce laid out the challenges facing 'Europe' in meeting the goals of the Lisbon Council (2000); to become *the most competitive and knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion*. The purpose of the Summit was to take forward the European Commission's Action Plan presented by the Council of the European Union in March 2001 to the Member States:

- To develop the comprehensive integration of ICT into education and training
- To create flexible infrastructures that will make eLearning available to all
- To develop universal digital literacy
- To create a culture of lifelong learning
- To develop a high quality European educational content.

According to the Summit report, "to meet these goals, Europe needs to expand its educational opportunity." Educational opportunity is viewed as each individual having access to ICT and a means of developing digital literacy which will enable them to keep pace with economic, social and technological changes and thus ensure each person will be able to secure their own future through a process of lifelong learning.

The Summit Declaration identified a number of key challenges facing 'Europe'.¹ First, in order to meet the demands of the knowledge economy, there is a need to **accelerate** the process of change and innovation. However, the Summit Taskforce argues that attempts by Member States to generate these changes through **bringing teachers alongside** are failing to progress sufficiently rapidly to ensure the realization of the eLearning strategy. The Taskforce observes: "In many European countries the conditions needed for developing the role of the teacher and enhancing the status of the profession are simply not progressing at a pace that will allow pedagogical innovation to be spread rapidly so that it becomes a systemic part of the education system." (p. 2)

Second, according to the eLearning Summit Taskforce, eLearning requires immediate and substantial investments by governments and education and training bodies to generate universal digital literacy. Again, the Taskforce note that the necessary pace of change and the scale of investment in infrastructure, tools, services and content that will be required, "must be significantly increased"

¹ I take Rosamond's point, however, that the notion of 'Europe' is a social construction and one that is at the heart of the changing political economy of Europe.

(p.2). From there the solution for the Taskforce is an inevitable alternative: that in order to “...provide a **step change** in the implementation of innovative models of eLearning, the transformation of learning institutions, and the social perception of the role and status of educational practitioners” (p. 3), PPPs should be explored as offering considerable potential as a mechanism for delivering education and training into the future given the capital shortages Member States face in investing in the public sector. In the view of the Summit Taskforce: “Active private sector participation in eLearning and ongoing dialogue with the public sector is no longer a viable option but an urgent necessity” (p. 3) and “a precursor to preparing a **fresh stage in sustainable European cooperation**” (p. 3). The Taskforce Declaration concludes with the recommendation to the Commission that it should “explore the potential of public private partnerships”(p. 6).

In many respects, the Summit Taskforce report is a remarkable one. To begin, the Summit Taskforce, chaired by IBM Europe, was composed of five companies, IBM, Cisco, Nokia, SanomaWSOY, Smartforce. It was this group, too, who led the development of the Summit and who have had a significant role in subsequent developments including the development of Career Space, an initiative that I will look at in closer detail later in the paper. The Summit, hosted at the IBM International Training Centre, attracted over 350 participants from the public and the private sectors, including policymakers from national ministries of education and employment, senior officials from the European Commission, and representatives. At the Summit a further 25 companies (3Com, Apex Interactive, Apple, Auralog, British Telecom, Centra, CEPIUS, Ge.world, Transware, CompTIA, Courseware Factory, De Wilde CBT, Digital Brain, EDS, EdskillsNTO, European Education Partnership, Granada Media, Intel, Interact Group, Manpower, Marconi, Oracle, Sonera), then formed a Steering Group who agreed to take the conclusions and recommendations of the Summit forward. These transnational firms have huge interests in the IT world, including the provision of hardware, software and education and training. Second, the Summit Report observes that education, as we have known it, must be recast. According to the Taskforce, no longer will education be necessarily delivered via an education system and its teachers. Rather, educators’ roles, pedagogical practices and educational spaces will redefined within the framework of a partnership between the public and the private sectors.

If one were to read the report of the eLearning Summit Taskforce disconnected from other events and agendas within the EU, it might be easy to conclude that key interests within the private sector had hijacked the agenda of the eLearning Summit and inserted a seemingly tentative claim to the need for (exploring) public-private-partnerships as a means for creating capacity. However, as early as 1996, the Commission—in setting out the guidelines for future Community action 2000-6 in *Toward a Europe of Knowledge*, had linked the idea of knowledge and skills for a knowledge economy with the specification of a particular means for bring this about—the private sector. For example, in

paragraph 3 of the Report, under the section *The Parties Involved* – the Commission notes that “there needs to be a commitment to securing greater involvement of the business sector...the dividing line between the world of education and that of the information society is fluid and connections need to be established in both directions.”

The evidence suggests that by the mid-1990s the Commission had a preferred ideological position of as to how the European knowledge economy education space should be developed. This ideological preference, of the liberalization of markets and the conditions of trade, was later given structural weight with The Stability Pact, negotiated in Cologne in June 1999 as part of the Commission’s conditions for widening the Union to include South Eastern Europe (European Commission, 1999). Linked to the Treaty of Maastricht (1991) with its emphasis on the management of public spending, the Stability Pact (SP) commits EU members and acceding countries to principles of market liberalization (p. 3) while reigning in public expenditure:

- public spending must be in surplus – 1 to 2 1/2 per cent of GDP in 2002
- central government spending must be in balance
- overall central government spending must be lower than the growth of the overall budget (European Council, 2000);

While the Stability Pact is invoked as the reason for pressing Member States and acceding countries into consideration of private financing of previously publicly funded activity,² the Commission had made clear its ideological position and determined that its capacity to construct and govern a European education space in line with the 1991 The Treaty of Maastricht³ and the Commission’s economic strategy would require substantial support from the business sector.

Embedding a European Education Space – The Lisbon Council

Embedding education in a European space is no straightforward process, particularly as ideas like ‘European education’ are neither pre-existing nor commonsense categories with identifiable activities and institutions, and because the Commission has had limited desire (largely because of its commitment to the principle of subsidiarity) and limited capacity to govern that space in policy terms. However, within the context of creating a competitive European knowledge economy, creating a European education space with a particular mandate and capacity that could be governed was critical. The *Presidency Conclusions* of the European Council in Lisbon, 23-24 March 2000 can be seen as a watershed in

² See, for example, the controversy in the UK when English Chancellor of the Exchequer Gordon Brown announced in May 2001 that public spending in Health and Education would increase. The EU reminded England that it must meet the terms of the Stability Pact in terms of its public sector spending (see L. Elliot editor “Brown’s hands off warning to Brussels”, *The Guardian*, May 7th). .

³ Under the 1991 Maastricht Treaty, countries that wish to join the Euro must meet certain criteria which include keeping their budget deficits under 3% of GDP, keeping their budgets close to balance over the medium term, and keeping their government debt under 60 % of GDP (Ball, Healey and King, 2002: 58). .

this regard (Barcelona European Council, 2001). Here the Council specified a clear mandate for education and training, as well as the means for bringing this about. ICT was high on the agenda. According to the Council, investments in ICT infrastructure and digital literacy were critical to developing the services sector and to overcoming the widening skills gap in information technology. The means to do this was along partnership lines.

The Council identifies two kinds of partnership. One kind of partnership would be multi-partners establishing multi-purposed education centers (paragraph 26). This type of partnership would open up the previously closed world of provision to a range of new providers, along with those traditionally in the education sector, as well as being a site that was accessible to different types of (lifelong) learners. A second kind of partnership referred to the means through which the new European education space was to be achieved. Under the heading, *Mobilising the Necessary Means* (paragraph 41), the Council states that “Achieving the new strategic goal will rely primarily on the private sector, as well as on public-private partnerships. It will depend on mobilizing the resources available on the markets as well as on efforts by Member States. The Union’s role is to act as a catalyst in this process, by establishing an effective framework for mobilizing all available resources for the transition to the knowledge based economy and by adding its own contribution to this effort under existing Community policies which respecting Agenda 2000.”

In 2001 the European Commission, in the *European Report on the Quality of School Education*, laid down a framework for guiding action and mobilizing resources – 16 *Quality Indicators* for catalyzing change in the direction envisaged by the Commission. In the area of ICT the key indicator was the “number of students per computer” – a benchmark according to the Commission that would “...provide an introduction to policy discussion by raising a number of questions about the future place, purpose and practice of ICT in European schools” (p. 7) and because ICT is already having a far reaching effect on people’s lives and pupils learning, with, for example, 40% of all UK market shares in ICT” (ibid). While in reality the “number of students per computer” benchmark of ‘quality’ tells us little about the conditions of access⁴ for pupils in schools, it would seem that its presence as a benchmark is to register the centrality of ICT in the creation of a European education space as part of the European knowledge economy. As Shore puts it, while Euro-statistics are themselves indices of opinion based upon little more than aggregated data, they:

...are not only powerful political instruments for creating a knowable, quantifiable and hence more tangible and governable ‘European population’ and ‘European space’: rather, they are also powerful moulders

⁴ In their benchmarking report *European Youth in the Digital Age* (November, 2001) based on Eurobarometer surveys carried out in 2001, the Commission notes that the level of computer equipment in EU schools is relatively high – with on average 12 off-line computers per pupil. However it adds that there are vast differences between EU member states, varying from 3 to 25 (p. 2).

of consciousness that furnish the meta-classifications within which identities and subjectivities are formed.

The European Commission Report also raised questions about the costs/benefits of alternative forms of provision; for example, how much learning can be independent, teacher led, peer group led, or, home school or community based (p. 7). Like previous Commission reports, the European Report also argues: “The information explosion demands fundamental rethinking of traditional conceptions of knowledge, its transmission, delivery by teachers and acquisition by students. ... “All of these areas of knowledge and skills present major challenges to the teaching profession ... Change requires rethinking, reappraisal, reevaluation of accepted practices, challenging what has always been done and accepted. Change often requires *restructuring and re-culturing of organizations*. It poses new demands on hierarchies, status and relationships” (my emphases, p. 9).

The Commission Report turns to the difficult question of resources. It suggests that requests for more resources as a typical response and adds: ‘more’ is not feasible, especially when governments are faced with providing for an increased number of learners in education settings for a longer period of time. In essence, the Report argues that the resource challenge has to be looked at in a different way particularly as “...young people see school structures, curricula and the learning environment” as irrelevant to their lives.

Like previous declarations and reports the Commission identifies the threats to the development of the knowledge economy strategy as lying in both the forces (teachers) and the means (access to computing) of production. That is, teachers lack skills and resist using ICT as they see it as a threat to their jobs (p. 24); the ratio of pupils per computer is still very uneven (p. 52), and in many cases computers in schools are simply not sufficiently up to date to enable them to access programmes that have been developed (p. 53). A preferred solution follows: the flexible knowledge economy means provision should be less institutionalized with individuals assembling their own building blocks of knowledge and qualifications in informal ways and in new contexts (p. 10). The Report observes: “All member states are realizing that the future brings a monumental challenge to traditional structures of education institutions. This means finding ways of educating people beyond school and outside the classroom, helping them to acquire the skills and competencies that will make them less vulnerable in the global economy” (p. 11). The question then posed is: *How would it be possible to create partnership with institutions or organizations which could help to increase the availability of computers in schools? How can schools be guaranteed a real long-term benefit from such an approach?*

Following the Council Resolution on eLearning in July 2001 (Council of the European Union, 2001/C 204/02), an Interim Report—*eLearning: Designing Tomorrow’s Schools*—was released by the European Commission in February 2002 which sought to “lay the foundations for concrete and sustainable actions”

(p. 2) to meet the Commission's knowledge economy goals with an ICT and digital literacy strategy. With enhancing quality and improving access constantly narrated as the keystones for building the European knowledge society, the report then proceeds to lay out a set of preferred options for what quality and access might mean; flexible and virtual universities, multi-purpose places for learning, the development of an ICT Curricula for the 21st Century, public private partnerships. Again the issue of resources and the means through which resources might be made available is considered: "This need is ever more pressing in a more difficult economic environment" (p. 11) while "Public-Private Partnerships need to be explored" (ibid). At the same time, that this European space is more than a 'learning' space' in a more traditional sense becomes evident at several points in the Report. While recognizing the recent downturn in the ICT sector and consolidations in the market for e-learning products, the Report observes: "The global market for eLearning and services is expected to grow strongly in the forthcoming years, providing both a challenge and an opportunity to European education systems and to related economic sectors such as multimedia publishing" (p. 5). The Report concludes with: "...it is clear that the eLearning initiative is playing an important role in helping Europe to exploit the use of ICT for education sand training, and to realize its potential to be a world leader in learning products and services, and in terms of successfully sharing resources and know-how in education and training".

A European Knowledge Economy Education Space: Scale and the Politics of Territorialisation

Before moving to examine the Commission's persistent privileging of public private partnerships as a means through which the European knowledge economy education space is to be realised and the consequences of this for social equality and cohesion, I want to consider the social and political processes at work in creating this territory. In particular, I want to draw upon the work of the critical geographers and their analysis of space, scale and territorialisation, as well as recent work on the idea of 'Europe' and the 'European economy' as a social imaginary. These ways of thinking about the active construction of space and territory at a supranational scale enable us to see how a complex and particular regime of economic governance is developed as part of an embryonic Euro-polity.

As Shore (2000) and Rosamond (2002) point out, categories such as 'the European economy' and 'European competitiveness' are not self-evident entities. Rather, they are social constructions that are worked at discursively and materially to embed a set of social relations at a new scale—the supranational. This way of thinking about space and scale (Europe versus National States) and the identities of those who inhabit that space (such as the competitive European, an educated European), owes much to the work of writers like Lefebvre (1991), Harvey (1982, 1999), Smith (1993) and Brenner (1998, 1999). These writers argue that human activities are located on multiple territories and that the

geography of a territory, its nature and meanings, is both produced and reproduced. Territories, thus, can be viewed as spatial configurations and treated as an active moment within the overall temporal dynamic of accumulation and social reproduction (Harvey, 1999). In other words, and as we have argued elsewhere in relation to the World Trade Organisation—a powerful agent engaged in the construction of a ‘global’ scale of governance—spaces and their territories, like the ‘global’ or the ‘national’, “...are not neutral containers; they are themselves constructed and reconstructed, spaces that are mapped as places which are, on the one hand, governed and, on the other, lived in and through social relationships and social relations” (Robertson, Bonal and Dale, 2002). Similarly, Rosamond (2002), in an analysis of the construction of a competitive Europe, argues that ‘imagining the European economy’ is a rhetorical strategy as part of a more complex process of constructing a regime of economic governance being developed around the European Union. Rosamond shows how an ‘idea’ like ‘competitiveness’ can become “sedimented and ‘banal’ in the sense of becoming commonsensical and barely discussed” (op. Cit: 158), in the process constructing identities and subjectivities.

In the same way, we can see how the constant narration of ideas like a ‘European education space’, a ‘competitive and knowledge based economy’ and ‘public private partnerships’, as well as the institutions engaged with their narration, come to be viewed as commonsense ideas at a scale that sits beyond the national and the local. We can also see the way these ideas are scaffolded into existence and sedimented into institutions and operative networks as material practices through additional policy manoeuvres such as benchmarking. Finally we can see how these strategies privilege particular kinds of interests and institutional arrangements (as in the eLearning Summit Taskforce and the subsequent development of *Career Space*) and embed a particular kind of framework for action, a particular type of commonsense. In Robert Cox’s (1996: 97) view, a framework for action or historical structure is “...a particular combination of thought patterns, material conditions, and human institutions which has certain coherence among its elements. These structures do not determine people’s actions in any mechanical sense but constitute the context of habits, pressures, expectations and constraints within which action takes place”. Crucially, this process is co-constitutive. That is, the construction of space as a particular type of territory, shaped by particular types of ideas, is both the object of and the outcome of struggles between agents that operate at different scales.

In the case that we are concerned with, the creation of the European knowledge economy education space, this means engaging in a set of strategic manoeuvres that legitimates the right of a set of supranational institutions (European Commission, Council of Europe, Organisation for Economic and Cooperative Development) and transnational firms operating at a supranational scale, to create and govern this space. The discursive strategy of the Commission, through these various Reports, is to draw on common sense discourses of globalisation to elaborate upon the external threats while promoting the

uniqueness of the European space. It thus legitimizes policymaking in this area and the means for bringing this about. In relation to **threats**, the Commission and key economic actors point to

- (i) the inability of national states to generate the level of investment in ICT and education required to keep up to date,
- (ii) the entrenched interests of teachers in national education systems thus making rapid progress difficult, and
- (iii) the difficulties posed by changes in the governance of education systems (devolution) thus limiting the capacity nation states to direct education systems and ensure equity of access.

With regard to **uniqueness**, the Commission argues that it is only at the European level that the scale and pace of investment is possible. In relation to **means**, the Commission is insistent that the private sector must be involved in the development of education policy and provision. The identification of imperatives means Commission actors are "...then able to offer powerful cases for the development of European-level solutions, delivered through European-level policy instruments and institutions"(Rosamond, 2002: 162). He further observes:

Such patterns of rhetorical practice are perhaps particular to the Commission and may indeed be part and parcel of the distinctive policymaking dynamics of the EU where supranational entrepreneurs produce analyses of possibilities, ongoing deliberation and interaction. This is especially true of the Commission which, as Thomas Christiansen notes, has developed over time sophisticated strategies for the achievement of its institutional purpose: the expansion of its policy competence (ibid).

Key economic actors like the large transnational firms IBM, Cisco and Nokia, among others, have been actively participating in the creation a European educational space through generating the conditions for their ongoing and future investment in the lucrative education market without the impediments of existing institutional arrangements, problems of state regulation and pressure from civil society about the role of large private for profit firms in the education sector.⁵ For the EC to foray into education and training on such an unprecedented scale, unhindered by the local and national politics of the Member States, it must develop its own system of innovation enabling it to realize a 'quantum shift' in the capacity to bring this about. This means developing the means to go beyond the establishment of objectives and benchmarks. It means drawing upon a set of resources made available through the private sector to provide a particular kind of education that is not dependent upon place but, rather, uses new technologies to operate across boundaries. The construction this knowledge economy education space carries all of the hallmarks of the emerging EU economic space,

⁵ It should be noted that these developments are taking place at the same time that education is increasingly regarded as a site of investment and a means of potential profit in the global economy (see Heyneman, 2001; Robertson, Bonal and Dale, 2002).

which, as Rosamond observes, is quite distinctive: “It amounts to a quite particular form of economic internationalisation involving the “...freeing of trade and significant deregulation, combined with new rule setting, the development of common policies, the transfer of power to central institutions and the development of redistributive mechanisms” (2002: 162). However, the question to be posed, is whether the EC has sufficient regulatory apparatus in place, aside from crude measures of quality like ‘the number of computers per pupil’, to ensure that social equality is not undermined when the education space is exposed to private for profit interests?

PPPs – Inserting ‘Private’ Interests into the Education Space

The tendency I have been tracing in the active construction of a European knowledge economy education space is the idea that education and training should be delivered in partnership with the private sector. This position has considerable resonance with Third Way or ‘Neue Mitte’ politics which now characterizes much of the restructuring or modernization programmes taking place across Europe, including Germany, Spain, Greece (see Giddens, 2001; Mouzelis, 2001). A fundamental idea is that the state should not dominate the provision of public services; rather a range of patterns that include the market and civil society should emerge that enables consumer choice and market competition though, as Giddens argues (2001: 6), the state needs to regulate and intervene in both to ensure both quality and social equality. The appeal of the idea of partnership for national governments committed to neo-liberal policies is that it is a powerful discourse of inclusion and collaboration. In talking about the partnership politics in the UK under Blair, Newman argues that it was Labour’s attempt to forge a consensual style of politics.” It signified “...an harmonious, non-conflict-based form of relationship. In particular the language of partnership was adopted in place of the language of competition to re-label contractual or outsourcing arrangements between the public and the private sectors” (Newman, 2001: 166).

For the European Commission, the idea of partnership has a number of purposes; it enables considerable leverage over a particular type of capacity in the ICT field, the ability to draw upon financial resources/expertise to enhance its territorializing agendas in relation to Member States while at the same time suggesting a continuation of the Commission’s partnership strategy with Member States (see Rodrigues and Stoer, 2001). In the process, the idea of partnership while concealing the extent to which the Commission has sought to be an environment maker rather than an environment taker (Rosamond, 2002: 163) in key economic and social policy areas.

The insertion of private interests into the European education space is potentially problematic, particularly if we are talking about—as in the case of the ICT strategy—the introduction of **private-for profit** interests in the partnership. In order to think through this in more detail, it is instructive to look at a number of

examples of PPPs. In the EU, the most high profile PPP is the development of 'Career-Space' (see www.career-space.com). Career Space is a consortium of major Information and Communications Technology Companies—BT, Cisco Systems, IBM Europe, Microsoft, Intel, Nokia Nortel Networks, Philips Semiconductors, Siemens AG, Telefonía S.A and Thales – plus the European Information and Communications Technology Industry Association. Career Space is conceptualized as an alternative site that, it proposes, is critical to helping develop the knowledge economy (it argues that ICT accounts of more than 6.3% of GDP). The purpose of Career Space is

To develop a framework for students, education institutions and governments that describe the roles, skills and competencies required by the ICT industry in Europe. The first step has been to develop generic skills profiles relevant to key jobs in ICT and to create a dedicated website (www.career-space.com) and use other communication tools to make this information widely available. The generic skills profiles described in this document cover the main job areas for which the ICT industry is experiencing skills shortages. These core profiles describe the jobs, setting out the vision, role and lifestyle associated with them. The specific technology areas and tasks associated with each job are also outlined, as well as the level of behavioural and technical skills required to carry out the profiled jobs (see www.career-space.com).

The large transnational ICT firms' interest in creating an ICT curriculum framework that gives substance to and which operates in a virtual European education and training space is tied to its own need to generate profits and to shape the conditions that give rise to profitability. The curriculum, however, as Apple (1982) reminded us more than two decades ago in his work on teachers and texts and the logic of curricular control, is no neutral space. Rather, the curriculum is a particular set of discourses, shaped by particular sets of ideas about the world and proper social relationships.

The question of the nature of private sector interests in PPPs has emerged in England—especially as Labour has relentlessly (and in the face of considerable public opposition – see Freedland, 2002) to use PPPs in key public sector areas of expenditure like health, education and transport.⁶ An early model of PPPs in the education sector is City Technology Colleges (CTCs); an individual, a company or an organization acts as a sponsor and sets up a charitable foundation to run a school on a not-for profit basis.⁷ The sponsor contributes to

⁶ The Labour Party –through its policy 'think-tank' the Institute for Public Policy Research, commissioned a report on public private partnerships. The report Building Better Partnerships: The Final report of the Commission on Public Private Partnerships, 2001. The report remains committed to PPPs, though recognizes some of the shortcomings in particular public good sectors, like health and education.

⁷ It is important to point out though that the idea of 'partnership' is not a new feature of public policy and practice in England. Through the late 1980s and early 1990s, though the form and approach has varied considerably, the Conservative government had introduced public/private partnerships as a means of

the capital costs of the school, they may well own the land, and are expected to contribute to the ongoing capital costs for the school. CTCs are pedagogical spaces: where the curriculum is more keenly oriented toward the world of 'business', teachers' labour contract is different to other teachers employed in the schooling system (longer hours, individual contracts, and the traditional hierarchy of central, Local Education Authority, local school is replaced with a governance structure run by the 'private sector' interests in the school. This has not, in the main been a successful PPP strategy, largely as it is based upon a not-for profit model. This model has deterred the private sector from investing in this initiative; instead, the government has ended up providing the funds itself while losing considerable control over the governance of the school.

Later versions of PPPs within the schooling sector have emerged under the Private Finance Initiative (PFI) (see Robertson, 2002 for an extended analysis of PPPs in England). The immediate perceived benefit of PFIs to the government is that services can be provided on an 'off-balance sheet' basis. This practice, in theory, enables governments to avoid public sector controls—some of which as discussed earlier are imposed at the supranational level, while relocating the risks of investment with the private sector.⁸ However, as Ball et al (2002) show, while the case made for introducing PFIs was to ensure means other than public sector borrowing should be found to finance worthwhile public sector investments (particularly capital investments in infrastructure), an analysis over the long run shows this is simply not the effect. Rather, Ball and his colleagues show that public sector borrowing falls by the full amount in the first year and after that the fall disappears over time. The upshot of this is that PFIs permit less and less extra investment as time goes by. For the state to increase levels of funding, they then must do it through higher taxes.

Education Action Zones (EAZs) are the most visible example of PPPs within education currently. The model being pursued in EAZs is largely not-for profit, though some activities within the zone, like ICT investments, operate under the for-profit model through the PFI. Again, evidence suggests that where the model of PPPs is not-for profit, there has been little significant investment of private funds..⁹ Further, Hallgarten and Watling (2000: 26-27), in a publication put out

unlocking the dominance of public sector power, a strategy not dissimilar to the way in which the EC is seeking to unlock the dominance of the nationally-located institutional fix in education.

⁸ If public sector bodies have to pay for assets, accounting rules say the full costs must be added to government expenditure in the year of implementation. Private financing, however, ostensibly provides an alternate means for the state of raising capital for investment in the public sector side-stepping political controls and the political damage associated with it.

⁹ Established in 1999 in disadvantaged inner city areas to respond to the problem of 'failing schools', around 10-12 schools formed to make up a zone intended to 'raise standards and link education innovations to wider social initiatives. Notable is that the zone had to raise funds from the business sector to be matched by government; it was governed by a local forum hence avoiding the Local Education Authority, the focus in the curriculum was on ICT as a resource for learning, and new rules for invoked for employing teachers and administrative staff.

by the Institute for Public Policy Research¹⁰ show that where the private sector have invested, there is an alarming level of opaqueness and lack of accountability.

PPPs in education raise questions about the nature of private interests. These interests might be directed toward (i) profit-making, (ii) shaping the behaviour of young people and families, or (iii) managing the image of the firm as a responsible corporate citizen within the community. In relation to the first of these, *profit*, analysts point to national and international companies making investments in ICT in schools (hardware and software) with a major interest in securing their interests in the competitive ICT market. Alternatively, companies like Jarvis, Cambridge Education Associates, the Council for British Teachers or Arthur Anderson and Ernst and Young have secured PPPs to variously manage or build schools, or manage Local Education Authorities, all with a view to making a profit (Monbiot, 2000). In each of these cases, profits are central. As can be seen in systems that were previously publicly-owned, such as transport, profit-making and delivery of high quality services to the wider public are often be in conflict (Pollock, Shaoul, Rowland and Player, 2001). While it is argued that *for-profit* contracts can be set out with sufficient clarity and detail to ensure the provision of quality and accountable services, to date there have not been the mechanisms of public accountability for services delivered by private companies to ensure that this is actually the case.

Changing Governance, Changing Equality?

So far our concerns have been with the question of the nature of the private sector's interest in PPPs in education and the capacity of state's to regulate those partnerships sufficiently to ensure transparency and public accountability. However, ideas like 'quality', 'transparency' and 'accountability' operate within a given framework of action. If we take a given a structure or framework for granted, our actions are to make things more or less better, rather than question the overall framework. The EC's education policymaking in ICT operates within this framework. Investments in ICT infrastructure, education and training are directed at transforming both the forces and the means of production (Harvey, 1999: 101). Steeck (1999: 2) argues that "It is this dialectic that, in the face of new technologies, expanded markets and reorganized companies, forces public money to search for a new balance between protection and risk, security and opportunity, collective solidarity and individual responsibility, public authority and private exchange. The dominant logic in the European education space is *supply side egalitarianism* which is oriented toward equal marketability. Streeck also suggests that large scale reliance on private investment for infra-structural purposes will not, in the long run, bring about a level of inequality that is incompatible with supply-side egalitarianism. This is presumably as there will be a cost imposed on the 'consumer' in the form of fees unless the Commission is able to develop mechanisms of redistribution or other forms of regulation. For

¹⁰ The Labour Party think tank sympathetic to PPPs.

Streeck, Third Way social democracy seems to become indistinguishable from an activist liberalism that pursues social justice through intervention in the distribution, not of market outcomes, but of the capacities for successful market participation (op. Cit: 3). In this set of arrangement, education loses its public good function. As a private good acquired to ensure equal marketability, education in the European space will have limited capacity to contribute to societal cohesion.

It is difficult to see how ideas like partnership can operate with any sense of symmetry of power between the public and the private, especially when it involves powerful companies like Apple, IBM and Cisco systems, in short ICT versions of media owner Rupert Murdoch. As Mouzelis (2001: 447) observes in his comments on Gidden's proposed Third Way; a characteristic of late modern societies is that economic interests have penetrated the cultural realm and that this process has reached unprecedented dimensions. He calls for a regulatory approach that would democratize cultural production by bringing into the sphere of 'civil society' where it would function neither on profit or state/party logic (Mouzelis, 2001: 447-9). If, not, he says, we are drifting from a market economy to a market society, and one that needs to be reversed. However, not only will it be increasingly problematic to reverse this policy tendency given the protections afforded private investors under the terms of the WTO/GATS agreements (see Robertson, Bonal and Dale, 2002), but it assumes a national focus in its analysis. The real challenge such scalar shifts present us with and evident in the case that I have been analyzing here is that these are political manoeuvres by political and economic actors to conceal or reveal particular types of politics. Not only is it difficult to contest what is increasingly viewed as a commonsense solution to the challenges of globalisation, but the frameworks which structure the social relations of the European education space are (intentionally) less visible in the political arenas of everyday life. As a consequence, the rescaled functional division of labour and the creation of a European education space is less accessible to challenge.

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