

The London School of Economics and Political Science

Constructing the ‘Europe of Knowledge’?

**The role of ideas in the transformations of
European Education Policy (1973-2010)**

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Abstract

Since the launch of the Lisbon strategy in 2000, the European Union has significantly transformed its education policy under the umbrella notion of the ‘knowledge economy’. In particular, the dominant policy discourse links education to economic growth with the predominance of education as a pro-market policy over education as a policy aimed at social inclusion. In addition, the European Commission performs a more cognitive, normative and regulative role through the governance mode of the Open Method of Coordination and its monitoring mechanisms such as performance indicators and benchmarking. Although these changes have been acknowledged by the literature, the tendency of structural or institutional accounts has been to take them for granted or as inevitable. The purpose of this thesis is to provide a theoretically and empirically based analysis of the policy process of these transformations. By drawing upon ideational theories and by employing process tracing over a time frame of more than three decades, the thesis builds a three-stage theoretical argument to explore in a structured fashion how the consensus around specific ideas about the goals of European education policy was formed, which actors advocated it, and why it prevailed. The empirical material draws on original and confidential archival sources, primary sources, official EU documents, and few in-depth elite interviews. The findings show how a specific problem definition of education allowed the European Commission to strategically construct a specific education agenda around the notion of the knowledge economy, which also reflected the preferences of powerful economic actors within the European Union. However, the findings also suggest that the polysemantic concept of the idea of knowledge economy itself acted as *coalition magnet* by aggregating actors with diverging interests as well as reinforcing the power and interests of the actors advocating this idea. By looking at the political-economic causes of the transformations of education, this thesis adds new knowledge to the current EU education policy literature. In addition, the thesis contributes to the current debates on the role of ideas in shaping political outcomes.

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List of abbreviations

AE – Agence Europe

AEDE – European Association of Teachers

AEGEE - Association des Etats Généraux des Etudiants de l'Europe/ European Students' Forum

CEC – Commission of the European Communities

CEDEFOP – European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Centre Européen pour le développement de la formation professionnelle)

CEEP – European Centre of Public Enterprises

CES – Economic and Social Committee

CRELL – Centre for Research on Education and Lifelong Learning

COMETT – Community programme for Training in New Technologies and Cooperation between Universities and Industry

COR – Committee of the Regions

DG – Directorate-General

EACEA – Executive Agency for Education and Culture

EC – European Commission

ECU – European Currency Unit

ECTS – European Credit Transfer System

ECVET – European Credit Transfer System for Vocational Education and Training

EHEA - European Higher Education Area

EQAVET - European quality assurance in Vocational Education and Training

EQF – European Qualifications Framework

ERASMUS – European Community Action Scheme for the mobility of university students

ERT – European Round Table of Industrialists

ESF – European Social Fund

ESPRIT – European Strategic Programme for Research and Development in information technology

ETUC – European Trade Union Confederation

ETUCE – European Trade Union Committee for Education

EU – European Union

HAEU – Historical Archives of the European Union

IRDAC – Industrial Research and Development Advisory Committee

OECD – Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

OMC – Open Method of Coordination

PLAs - Peer Learning Activities

TEMPUS – Trans-European Mobility Scheme for University Studies

UK – United Kingdom

UNESCO – United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization

UNICE – Union of Industrial and Employers’ Confederation of Europe

US – United States

VET – Vocational education and training

YFEC – Youth Forum of the European Communities

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“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of light, it was the season of darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to heaven, we were all going direct the other way.” (Charles Dickens, *A Tale of Two Cities*, 1859).

I always thought that the beauty of these opening lines was in clearly capturing the meaning of the contradictions. Although for Dickens these contradictions represented London and Paris in the turmoil of the French Revolution, I also found the same contradictions on my PhD journey. Each of these lines is linked to a specific moment of this journey, which for me has been a little revolution both intellectually and in my daily life.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

1.1 The puzzle of the transformations of European education policy

After existing as a strict intergovernmental policy domain since the European Economic Community was established by the Treaty of Rome in 1957, European education policy¹ has been significantly transformed since the year 2000. The link between education and economic growth, and the emergence of a “European educational space”—based on transnational networks, rules and institutionalised practices—are the two main components of these transformations (Lawn, 2003; Gornitzka, 2007: 176).

Since the launch of the Lisbon Strategy in 2000 and its ambitious goal to make the EU “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world”, the dominant policy discourse links education to economic growth, with the predominance of pro-market purposes over other purposes, such as education for social inclusion or personal development (Ertl, 2006; Walkenhorst, 2008). Goals and concepts such as quality in education, employability, lifelong learning, and business cooperation dominate the policy agenda, suggesting a more supply-side orientation of education policy and the framing of education as a “supplementary market and workforce tool” (Walkenhorst, 2008: 569).

¹ For the purposes of this thesis, European education policy broadly refers to any level of education, with the term ‘policy’ loosely defined as governmental activity in one field (e.g. purposes, decisions, proposals, programmes, outputs).

Lisbon has also set in motion a process of coordination of Member States' education systems, based on the setting of common objectives to be achieved through benchmarks and indicators; the achievement of these common objectives is monitored by the European Commission² under the policy mode of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) formally adopted in 2001 and implemented since 2002 through a dense transnational network of experts and representatives from national ministries (Gornitzka, 2005). The establishment of policy initiatives such as the Bologna process (1999) for higher education and the Copenhagen process (2002) for vocational education and training have further expanded the role of the European Commission in the formulation of a cognitive, normative and regulative 'model' of European education policy (Jakobi et al., 2010; Martens et al., 2010). Education is now one of the main pillars of the 'Europe 2020 Strategy' launched in 2009 and, within the governance architecture of the European Semester, the European Commission provides country recommendations to Member States on their education and training systems with education fully embedded into European economic policies.

In a nutshell, we observe a complete redesigning of European education policy in terms of what to do, how to do it and who is in charge. As noted by Capano and Piattoni, Lisbon marked "a dramatic departure from a consolidated tradition. What was once to be avoided has become something to be actively pursued" (Capano and Piattoni, 2011: 584). Overall, the transformations that have occurred since the Lisbon Strategy suggest that we can ascertain a shift in European education policy from three dimensions:

² Hereinafter referred to as the European Commission or the Commission.

1. The interpretation of education as a solution to meet the needs of the knowledge economy and the link between education and the economy;
2. Goals and purposes of education, focusing attention on the economic purposes over other purposes of European education policy;
3. Institutionalization of the policy (principles, instruments, venues, actors), which shifted the responsibility of the European Commission from *cooperation* to *coordination* of the education policy of Member States.

These dimensions of change raise several puzzling questions not yet answered in full by the existing literature. A first empirical puzzle concerns the institutional responsibility of the European Commission in education. More specifically, *why did the European Commission manage to increase its role in education policy at a given point in time (namely, since the 2000s), and why was it able to do so despite the lack of an explicit legal competence for education?* Indeed, Articles 165 and 166³ of the Treaty of Lisbon (2007) still strictly delimit the competences of the European Union in education policy by assigning the EU a “supporting and complementing role in educational matters”.

Second, as it will become clearer in the empirical chapters, the transformation of European education policy is also puzzling from the point of view of its policy goals. Since 1975, the year when it can be ascertained that a more active role of the Community in education began, the agenda of this policy field has always oscillated between several dimensions of education. Economic concerns were present but not predominant. Education was also linked to promoting a better inclusion of

³ Previously, Articles 126 and 127 in the Treaty of Maastricht (1992) and renumbered as Articles 149 and 150 in the Treaty of Amsterdam (see also Table 1.1 at the end of this chapter)

disadvantaged groups (such as those with disabilities, migrants' children, and women) and to build European political identity. *Why then, at a given point in time, did the idea of education as a tool to promote European competitiveness and economic growth prevail over other equally plausible purposes?*

Finally, the transformations of European education policy raise a third theoretical puzzle in terms of their understanding for the two mainstream theories of European integration. Indeed, these transformations cannot be easily justified by supranationalist or liberal intergovernmentalist approaches.

Supranationalist approaches, which explain integration as a path-dependent pathway led by technocratic imperatives and spill-over effects (Stone Sweet and Sandholtz, 1998), cannot explain why the developments of the European education agenda have taken place without any formal change in the Treaty, with the EU having limited competence in supporting and supplementing Member States' actions. Indeed, although the idea of European cooperation in education has a long history dating back to the 1960s (see also Corbett, 2005), it has always been a history of failure in practice, with the European Commission facing considerable resistance from Member States to cooperate in this policy field. As suggested by Lawn, "education was not one of the main pillars of policy. Education was silent, a silence which recognised its lack of significance in the creation of the Union" (Lawn, 2006: 274). Therefore, how the European Commission managed only after the 2000s to overcome the long-standing historical reluctance of Member States to cede any power in this sensitive policy field without any legal change in the Treaty is an issue that requires further clarification.

Moreover, these changes did not arise from Member States' initiative, as a liberal intergovernmentalist explanation would posit (Moravcsik, 1993; 1998). Education has

always been considered to be a strong domestic competence, closely linked to nation-building processes, and has always been perceived as an area of national diversity (de Wit and Verhoeven, 2001; Bartolini, 2005). Education is also a salient issue for policymakers and public opinion. As Beukel observes, “the very notion of ‘Europeanization of education’ causes concern in most countries in Europe, one reason being that it is equated with homogenization of the educational system that could imply a loss of national identity” (Beukel, 2001: 126). In this respect, education is a prominent issue in the eyes of the electorate. For instance, the majority of European citizens believe that education policies should be decided only within Member States. According to the Eurobarometer survey for the period 1989–2010, a constant percentage of around 63% of European citizens say that education policy should be decided at a national level, while only around 34% say that it should be decided jointly at national and European levels. Significantly, when asked whether education should be decided mainly at an EU level, the percentage of citizens agreeing with this is equal to 0% (see also Novoa and deJong-Lambert, 2003). At the same time, the developments observed in the substantive content of the policy contrast with Europe’s different models of welfare; as also demonstrated elsewhere, among EU Member States, terms such as ‘economic competitiveness’ are highly contested with a variety of interpretations (Jessop, 2002; Van Apeldoorn, 2003; Levitas, 2005; Schierup et al., 2006; Hay, 2007).

In all these respects, given that education is not only closely linked to national identity and long-standing traditions of different cultural and social purposes but is also attractive in terms of electoral votes, we should not expect Member States to agree on a coordinated approach to education based on common pro-market goals to be achieved through benchmarking and indicators. Perhaps most importantly, and as will be discussed in the four empirical chapters, if these changes were the result of a rational

outcome of the bargaining process among Member States trying to maximize their utility, the Member States themselves would not have been opposed to them at each step of this process.

To summarize, although both supranationalist and liberal intergovernmentalist approaches can be helpful in analysing policy areas where the transfer of competences is more straightforward (such as commercial policy, competition, trade and monetary policy), they are less equipped to elucidate shifts of competences in those policy areas, such as education, characterized by shared competences, strong national roots and institutional complexity.

Building from these puzzles, the empirical research question that this study addresses is as follows:

What explains the (development and change in) policy orientation of European education policy and what are its consequences?

Accounting for this shift is the task of this thesis; in doing so, the aim is to provide a theoretically and empirically based analysis of the policy process of these transformations. In all these respects, it is argued that only an ideational perspective – namely a perspective where specific cognitions guide actors' responses to policy choices (Jacobs, 2015 : 43) - can provide a satisfactory explanation for these puzzles. Before proposing the ideational argument of the study, the next section discusses in more detail how the existing literature has attempted to examine the drivers and causes of the transformations of European education policy.

1.2 Existing theoretical approaches to explain the puzzle

Several scholars have emphasised the supranational role of the European Commission as a key actor in European education policy (Field, 1997; Hingel, 2001; Trondal, 2002; Ertl, 2003; Dehmel, 2006; Keeling, 2006; Beerkens, 2008; Souto Otero et al., 2008). In this respect, Souto Otero and colleagues, in addressing the mechanisms by which the Commission has advanced in the field of education since the Lisbon Strategy, note how “the Commission has—through previous preparation and framing work and then through the use of the Open Method of Coordination—been very successful in driving initiatives in areas where it previously faced strong opposition and blockages from Member States” (Souto-Otero et al., 2008: 244). With reference to the process through which the European Commission has advanced its agenda, Keeling has focused on the Commission’s higher education discourse within the Lisbon Strategy and the Bologna process, pointing out how the Commission has been an “indispensable player” in promoting a discourse that emphasises growth and employability (Keeling, 2006: 208).

Similarly, Warleigh-Lack and Drachenberg, by employing participatory observation and semi-structured interviews, have examined how the soft policy mode of the Open Method of Coordination has enabled the European Commission to gain policy capacity without a formal delegation of Member States by influencing the content of national policy agendas for education on educational levels from primary school to higher education (Warleigh-Lack and Drachenberg, 2011: 1008). In this way, they borrow the neo-functionalist concept of spill-over, by arguing that the OMC contributed to socialisation and increased cooperation. By analysing the increase in cross-border activities among universities, faculties and students in higher education, Beerkens has highlighted the ability of the European Commission to act as a policy entrepreneur and

to set and channel the discourse in higher education (Beerkens, 2008: 423). Finally, Ertl (2003) has argued that the establishment of the exchange mobility programmes and the related funding is another factor that explains the influence of the European Commission.

What all these studies have in common is a view of the European Commission as a policy entrepreneur that is able to orchestrate socialisation, to shape policy agendas and to create a constituency of support through the development of a European network of experts and stakeholders (Laffan, 1997; Pollack, 1997; Princen, 2011). Taken together, these studies are—more or less explicitly—grounded in those theoretical arguments that view the European Commission as a supranational policy entrepreneur engaging in ‘entrepreneurial activity’ (Pollack, 1994: 138) as a ‘purposeful opportunist’, which refers to the Commission’s embodiment of the interests of the Community while representing the sum of the particular interests of Member States (Cram, 1997: 6; see also Bulmer, 1998 and Wendon, 1998 for the influence of the European Commission on social policy).

As argued by Pollack, the Commission can strategically exploit the different domestic preferences to push forward its own agenda (Pollack, 1997: 124); indeed, its agenda-setting influence depends on “Member State uncertainty regarding the problems and policies confronting them and on the Commission’s acuity in identifying problems and policies that can rally the necessary consensus among Member States in search of solutions to their policy problems” (Pollack, 1997: 128). This is what Pollack refers to as “creeping competence”, meaning that the Commission’s initial competences creep into other policy areas without formal authorisation (Pollack, 1995).

Although this thesis does not challenge—but instead acknowledges—the policy entrepreneurship argument, two limitations of these studies emerge.

First, given that education is such a visible area of policy in Member States in which the Commission lacks any formal competence, supranational actors could be influential – and hence act as informal agenda-setters, only to the extent that they can convince Member States and political elites to follow their favoured agenda for educational reforms (Pollack, 2003). In other words, the European Commission should persuade Member States of the advantages of supranational cooperation in order to shift their loyalties away from their national institutions towards European institutions. This suggests that a supranationalist approach should at least be supplemented by a more idea-centred analysis that could elucidate why the matters the Commission was pushing had such broad resonance.

Second, is the European Commission the only policy entrepreneur to set the education agenda and shape its content? Even though the literature has unanimously focused on the policy entrepreneurship of the European Commission, it may be possible that other actors have influenced this process. This is a perspective that has been, to date, neglected by the literature. For instance, the role of non-state actors, including unions and the world of business and employers, in diffusing education reforms and policy goals has been largely unexplored (Jakobi et al., 2010; Busemeyer and Trampusch, 2011). Although non-state actors do not have as much material power as state actors, they can hold powerful ideas, beliefs, scientific evidence and moral principles that give them strength and legitimacy (Keck and Sikkink, 1998). As Susan Strange put it, “politics is larger than what politicians do, and that power can be exercised—as it is every day being exercised—by non-state authorities as well as governments” (Strange, 1996: 14). Hence, this suggests that broadening the analytical lens to include more of

the social world would provide a better account for the dynamics and mechanism of the European education policy process.

Other scholars have examined the changes in European education policy from theoretical perspectives more grounded in the rationalist or liberal intergovernmentalist lens of analysis, on the assumption that supranational institutions are mere agents of the EU system of government rather than powerful independent actors (Hoffman, 1966; Moravcsik, 1998; Hix and Hoyland, 2011: 16). In exploring the evolution, expansion and dynamics of European education policy, Walkenhorst argues that, since the 2000s, education “has experienced a paradigm shift in its policy aims” (Walkenhorst, 2008: 571). Through a quantitative content analysis of EU official documents from the 1970s to 2006, he shows how the aims of European education policy have progressed from being a policy “with primarily politico-educational goals to a supplementary market and workforce creation tool” (Walkenhorst, 2008: 569). In identifying the drivers of this shift, Walkenhorst points to two factors: on the one hand, the changes in the economic environment, growing demands for internationalisation and globalisation trends that have triggered more political activity; on the other hand, national reform pressures that have led Member States to make strategic use of the Open Method of Coordination as a tool to implement domestic reforms (Walkenhorst, 2008; see also Martens and Wolf, 2006; Amaral et al., 2009). In other words, the overall European education agenda and the use of the Open Method of Coordination are helpful to some governments in achieving education reforms that they might be resisted on a purely domestic basis, where instead they can strategically take advantage of the EU Commission with its operational infrastructure and resources of information, experience and research capacities (Nugent, 2010).

Although this explanation aptly points out the economic constraints posed by globalization (Walkenhorst, 2008), and although it can explain why Member States have pursued the education issue, it faces some blind spots. First, a rationalist explanation offers no theory of preferences; instead, it deploys exogenous preferences in explaining individual and social choice. As Cini puts it, this explanation has “nothing to do with ideology or idealism, but is founded on the rational conduct of governments as they seek to deal with the policy issues that confront them in the modern world” (Cini, 2003: 95). Second, it does not take into account the specific peculiarity of education as a policy field characterised by ‘ambiguity’ and ‘high-issue complexity’ (Zahariadis, 2008). While ambiguity refers to a process “where there is a shifting roster of participants, opaque technologies and individuals with unclear preferences” (Ackrill et al., 2013: 871), high-issue complexity indicates the degree of interaction (horizontal and vertical) among different policy actors that makes the direction of policy change more unpredictable (Zahariadis, 2008). Third, whereas rationalist approaches are undoubtedly important in explaining actors’ strategic behaviour in their decisions to cooperate at the European level, their focus on a short-time horizon neglects potential long-term factors that might elucidate how the choice was made (Pierson, 2003). In other words, where these approaches make their own contribution is at the stage at which the policy has been chosen, but they are less concerned with the stage at which the policy is formulated and debated. Put differently, they leave unexplored how one strategy came to be viewed as more appropriate than another and thus institutionalised as policy practice, failing to consider whether and how ideas can shape the definition of interests.

In sum, as in the case of liberal intergovernmentalism, rationalist arguments do not clarify *what* has persuaded Member States to see the *problem* of education in terms that

made, for instance, coordination around benchmarking and indicators the chosen *solution*. Hence, to make both explanations more fruitful, they should be at least enriched with a more ideational lens of analysis able to capture the process through which specific ideas and beliefs shaped actors' interests.

Finally, Corbett (2005) has traced the historical development of European higher education policy back to between 1955 and 1987. Her seminal and extremely rich empirical account and extensive use of historical sources shows an intense and complex political process shaped by unexpected events and led by the policy entrepreneurship of some Commission officials in successfully driving the early steps in the evolution of higher education policy. The findings highlight the role of individual entrepreneurship within the Commission in exploiting policy windows and proposing institutional innovations that strengthened its own role and influenced future policymaking, such as in the case of the Erasmus mobility programme (see also Fligstein and Mara-Drita, 1996). Drawing upon Kingdon's agenda-setting multiple streams model, the work of Corbett represents a major contribution in reconstructing the early years of Community cooperation in higher education. However, her historical reconstruction ends with the Erasmus decision of 1987 and hence it does not explore the developments occurred after this date. In addition, whereas Corbett attributes a great explanatory power to the role of individual policy entrepreneurs, she fails to consider how others explanatory factors might have played a role (Musselin, 2007). In both respects, this thesis builds on the work of Corbett but it complements it in terms of time-horizon and in terms of specifying the mechanisms and the factors driving the transformations of European education policy.

From a more historical institutionalist approach, the evolution of European education policy might be correctly interpreted as a process by which endogenous institutional

changes led to unintended consequences beyond the original aims of Member States that in turn enabled the European Commission to further influence the process (Pierson, 1996). Thus —and compared to supranationalist and liberal intergovernmentalist approaches—historical institutionalism is more equipped to explain the departure of education policy from its purely liberal intergovernmentalist perspectives. However, historical institutionalism speaks less to questions such as the substantive content and orientation of the policy. As Beland states, “institutional factors may help to explain why a policy alternative is defeated or enacted but it can seldom account for the reasons why actors conceived and made sense of this alternative in the first place” (Beland, 2009: 703). In this respect, this approach leaves unexplored the process and the mechanisms that might elucidate why what was advocated by some actors prevailed over others’ policy solutions. Hence, complementing historical institutionalism with an ideational lens of analysis could shed light on the substantive content of ideas and the role they play in the policy process.

To summarise, two reflections arise from this discussion. First, what has emerged from the literature is an overemphasis on the role of the European Commission in driving these changes. However, a solid explanation of the mechanism through which the European Commission gained (and maintained) its role is still lacking. At the same time, the role of non-state actors in contributing to the formulation and shaping of European education policy has been largely unexplored.

Second, from a more theoretical dimension, existing perspectives are limited as they fail to elucidate how specific ideas were chosen and how the common consensus around specific problems was constructed given also the ambiguity and the institutional complexity of the policy field of education. For these reasons, by complementing these

perspectives with an ideational approach, it is possible to better elucidate *how* preferences were formed and *why* some preferences mattered more than others.

1.3 The argument in brief and the research strategy

The empirically informed argument is that the key to solving the puzzle of European education policy lies in the ideational construction of a powerful cognitive and normative framework around the notion of a ‘Europe of knowledge’ that: (i) framed education as a solution to Europe’s lack of competitiveness and, in turn, (ii) shaped Member States’ interests in cooperation at the European level. In other words, the core theoretical argument, which draws eclectically upon agenda-setting literature, social construction of problems and ideational theories, is that *the way a problem is defined influences policy actors by setting the boundaries of what topics would be considered in the debate, who would be empowered to participate and what would be the implications of the policy solutions that will be institutionalized as policy choice* (Schattschneider, 1960; Felstiner et al. 1980; Kingdon, 1984; Hall, 1989; Weiss, 1989; Entman, 1993; Campbell, 2002; Stone, 2002; Schmidt, 2008; Mintrom and Norman, 2009; Mehta, 2011; Parsons, 2016; Beland and Cox, 2016).

This argument is developed in three stages and substantiated by detailed observable implications which are tested against the empirical material collected. As the purpose of this study is not to show the causal supremacy of ideas over other factors, but rather to provide an in-depth explanation of the process through which ideas shape political outcomes, the observable implications are not tested against competing ones but are instead integrated and evaluated within other institutional and material factors.

The first stage examines how the definition of a problem can emerge. Although some form of external trigger is required for ideational change, such as economic crises, shocks or policy failures, the change in a problem definition is also affected by other conditions and by the role of an ideational political entrepreneur as the main agent of change. The second stage explores the development of the problem definition in the policy-making arena, namely its impact in terms of topics discussed, actors empowered to participate to the policy debate, and institutions involved. The final stage focuses on the institutionalization of the problem definition as a policy solution, which in turn becomes a policy choice. Here, the way a problem has been previously defined has an impact on the final choice. However, the policy choice is also strategically driven by the viability of the solutions, namely whether they are economically, administratively and politically viable (Hall, 1993), and this is particularly relevant in the EU arena where a consensus among Member States with diverging preferences is a prerequisite for any given policy choice. Although the above conditions for the success of ideas in the policy process have been widely investigated by the literature, little is known about the specific criteria for ideas to create coalitions. One criterion examined in this study is the polysemantic attribute of specific ideas, namely their intrinsic quality of possessing multiple meanings that can be used “in a variety of policy directions”, which in turn make them attractive to different actors (Jenson, 2010 : 75; Beland and Cox, 2016 : 430). In addition, a favourable *zeitgeist* - the prevailing ideological and socioeconomic assumptions in a given moment in time - increases the chances of the problem moving forward at each of the three stages (see also Chapter Two).

Accounting for the process of the trajectory of ideas over a three-decade time horizon and their interaction with institutional and material factors requires an in-depth qualitative study. It also requires a method that can provide a detailed reconstruction of

the policy process and that can elucidate the mechanisms through which ideas, interests, institutions and the changes in the socioeconomic context produced a particular outcome. Specifically, the pursuit of an exploration and analysis of ideational mechanisms and chain of events directs the research to a process tracing methodology. As explained in Chapter Three, process tracing “traces the operation of the causal mechanism at work in a given situation” (Checkel, 2008: 116), and it involves “reconstructing actors’ motivation” as well as their “definitions and evaluations of situations” (Berman, 1998: 34). When using process tracing for testing ideational explanations, the methodological challenge is to show the role of ideas as “autonomous causes”. As argued by Craig Parsons and Alan Jacobs, this means investigating “how ideas exercise an influence by themselves but without being completely separated from their material context of reference and institutional settings” (Jacobs, 2015; Parsons, 2016: 460). In this respect, three empirical strategies are employed to examine the three-stage argument: analysing private communications; expanding the temporal scope of the analysis; and tracing ideational diffusions and the role of ideas carriers (Jacobs, 2015; Parsons, 2016).

The empirical material has been gathered through systematic analysis of original and confidential archival sources, primary sources, official EU documents, secondary sources and in-depth interviews with a former EU Commissioner for Education and high-ranking officials within the European Commission. The case of European education policy is examined as a case of change in EU public policy under conditions of ambiguity and institutional complexity.

1.4 Empirical significance

For many years, the study of education has been surprisingly neglected by political scientists (Jakobi et al., 2010: 1). As a policy field that is primarily national in terms of structure and content, education was intended more as a topic of study for sociology, comparative education or economics rather than as an autonomous discipline of political science analysis. In recent years, however, education has increasingly gained significant scholarly attention in research fields such as partisan politics, comparative political economy and the internationalisation—including the Europeanization—of education (see also Busemeyer and Trampusch, 2011 for an overview of the most recent research strands).

At the same time, the academic literature on EU studies has also paid little attention to European education policy, despite being a prominent arena in which identity and legitimacy can be created and which “offers insights about how power is exerted in Europe in sophisticated ways, involving soft tools” (Novoa and Lawn, 2002: 4; Lawn, 2006; Holford and Spolar, 2012). Only in the last few years, and due to the several developments that have occurred since the Lisbon Strategy, a “still nascent but growing literature in European studies” has started to directly address the transformation taking place in education in Europe (Keating, 2013: 477). Hence, research in European education policy is still in its infancy, with several dimensions and key aspects of the policy process still in need of clarification (Bache, 2006; Jakobi et al., 2010; Souto-Otero, 2015; Chou and Ulnicane, 2015).

This thesis speaks and contributes to the multiple strands of literature that are emerging regarding the so-labelled ‘Europeanization’ of education policy.

Several studies have focused on the *impact* and *effects* of the European Union strategies on national education systems (Field, 1997; Beukel, 2001; De Wit and Verhoeven, 2001; Philips and Ertl, 2003). Drawing from institutionalists' perspectives, some scholars have specifically looked at small-N comparative case studies to explore to what extent Member States' systems are affected by EU initiatives and policy processes, such as the Copenhagen process or the Bologna process (Brockmann et al., 2008; Powell and Solga, 2008; Ravinet, 2008; Nagel, 2009; Trampusch, 2010; Dobbins et al., 2011; Voegtle et al., 2011; Veiga and Amaral, 2012; Elken and Vukasovic, 2014; Nokkala and Bacevic, 2014; Ante, 2016).

Taken together, these studies aptly elucidate how and under what conditions the Europeanization of European education policy impacts national systems and is mediated by domestic institutions and veto players (Trampusch, 2009). The main leitmotiv of this strand of research is that 'institutions matter', and despite the fact that the EU level may provide a *learning bridge* towards convergence and harmonisation between national systems, such as the Open Method of Coordination, domestic interests and preferences, as well as veto powers, will always act as a *selective wall*.

However, in doing so, the existence of a European education policy risks being taken for granted in lieu of explaining how and under what conditions it was created. By addressing these questions in the next empirical chapters, this thesis aims to complement this strand of research by providing original knowledge on the policy process through which substantive ideas played a role in European education policy and by which actors they were advocated.

At the same time, several scholars have critically engaged with the overall nature, direction and significance of these changes towards a neo-liberal orientation for

European education policy and marketization trends (Karlsen, 2002; Bache, 2006; Field, 2006; Robertson, 2008; Dale, 2009; Garben, 2012; Holford and Spolar, 2012; Verger et al. 2107; Komljenovic and Robertson, 2107). For example, Dale has noted how, since the launch of the Lisbon Strategy, the notion of economic competitiveness has become the “master discourse” revealing a neo-liberal orientation of the policy with a lifelong learning policy as part of a “hegemonic European project” (Dale, 2009: 25–26). Similarly, Robertson has pointed out how the Lisbon Strategy has strengthened the “neo-liberal language of economic competitiveness” in European higher education policies, with higher education playing a key role in creating “both minds and markets for the European knowledge-economy” (Robertson, 2008: 1), while Field has argued how the notion of lifelong learning is now regarded as a source of “competitive advantage” (Field, 2006: 17). Karlsen (2002), Bache (2006) and Garben (2012) note that the dominant aim of education is primarily to achieve economic goals. Finally, Holford and Spolar, by providing a historical overview of the evolution of lifelong learning since the 1990s, highlight a tension between two themes: education for productivity and competitiveness on the one hand and education for personal development and social inclusion on the other; within this tension, they note how, with the Europe 2020 agenda, the “neo-liberal competitiveness agenda dominates and appears to be reinforced by the OMC architecture” (Holford and Spolar, 2012: 14).

Although these studies pay significant attention to the challenges and dangers of the economic orientation of education, they are less concerned with understanding the process through which these ideas became predominant; as argued by Komljenovic and Robertson, though these are prominent topics of research, they are treated “as black box at worst, or a flat canvas at best” (Komljenovic and Robertson, 2017 : 289). Therefore, one of the tasks of this thesis is to contribute to these debates by tracing the trajectory

through which economic ideas about education played a role in the political debate and identifying which powers and interests were at stake. Put another way, by examining the political-economic causes of the transformations in education—one of the institutions of social policy most responsible for the integration of individuals into society—this study helps to elucidate whose needs European education policy is serving or, to put it differently, who decides “which” education Europeans need.

1.5 Theoretical significance

Beyond its empirical relevance, the case of European education policy is also significant in contributing to important questions about the role that ideas play in policymaking processes. Indeed, education is a policy field in which ideas play a significant role in shaping issues such as the specific content of a policy, actors’ preferences, and—more generally—the overall purposes of policy choices, namely to ensure equality of opportunities for all citizens, or to contribute to economic growth through investment in human capital or to promote personal development of critical faculties (see also Trowler, 2003 for a discussion on different ideologies and educational aims). Hence, one purpose of this thesis is to contribute to the recent ideational debates on how ideas matter in producing political outcomes (Gofas and Hay, 2010; Beland and Cox, 2011; Rodrik, 2014; Carstensten and Schmidt, 2016; *European Journal of Public Policy*, special issue ‘Ideas, political power and public policy’, 2016).

Once dismissed by rationalist scholars as a mere smokescreen for self-interested motives (Campbell, 2002: 21), a considerable number of studies have been published on the role of ideas in policymaking (Kingdon, 1984; Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Goldstein and Keohane, 1993; Hall, 1993; Yee, 1996; Berman, 1998; Finnemore and

Sikkink, 1998; McNamara, 1998; Blyth, 2003; Parsons, 2003; Culpepper, 2008; Schmidt, 2008; Beland, 2009; Mehta, 2011; Berman, 2013; Blyth, 2013). Some core questions of the ideational analysis have involved the investigation of whether, when and how ideas matter. It is well established that they matter during moments of crisis and uncertainty (Blyth, 2002) or during critical junctures (Parsons, 2003); that contingent factors account for when they reach the policy agenda (Kingdon, 1984); and that ideas matter when they are able to address a problem in a way that brings broader acceptance from policymakers (Hall, 1993). At the same time, as noted in *Ideas and Foreign Policy*, an edited volume by Goldstein and Keohane (1993), ideas can have influence in three ways: first, they work as “roadmaps” by providing guidance to policy actors towards their objectives; second, they act as “focal points” by enabling actors’ strategic interactions to promote a particular outcome; third, once ideas are embedded in institutions, they constrain policy choices.

In the field of European political economy, a number of contributions have paid attention to how an ideational consensus on specific solutions to European problems has emerged (Berman, 1998; McNamara, 1998; Parsons, 2003; Jabko, 2006). For example, Sheri Berman, through a comprehensive and comparative study of the social democratic parties in Italy, Germany and Sweden, has demonstrated how social democratic ideas shaped EU politics by playing a “crucial role in structuring actors’ views of the world by providing a filter or a channel through which information about the external environment must pass” (Berman, 1998: 30). Kathleen McNamara has highlighted how shared beliefs among European policymakers led to a neo-liberal consensus on monetarism (McNamara, 1998), and Craig Parsons—through a longitudinal historical reconstruction of the European integration process from 1947 to 1997 from the perspective of French policymaking—has shown how the institutionalization of ideas

“effectively defined the interests even of actors who long advocated other ideas” (Parsons, 2003: 2). Whereas Berman, McNamara and Parsons focus on the role of ideas from more constructivist and institutionalist perspectives, Jabko (2006), by examining the making of the Single Market, adopts what he labels “strategic constructivism” in order to stress how ideas can be instrumentally used to create consensus among actors with divergent interests.

In sum, taken together, the ideational scholarship has provided convincing evidence that ideas do indeed matter in shaping political outcomes. However, despite these excellent studies on the role of ideas, it is still not clear how ideas are first produced and selected, and through which causal mechanisms they are put into action (Campbell, 2008; Beland and Cox, 2011; Carstensen, 2011; Daigneault, 2014; Parsons, 2016).

Against these challenges, the empirical material aims to contribute to the current ideational literature from two aspects. The first contribution is to examine the trajectory of ideas, namely how they originate, develop and become institutionalised. In particular, by following a single case study over a period of more than three decades (thus being able to collect enough data through a detailed historical reconstruction to trace how they are chosen and institutionalised), it can be possible to explore the process through which specific ideas become influential. Indeed, this is still an under-theorised issue that requires further research (Lieberman, 2002; Campbell, 2004; Berman, 2013; Saurugger, 2013). Furthermore, by examining ideas through careful process tracing, it is also possible to provide further clarification on the role of actors as ideas carriers, an aspect “that is sometimes neglected in ideational analysis” (Campbell, 2004; Carstensen, 2011; Daigneault, 2014: 454; but see for instance, Jabko, 2006).

1.6 Overview of the thesis

The remainder of this thesis proceeds as follows. Chapter Two defines the key theoretical concepts adopted in the study, and presents the three-stage theoretical argument and the observable implications. Chapter Three outlines the research strategy; it discusses the use of process tracing as the method most suitable for investigating the influence of ideas; justifies the choice of the periodization of the analysis; and presents the data collection strategy and evaluation of sources. Chapters Four, Five, Six and Seven form the bulk of the empirical analysis. A timeline providing an overview of the main institutional and legislative developments analysed in the empirical chapters is presented at the end of this introductory chapter (Table 1.1).

Chapter Four situates European education policy in a historical perspective and examines the policy developments between 1972 and 1985. The chapter highlights the coexistence of different social, economic and political purposes for education, and explores how the problem definition of education as a factor of economic growth emerged in the mid-1980s and which factors contributed to this emergence. Chapters Five and Six analyse the development of the problem definition and its impact on the political landscape between the mid-1980s and the end of the 1990s. Chapter Five traces the development of the problem definition in the discourse and policy debate; it examines how the European Commission and European business took ownership of the problem and constructed a rhetorical narrative in which education became conceived as a solution to the problem of Europe's lack of competitiveness. Chapter Six investigates how the problem definition influenced policy initiatives and policy programmes, while at the same time enabling the European Commission to expand its institutional competencies. Chapter Seven analyses the policy developments of European education

policy from the end of the 1990s to 2010. The chapter shows how the problem definition of education as a factor of economic growth became institutionalised as a policy solution in terms of principles, rules, actors and venues. Chapter Eight summarises the findings and their correspondence with the theoretical argument; specifies the theoretical significance of the findings for the ideational literature and EU public policy studies; and concludes by presenting the empirical contribution, the limitations of the study, and areas for future research.

Taken together, the four empirical chapters show how a specific problem definition of education allowed the European Commission to strategically construct European education policy around the notion of the ‘knowledge economy’, which reflected the preferences of powerful economic forces within the European Union. In particular, together with the policy entrepreneurship role of the European Commission, the findings underline the role of the European Round Table of Industrialists as an ideas generator and carrier of specific neo-liberal ideas such as benchmarking and lifelong learning. However, the findings also suggest that it was the polysemantic concept of the idea of the ‘knowledge economy’ itself—able to combine an economic and social justification of education policies intended to increase the wealth and cohesion of the EU—that acted as coalition magnet by aggregating actors with diverging interests as well as by reinforcing the power and interests of the actors advocating this idea. Indeed, by exploiting the notion of the knowledge economy, the European Commission has successfully compensated its lack of formal competence in education, and it has expanded its institutional legitimacy in coordinating the education agenda of Member States. Moreover, the findings underline the importance of the zeitgeist in which ideas are embedded that can facilitate or hinder their acceptance.

Table 1.1 Overview of the main institutional and legislative developments (1973-2010)

	1973-1985 Emergence of the problem definition	1985-1997 Development of the problem definition	1997-2010 Institutionalization of the problem definition as policy solution
Education structures within the Commission and relevant DGs	<p>1973 – set up of a specific Directorate for Education and Training that becomes part of the Directorate-General for Research, Science and Education (DG XII)</p> <p>1975 – Creation of Cedefop, European Agency for the development of vocational training in Berlin</p> <p>1981 – Education and training are incorporated into the Directorate-General Social Affairs and Employment, that becomes Directorate-General Social Affairs, Employment, Education, Training and Youth (DG V)</p>	<p>1989 – creation of the Task Force Human Resources, Education, Training and Youth (TFHR), a separate unit for education and training within DG V</p> <p>1995 – the Task Force is transformed into the Directorate-General for Education, Training and Youth (DG XXII)</p>	<p>1999 – the Directorate-General for Education, Training and Youth (DG XXII) is renamed DG Education and Culture (DG EAC)</p> <p>2005 - set up of the Executive Agency for Education and Culture (EACEA)</p> <p>2005 - establishment of the Centre for Research on Education and Lifelong Learning (CRELL)</p>
Commissioners	<p>1973-1974 – Ralph Dahrendorf - Research, Science and Education (DG XII)</p> <p>1975-1980 – Guido Brunner - Research, Science and Education (DG XII)</p> <p>1981-1985 – Ivor Richards - Social Affairs, Employment, Education, Training, and Youth (DG V)</p> <p>1985 – Peter Sutherland - Social Affairs, Employment, Education, Training, and Youth (DG V)</p>	<p>1986-1989 - Manuel Marin, Social Affairs, Employment, Education, Training and Youth (DG V)</p> <p>1989-1993 - Vasso Papandreou - Social Affairs, Employment, Education, Training and Youth (DG V)</p> <p>1993-1995 – Antonio Ruberti –Science, Research and development, (DG XII) with competences on education and training</p> <p>1995- 1999 – Edith Cresson –Education, Training and Youth (DG XXII)</p>	<p>1999-2004 – Vivian Reding, Education and Culture (DG EAC)</p> <p>2004- 2009 – Ján Figel’, Education and Culture (DG EAC)</p> <p>2009-2010 – Maroš Šefčovič, Education and Culture (DG EAC)</p>
Institutional developments	<p>1976 - Resolution on a ‘Community Action Programme on Education’, laying down principles and areas of action</p> <p>1976 – set up of an Education Committee within the Council</p> <p>1985 – Launch of the Comett programme on cooperation between universities and industries regarding training in the field of new technologies</p>	<p>1985-1993 – Launch of the first generation of mobility programmes: Comett, Erasmus, Lingua, Tempus, Petra, Iris, Eurotecnet, Youth for Europe, Force</p> <p>1993-2000 –Launch of the second generation of mobility programmes: Leonardo and Socrates</p>	<p>1999 –Bologna Process for higher education</p> <p>2000 – Launch of the Lisbon Strategy</p> <p>2001 – EC Report on “Concrete future objectives of education and training systems” to be achieved through the Open Method of Coordination</p> <p>2002 – Copenhagen process for vocational education and training</p> <p>2002 – Launch of “Education and Training 2010” work programme</p> <p>2007 – Launch of the “Integrated Lifelong Learning Programme” replacing the former generation of mobility programmes</p> <p>2009 – Launch of “ Education and Training 2020” work programme</p>
Treaty Articles and EU judgements	<p>1957 – Article 128 in the Treaty of Rome - referring to the drawing up of general principles for implementing a common vocational training policy</p> <p>1985 –“Gravier judgement”, the European Court of Justice rules that higher education can be covered within the EEC Treaty in the general principles for implementing a common vocational training policy (Article 128)</p>	<p>1992 – Treaty of Maastricht; official recognition of education as an area of EU competence under Article 126 whereas former vocational training Article 128 is enriched and becomes Article 127; the task of the EU is to “support and supplement” Member States’ actions in education and training</p> <p>1997 – Treaty of Amsterdam – Article 126 renumbered as Article 149 and Article 127 renumbered as Article 150</p>	<p>2007 – Treaty of Lisbon – (Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union); (Title XII) Article 149 (former 126) becomes Article 165 and Article 150 (former 127) becomes Article 166</p> <p>EU competences in education and vocational training remain unchanged since the Treaty of Maastricht</p>

Chapter 2

Theoretical framework

2.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the theoretical framework of the thesis. It begins by discussing the main theoretical perspectives and key concepts on which the theoretical argument of the study is built. The theoretical perspectives are articulated around the three analytical categories regarding the functions of ideas proposed by Jal Mehta, who, drawing upon the literature on agenda setting and the social construction of problems, distinguishes ideas as policy solutions, problem definitions and public philosophies or zeitgeist (Mehta, 2011). The advantage of utilizing this analytical distinction is that it offers clear categories that can capture the dynamism of ideas in terms of their conceptualization while at the same time providing evidence of their different functions in shaping political outcomes. Within each of these three categories, additional theoretical insights that further specify the conditions under which ideas perform their functions are elaborated.

The second section of the chapter presents the theoretical argument in detail and specifies the observable implications derived from the theories. Starting from the assumption that, given the complexity of the social world, outcomes in political science can rarely be explained by a single theory, the argument proposed rests upon theoretical synthesis and analytical eclecticism from the theories presented in the previous section (Rudra and Katzenstein, 2010). However, in order to avoid the danger of “theoretical selectivity”, namely cherry picking specific theoretical propositions that could facilitate

the narrative but might entail a lack of coherence and consistency, the theoretical argument of the study is developed in three-stages and substantiated by detailed observable implications, which will then be tested against the empirical materials collected.

The first stage looks at the origins of ideas, namely the conditions under which a problem definition changes and how actors intervene in this process. The second stage analyses the development of the problem definition, namely how it influences the themes of the policy debate, the actors empowered to discuss it and the policy solutions advocated. The third stage examines how the problem definition is institutionalized as policy solution. For each of these stages, observable implications are derived. A final section offers some conclusive remarks.

As the purpose of this study is not to show ideas in terms of their causal supremacy over other factors but, rather, to provide an in-depth explanation of the process through which they influence political outcomes, the observable implications are not tested against competing ones but are instead integrated and evaluated within other institutional and contextual factors. This means that the importance of the political, social and economic historical context in which ideas are embedded will also be carefully considered. As advocated by Tilly, “explanatory political science can hardly get anywhere without relying on careful historical analysis” (Tilly, 2006: 417). In this sense, this study emphasizes that the role of history remains crucial to our wider understanding of political outcomes and hence it pays particular attention to trying to maintain a balance between “getting the facts right”, through the construction of a narrative-based explanation (Levy, 2001: 40, 49), while at the same time following the basic templates of social science in carefully specifying the theoretical assumptions (Schimmelfenning, 2015: 124).

2.2 Theoretical perspectives and functions of ideas: ideas as policy solutions, problem definitions and zeitgeist

What are ideas? Defining ideas is a problematic task and there is a significant degree of uncertainty around their conceptualization. Beland and Cox define ideas as “causal beliefs which are produced in our minds and connected to our world via our interpretation of our surroundings” (Beland and Cox, 2011: 3). Although this conceptualization takes into account how ideas drive interpretations and aptly highlights the importance of how individual meanings are translated into action, it nevertheless poses some problems in capturing a number of important features ideas possess. In this respect, different notions have been used to emphasize their different shapes and meanings. A first distinction concerns the different levels of ideas in terms of ‘policies’, ‘programs’, and ‘philosophies’; in other words, specific policies proposed; programmes of action to solve a problem; and philosophies intended as “worldviews that undergird the policies and programs with organizing ideas, values and principles of knowledge and society”, (Schmidt, 2008 : 305). A second differentiation is between ‘cognitive’ and ‘normative’ ideas (Campbell, 2002). Cognitive ideas – also referred to as ‘blue prints’ (Blyth, 2002: 11), or ‘policy solutions’ (Mehta, 2011 : 40) – indicate specific guidelines and proposals on how to solve a problem, whereas normative ideas identify values, attitudes, or identities that serve to legitimate policies (Campbell, 2002 : 23; Schmidt, 2008 : 307). Taken together, these conceptualizations suggest that ideas are not a monolithic notion and that the way in which they are conceptualized is dependent on the function they fulfil.

Accordingly, this chapter follows the analytical conceptualization provided by Jal Mehta, who proposes that ideas should be distinguished in relation to the function they

perform in the political process, namely ideas as policy solutions, problem definitions and public philosophies (Mehta, 2011: 23-46). As mentioned in the introductory section to this chapter, this analytical distinction provides clear theoretical categories that can in turn facilitate the formation of empirical predictions. The remainder of this section presents each of these three analytical categories and discusses additional theoretical insights that further specify the conditions under which ideas perform these functions.

Ideas as policy solutions: why one idea becomes accepted

According to Mehta, ‘policy solutions’, namely the issue of why some ideas become policies while others do not, are “both the narrowest conceptualization of the role that ideas play in politics and the most theoretically developed.” (Mehta, 2011: 28). Drawing upon Peter Hall, Mehta states that economic, administrative and political viability factors have the most influence over whether an idea becomes an effective policy solution (Hall, 1989: 370-371; Mehta, 2011). The concept of economic viability stresses the role of economic structures and conditions, as well as the subjective goals and problems of the time. In his seminal account of Keynesian ideas, Hall emphasizes that Keynesian ideas were "best suited" and mostly welcomed in countries with closed industrial economies, rigid labour markets and well developed financial systems (Hall 1989: 372). Regarding administrative viability, Hall refers to “the degree to which new ideas fit the longstanding administrative biases of the relevant decision makers and the existing capacity of the state to implement them” (Hall, 1989: 371, 374). In other words, ideas need to fit with “existing institutions, resources available in the bureaucracy to adopt new ideas and the openness of the State bureaucracy to the ideas of academia” (Carstensen, 2011: 159; Hall, 1989, Weir, 1989). As also argued by Goldstein and Keohane, when ideas influence the design of organizations, “their influence will be

reflected in the incentives of those in the organization and those whose interests are served by it” (Goldstein and Keohane, 1993: 20).

Finally, in terms of political viability, an idea is politically viable if, according to Hall, it has "some appeal in the broader political arena" but particularly among those to whom politicians are attempting to appeal (Hall 1989, 374). As noted by Mehta, political viability is “so obviously important that it needs to be specified further to be analytically useful” (Mehta, 2011: 28). In particular, Mehta questions whether considering an idea politically viable solely when it fits with the goals and interests of the dominant actors is the most appropriate way to show its contribution in terms of political viability. Hence, he proposes that room should be left for a more dynamic role for ideas and notes the possibility that “a new policy idea creates its own backers, either by forging new coalitions or by causing groups to see their interests in a different and new way” (Mehta, 2011 : 29). This claim suggests that an intrinsic element of power might be held by ideas and that this power depends precisely on how ideas can contribute to aggregating, or re-aggregating, actors’ interests, for instance through “advocacy coalitions” (Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith, 1993) or through discursive interaction (Schmidt, 2008). In this respect, Schmidt argues that “actors can gain power from their ideas as they give power to those ideas" (Schmidt, 2009: 532).

This begs the question, what are the characteristics that ideas need to possess to be perceived as a persuasive policy solution? Schmidt and Carstensen point out three characteristics that ideas need to possess, namely the relevance, the applicability and the coherence of the idea. As they argue, persuasive ideas need to show: “first, the policy programme’s relevance, by accurately identifying the problems the polity expects to be solved; second, the policy programme’s applicability by showing how it will solve the problems it identifies and, third, the policy programme’s seeming coherence, by making

the concepts, norms and methods and instruments of the programme appear reasonably consistent and be able to be applied without major contradiction” (Carstensen and Schmidt, 2016 : 324). In view of these considerations, the concept of the political viability of an idea requires further theoretical reflection. In particular, through which mechanisms does an idea become politically viable? Are there specific characteristics intrinsic to the idea itself that might increase its political appeal and enable it to forge new coalitions?

In this respect, this means to specify which factors play a role for ideas to act as coalitions. Beland and Cox (2016) suggest the notion of ideas as “coalition magnets”, namely the capacity of an idea in constructing a political coalition. In their analysis of the conditions under which an idea acts as a coalition magnet, three things need to happen: first, “the ideas are effectively manipulated by policy entrepreneurs as those entrepreneurs seek a new language to define policy problems”; second, “the ideas are embraced or promoted by key actors in the policy process”; and third, “the ideas bring together actors whose perceived interests or policy preferences had previously placed them at odds with one another; or the ideas might awaken a policy preference in the minds of actors who were not previously engaged with the particular issue” (Beland and Cox, 2016 : 429). The specification of the conditions under which ideas become coalition magnets further clarifies Hall’s condition for political viability.

At the same time, it is also important to specify the qualities that ideas need to possess in order to become coalition magnets. Even though Beland and Cox suggest “that the success of the idea in coalition building partly depends on its intrinsic qualities, especially its valence and its potential for ambiguity or polysemy” (Beland and Cox, 2016: 430), little is added about these qualities. An important element in this regard has to do with the “multivocality” of the idea, namely its “capacity to be understood in

multiple ways, combining shared and unshared interpretations” (Parsons, 2016: 456). Evidence on this is provided by Jabko’s account of European economic integration in the 1980s and 1990s in which he convincingly demonstrates how the idea of ‘the market’ acted as a coalition building tool by aggregating a coalition of otherwise different actors who had different understandings (and interests) in regard to the creation of the euro in their national constituencies (Jabko, 2006). The concept of ambiguity of ideas was also recognized by Hall already in 1989, when he was arguing, with reference to Keynesianism, that:

To be Keynesian bespoke a general posture rather than a specific creed. Indeed the very ambiguity of Keynesian ideas enhanced their power in the political sphere. By reading slightly different emphases into these ideas, an otherwise disparate set of groups could unite under the same banner (Hall, 1989: 367).

In the same vein, Schmidt and Thatcher, with reference to the resilience of neo-liberal ideas, stress that ambiguity is one of the properties that characterizes the ability of an idea to become resilient (Thatcher and Schmidt, 2013).

Besides Peter Hall’s distinction between the economic, administrative and political viability of ideas as policy solutions, another conceptualization of ideas as policy solution is the one offered by John Kingdon with its Multiple Stream Model. In his seminal work, *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies*, Kingdon begins with the following puzzling question: “what makes people in and around government attend, at any given time, to some subjects and not others?”(Kingdon, 1984: 1). By tracking the development of healthcare reforms and transport deregulation over a four-year period through 247 interviews, Kingdon shows that ideas succeed when the three streams of ‘problems’, ‘policy’ and ‘politics’ couple together during policy windows—referred to as “opportunities for advocates of proposals to push their pet solutions or to push attention to their special problems” (Kingdon 1984: 165) - thanks to the role of ‘policy

entrepreneurs' who link their favoured solution to a problem (Kingdon, 1984, 2003). More specifically, the 'problem' stream includes all those conditions – that might be signalled by indicators, focusing, events, feedback – that government officials define as problems. The 'policy' stream includes all policy alternatives available for a particular problem, while the 'politics' stream is referred as the “national mood”, namely the feedback from political parties, public opinion and interest groups.

Although Kingdon remains a firm reference point for every scholar interested in the role of ideas, his model presents several limitations, among which is the lack of a specification of the mechanisms through which change will occur and why (Mucciaroni, 1992; Zahariadis, 2008). In addition - and this is particularly relevant for the purposes of this thesis, which takes the historical dimension into serious consideration - Kingdon's model lacks precisely this aspect, as it is less concerned about how the social and political context impacts on the shifts in the problem and solution streams over time (Weir 1992: 18). However, Kingdon has the great merit of stressing the importance of policy entrepreneurs as active agents of the ideational process (Mehta, 2011: 29). Given that one purpose of this study is to advance a better understanding of the interaction between ideas and their agents, the concept of policy entrepreneurship deserves further theoretical clarification.

Who works for ideas' acceptance? Policy entrepreneurs as active ideational agents:

The concept of policy entrepreneurship is central to Kingdon's perspective. Different conceptualizations exist regarding the notion of policy entrepreneurs: they might be either individuals within the political system or actors outside, operating in policy networks (Pemberton, 2000) or in advocacy coalitions (Sabatier, 1988). In Kingdon's original conceptualization, policy entrepreneurs advocate policy proposals or ideas prominently. They are individuals “who are willing to invest resources of various kinds

in hopes of a future return in the form of policies they favour” (Kingdon, 1984:151). Policy entrepreneurs possess political resources such as access, persistence and credibility (Dahl, 1961, Kingdon, 1984) while at the same time displaying skills and strategies in using their political resources (Zahariadis, 2013). These specialists might be creative individuals – such as Commission officials, national ministry experts and industrialists – who share a common interest in a given policy and recognize the opportunity to intervene (Zahariadis, 2008 : 518). For example, in their theoretically and historically informed account on the EMU negotiations, Featherstone and Dyson convincingly demonstrate the agenda setting role of policy entrepreneurs such as Delors and Genscher as “enormously important factor in the EMU negotiations” (Featherstone and Dyson, 1999 : 750).

By exploring the relationship between policy entrepreneurs and five theories of policy change (incrementalism, multiple streams model, institutionalism, punctuated equilibrium and advocacy coalitions), Mintrom and Norman suggest four characteristics that policy entrepreneurs should exhibit. First, they should possess *social acuity*, namely “perceptiveness in understanding others and engaging in policy conversations”. This is consistent with Kingdon’s conceptualization of policy entrepreneurs, who are able to identify and exploit a window of opportunity to introduce policy innovations. Second, they should be *able to define problems*, for example through the use of rhetorical strategies, which might suggest that a crisis is imminent (Stone, 2002), or by emphasizing the failure of current policies and seeking support from other actors through the building of coalitions (Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Schattschneider, 1960). A third characteristic that policy entrepreneurs should exhibit is *team building*, namely working effectively with others or making use of their personal and professional network” in order to promote policy change. Finally, the fourth characteristic is *leading*

by example, which should be demonstrated by “taking an idea and turning it into action themselves” (Mintrom and Norman, 2009: 651-654).

An additional concept related to the notion of policy entrepreneurs is the concept of ‘political entrepreneur’. Originally developed by Dahl in his investigation into the role of key actors in promoting change in the New Haven, the political entrepreneur is identified as a “cunning, resourceful masterful leader” who is the main agent of change (Dahl, 1961: 6). According to Scheingate, political entrepreneurs are “individuals whose creative acts have transformative effects on politics, policies or institutions” (Scheingate, 2003: 185). Moments of crisis or uncertainty are moments in which “political entrepreneurs can offer alternative or competing narratives that redefine political interests in a manner that opens up new coalition possibilities” (Scheingate, 2003: 193). Hwang and Powell, observe that “much entrepreneurial activity entails recombination of existing materials and structures, rather than ‘pure’ novelty”, leaving room for a less rationalistic view of political entrepreneurs (Hwang and Powell, 2005: 180).

However, although what policy entrepreneurs *do* has been highlighted in the literature, “the concept of policy entrepreneurship is yet to be broadly integrated with studies of policy change” (Mintrom and Norman, 2009: 649). Mintrom and Norman, in particular, note that there are two main aspects of the concept of policy entrepreneurship that could benefit from further clarification: the first aspect stresses the need to provide further evidence on the motivation and strategies employed by policy entrepreneurs; and the second aspect draws attention to the interaction between policy entrepreneurs and the historical and political context within which they operate. As they observe, “to date, most studies of policy entrepreneurship have focused on contemporary episodes of policy change. However, significant insights can emerge from historical studies and

from studies that involve a time frame of several decades” (Mintrom and Norman, 2009: 662).

Collectively, the theoretical perspectives reviewed so far show that considerable attention has been devoted by the literature to the function of ideas as policy solutions and to the role of policy entrepreneurs as agents that use their ideas to solve problems. There remain, however, several aspects that need further theoretical reflection. Indeed, although the perspectives examined provide significant insights into the role of ideas as policy solutions, the issue of the process through which some ideas become favoured over time remains underspecified (Mehta, 2011: 31). In other words, when is the time for an idea up? Does it occur during an exogenous event and is it therefore linked to contingency (Kingdon, 1984)? Does it follow a linear path, in which policy failure follows uncertainty, which in turn follows a new idea (McNamara, 1998), or instead can it be a gradual process in which a political space for a new idea is created “through the rise of a new set of considerations that make a different set of policies appropriate for approaching the issue area” (Mehta, 2011 : 32; Campbell, 1998)? Finally, besides pushing for their favourite solutions, do policy entrepreneurs have also a role in the definition of a problem?

To address these questions, it might be worth looking beyond the role of ideas as policy solutions and instead focusing more on how a specific definition of a problem might in turn affect the choice of a solution. The next subsection turns to the function of ideas as ‘problem definitions’.

Ideas as problem definitions

Investigating how a problem is defined is a well-established research area on its own that has attracted considerable interest since the seminal work of Schattschneider (Schattschneider, 1960; Cobb and Elder, 2001; Baumgartner and Jones, 1993; Schon and Rein, 1994; Stone, 2002). Mehta argues that problem definitions help “to makes sense of a complex reality” (Mehta, 2011: 32) in a way similar to policy paradigms, which are defined by Hall “not only the goals of policy and the kind of instruments that can be used to attain them, but also the very nature of the problem they are meant to be addressing” (Hall, 1993: 279). However, Mehta notes that, compared to the notion of policy paradigms, the notion of problem definitions is more appropriate; as he notes, “problem definitions define the scope of potential choices, but within a given problem definition, there are still often multiple choices for policy” (Mehta, 2011 : 33). Hence, this suggests that while the definition of paradigms seems to imply that ideas can be identified as coherent and stable bloc of meaning, the notion of problem definitions evokes more dynamism by indicating “the fluid nature of constantly competing ideas that highlight different aspects of a given situation” (Mehta, 2011 : 33). Accordingly, this study employs the notion of problem definitions rather than the one of policy paradigms, as it is better suited to the research purpose of capturing the dynamic influence of ideas.

Several studies have indicated the importance of defining an issue under several aspects. To begin with, defining an issue is not a solitary exercise but includes the definition of its alternatives and also triggers specific consequences and choices. As eloquently noted by Schattschneider’ in his excellent contribution on agenda setting, the definition of the alternatives is the “supreme instrument of power [...] because the definition of the alternatives is the choice of conflicts, and the choice of conflicts allocates power”

(Schattschneider, 1960: 66). For example, John Gusfield, in his seminal study on drink-driving and the construction of public problems, argues that the definition of the drink-driving problem has led to individuals being punished for driving drunk while it has been less focused on other elements such as, for instance, improving car manufacturing (Gusfield, 1981). As he argues:

Knowledge and law are not shiny marbles lying on the beach and awaiting only the sharp eyes of skilled men and women to be found. The 'facts' of alcohol are picked out of a pile, scrubbed, polished, highlighted here and there, and offered as discoveries in the context of the particular and practical considerations of their finders (Gusfield, 1981 : 20).

Another important aspect of problem definition is that it sets the scene for how an idea will be further developed and articulated in the political landscape (Weiss, 1989: 97; Schon and Rein, 1994). Carole Weiss, in her study on the shift from one problem definition to another in the case of US Federal Government information collection strategies, stresses the importance of problem definition, as “it legitimates some solutions rather than others, invites participation by some political actors and devalues the involvement of others, focuses attention on some indicators of success and consigns others to the scrapheap of the irrelevant” (Weiss, 1989: 98).

These considerations elucidate the importance of better investigating the role of problem definitions when investigating political outcomes. They also entail a set of questions that need to be addressed when approaching problem definitions. How does a problem originate? How is it defined and through which mechanisms? What is the role of policy actors in defining a problem? Is there any link between the problem definition and the venues in which it is discussed?

From material conditions to problems:

The, perhaps obvious, starting point in discussing problem definition is that problems do not automatically appear on the scene but they need to be defined. An external crisis is usually regarded as the key point for opening up the possibility for a change in a problem and ideational change more generally (Schmidt, 2002: 225). As posited by Kingdon, a problem exists only at the moment in which actors start to think that something can be done in order to change a situation (Kingdon, 2003 : 109-111). Kingdon's problem stream is particularly helpful in understanding how a problem emerges. Indeed, the problem stream encompasses all of those conditions that governmental officials define as problems at the moment they decide to do something about them (Kingdon, 2003 : 198). Such conditions may be signalled by indicators such as data and reports, focusing on events such as disasters and crises, or feedback channels from existing programmes (Birkland, 1997). As Kingdon argues, "people define conditions as problems by comparing current conditions with their values concerning more ideal states of affairs, by comparing their own performance with that of other countries or by putting the subject into one category rather than another (Kingdon, 2003 : 19). Obviously, not all conditions may lead to the definition of a problem, but this can be done through the association of a range of values with a particular issue (Zahariadis, 2013). When conditions are critical or circumstances have changed significantly, policy makers see the condition as a problem. For instance, a comparison of education performances within Member States through indicators may help to define a condition as a problem. However, although Kingdon aptly highlights that an objective condition might not be automatically considered a problem, he leaves undetermined the mechanisms through which this process occurs. Given the existence of an objective condition about which policy makers decide that something needs to be

done, how, for instance, are indicators and focus events transmitted, manipulated and conveyed? In other words, through which strategies is a problem defined and who defines a problem?

Defining a problem: framing strategies

The term framing embodies various definitions, such as ‘causal stories’, ‘policy images’, ‘collective definitions’, and ‘public definitions’ (Baumgartner and Jones 1991; Gusfield 1981). In the policy analysis perspectives, the notion of frames refers to a public definition of a problem, which emphasizes some aspects of reality while obscuring others (Snow et al. 1986). Indeed, Schoen and Rein define a frame as “a perspective from which an amorphous, ill-defined, problematic situation can be made sense of” (Schoen and Rein, 1993: 146); similarly Dryzek maintains that “each frame generally interprets the world in its own particular and partial way” (Dryzek, 1993: 222), and Yanow points out that frames “highlight and contain at the same time that they exclude” (Yanow, 2000: 11). According to Daviter, frames “affect which interests play a role during policy drafting and deliberation and what type of political conflicts and coalitions are likely to emerge as a result” (Daviter, 2007: 654). One of the most comprehensive definitions of frames is provided by Entman, who notes that: “to frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described” (Entman, 1993: 52).

These definitions suggest that frames are dynamic constructs that need to be communicated through the discourse. As argued by Schmidt, discourse is “both a set of policy ideas and values and an interactive process of policy construction and communication” (Schmidt, 2002: 210). Within the discursive process of frame

communications, “the rhetorical strategies that claimants employ in advancing a given problem definition are also key to their success” (Mehta, 2011: 36). Drawing upon policy analysis studies, three rhetorical strategies that actors often use to help assign responsibility to particular sources, legitimize possible political action, and challenge or protect the existing social order, are considered. These strategies are *measurement or counting; narratives or story-telling; and naming, blaming and claiming*.

Measurement or counting is a powerful strategy often used by those involved in problem definition (Stone 2002:33). Policy discussions often begin with the production of reports that show the magnitude of a problem that already exists and is getting worse. Counting impacts in two ways on the definition of a problem. On the one hand, it makes people notice the problem more, thus potentially stimulating demands for change; on the other, zooming in on a particular aspect of a problem means paying attention to some features of the issue while simultaneously ignoring others.

A second strategy is to employ *narratives*, used as a tool to construct a *convincing causal story or story-telling*. Patterson and Monroe define narratives as “the stories people tell to weave disparate facts together in a cognitive way to make sense of reality” (Patterson and Monroe; 1996: 315). Fischer argues that “the narrative is especially geared towards the goals of the actors and the way changing goals and intentions causally contribute to social change; it seeks to comprehend and convey the direction of human affairs” (Fischer, 2003 : 163). Thus, a narrative provides an order and a meaning to a given situation. How is a narrative constructed? As in an Aesop’s fable, narratives have a plot, characters and settings. Events are outlined in a sequential order in an effort to coherently explain the problem’s origin and development. The telling of the events is not neutral; rather it often includes the speaker’s perspective of what is important and integral to the story. Actors using narratives employ many rhetorical

strategies including metaphors, synecdoche, symbolism and figurative language to elaborate a point and draw attention to it (Stone 2002). A common storyline in narratives is the story of decline, which Stone synthesizes: “*In the beginning things were good. But they got worse, and right now they are nearly intolerable; something must be done*” (Stone, 2002: 158). This story usually ends with the prediction of a crisis and some sort of proposal to avoid that crisis. Policy narratives also help to shed light on the fact that it is possible to ameliorate a situation through various proposed policy actions, usually those actions favoured by the storyteller. Proposals can even take the form of a warning that - unless some action is taken - the problem will only get worse. Stories of decline typically, include facts and figures to show how a problem has got worse.

Finally, within the perspective of social constructivism, a strategy that has been emphasized by Felstiner and his colleagues is the so-called *naming, blaming and claiming*. More precisely, naming refers to an “injurious experience” (Felstiner et al., 1980: 634) that is attributed “to the fault of another individual or social entity (ib. 635). Only when naming and blaming have occurred can we expect claiming to take effect: “when someone with a grievance voices it to the person or entity believed to be responsible and asks for some remedy” (Felstiner et al., 1980: 635-6). For example, obesity in young children (naming the problem) may lead to weak government policies being identified as a causal agent rather than the industries that produce junk food (blaming). Thus the enhancement of governmental strategies to ensure that children are given the right advice on a healthy diet is proposed rather than, for instance, taxing junk food companies (claiming). This suggests that, depending on how policy problems are depicted or on the qualities of a given frame, certain actors are empowered while others lose control over policy (Schon and Rein, 1994; see also below).

Defining a problem: actors' power and ideational agents

The second question is who defines a problem. According to Mehta, problem definition is a “negotiated process among claimants with various points of view” (Mehta, 2011: 34).

Deciding who can claim ownership of a problem is an important factor in problem definition (Schneider, 1985). According to Birkland, the actors who describe a problem will also be the ones who define the solution to it and they will therefore prevail in the policy debate (Birkland, 1997: 106). Baumgartner suggests that new issues can make it onto political agendas when the proponents of a given policy frame act as “advocates” (Baumgartner, 2007), and succeed in extending the conflict to a wider circle of actors, in order to redefine the line between the proponents and the opponents of a proposal (Princen, 2007). Moreover, actors who have more to gain from the ideas are expected to have more influence. In a context of competing ideas, one of the crucial variables determining an idea's successful acceptance is whether or not it is "adopted by a person or group that is able to make others listen or render them receptive" (Berman 1998 : 25). In Sikkink's study of economic policy in Argentina and Brazil, political leaders were instrumental because they brought individuals together in political coalitions where ideas served as the "glue" keeping the group together (Sikkink, 1991: 244). Hence, the power of the actors has a great role in defining a problem. However, what is power?

Power is a complex and controversial concept (see also Barnett and Duval, 2005 for a distinction on the multiple forms of power). One of the most well-known formulation of power is the one proposed by Dahl, with power defined in terms of direct decision-making power and expressed as “the ability of A to get B to do what B otherwise would not do” (Dahl, 1957 : 202-203). To this dimension, Bachrach and Baratz (1962) add the definition of power in terms of agenda-setting and policy formulation, while Lukes

(1974) defines power as the ability to shape norms and values in influencing other's goal for action. Lukes' view is close to the Gramscian concept of moral power, namely the ability to claim "intellectual and moral leadership" that in turn helps actors to persuade and influence others by presenting their ideas as promoting the general interest of the entire society, as opposed to being driven by self-interest (Gramsci, 1971: 182, 269). In addition, power can also be manifested in terms of actors' knowledge, as expressed by the concept of 'epistemic communities', who are groups of professionals with recognized expertise in a particular area for which they can claim authoritative knowledge (Haas, 1992: 3).

This thesis conceptualizes power in terms of 'ideational power', that Carstensen and Schmidt define as the "capacity of actors (whether individual or collective) to influence other actors' normative and cognitive beliefs through the use of ideational elements" (Carstensen and Schmidt, 2016: 321). In particular, they distinguish three types of ideational power: *power through ideas*, conceived as the ability of actors to convince other actors to accept their views; *power over ideas*, linked to "agents' imposition of ideas"; *power in ideas*, referred to "institutions imposing constraints on what ideas agents may take into consideration" (Carstensen and Schmidt, 2016: 320-321). Though this conceptualization aptly incorporates the role of actors as ideational agents, or ideas carriers, who not only implement ideas but also construct and reconstruct them (see also Schmidt and Thatcher, 2013: 22), it nevertheless implicitly takes for granted that, in order to have influence, ideas need to be advocated by powerful actors (see also section two on policy/political entrepreneurs). In other words, it leaves unexplored whether the nature of ideas themselves can contribute to the influence or power gained by those who advocate them. In this respect, one of the aims of this thesis is also to shed light on whether "ideational power" can also be conceived as *power of the ideas* themselves.

Where a problem is defined: the institutional venue

According to Baumgartner and Jones, a key component of how a problem is favourably acknowledged is the context or institutional venue in which it is heard (Baumgartner and Jones 1991: 1044-45). In attempting to explain change over longer periods of time, Baumgartner and Jones argue that change occurs when a policy image is challenged and replaced by an alternative image. With regard to political actors, they state:

On the one hand, they try to control the prevailing image of the policy problem through the use of rhetoric, symbols and policy analysis. On the other hand, they try to alter the roster of participants who are involved in the issue by seeking out the most favourable venue for the consideration of their issues. In this process, both the institutional structures within which policies are made and the individual strategies of policy entrepreneurs play important role (Baumgartner and Jones, 1991: 1045).

In other words, Baumgartner and Jones suggest an interactive link between the framing process and the institutional venue. The latter encompasses the notions of responsibility and ownership of a problem: “as venues change, images may change as well; as the image of a policy changes, venue changes become more likely (Baumgartner and Jones 1991: 1047). According to Weiss, a successful problem definition is also affected by the institutional venue in which policy makers operate but at the same time problem definitions can result in new institutional arrangements, in the sense that they can influence “which institutions are legitimized and strengthened and which are not” (Weiss, 1989 : 117).

Ideas as zeitgeist

The third and last function that ideas perform is as ‘zeitgeist’ or public philosophies. A *zeitgeist* or public philosophy is a “disparate set of cultural, social or economic assumptions that are overwhelmingly dominant in public discourse at a given moment

in time” (Mehta, 2011: 40) with any attempt at criticism being confined to a small minority.

On this account, a zeitgeist stresses the role of the social and political context within which ideas gain (or do not gain) ground which considerably increases (or diminishes) the chances of success for a specific idea. Numerous terms have been used in the literature that overlap with the concept of zeitgeist, such as “world views” (Goldstein, 1993), “wider societal concerns” (Rhinard, 2010), “national mood” (Kingdon, 1984) and “public sentiments” (Campbell, 2008: 167). What these terms commonly underline is that the social and political context within which policies operate favours consideration of some issues while discouraging consideration of others. For instance, Baumgartner has argued that, in the EU context, neo-liberal policy solutions have a better chance of making their way to the top of the political agenda (Baumgartner, 2007: 485–6). Hence, the specific definition of a problem is also influenced by the social, cultural and ideological context within which the definition of the problem takes place and, in this respect, any complete accounting must link changes in society, politics and the intermediaries that link the two” (Mehta, 2011: 40). This means that ideas are more likely to gain support when they fit within the prevailing public philosophy of a period.

To sum up, this section has considered the different forms that ideas can have as policy solutions, problem definition and zeitgeist. In terms of policy solutions, it has been highlighted that ideas become policy solutions when they enjoy economic, administrative and political viability; this latter factor has further been elaborated in terms of the ability of one idea to be polysemantic, namely to appeal to a wider set of political constituencies. On the other hand, ideas can also take the form of problem definitions, under the assumption that the way a specific problem is defined has in turn implications for the chosen policy solution. In this respect, it has been underlined how

problems emerge, through which rhetorical strategies they are defined, by whom (the ideational agents/ideas carriers) and in which venues. Within both formulations of ideas as policy solutions and ideas as problem definitions, the role of actors – being them policy entrepreneurs, political entrepreneurs, or ideational agents/ideas carriers – has been emphasized. Furthermore, ideas can also take the form of zeitgeist, flowing from a set of assumptions that reflect the specific social, cultural and political context of the time.

2.3 The three-stage argument and observable implications

The typology of ideas as policy solutions, problem definitions and zeitgeist discussed in the previous section, presents the advantage of offering a dynamic conceptualization of ideas that allow us to eclectically develop a theoretical argument and its corresponding empirical observations in order to address the research question of this study. To briefly recall the research question of the thesis: *what explains the (development and change in) policy orientation of European education policy and what are its consequences?*

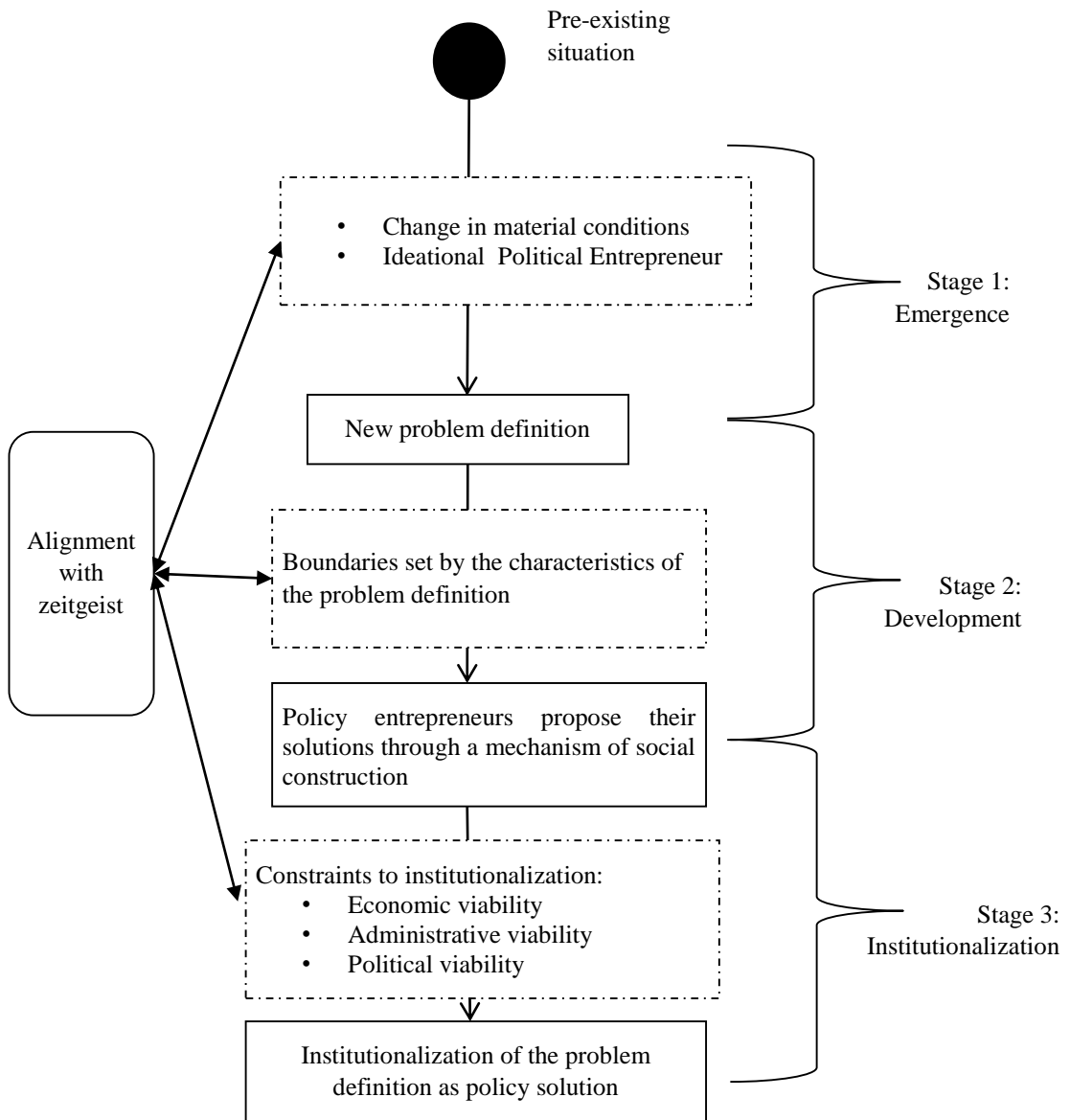
In addressing this question, the main goal of this study is to understand the transformations of European education policy over a time frame of three decades in terms of the substantive content of its ideas. Furthermore, the additional task is to investigate the dynamic interaction between the substantive content of these ideas and the active agency of policy actors in advocating them. In doing so, close attention is paid to tracing the trajectory of these ideas across historical, social and political contexts.

At the same time, by developing carefully formulated predictions of what evidence should be expected, it is hoped to avoid the “story-telling trap”. As pointed out by

Aminzade, through making the theories behind our narrative more explicit, “we avoid the danger of burying our explanatory principles in engaging stories [...] and can explore the causes and consequences of different sequence patterns” (Aminzade, 1993 : 108). Furthermore, by elaborating on Mehta’s analytical categories of the three functions of ideas and by supplementing them with the theoretical perspectives discussed in the previous section, it is possible to add more clarity in capturing the causal mechanisms through which ideas operate, the role of agency in this process and the importance of the context within which ideas are embedded.

The remaining part of this section presents the theoretical argument (outlined in the Figure 2.1 below) and the observable implications. The argument is developed in three-stages. Specifically, *the way a problem is defined (stage 1) influences what topics would be considered in the debate and who would be empowered to participate (stage 2) and in turn has implications for the policy solution that will be institutionalized as the policy choice (stage 3)*. In the following sub-sections, each stage is presented individually alongside its corresponding observable implications, which are tested against the empirical materials collected as described in the methodological chapter which follows.

Figure 2.1 Theoretical Framework



Stage One: Emergence of a problem definition

Exogenous and strategic factors are crucial for bringing to the forefront specific ideas of how a specific problem should be understood and defined. According to the literature, a change in the material conditions can be expected to indicate a condition as a problem and trigger some action (Kingdon, 1984; Mintrom and Norman, 2009). Indicators

(Kingdon, 1984), economic crises (Hall, 1993), focusing events (Birkland, 1997) or external crises (Schmidt, 2002: 255) have a highly visual impact and they can be expected to gain public attention, triggering a response to these conditions from policy makers (Zahariadis, 2008).

The change in the material conditions then sets into motion a debate in which the problem is interpreted from different perspectives. However, although some form of external trigger is needed for ideational change, the initial spark in the origin of a problem definition is also affected by other conditions. In particular, an *ideational political entrepreneur* needs to be present for a problem definition to enter the political environment (Dahl, 1961; Mintrom and Norman, 2009).

A policy actor can be qualified as “ideational political entrepreneur” if he or she presents the following characteristics: (i) he/she holds specific ideas that function as “road maps”; (ii) he/she possesses personal and political resources - such as teambuilding, social acuity, persistency, credibility and access – to put his ideas in practice; and (iii) he/she has the ability to exploit a window of opportunity such as a crisis or a focusing event.

The political entrepreneur is expected to introduce policy ideas within the policy making environment by exploiting a window of opportunity and by investing his/her personal and political resources in advocating and putting into practice his/her ideas.

Moreover, the specific zeitgeist in which the problem is debated is also an intervening factor that can increase (or decrease) the chances of a problem to enter the political arena.

In sum:

A change in the material conditions is expected to bring a problem to the fore with different ideas floating in the policy debate but, in order for a new problem definition to enter the policy arena, an ideational political entrepreneur as the main agent of ideational change needs to be present. Furthermore, the fit between the problem and the specific zeitgeist of the time increases the likelihood of a problem entering the political arena.

In relation to the empirical question at hand and concerning education policy in Europe, there are a number of empirical observations emanating from this argument. First, the new problem definition should be emerging at a time when material conditions allow for change. Empirically, this means that economic and educational indicators such as unemployment rates, number of school leavers and growth rates should convey a sense of crisis, or at least of a “focusing event”. Furthermore, given the great complexity of education as a policy issue, the resistance of Member States to cooperate (see also Chapter One), and also consistent with the above discussion about the actors linked to problem definition, it should be expected that the presence of a political entrepreneur acting as ideational agent should be empirically observable.

The political entrepreneur would be an individual well-placed in the EU arena possessing specific ideas about the contribution of education to European economy. We should expect an individual able to persuade, negotiate and communicate his or her ideas about education, supported by an effective team who recognizes him or her as a leader and able to perceive and overcome challenges as well as exploiting a window of

opportunity to put his ideas in practice. Finally, we should expect a zeitgeist which fits to the way the problem is defined.

Stage Two: Development of the problem definition in the policy-making arena

This stage relies more on contributions that emphasize the socially constructed nature of problem definitions (Felstiner et al.; 1980; Weiss, 1989; Birkland, 1997; Schon and Rein, 1994; Stone, 2002; Fischer, 2003; Baumgartner and Jones, 2003; Baumgartner, 2007; Mehta 2011). The emergence of the problem definition can be expected to trigger a process in which the problem definition itself influences policy themes, policy actors and institutional venues. Themes that are more aligned with the assumptions of the problem definition are expected to receive greater emphasis, while those that are not are more likely to be marginalized. In this respect, the problem definition is likely to influence the content of the policy debate, which issues receive attention and which do not, and this in turn demarcates what is further discussed in terms of policy solution. The problem definition is also expected to influence which kind of actors take part in the policy debate.

Policy entrepreneurs whose assumptions are more aligned with the way the problem is defined are expected to take ownership of the problem and can hence be expected to propose their policy solutions through a mechanism of social construction. Their ownership of the problem and participation in the policy debate are likely to be a manifestation of their material, knowledge and moral power, as a result of which they can make their ideas more influential within the policy arena. By acting as ideational agents/ ideas carriers, policy entrepreneurs can be expected to advocate their favourite understanding of the problem by constructing a compelling narrative and simplifying a

complex reality in a way that is favourable to the definition of the problem. Here, framing strategies, such as counting, narratives or story-telling, and naming, blaming and claiming, can be expected to be employed in order to construct the policy narrative.

In this respect, the main line of division can be expected to occur between powerful policy entrepreneurs who claim their expertise in regard to problem ownership and those policy actors who are not so powerful and whose participation is thus devalued. Furthermore, a shift in the institutional venues in which the problem is discussed is also likely to be observed. The problem definition hence acts as a vehicle for legitimating some institutional venues over others. As for the previous stage, the zeitgeist within which the problem is discussed and solutions are proposed, can favour consideration for some issues while discouraging consideration of others.

In sum:

The way the problem is defined is expected to develop in the policy-making arena by impacting on what topics will be considered in the debate and who will be entitled to participate to the policy debate; actors more aligned with the problem definition are more likely to become legitimized to speak and to propose their policy solutions through a mechanism of social construction and rhetorical strategies. The problem definition can provide added value to specific institutions over others, and a favourable zeitgeist can increase the likelihood of the problem definition to further advance in the policy arena.

In relation to the empirical question at hand and concerning education policy in Europe, there are a number of observable implications emanating from this argument. First, once the problem of education is defined as an issue of economic competitiveness, working

plans and policy programmes at the European level will emphasize the contribution of education to the European economy while being less focused on other aspects, such as social and cultural ones. Since the problem of education is defined as an issue of European competitiveness, a shift in the institutional venue in which education policy is discussed is more likely to occur, with the European Commission being expected to expand its institutional competences as result of the problem definition.

At the same time, we should expect the European Commission to be more legitimized to speak in the policy debate and develop the problem definition through a mechanism of social construction. In particular, given its entrepreneurial capacity in terms of informal agenda setting – such as operational infrastructure and extensive resources - (Pollack, 2003 : 51; Cram, 1994; Laffan, 1997; Wallis and Dollery, 1997), the European Commission is expected to act as the central ideational political entrepreneur by providing a compelling narrative, for instance by making a convincing case that a ‘supranational scale’ is appropriate in response to the problem (Leitner, 1997: 124), and by focusing the level of attention on some issues (e.g. education for better employment) rather than others (e.g. education for better inclusion). Framing strategies, such as counting, narratives or story-telling, and naming, blaming and claiming, are expected to be employed and communicated through the discourse. For instance, policy document(s) should emphasise the importance of education for European competitiveness and public statements/discourse should warn of an imminent Europe-wide crisis unless (the EU-proposed) actions in regard to modernizing the education system are undertaken.

Moreover, given the link between education and economic concerns, business actors with more privileged power positions are expected to become more dominant in the debate than other actors (for instance unions) and act as ideational agents/ideas carriers

in proposing their policy solutions. Finally, we should expect a zeitgeist which is appropriate to the way the problem is defined.

Stage Three: Institutionalization of the problem definition as a policy solution

The third stage is the one in which the problem definition is institutionalized as a policy solution. Institutions are defined as “a relatively enduring collection of rules and organised practices, embedded in structures of meaning and resources that are relatively resilient to the idiosyncratic preferences and expectations of individuals and changing external circumstances” (March and Olsen, 2008 : 3). Institutionalization is expected to be the outcome of the previous two stages with the problem definition influencing the chosen solution. Its influence is likely to be a manifestation of the multiple functions of the previous two stages: which principles, rules and procedures become embedded in the architecture of the policy and which not; which actors gain credibility and power; which institutions become empowered and reinforced; and which approaches are ultimately favoured in the final decision. Indeed, even though the problem definition is expected to influence the final decision, political and strategic factors also play a role. This is particularly relevant when analysing policies within the context of the European political arena and it has greater significance for policy fields characterized by a high degree of complexity, ambiguity, and Member States’ contestation such as education (Zahariadis, 2013; see also Chapter One).

Consequently, building upon the discussion of the previous section of ideas as policy solutions, an idea has more chance of being institutionalized as a policy solution when three conditions are met simultaneously: the idea is economically viable, administratively viable and politically viable (Hall, 1993). In terms of economic

viability, an idea is expected to resonate with widely held moral views or social objectives around which there is a broad consensus among the relevant actors, and hence it fits with the prevailing zeitgeist. In terms of administrative viability, an idea is expected to fit with the existing institutions and resources of the bureaucracy. While the economic and administrative viability are more straightforward to capture, it has been argued that the political viability of an idea is a more complex concept that requires further elaboration. One feature that an idea must exhibit in order to be politically viable is to act as a “coalition magnet”, namely the ability to be “polysemantic” (Beland and Cox, 2016; Jabko, 2006; Jenson, 2010). This means that the same idea can be interpreted to have several meanings, each of which appeals to the interests or ideals of a particular group that can result in the creation of a supporting coalition.

In sum:

It is expected that the institutionalization of the problem definition as policy solution will be influenced by the two previous stages and is thus the result of a common conceptualization of the problem definition; however, political and strategic factors are also expected to play a role and solutions that are administratively, economically and politically viable are more likely to succeed. Within political viability, it is expected that policy ideas that are polysemantic have more success to be used according different rationales, and can hence create new coalitions among actors with different interests.

For the problem at stake, the institutionalization of the idea of education under a more economic dimension will be affected but not entirely driven by the two previous stages. Indeed, more pragmatic and strategic considerations regarding the economic,

administrative, economic and political viability of the idea should be discussed: for instance, whether the policy solution is aligned with existing practices in the administration; whether it is economically viable, namely it fits with the prevailing zeitgeist in the sense of being consistent with the perceived problems and social and economic objectives of the time; and, finally, whether it is politically viable and it can speak to different interests. The policy debate should provide evidence of the presence of these questions. In addition, policy solutions that meet distinct rationales and can be used in a polysemantic way are expected to be favoured, because they allow to create coalitions in a shorter range of time.

If the investigation of the empirical material provides evidence that actors interpreted the same idea differently, the argument of the polysemantic nature of the idea could be harder to reject. Evidence of polysemy would be to observe in the discourse of policy makers the presence of a different notion attributed to the same idea. In addition, evidence in the policy debate of diverging and unstable preferences of Member States, which in turn change in a short period of time, could contribute to demonstrate that, more than other factors, it was the exposure to the problem definition that altered their preferences. Furthermore, evidence that the development of the problem definition happened well before the policy choice, could additionally support the influence of the problem definition.

2.4 Concluding remarks

This chapter has presented the theoretical framework of the study and the observable implications. By drawing eclectically on the literature on agenda setting, ideas and social construction of problems, the chapter has proposed a theoretical argument that avoids the pitfalls of relying exclusively on one specific factor as an enabling device for change. The argument has been conceptualized as a configuration of three-stages in which a problem definition originates (stage one), develops in the policy-making arena (stage two) and in turn points to the institutionalization of the problem definition as policy solution (stage three). For each of these stages, observable implications have been derived.

In addition, the argument proposed accommodates rationalists and institutionalists perspectives with an ontologically consistent constructivism that challenges the existence of an objective social world and maintains that the definition of interests is contingent upon the construction of what is perceived as being real (Berger and Luckmann, 1967; Adler, 2001). In other words, the argument does not overlook the role of interests, but it highlights how the definition of a problem can redefine particular interests or create new coalitions. Furthermore, the historical and institutional framework within which actors operate is not neglected but it is complemented with the mechanisms of ideational influence.

Chapter 3

Research strategy

Process tracing the influence of ideas

3.1 Introduction

Although there is consensus that ideas matter in political outcomes, there is still little methodological clarification regarding how they can be traced empirically (Mahoney, 2008; Campbell, 2008; Beland and Cox, 2011; Saurugger, 2013; Daigneault, 2014; Jacobs, 2015). On the one hand, it is challenging to observe the key mechanisms of ideational influence; on the other, it is difficult to distinguish the influence of ideas from “the material parameters of the choice situation” (Campbell, 2008: 163). This latter point, more than suggesting the need to show the causal supremacy of ideas over other factors, highlights the more complex methodological task of establishing the influence of ideas as “autonomous causes”. As suggested by Craig Parsons and Alan Jacobs, this means: (i) attempting to show that ideas have an influence on their own and are not solely an “echo or embellishment of responses to other aspects of the context”; and (ii) that this influence is not completely detached from the influence of other conditions; but that nevertheless they possess their own influence over other conditions (Parsons, 2016: 448; Jacobs, 2015).

On the basis of these suggestions, how can the distinction between ideational and material effects be empirically tracked? And how can the mechanisms of ideational influence be observed?

To address these methodological questions, this chapter outlines the research strategy that this thesis adopts. In this respect, process tracing is proposed as the method most suitable for assessing the influence of ideas at key points in time and for distinguishing the influence of ideas from the influence of other conditions (Jacobs, 2015). The second part of the chapter explains the choice of a single case study, justifies the chosen periodization, and presents the strategy for data collection and source evaluation.

3.2 Empirical strategies for process tracing the influence of ideas

There is no uniform definition of process tracing. This method draws inspiration from different research fields: political science, evaluation, historical methods and comparative politics. It is perhaps because of its multidisciplinary background that it is still a contested approach, with little consensus on its definition, which often depends on the disciplinary field in which the method is applied and the disciplinary and epistemological background of the researcher (Little, 1995; Bates et al. 1998; Buthe, 2002; Brady, 2004; Geddes, 2003; Collier et al., 2004; Kittel and Kuehn, 2013; Bennett and Checkel, 2015). For instance, Bates and his co-authors (1998) use the term to refer to ‘analytic narrative’, combining the game theory approach with the narrative method; Buthe proposes the notion of ‘historical narratives’ in the sense that process tracing can detect “sound, systematic, regular relationship between variables” (Buthe, 2002 : 482). However, reducing process tracing to a mere analysis of the temporal process would be of little help in updating our knowledge of the different factors contributing to policy change. At the same time, to equate process tracing with the concepts of intervening variables overlooks the strength of this method in detecting the causal mechanisms between an initial set of conditions and an outcome.

A more comprehensive definition of process tracing is provided by Van Evera, who maintains that this method involves research where “the cause-effect link that connects independent variable and outcome is unwrapped and divided into smaller steps: then the investigator looks for observable evidence of each step” (Van Evera, 1997: 64). This definition suggests that process tracing is more than a method of explaining why something happened, and rather is focused on what links a condition and an outcome together, by providing a clear theorisation of the causal mechanism underlying a causal effect (Brady and Collier, 2010; Beach and Pedersen, 2013; Bennett and Checkel, 2015). As also argued by Bennett and Checkel, process tracing can be defined as “the analysis of evidence on processes, sequences, and conjectures of events within a case for the purposes of either developing or testing hypothesis about causal mechanisms that might causally explain the case” (Bennett and Checkel, 2015 : 7).

The approach proposed by Bennett and Checkel is particularly appropriate in the context of this thesis, as it highlights the contribution of process tracing in capturing how something happened, by linking a condition and an outcome together through a sequence of causal mechanisms, while at the same time emphasising the importance of observable evidence. In this respect, a mechanism is based on the idea of a cause as an “effect-producer factor” (Hall, 2004) whereby causal forces are transmitted through a series of interlocking parts of a mechanism to produce an outcome (Glennan, 1996; Bunge, 1997). Moreover, accounting for the causes of specific outcomes also means adopting a “causes of the effects” approach rather than an “effects of causes” one; while the former starts with an outcome of a case and is concerned with explaining its causes, the latter privileges estimating the average effect of hypothesised causes across a population of cases (Mahoney and Goertz, 2006 : 230). Finally, as is the case in this thesis, the use of process tracing relates to theory-building purposes, namely engaging

with the empirical material and the theoretical literature in order to detect and identify potential mechanisms, with the empirical data ultimately driving the theorizing process (Swedberg, 2012 : 7; Beach and Pedersen, 2013).

In all of these respects, process tracing can help in understanding the emergence, development, and institutionalization of a problem definition by examining the chain of the events and reconstructing details such as “who the relevant actors are; how their beliefs and preferences are formed, how they choose their actions and how the individual actions of multiple actors are aggregated to produce the collective outcome” (Schimmelfennig, 2015: 105). In other words, through process tracing it is possible to evaluate the extent to which the empirical material confirms or disconfirms the predicted parts of the three-stage argument based on the “prior expectation” of finding this evidence (Beach and Pedersen, 2013). This prior expectation, or prior knowledge, is represented by the researcher’s degree of confidence in the validity of their predictions before gathering the evidence, where those predictions are based on “existing theorization, empirical studies or other forms of expert knowledge” (Beach and Pedersen, 2013 : 84; Collier, 2011 : 824).

Process tracing ideational mechanisms is a particularly challenging task. Although the previous chapter has clearly specified the case-specific observable implications derived from the theoretical argument - whose specification is considered one of the key steps for “efficient” process tracing (Bennett and Checkel, 2015 : 18; Schimmelfennig, 2015 : 105-106) - the challenge of showing the influence of ideas as “autonomous causes” still remains. In order to address this challenge, this thesis follows Alan Jacobs’ advice on process tracing ideational explanations (Jacobs, 2015: 42-73; see also Parsons, 2016). In particular, three empirical strategies are employed to examine the three-stage

argument: (i) analysing private communications; (ii) expanding the temporal scope of the analysis; and (iii) tracing ideational diffusions and the role of ideas carriers.

Three empirical strategies for assessing the influence of ideas

The first strategy is the *analysis of private records*. This strategy provides an effective way to “observe communication, during the process of decision making that is congruent with the idea” (Jacobs, 2015: 49). The analysis of private communications, such as, for instance, confidential documents, internal notes, and confidential letters is a useful way not only to reveal the ideas held by actors but also to observe whether actors “applied a particular set of values, beliefs, analogies, etc. to the decision in question (Jacobs, 2015 : 52). For example, in this study, the analysis of the private communications of Peter Sutherland helped to better identify not only the ideas he possessed about education but also his role as an ideational political entrepreneur (see Chapter Four).

A second strategy is to *expand the temporal scope of the analysis* in order to better differentiate ideational from material causes. As argued by Jacobs, “because cognitive constructs are relatively resistant to change, we should see evidence of relative stability over time in both actors’ ideas and in the choices that are hypothesised to result from them, even as material conditions change” (Jacobs, 2015 : 57). In other words, by expanding the time horizon of the analysis prior to the “decision(s) initially of central interest to the investigator” (Jacobs, 2015: 57), it is possible to examine the influence of ideas over time in comparison with the shifts in the material context. Put simply, if the ideas remained constant while the material context varied, it might be possible to infer that the idea played an autonomous role compared to the role played by material factors.

In the case of this study, the time horizon of the investigation has been expanded with the analysis beginning in the year 1973 (see also the next section on periodization). In this way, it was possible to observe that not only did specific ideas about the role of education for European economic competitiveness gain ground from 1985 onwards, but also that these ideas were only partially moved by the changes in the material conditions “to which, under a materialist explanation, they ought to have been highly sensitive” (Jacobs, 2015 : 58).

The third strategy suggested by Jacobs focuses on *tracing ideational diffusion through the identification of ideational origins and ideas carriers*, namely agents “who not only implement these ideas but also construct and reconstruct them” (Thatcher and Schmidt, 2013 : 22; Jacobs, 2015). In terms of the identification of ideational origins, Jacobs suggests that “there should be evidence of a source for the idea that is both external and antecedent to the decision being explained” (Jacobs, 2015:65). In practice, this strategy requires not only looking for evidence that policy actors were exposed to relevant ideas but also that the source of the ideas “must have been sufficiently prominent and credible to have influenced the intellectual environment in which the case is situated” (Jacobs, 2015: 66). This brings in the additional task of identifying ideas carriers by establishing that “changes in outcomes should follow the entry of identifiable carriers of the relevant ideas into key loci of political authority” (Jacobs, 2015: 67). How can ideas carriers be recognised? First, in order to detect and identify these carriers and their belief systems, their non-state activity outside the political venue must be traced. Second, they need to have sufficient influence within a venue (Jacobs, 2015: 68). In the case of this study, by employing this strategy it has been possible to shed new light on the role of the European Round Table of Industrialists as ideas carriers regarding the substantive content of the education agenda as well as their role as first-mover in proposing the

setup of the Open Method of Coordination for education (see Chapter Five, Chapter Seven).

3.3 Motivation for the choice of a Single Case study and periodization of the analysis

This research project is based on a single case study that provides a temporal analysis of the trajectory of European education policy from 1973 to 2010. A significant merit of case studies is that they can provide an in-depth and empirically rich analysis of a complex phenomenon. As stated by Yin, a case study is “an empirical enquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in-depth and within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (Yin, 2009: 14). A fruitful distinction in terms of case studies is made by Stake, who distinguishes between intrinsic case studies – which provide an in-depth explanation of a single event – and instrumental case studies – which offer an insight into an issue or enable the redrawing of a generalization (Stake, 2005: 445). This study stands in between these two distinctions: on the one hand, it is intrinsic, as it aims at contributing to a better understanding of the transformations of European education policy and of its policy orientation; on the other, it is instrumental, as it seeks to provide more generalizable considerations regarding how ideas influence political outcomes.

A specific concern for single case studies, and for qualitative research more generally, is that of generalisability. Differently from quantitative studies, the issue of generalisability in qualitative analysis has a more complex meaning. As pointed out by Flyvbjerg, case studies can not only serve theory-building purposes but they can also generate “concrete, practical (context dependent) knowledge” (Flyvbjerg, 2006: 221-

224) and thus provide a better understanding of the particular case analysed. However, though it is usually not possible to draw statistical generalisations from qualitative case study research, it is nevertheless possible to acquire analytical generalisation (Yin, 2003: 10). Put simply, this means articulating how the findings can go beyond the particular case by specifying why they are significant, and to whom and to which processes they can be generalised and transferred. In this case, the findings could be generalised by transferring the three-stage argument to other cases of European policy-making in fields – such as social policy - where the EU has no binding competence (see also Chapter Eight).

Finally, the choice of a single case study is strictly related to the main purpose of this thesis, which is to trace the influence of ideas from their origins to their institutionalization. Consequently, this kind of goal necessarily requires careful historical reconstruction, which can be most fruitfully undertaken through a single case study (Campbell and Pedersen, 2011; Saurugger, 2013). This last point introduces an important component of a single case study, namely the justification of the period of choice for undertaking the empirical analysis (Bennett and Checkel, 2015: 26).

A very familiar concern for historians, periodization represents an important component of single case studies and of process tracing in general (Amenta, 2009; Bennett and Checkel, 2015). Besides being essential in delimiting the research question to a specific timescale, the creation of a structured and ordered framework through periodization is a pre-condition for facilitating the comprehension of the chain of events. Hence, providing a justification for the starting and ending points of the investigation of the empirical evidence is an essential task in the research strategy. The eminent historian Edward Hallett Carr makes this clear when he says: “the division of history into periods is not a fact, but a necessary hypothesis or tool of thought, valid in so far as it is

illuminating, and dependent on its validity on interpretation” (Carr, 1962: 54). In other words, periodization is part and parcel of the interpretation (and selection) that we attribute to the phenomena under consideration. According to David Phillips, periodization possesses three features: “a subjective ordering which will be often defended in quasi-objectives terms”; “the ability to make sense of otherwise unmanageable time spans by identifying unities of some kind”, and the “identification of significant events that may be taken to determine change” (Phillips, 2002: 364). The latter point echoes the advice of Bennett and Checkel, who suggest starting with a critical juncture at which “an institution or practice was contingent or open to alternative paths and actors or exogenous events determined which path it would take” (Bennett and Checkel, 2015: 26). The same authors also suggest identifying a point at which a “key actor or agent enters the scene or gains some material, ideational or informational capacity” (Bennett and Checkel, 2015: 26).

Following these suggestions, the time frame of the research covers a period of over three decades: from the year 1973, when a more formal role of the Community in education began, to the year 2010, when European education policy was fully integrated within European economic policies. In order to facilitate the comprehension of the sequence, description and analysis of the events - and on the basis of the three-stage theoretical argument, as it emerged from the analysis of the empirical material - this period is divided into three units: 1973-1985; 1985-1997; and 1997-2010.

However, even though the use of historical phases allows for presenting the empirical material in a coherent way, it must also be noted that a precise delimitation is ultimately a tentative effort, as events might also cross these time-boundaries (Phillips, 1994). At the same time, the division into time periods also raises an important question: what determined the starting and ending dates of each of the three periods above? As

suggested by Philips and Bennett and Checkel, particular significance has been attached not only to major political events (in this case, events that occurred at the European level with reference to education policy) but also to events that marked a change of direction in the content of the policy. These three periods of time are presented and discussed in their own chapters, and they include:

1. The emergence of the problem definition, 1973-1985 (Chapter Four)
2. The development of the problem definition, 1985-1997 (Chapter Five; Chapter Six)
3. The institutionalization of the problem definition as a policy solution, 1997-2010 (Chapter Seven)

3.4 Data collection and evaluation of sources

Collecting the empirical observations within a single historical case study is a challenging task. It is “both time consuming and demands skills” and requires the development of deep knowledge of the case under investigation (Amenta, 2009: 352). From this perspective, process tracing is exposed to several sources of potential bias that apply to the different types of evidence collected (Collier et al. 2004). For example, engaging in the data collection phase might entail the risk of cherry-picking those data that most conveniently increase the researcher’s confidence in the observable implications. As argued by Collier and Mahoney, selection bias occurs when “some sort of selection process in either the design of the study or the real world phenomena under investigation results in inferences that suffer from systematic error” (Collier and Mahoney 2006: 58-59). In other words, this can occur due to exaggerating or

misunderstanding the significance of a particular piece of material or due to overestimating the importance of a particular document without assessing its accuracy or possible omissions. Consequently, to avoid a purely subjective interpretation and increase the accuracy of the findings, the data collected have been critically assessed and evaluated according to two criteria: the context and the source of information.

To satisfy the first criterion, the content of the different sources of information was assessed by placing them in the case specific context in which they were produced. Following George and Bennett, this meant engaging in “who is speaking to whom, for what purpose, and under what circumstances” (George and Bennett, 2005: 99-100). For example, in analysing a meeting minute, this entailed asking the purpose that the document served, why it was created and whether it is an accurate reflection of what really occurred. In the same vein, if some particular content was not mentioned in the text, this omission might also have had inferential weight in the analysis. Moreover, when assessing the content of different sources, caution had to be exercised in assessing their *certainty* – what needs to be found in the empirical material if a specific prediction is true - and their *uniqueness* - namely whether it is possible to explain the existence of the predicted evidence with any eventual plausible alternative explanations (Van Evera, 1997: 31-32; Beach and Pedersen, 2013). Within this process, an additional way to avoid fallacious inference based on an incorrect reading of the data was to analyse what the data meant in relation to the theory proposed.

The second criterion was to evaluate the data according to the sources of information following two strands of good measurement: reliability and validity. While reliability refers to the ability of the empirical tests to consider both the presence and absence of the observable implications, validity indicates that the evidence has been accurately measured (Beach and Pedersen, 2013: 126-127). A way to test the reliability and

validity of the documents collected was to collect and triangulate multiple sources of information, such as confidential documents, primary sources, secondary sources and interviews. In small N research in particular, data triangulation is assumed to increase both the validity and reliability (Yin, 2009). In comparison with triangulation, which in quantitative analysis is purely intended as a means of cross-validating data, triangulation in qualitative studies helps to better capture different dimensions of the same phenomenon and to “clarify meaning, verifying the repeatability of an observation or interpretation (Stake, 2005: 454). Following these considerations, in this study three sources of observation were triangulated. First, secondary sources that describe and discuss the change in European education policy were examined. Second, primary sources (historical archives and official EU documents) were collected, analysed and evaluated according to the contextual knowledge of the case and with reference to the theoretical insights. As Amenta puts it nicely, this meant going “native for a while as a historian, but trying to emerge from the archives with social science theoretical insights and demonstrations of arguments” (Amenta, 2009: 357). Third, the interpretation of key actors and policy makers was analysed through in-depth elite interviews.

Secondary literature on education

The first step was the collection of secondary literature on European education policy. Given the paucity of studies on education within the political science and European politics literature (Busemayer and Trampusch, 2011; see also Chapter One), a preliminary intense literature review was collected, drawing upon the adjacent disciplines of comparative education and the sociology of education. In this respect, the main contributions consulted were those of Ertl (2003), Field (1998), Neave (1984), Corbett (2005) and the detailed volume edited by the European Commission and written

by Luce Pépin on the history of European education policy (Pépin, 2006). Articles from the European Journal of Education, founded in 1965, were also consulted and selected with reference to their specific focus on European education policy. Collectively, these studies provided a preliminary mapping of the main historical developments of European education policy between 1973 and 2010. Furthermore, an additional advantage of these sources was that they contributed to the choice and articulation of the periodization of the case study within the empirical chapters as discussed earlier.

Archival research

The second step was to conduct extensive archival research at the Historical Archives of the European Union (henceforth, HAEU) held at the European University Institute in Florence. The HAEU contain not only primary documents from European Union institutions (meeting minutes, official statements, and policy positions) but also the private papers of key European politicians and high ranking EU officials, some of which have not been consulted previously (this was the case of the private papers of Peter Sutherland, deposited in June 2015 and consulted by the author in September 2015). Due to the 30-years rule, which requires that documents be made public 30 years after their production, only EU documents up to 1985 could be consulted. However, when needed (because the description of the documents in the catalogue of the HAEU made a specific reference to education, which was particularly intriguing), a derogation was granted by the Director of the Historical Archives.

The sources of information consulted and their respective relevance to verifying the observable implications were:

- the private Fonds⁴ of Emilio Gazzo (EG), Helen Wallace (HW), Emile Noel (EN), Pier Virgilio Dastoli (PVD), and the European Social and Economic Committee (CES)
- the private papers of Peter Sutherland, containing confidential letters, official speeches, minutes of meetings and internal notes covering the one year of his mandate as Commissioner for Education in 1985
- the historical Fonds of Cedefop, which contain working plans and annual reports together with meeting minutes both of the Management Board and the Bureau. The archives of Cedefop were particularly relevant for the purposes of this research. Indeed, since the Centre was established under a quadripartite structure, they reveal the positions of Member States, Trade Unions, Employers, officials of the Centres and Commission representatives, thus providing a comprehensive picture of the actors participating in the policy process
- for a further examination of the education policy making process and non-State actors, the following Fonds were consulted: the *Youth Forum of the European Communities*(YFEC) and the *Fonds of the Association Européenne des Enseignants* (AEDE)
- Press releases of the European Parliament (CPPE), which collects articles on education policy from the main European newspapers (for language reasons only English, Irish, Spanish, Italian, French and Belgian newspapers were consulted).

⁴The Society of American Archivists defines “Fonds” as “the entire body of records of an organization, family, or individual that have been created and accumulated as the result of an organic process reflecting the functions of the creator”.

- For the most recent period of European education policy and in particular the period close to the Lisbon Strategy, the Bulletins of Agence Europe (AE), the press agency that publishes news about activities of the EU, were consulted. Articles were selected through a keyword search using “education”, “knowledge economy”, and “Open Method of Coordination”. The major advantage of the AE bulletins was that they provided insights into the opinions of the European Council regarding the Communications of the European Commission, captured the reactions of Member States to the European Commission’s proposals and shed light on the priorities of each Member State Council’s Presidency, especially close to the decisions of the Lisbon Strategy.

In addition to the archival research conducted at the Historical Archives of the European Union, the research also benefitted immensely from the private papers of Hywel Ceri Jones containing confidential letters, official speeches, internal notes, and covering the period 1973-1998.

Official EU documents

Official EU documents such as Commission communications, Commission reports, Council decisions, Council reactions to Commission communications, conclusions of Council Summits and speeches were collected and analysed through qualitative documentary analysis. Qualitative analysis was employed to assess the specific ideas and policy aims of European education policy and their eventual shift over the time period examined. Qualitative analysis offered an effective way to detect which rhetorical strategies were used and how discourse was communicated. Furthermore, the sequence of the documents in terms of their publication date enabled the tracing of the

trajectory of specific ideas of education over time. In a similar vein, in order to reconstruct the trajectory of ideas, acknowledgments in official publications or official speeches were considered important in order to assess whether there was a link between specific ideas and their ideas carriers.

In-depth elite interviews

Finally, few in-depth interviews were conducted with EU high-ranking officials and key actors in order to understand how particular ideas mattered. The interviews helped in validating or challenging the accuracy of the information collected from other sources (Tansey, 2007) and also in clarifying some “black box” aspects of the primary sources, hence compensating for the limitations of documentary evidence (Davies, 2001). For example, this was the case for existing but not publicly available archival documents. At the same time, the interviews were also useful in terms of establishing counterfactual evidence. Counterfactual analysis should answer the hypothetical question: “what could have happened but did not it fact happen”? Since counterfactual reasoning is based on non-observations that are often not realized in practice, a potential way to establish counterfactual evidence is through interviews, especially elite interviewing (Kay and Baker, 2015). Having witnessed the political events, interviewees can represent a critical source of information on the policy process. In this respect, the purpose was to ask them how they thought a particular outcome would have looked in the absence of specific factors intervening within the policy process. Although the counterfactual is an imaginative thought construct that can only be based on guesswork – in the absence of any alternative scenario to compare with – it nevertheless highlighted the interviewees' perceptions of events or non-events.

In particular, the research benefited from four in-depth extensive interviews and conversations with:

- Peter Sutherland – Commissioner for Social Affairs, Employment, Education, Training and Youth (DG V) in 1985; Interviewed in November 2015
- Hywel Ceri Jones – EU official from 1972-1998; Member of Sutherland’s cabinet in 1985; Hywel Ceri Jones joined the European Commission in 1973 first as head of the Education division within DG Research, Science and Education and successively from 1981 till 1993 as Director for Education, Training and Youth Policy, and Director of the Commission’s Task Force for Human Resources, Education, Training and Youth. From 1993 till 1998 he acted as Director General of Employment, Social Policy and Industrial Relations; Interviewed several times between 2016 and 2017
- Andre Kirchberger – EU Official from 1981-1998, Member of Sutherland’s cabinet in 1985; former Head of the Vocational Training Policy Unit in the Directorate General for Education, Training and Youth and involved in education and training at Community level from 1982 to 1999; Interviewed in April 2017
- David Marsden – currently Professor of Industrial Relations at the London School of Economics and Political Science and former member of the Study Group appointed by Edit Cresson in 1996; Interviewed in April 2017.

Although elite interviews do not involve respondents usually conceptualized as “vulnerable” in terms of research conventions (Lancaster, 2017: 99), there are nevertheless concerns on how to manage confidentiality and anonymity. In this respect, directly quoted interviewees were asked to consent to their full name being used in the thesis and consent was granted.

Chapter 4

The emergence of the problem definition (1973-1985)

4.1 Introduction

On 31st January 1985, at a meeting with social partners in Val Duchesse, Peter Sutherland, the new Commissioner for Social Affairs, Employment, Education, Training and Youth (DG V⁵), opened his speech by stating that:

We are all of us in this room fully committed to the re-emergence of Europe as a major first-class industrial power [...] we must transform - together - our whole approach to education (Sutherland, 1985a: 1).

This bold statement seems to indicate an explicit link between education and European economic growth, thus suggesting a shift towards a more economic orientation of European education policy compared to the more social and redistributive one that had prevailed up until then. This chapter explores how and to what extent this shift occurred and analyses the main factors and policy actors that gradually led to education becoming defined as a problem of European economic competitiveness.

The chapter corresponds with the first stage of the theoretical argument in which a change in the material conditions is expected to bring a problem to the fore with different ideas floating around in the policy debate. However, in order for a problem

⁵ Hereinafter referred to as DG Social Affairs, DG V or Directorate-General Social Affairs, Employment, Education, Training and Youth .

definition to enter the policy arena, an ideational political entrepreneur as the main agent of ideational change needs to be present.

Through a detailed historical account and by employing process tracing, the chapter examines the origins of European education from 1973, the year in which we can ascertain the official birth of this policy domain, to 1985, the year in which we can detect a change of direction in terms of content and policy initiatives. First, in terms of content, the chapter shows a gradual shift from a social to a more economic conception of education with 1985 being regarded as the starting point of a progressive divergence in the conception of education as an economic tool at the expense of social equity. As will become clearer in the next chapters, this process will crystallize a way of thinking about education that has now become the dominant one. Second, in terms of policy initiatives, the year 1985 marks a capstone in European cooperation in education with the launch and approval in less than five months of Comett, the first exchange mobility programme of university-industry cooperation, which will pave the way for the approval of other mobility programmes (see Chapter Six).

Although an economic rationale, namely the changes in the material context, can explain the acceleration in terms of Community efforts towards education, it is less able to account for the reorientation of education policy towards a specific content. In particular, what is left unexplained is why the European education agenda changed its orientation; in other words why, despite the same material pressures such as unemployment and technological change, the economic orientation prevailed over the social one. At the same time, regarding the launch of the Comett programme, the sudden change in the preference of Member States for increasing cooperation, as manifested in the launch of the Comett programme, seems to suggest that other explanatory factors might have played a role. Conversely, the chapter shows that the

changes in terms of content and policy initiatives resulted from the interplay between a changed socio-economic context and the ideational political entrepreneurship of Peter Sutherland. Under his one-year mandate as Commissioner for DG V, old – and new – ideas regarding the goals and purposes of European education policy became articulated and synthesized in a coherent framework, which pointed to Europe’s lack of competitiveness and the role of education as a remedy to that.

After this introduction, section two sets out the historical background of European education policy and traces the early developments in terms of initiatives and policy content during the period 1973-1981. Section three examines how the education agenda was transformed in its orientation by the changes in the material conditions at the beginning of the 1980s, namely the dramatic rise of unemployment and the challenges brought by technological change. In particular, the section analyses how the changes in the material context continued the debate around its social purpose and which factors intervened to reinforce a more economic view of its content and aims. Section four presents evidence that qualifies the Commissioner for Education, Peter Sutherland as an ideational political entrepreneur; specific attention is devoted to his ability to recast the terms of the educational policy debate around the instrumental role of education as a tool to remedy the European lack of competitiveness. The final section discusses the findings and concludes.

The chapter draws on the analysis of original archival materials, the private papers of Peter Sutherland held at the Historical Archives of the European Union in Florence and the private papers of Hywel Ceri Jones, and two in depth interviews with Hywel Ceri Jones and Andre’ Kirchberger, members of Sutherland’s cabinet (see also Chapter Three).

4.2 Early developments of European education policy

During the 1970s, the term ‘Grey Area’ (*Zone Grise*) indicated those policy areas that were not originally mentioned in the Rome Treaty and that were characterised by ‘non-economic aims’. These were also policy areas in which the European Commission wished to expand its competences, but it was well aware that these policies were strictly falling within the legal competence of Member States (Confidential compte rendu ‘Zone Grise’, 1978; Interview with Jones). Education policy was one of these Grey Areas. Indeed, whereas Article 128 of the Treaty of Rome (1957) mentioned vocational training with reference to the drawing up of general principles for implementing a common vocational training policy⁶, there was no reference to education. The main purpose of the Community was geared towards promoting economic cooperation and trade through the implementation of a custom union and a Common Agricultural Policy, with education deeply rooted within the competences of Member States under a strong intergovernmental approach (Khan, 1994: 50; Lawn and Novoa, 2002). Consistent with Alan Milward’s thesis that the European integration project was based on a European level - responsible for economic integration - and on a Member State level - responsible for welfare (Milward, 1992) - education was also strongly retained as an exclusive national competence because it was so closely linked to national cultures and to the construction of national identities (Bartolini, 2005; see also Chapter One). In the words of Hywel Ceri Jones:

⁶ Specifically, Article 128 of the Treaty of Rome referred to the drawing up of general principles for vocational training: “the Council shall, acting on a proposal from the Commission and after consulting the Economic and Social Committee (of the social partners) lay down general principles for implementing a common vocational training policy capable of contributing to the harmonious development both of the national economies and of the common market” (Article 128). However, despite being mentioned in the Treaty of Rome, the implementation of these principles was “all but a dead letter” until the mid-1980s (Flynn, 1988 : 59).

This initial foundation period reflected the uneasiness of the then six Member States to brook any interference with areas, of which education was but one, which lie in the very heartland of public sensitivity about the idea of national sovereignty [...] education was a national affair, not even to be discussed at Community level. If anybody attempted to broach the subject it was easy enough to argue that the Council of Europe had been created precisely to develop intra-European cooperation in areas such as education and culture (Jones, 1983: para 1).

Against this scenario, it was not until the beginning of the 1970s that education slowly and indirectly emerged in the policy debate linked to the emergence of new social issues.

After the Golden Age of the 1950s and 1960s, the beginning of the 1970s represented the end of an exceptional period of economic, social and political stability for Europe and the start of a difficult period that will be labelled *Eurosclerosis* (Giersch, 1985). The oil crisis of 1973 affected most European countries with a resulting rise in the rate of unemployment, which doubled between 1973 and 1977, to approximately 2 million unemployed young people under the age of 25 years (CEC, 1977a). Moreover, the student movement of May 1968 led to the emergence of new social needs, such as the need for a radical reform of the educational system, and new demands being put forward by groups such as students and women (Mazower, 1998). In addition, the first enlargement in 1973 included countries, such as United Kingdom and Ireland, that were experiencing dramatic de-industrialisation and economic decline (Varsori and Mechi, 2007; Cassiers, 2006). Furthermore, a growing concern was represented by the situation in the Community of migrants and their children, with around 3.5 million children of migrant workers being in the school systems of Member States (OECD Observer, 1975).

At the Paris summit of December 1972, the heads of State of the European Community declared for the first time that the implementation of a social policy was a major objective. They stated that, “economic expansion is not an end in itself, it should result in an improvement in quality of life as well as in standards of living” (European Community, 1972) and asked the European Commission to launch a concrete social programme to “emphasize the human face of the Community” (Jones, 1983: para 2). In January 1974, the Council launched its first *Social Action Programme*, highlighting three objectives: (i) full employment, (ii) the achievement of better living and working conditions, and (iii) the involvement of social actors in Community decisions. Hence, embedded in this growing awareness of the *social* dimension of the European Community, education emerged as an institutional and policy domain at community level (Corbett, 2005 : 76; Rubio, 1997). As recalled by Jones, “even though there was still no direct reference to education, it is reasonable to suppose that social policy did not exclude education” (Interview with Jones).

For the first time after the Treaty of Rome was signed, a specific Directorate for Education and Training was set up in 1973 and became part of the Directorate-General for Research and Science, thus becoming the Directorate-General for Research, Science and Education (DG XII), with Ralf Dahrendorf as Commissioner (Neave, 1984:8; see also Pépin, 2006 : 92)⁷. In 1975, Cedefop was established in Berlin. Cedefop was the first European agency for the development of vocational education and training, set up

⁷ As we shall see in the next section, in 1981 education will be incorporated, together with vocational training and youth, into the Directorate-General for Social Affairs and Employment (DG V), whereas in 1989 – as we shall see in Chapter Five and Six - education will receive an autonomous status with the creation of the Task Force Human Resources, Education, Training and Youth that will in turn become in 1995 the Directorate-General Education, Training and Youth (DG XXII).

with the purpose of acting as an agent for the exchange of information and communication on Member States' educational systems (Council Regulation, 1975). According to Varsori (2004), Cedefop represented one of the main achievements of the trade unions in their efforts to achieve greater representation within the Community, especially after the creation in 1973 of the European Trade Union Confederation. Indeed, governed by a quadripartite management board (comprising representatives of the Commission, the governments of the ten Member States, employers' organisations and trade unions), its creation was championed by Maria Weber, the then Vice-President of the German Confederation of Trade Unions (Varsori, 2004). Thus, on the one hand, the creation of Cedefop can be considered as a result of social concerns, emanating from unions and social actors. On the other, its establishment under a quadripartite institutional structure complied with the wish of most Member States to limit the powers of the Commission, thus confirming the intergovernmental nature of the policy.

Parallel to these institutional innovations, a debate on specific themes of cooperation in education came to the fore through the publication of the *Janne Report* of 1973, considered the first official attempt to provide an input to the European Commission's thinking regarding education (Janne, 1973; Interview with Jones). Prepared by Henri Janne, former Belgian minister of Education, in cooperation with thirty-five education experts and relevant academics,⁸ and inspired by the "recognition of an educational

⁸Contributors of the reports included: Hendrik Brumans, the Rector of the College of Europe, Alexander King, Director General of Scientific Affairs within the OECD, Jan Tinbergen, Nobel Prize winner for economics, James Perkins, President of the International Council for educational development; Raymond Poignant, Director of the International Institute for educational planning Unesco; Aldo Visabergghi, Professor of Educational Sciences in Rome and Member of the CERI, the Centre for Educational research and innovation of the OECD, Eide Kjell president of the CERI.

dimension of Europe and the irreversible initial movement towards an education policy at European community level” (Janne, 1973:10), the report linked education to the *crisis of values* caused by the “staggering changes due to their rapid scientific and technological progress, changes affecting structures, ways of thought and way of life” (Janne, 1973:17; emphasis added). The report proposed some themes of cooperation for education, such as improving knowledge of languages, promoting the European dimension, establishing initiatives for promoting mobility and exchanges between education institutions, and “the right to engage normally in activities covered by degrees and diplomas in all Member States of the Community” (Janne, 1973:35). Besides suggesting the themes around which cooperation should be organised, the report also provided suggestions in regard to potential harmonization and standardization of Member States’ education practices. However, this latter proposal was immediately rejected. In the words of Jones, it was largely “unrealistic” to propose a notion of harmonization and, apart from the Italian support, all of the other Member States, including France, Germany, UK and Denmark, were strongly against it (Interview with Jones).

The first official document on education produced within the European Commission was the paper “Education in the European Community” (1974), written by Hywel Ceri Jones. By drawing from Janne’s proposals for cooperation but without pushing his harmonization ambitions, the report proposed a strategy of common action and suggested mechanisms for cooperation, such as the exchange of views and information. In particular, four areas of cooperation were proposed: (i) the need to improve and extend opportunities for teachers and students to move among the countries of the Community, and also to tackle the problem of academic qualifications; (ii) the education of the children of migrant workers; (iii) the encouragement of the

development of a European dimension of education, including the teaching and learning of foreign languages; and (iv) the strengthening of cooperation between higher education institutions and the academic recognition of periods of study abroad (CEC, 1974 : 50).

What can be noticed so far is that, in both publications, the themes of cooperation clearly pointed to more social and cultural aspects of education; although pursuing economic goals, such as the mobility of workers, that was acknowledged through the goal of the academic recognition of diplomas, both publications interpreted the notion of the “European dimension of education” under a genuine social and cultural dimension, as manifested by the inclusion of themes such as knowledge of foreign languages, the promotion of exchanges and cooperation between education institutions and the importance of education for migrant children. At the same time, the European Commission was well aware of the difficulty of advancing a common education policy. Indeed, by referring to the social problems of the period, the Commissioner for Education Ralf Dahrendorf was cautiously arguing that “the Community can make only a very limited contribution to their solution, this is partly because the Community is not necessarily the appropriate political framework for solving them”. Hence, in Dahrendorf’s view, the main contribution of education was “to promote the process of EU integration, for instance by increasing mutual understanding, eliminating prejudice, and promoting initiatives for cooperation between institutions from different member countries” (Dahrendorf, 1973; Corbett, 2005 : 81).

The first Community Action programme on Education in 1976

It was only in 1976 that education became officially recognized at the European level as an area of cooperation with the Resolution on a *Community Action programme on education*, adopted by the Council on 9th February 1976. The Resolution, despite reaffirming the concept of avoiding any harmonization of education policies, established the concept of advancing cooperation in seven areas: (i) better facilities for the education and training of nationals and the children of nationals of other Member States of the Communities and non-Member States; (ii) the promotion of closer relations between educational systems in Europe; (iii) the compilation of up-to-date documentation and statistics on education through the setting up of an information network; (iv) increased cooperation between institutions of higher education; (v) improved possibilities for academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study; (vi) the encouragement of freedom of movement and mobility of teachers; and (vii) the achievement of equal opportunities for free access to all forms of education.

In addition, the Resolution made a clear distinction between those actions that should be enacted at the Community level, such as setting up an information network for the exchange of information about education systems, and those that should be left to individual Member States by guaranteeing the diversity of educational systems and practices. Jones recalls that this approach was advocated with great force by the UK and Denmark because of their strong tradition of decentralised educational systems (Interview with Jones). The same Resolution included the decision to implement “Joint Study Programmes”, which were grants for students and teaching staff aimed at undertaking short visits to other Member States and at encouraging the study and discovery of other higher education systems. However, although in principle the Joint Programmes were aimed at improving the mobility of students, in practice they had

very limited participation, no formal budget and no legal basis and the Commission was involved only in awarding grants, without issuing any guidelines (Sutherland, 1985d: pp. 4-5). In addition, besides affirming the national competence of education, the Council also affirmed the social role of education by restating that education was about far more than an economic domain: “on no account must education be regarded merely as a component of economic life” (Council of Ministers, 1974).

Finally, the Resolution officially set up an Educational Committee consisting of representative delegations of the governments of the ten Member States and of the Commission, with the chairman coming from the country holding the Office of President of the Council (Council of the European Communities, 1974). Even though the creation of this Committee represented a first attempt at Member States working together on these common problems, its policy activity made clear that competences had to remain at the national level (Gobin, 1997). Indeed, the planned meetings of this Committee were cancelled both in 1978 and 1979 at the request of France and Denmark, who were strongly opposed to any interference at supranational level (Agence Europe, no. 2933, 21 June 1980; Beukel, 1994; see also Corbett, 2005: pp. 97-106)

In sum, two reflections emerge from this historical account of the early developments of European education policy.

First, following the economic and social challenges of the 1970s, the main themes of cooperation in education were socially oriented. Even though themes with a more economic rationale, such as the recognition of diplomas and periods of study, were part of the debate, the main commitments for the Community were to help young people who were unemployed or threatened by unemployment (CEC, 1977b), and to enable migrant workers’ children to be provided with intensive teaching in the language of

their host country (Interview with Jones). In 1978, the European Commission presented five new Communications in order to strengthen actions in five areas, among which were the “reinforcement of modern language teaching”; “the promotion of the study of the European Community in schools” and “the promotion of equal opportunities for girls in secondary education” (Bull. EC, 1978). Jones, for instance, points out the work promoted by his directorate on carrying out research on pre-primary education, adult education and education for special needs children (Interview with Jones).

Overall, this seems to suggest that, when debating and speaking about cooperation in education, the boundaries of the debate were set by a specific framework oriented towards any general type of education level and towards the promotion of education and employment for any social group. However, even though cooperation on social themes was acknowledged by Member States, this was not the case for themes linked to cultural issues and to the notion of the European dimension. As recalled by Jones, all proposals regarding language teaching, cultural cooperation and collaboration programmes were strongly opposed by Member States, and by the UK, France and Denmark in particular (Interview with Jones).

Second, it was only at the beginning of the 1970s that education policy started to be recognized at the European level. The creation of a specific Directorate for Education – as part of the DG on Research, Science and Education - the establishment of Cedefop in Berlin and, above all, the Resolution of an Action programme on Education in 1976 with the institutionalization of an Educational Committee, were all significant policy innovations that attempted to create a supranational policy domain for education. However, these policy innovations also confirm the strict intergovernmental nature of education and the reluctance of Member States to cede any competence to the supranational level.

4.3 From “conditions” to “problems”: material changes and the social contribution of education

At the start of the 1980s, and after the two oil shocks of 1973 and 1979, Member States experienced an unprecedented rise in unemployment to levels not reached since the Great Depression: from 5.8 million in 1980 to 9.3 million in 1982 and 11.2 in 1985, with the highest rates in Belgium, Italy, France, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands (Fitoussi, Phelps and Sachs, 1986: 487). This was not exclusively a European trend: in the whole OECD area the total number of unemployed people was around 28 million (OECD Observer, 1982: 4). However, although the magnitude of the problem affected all of the world’s biggest economies, the recovery was much slower in Europe; indeed, whereas the recovery was underway in the US and the Japanese economy already had a more stable outlook, forecasts for Europe were less optimistic (OECD, 1984 :5).

Together with the dramatic unemployment rates, a second concern was the change in the work structures and way of production. The change from a Taylorist-Fordist to a Toyotist-Post Fordist model required firms to adapt their strategies to the volatile and unpredictable market conditions and have a more mobile workforce (Cusumano, 1985 : 264-265; Boyer, 1988). Different from the standardized mass production system of Fordism, which mainly relied on unskilled workers employed on the assembly line and engaged in simple tasks (Meyer, 1981), the Toyotist way of working was based on the concept of “lean” production, characterized by the principle of supplying materials, parts and sub-assemblies for the final assembly exactly when they were needed, i.e. “just in time”. Furthermore, computerization, automation and robotics were not only affecting production processes but also impacting on employment opportunities, with

low skilled jobs being most at risk (OECD Observer, 1982: 13). As Colin Crouch observed, “new technology will enable many people to do their work from home, while there will be changes in conditions at work for the majority who continue to work in offices and factories” (Colin Crouch, *The Guardian*, 1985). As stated by Jones, the main concerns raised by unemployment and technological change were:

How do we tackle unemployment especially amongst young people? And during that period sadly, we thought in all countries at this affection with the educational systems, diminishing the national budgets available to education, and a great concern about the responsiveness and the capacity for change and adaptation to meet these challenges on the part of the educational systems (Jones, 1987: 3).

Hence, the dramatic increase in unemployment rates and the prospect of the impact of technological change on workers, opened up a series of issues that also affected the debate on education. As also noted by Jones, “unemployment and the need for a more active European wide strategy for innovation in the field of technology have become the central point on the agenda of the community’s domestic preoccupations”(Jones, 1983 : para 6). In 1981, education and training became detached from the Directorate-General Science, Research and Education (DG XII) and became part of the Directorate-General Social Affairs and Employment, thus becoming Directorate-general for Social Affairs, Employment, Education, Training and Youth (DG V). This decision, supported by the new Commissioner Ivor Richard, was mainly due to the personal initiative of Jones, who stated that cooperation would be easier if education were linked to the DG for Social Affairs, given the more strategic location of this DG compared to the previous DG and the potential involvement of the Ministries of Labour and social partners in the educational debate (Interview with Jones). The incorporation of education within a DG that, compared to DG XII, probably had the most visibility given its link with

employment issues, seems to indicate a bigger role for education within the Community. It also meant that education could benefit greatly from the funding support of the European Social Fund. At the same time, this institutional shift might also be perceived as the reinforcement, in line with the past, of the social dimension of education, with more emphasis being placed on the need to prepare all workers for their adult life, as was also affirmed by the European Commission (COM, 1981).

The social contribution of education

The political debates and working plans between 1981 and 1985 show an increasing concern about - and discussions oriented towards - the issue of *social adjustment*, namely tackling the challenges of unemployment and technological change by enabling all kinds of workers to better cope with these changes. As maintained by the Council and Ministers of Education meeting in 1982, “technology is related to current changes in social values and attitudes to work and the emergence of new aspirations and occupations”, with the prevailing task of education being “to stimulate a broader form of social and vocational preparation for adult life” (Council of the European Communities, 1982 : 3). Within this meeting, particular attention was paid to the needs of specific groups such as older workers, women and the disabled, and attention was also focused on the challenges experienced by Small and Medium Enterprises. Indeed, the Council and the Ministers of Education considered it essential that “young people learn not only to use information technology as a tool but also to judge its effects on everyday life and its social significance” (Council of the European Communities, 1983). Among the priorities for the years 1983-1987 presented by the European Commission in 1982, technological change was linked to issues of social adjustment; indeed, the priorities included looking at the groups and organizations more affected by

technological change, such as unqualified unemployed young people, older workers who had been made redundant, and workers in small and medium enterprise (COM, 1982). The then Commissioner for Education, Ivor Richard, considered education an “integral element in a broader, more comprehensive social strategy” that should help in the “transition from education to working life” (Richard, 1981: 14 and 21).

Further evidence of strengthened action at European level towards a more comprehensive strategy to promote employment is the three Resolutions of the Council made between 1983 and 1985, which called upon the Commission to implement a series of actions and exchanges around three themes: (i) the support of vocational training policies concerning young people for work and the facilitation of their transition from education to working life; (Council of the European Communities, 1983a); (ii) the impact of new technologies (Council of the European Communities, 1983b); and (iii) equal opportunities for men and women (Council of the European Communities, 1985). Overall, these three Resolutions identified the appropriate goals and objectives with respect to the problem of unemployment. If, on the one side, the Resolutions conceived of education as an economic tool in the sense of ensuring that young people were properly equipped with the new technological knowledge required in the labour market, on the other education was oriented in more social terms, in the sense of the pursuit of equality in terms of educational opportunity. For example, education was considered crucial for helping women, who were amongst the groups experiencing the highest unemployment rate (Echo, 1983). The same social objectives were also reflected in the working plan for the years 1982-1985 of the European Commission Eurydice Unit, where the topics of the education of migrants and their families and the transition of young people from school to adult and working life were widely researched (Echo, 1983).

Another example of the social orientation of education was the proposal to increase actions regarding young people through the European Social Fund (ESF), which was the oldest financial instrument of the Community to assist regions with the most severe unemployment and to help people who were in the weakest position in the labour market. In 1980, 70 million of ECU⁹ were granted from the Fund for training or retraining activities for disabled workers. A year later, this figure exceeded 90 million, with the social fund making “a vital contribution to innovations of worldwide significance in devising new strategies for disabled people” (Richard, 1981: 4). Together with helping vulnerable groups, targeting the unemployment of young people was another aim of the ESF; indeed, the priority of the Commission was to implement “an action in favour of young people, aimed at ensuring for all people under 18 years old the acquisition of vocational training [...] this priority should be translated into the interventions of the European Social Fund which should devote to it a significant part of its resources” (COM, 1983).

In addition, largely intertwined with the policy orientations of the European Commission and the Council Resolutions, the working programme of Cedefop also reflected an interpretation of the problem of unemployment and technological change in terms of more social concerns. For example, the annual working programmes for the years 1983, 1984, 1985 were focusing on the following work themes: (i) young people, (ii) equality of opportunity for men and women; (iii) migrant workers; (iv) continuing training, and (vi) technological development and qualifications (Cedefop Archives, 1982). Finally, the “Memorandum on Current Education and Vocational Training

⁹ The European Currency Unit (ECU) was a unit of account between 1979 and 1998, based on a basket of currencies (De Grauwe and Peeters, 1988).

Policy in Western Europe”, adopted in 1984 by the European Trade Union Confederation, advocated effective policies for migrant workers and their children (and for the target groups most hit by the crisis) under the strong conviction that the comprehensive task of education and vocational training was that of promoting better conditions in terms of equity and social mobility (Lemke, 1988).

Hence, what emerges from the examination of the working plans and the political debate of the beginning of the 1980s, is that the increase in unemployment rates and the challenges brought by technological change strengthened the debate on the importance of education within a specific rationale encompassing social adjustment and full employment. In all of the key documents produced between 1980 and 1982 by the European Commission, the Council and Cedefop, the primary concern in regard to education was to ensure equality of opportunities and preparation for “working life”, and to help those groups most hit by the economic crisis, such as the long term unemployed, women, migrants, older workers, and the disabled. Conversely, themes more linked to economic concerns regarding technological change, for example references to the issue of the competitiveness of European economies, were not mentioned - probably because the then major preoccupations were to make education systems more responsive to the fight against unemployment and social adjustment to technological change. However, from 1983, the themes and contours of the policy debate changed considerably, with a more economic concern around the role of education emerging alongside the social one:

whereas in the period 1976-1982 attention had been strongly focused on the links between education and social policy, especially in measures to combat growing unemployment, in the past two years a new and growing emphasis had been given to the contribution of education and training in the task of modernising the economies and exploiting the potential of the new technologies (COM, 1985 : 1).

As this quote suggests, the year 1983 can thus be considered the starting point of a new discourse being granted to education, parallel to the social one, whereby the concept of modernizing European economies became a major concern in the European Commission's educational debate. Although the social dimension of education - and related topics such as the education of migrant children, equality of opportunities and the transition of young people from school to life - was still a dominant theme in the debate, new ideological and political trends came to the fore. On the one hand, the objectives of education policies were being influenced by a new ideological emphasis, in which "the distinctions between education and training have begun to lose all significance in the race by the Community to develop a technological culture and keep up with its main trading partners on the international scene" (Fogg and Jones, 1985: 299). In this respect, education started to be conceived of as a tool for ensuring a highly skilled workforce that could contribute to the relaunch of competitive European economies. On the other, after the stagnation period of the 1970s, the political and economic relaunch of the European project changed the orientation and level of importance attributed to education and its valued adding role to the construction of a "Europe of citizens".

Education, the economy and the relaunch of the European project

The beginning of the 1980s coincided with a period of several external and internal challenges within the European Community. These challenges had a considerable impact on the debate around education and led governments to reconsider the objectives of their own education policies. First of all, the prolonged period of low growth, high unemployment and high inflation, was putting pressure on governments to contain public expenditure and thus to review their spending programmes in all areas of social

policy, including education (OECD Observer, 1984). Following the crisis of the Keynesian consensus on solving the problems of European political economies (Featherstone and Dyson, 1999: 2), new ideas promoting neo-liberal solutions such as salary cuts, privatization and efficiency, entered the policy debate. European countries such as the UK, France and the Netherlands started to focus less on the social needs of education and became more oriented towards pursuing concepts such as the efficiency and modernization of their education systems (Neave, 1988). For example, in 1983 in France, Mitterrand - who had been elected in 1981 under an explicit socialist and anti-capitalist policy programme - adopted a clear neo-liberal programme, in which the socialist and democratic conceptions of education became replaced by the keyword “modernization”, which referred to the need to make education systems more competitive and selective (Sachs and Wyplosz, 1986).

Second, after the mass expansion of higher education in the 1960s and early 1970s, the systems of higher education in OECD countries were challenged in terms of the low enrolment of students due to the rising rate of graduate unemployment coupled with the decline in participation of the 18-24 year-old age group (OECD Observer, 1981: 28) and an overall decline in birth rates (OECD, 1991: 39)¹⁰. The low level of student enrolment, and thus less young people qualifying, caused more pressure to be put on education systems to make them more efficient. In addition, and linked to the technological changes examined earlier, the lack of employment opportunities and the mismatch between the qualifications possessed by workers and employment

¹⁰Between the beginning of the 1960s and 1987, birth rates rose slightly in only two OECD countries (Australia and Sweden) while falling by between 20% and 30% in Belgium, Denmark and Finland, between 30% and 40% in Austria, Germany, Italy and Spain, and by 43% in Portugal (OECD Observer, 1991).

opportunities, were factors underlying the inability of education systems to be responsive to the needs of the labour market.

Finally, and precisely because of the new flexibility in the tasks performed by workers, there was a need to have workers trained not only in the traditional low skills of Fordist production but also in transversal competences such as critical thinking and team work (Kennedy and Florida, 1993 : 102). As put by the OECD, “workers needed to develop and renew the knowledge and professional qualifications on which society and the economy depends” (OECD, 1985). As argued by Neave:

Whatever their precise consequences for education, industry and society (and the consensus is far from being established here), the new high technological revolution that stands in the offing is seen as the key to the economic status and fortune of nations. Thus, the ways of improving the *competitive position of the nation's industry and the part that higher education ought to assume in this task* has occupied an increasing part in the discussion of governments (Neave, 1986 : 7; emphasis added).

Within the European Community, the problem of the technological revolution and its impact on education was translated into the risk of a “competitiveness gap”, namely the fear that “Europe would lose its place in international economic, industrial and scientific competition” (Goujon, 2001 : 329). Alarming data pointed to the Community lagging behind the US and Japan. The main assumption was that the performance of the Asian and US countries could be partially explained as an outcome of efficient school systems and that “underinvestment in skill formation and low school performance in particular, may be factors of importance in an explanation of unfavourable economic performance” (Husen et al. 1992 : 7). In other words, the interpretation of technological change under economic rather than social concerns was introducing the idea that, rather than pursuing general objectives or addressing the lack of qualified workers, the main goal had to be

that of increasing the quality of education and training for the most qualified part of the workforce.

The first step in tackling the competitiveness gap was a Communication adopted by the European Commission in 1982, under a proposal made by the Commissioner for DG V Ivor Richard and in agreement with Karl-Heinz Narjes – Commissioner for the Internal Market and Etienne Davignon – Commissioner for Industrial Affairs - concerning measures in the area of new technologies in which the vocational training of workers had an important place. The following years witnessed increased attention being paid to the importance of education for Europe’s technological innovation. In 1984, in another Communication on “Technological change and Social Adjustment”, approved at the initiative of Richard, Davignon and Narjes, the central place that the Commission had in recognizing the importance of education and vocational training for the economic survival of the Community was restated (COM, 1984). As stated by Ivor Richard in the press release for this Communication, the “job potential of European high technology depends on the industry’s competitive success [...] so it is clear that the community must gear up its educational and training efforts if it is to enable its industry to match developments in the USA and Japan” (Richard, 1984). These concerns were shared by the Council and Ministers of Education, who regarded education and training as tools to answer the needs of the economy and society in regard to having “highly qualified manpower”, which was considered a pre-requisite for the “research and development and industrial policy field” (Council of the European Communities, 1984 : 5).

Whereas previously education and training had been anchored to the issue of their adaptation to the changing needs of the society, there was now an explicit link in terms of adapting them to the needs of industry. Similarly, while before the issue of cooperation had been referred to as general cooperation among higher education

institutions, the discourse made an explicit reference to strengthening the cooperation between universities and industries (Council of the European Communities, 1984: para 15). In accordance with the Council and the European Parliament, which underlined the need to improve Europe's technological innovation (Brok, 1985) the European Commission proposed "new measures to setup and help finance partnership programmes between industry and higher education, training and research establishments tailored to local or regional needs, in order to expand high Level training and help it to adapt to the changing needs of industry" (COM, 1984 : 2). As Narjes would write years later:

it was not until 1980 that the Community was able to take a strategic view of science and technology [...] it was not possible to devise a new model for society, to secure Europe's political and economic autonomy or to guarantee commercial competitiveness, without a complete mastery of the most sophisticated technologies (Narjes, 1988 : 396).

Hence, whereas only a few months earlier technological change had been more related to the dangers it entailed for ensuring equality of opportunities and the transition from school to life for all workers (including those who were more disadvantaged), from 1983, the primary element of the European discourse on technological change became associated with concerns linked more to the image of a Community that - if it wanted to remain competitive in the world scene - should rely on its ability in regard to technological innovation and on training highly skilled workers to facilitate its potential.

The words of Jones provide a comprehensive picture of this change:

Since around 1983, I detect a significant change of emphasis [...] a willingness to recognise the economic value of investment in education. And there is no doubt in my mind that the biggest factor in this change has been the impact of technology. There is throughout European concern that the new technologies should be seized upon as an opportunity to increase the competitiveness of Europe in relation to competition from Japan,

the USA, and increasingly from South Korea and south East Asia. A recognition that if we are to be competitive, we must assure the availability of qualified manpower and womanpower. But we cannot develop a highly qualified workforce unless we invest more in education and training. So, suddenly I believe we can see the switch from the idea of education as an instrument of social policy to a much more balanced approach to the role of education as a vital instrument for economic growth and recovery (Jones, 1987 : 3).

The change of emphasis that Jones was referring to, namely the idea that education and training had to contribute to bridging the gap between Europe's high technology industries and those of Asia and the United States, was strongly pursued by Etienne Davignon, Commissioner for Internal Market, Industry and Custom Union from 1977 and Commissioner for Energy, Research and Industrial Affairs from 1981 (Interview with Kirchberger). In 1983, Davignon, who was a great advocate of the importance of the relaunch of Europe's competitiveness, launched the Esprit programme (European Strategic Programme for Research and Information technology) to coordinate "research on the impact and consequences of the electronic revolution" (Neave, 1988 : 7).

In addition, together with Xavier Ortoli, Vice President of the European Commission between 1977 and 1984, Davignon was among the founding fathers of the European Round Table of Industrialists, which included the CEOs of Europe's most important multinational companies (Cowles, 1995). As will become clearer in the next chapter, the European Round Table of Industrialists will have an increasing role in the educational debate after Peter Sutherland became Commissioner for Education in 1985 (see Chapter Five). For the moment, it is important to note that the Esprit programme resulted from the collaboration "between supranational allied with a potent industrial coalition" (Sandholtz, 1992 : 173) and that the role of the European Round Table of Industrialists was crucial for the approval of the programme among Member States (European Oral History, Entretien avec Etienne Davignon, 1998). At the initiative of Davignon, in 1984, the Industrial Research and Development Advisory Committee

(IRDAC), comprising academics and business actors, was created to “lead community research towards goals of European Community significance” (Goujon, 2001: 340). This suggests that the technological concerns were also bringing the role of transnational business bodies greater legitimation as allies of the Commission in the debate on industry and technological change. Moreover, though Davignon was not formally engaged with educational issues, it is plausible to think that his strategic vision on technological innovation also had an influence on the educational debates. As also confirmed by Kirchberger, Davignon had “a crucial role in making the link between education and new technologies a common European concern” (Interview with Kirchberger).

The political and cultural relaunch of Europe: education and the Europe of citizens

Parallel to this discourse, a second factor that contributed to a renewed interest in education was the political, economic and cultural re-launch of the European integration process. The election, in 1981, of the socialist Mitterrand in France and in 1982, of the Christian Democrat Helmut Kohl as Chancellor in West Germany facilitated a resurgence of Franco-German relations, which in turn improved both countries’ relations with Italy (Ferraris, 1996). Both Kohl and Mitterrand realized that cooperation was essential in order to relaunch the European project. Moreover, the round of Mediterranean enlargement with the entrance of Greece in 1981 and the negotiations with Spain and Portugal for their entrance in 1986 also increased the sense of “depth” of the European Integration process, by accelerating the efforts to achieve greater economic and social cohesion in order to make it easier for people to move freely across European countries (Dinan, 2005).

Within this renewed input to the European project emerged a stronger “political commitment to the completion of the European Union” (Drake, 2000 : 88). At the European Council held in Stuttgart in June 1983, the Stuttgart Declaration emphasised the importance of improving European citizens’ knowledge of European history and culture and increasing cooperation between higher education institutions including the exchange of teachers (Corbett, 2005 : 113). A year later, at the Fointainebleu European Council, although education was not explicitly mentioned, it was considered “essential that the Community should respond to the expectations of the people of Europe by adopting measures to strengthen and promote its identity and its image both for its citizens and the rest of the world” (European Council, 1984: 11). During this European Council, a Committee for “A people’s Europe” – better known as the Adonnino Committee, from the name of the Italian Member of the European Parliament who headed it – was set up.

The proposals of the Adonnino Report were stressing the cultural aims of the Community, which enhanced the idea of European citizenship and advocated the participation of young people within the European project (Adonnino, 1985). For example, the report suggested the introduction of concrete “European” symbols to which citizens could relate, such as a European flag and a European anthem (Adonnino, 1985 : 29). In addition, the report made reference to the importance of the educational field, in particular language teaching, teacher and student mobility, the recognition of diplomas for academic purposes, university cooperation and vocational training. These proposals, linked to more cultural cooperation in education, were not entirely new and had received fierce opposition from Member States. Indeed, as seen in section one, goals such as encouraging cooperation between education institutions, and the notion of language teaching and university cooperation, had previously been mentioned in the

Janne Report of 1973 and the paper “Education in the European Community” of 1974, but they had been met with modest acceptance, if not opposition, from Member States (Interview with Jones).

Thus, it is somewhat surprising that this time Member States made reference to them and ingrained them to the image of a “Europe of citizens” under more political concerns. A potential explanation could be that, in comparison with the past decade, Member States now understood that if the European Community was to succeed as an entity this needed to include cultural integration, with education being considered the glue to bind the Member States together and a way to give a “human face to the Community (Corbett, 2005 : 115). As the Italian Prime Minister Giulio Andreotti wrote in a confidential letter to Jacques Delors, “there are all the premises for a rapid agreement of the Council on the proposals discussed and considered able to make a significant impact on the life of European citizens” (Confidential letter from Giulio Andreotti to Jacques Delors, 1985 : para 3).

Within this spirit of political renewal of the European project, public opinion was also calling for better cultural integration among European countries. For example, in April 1984, a meeting of philosophers, artists and intellectuals was held in Venice, organized by Dankert, president of the European Parliament, and Gaston Thorn, President of the Commission. At this meeting, a Declaration of nine points called for the need to work for the European Cultural Identity Renaissance (Le Monde, 5 April 1984). This Europhile mood was particularly strong in France. Le Monde made an appeal for “l’Europe de l’Education”: *”Il faut tracer le troisième coté du triangle européen, pour compléter efficacement le deux autres, économique et politique”*(Le Monde, 31 May 1984). This enthusiasm was also shared by the European Teachers’ Associations, which

greatly welcomed Adonnino's proposals to strengthen and promote the identity of Europe (Bulletin éducation européenne, 1984) .

However, as we shall see later in the following chapters, this more political-cultural view of education would run out of steam when the new problem definition started to be consolidated under more economic terms. What matters here is to note that the image of education under a more 'Europhile' spirit was part of the relaunch of the European Integration project, which in turn created an opportunity to disseminate new ideas about education. This relaunch of education coincided with the appointment of Jacques Delors as the new president of the European Commission in 1985. In announcing his work programme to the European Parliament in January 1985, Jacques Delors stressed the need to reinforce Europe's credibility by taking firm steps in three directions, which were embedded in the White paper presented in 1985 on the path towards the Single Market: (i) encourage genuine freedom of movement; (ii) genuine economic convergence, and (iii) measures towards human development in the fields of environment and culture (Agence Europe, 18 January 1985).

Within the Single Market project, education policy was recognized as having an important role. As will be examined in the next section, the Single Market project required citizens who not only believed in the process of European integration but also required a qualified manpower, which would be able to move across the EU and would have their educational credentials recognized in all Member States of the European Communities. It required free movement of students, teachers and professionals who needed to have their qualifications recognized. However, despite the existence of an ongoing policy debate around the economic and political contribution of education to the European Community, the definition of education as a social issue and a tool to promote "full employment for all" was still dominant. In sum, at the beginning of the

1980s, the changing material conditions and corresponding policy debate on education created tensions between the social and economic roles of education.

The following section will show how the emergence of an ideational political entrepreneur helped to shift this balance and resolve this tension in favour of the economic role. As seen, throughout the 1970s and up until 1985, the European Commission in practice had limited room for action due to the long standing resistance of Member States to cede any power. The beginning of Jacques Delors' Presidency, together with the vigorous leadership of the new Commissioner for Education Peter Sutherland, would be an essential step in resolving such stall.

4.4 Education from a social inclusion to a market tool: the ideational political entrepreneurship of Peter Sutherland in 1985

Sutherland and his ideas about education functioning as roadmaps

Peter Sutherland was appointed by Jacques Delors as Commissioner for Competition on 6th January 1985; for Sutherland the portfolio for Competition “had the most potential for constitutional effectiveness in a supranational sense”(European Oral History, Entretien avec Peter Sutherland, 2011 : 4). Competition was a key post in the European Commission as it is one of the areas in which the EC has responsibility over the Member States and obviously in 1985 it was a crucial policy area given the incoming Single Market project. At the same time, while waiting for the year that it would take for Spain to join the Community (and to Manuel Marin, the Spanish Commissioner designated for DG Social Affairs), Delors asked Sutherland to take temporary charge of the DG V (European Oral History, Entretien avec Peter Sutherland, 2011 : 4).

Former general attorney of Ireland from 1981 until 1985, Sutherland was a fervent pro-European and an ardent believer in the role of law. Before joining the European Commission, he was a member of the conservative Irish party, Fine Gael. He was of Christian democratic orientation and a member of a pro-Europeanist movement within this party, named the Just Society; he also took an active part in the campaign when Ireland was about to join the European Community (European Oral History, Entretien avec Peter Sutherland, 2011). This previous experience clarifies the two elements that were part of his cognitive scheme: the role of law on the one side and his Europeanism on the other. He described himself as follows: “I am a federalist, I believe in a federal Europe and I believe in the gradual increase in the powers of the European Union to make that a reality” (European Oral History, Entretien avec Peter Sutherland, 2011 : 4).

Although aware of the difficulty of undertaking initiatives in the sensitive policy area of education, Sutherland showed from the beginning a more proactive attitude than his predecessors. For instance, the former Commissioner for DG V Ivor Richard declared in 1981: “We have had to work rather gradually, bearing in mind that we do not have a strong base for community educational activity in the Treaty”(Richard, 1981 : 7). Hence, differently from the scepticism of Ralf Dahrendorf and the cautious attitude of Ivor Richard, Sutherland strongly believed that, despite the reluctance of Member States, there was room for manoeuvre for intervening in education, as the records of his cabinet’s correspondence show (Sutherland, 1985h). This attitude, which might be indicative of his persistency, also finds confirmation in the words of Jones, who, recalling Sutherland spending his first weekend as Commissioner for the DG reading and studying all of the relevant dossiers on education, noted that “from then on, you were working with somebody who was fully up to speed, understood sensitivities, legal

issues but also substantive issues and he was very determined to make a success to it” (Interview with Jones).

Indeed, immediately after his appointment as Commissioner for the DG V, he not only made it clear that education was his top priority but also laid down his aims in that regard, as he stated in his speech to the European Parliament Youth Committee in April 1985:

Education, for me, is about the development of basic human resources which we all know is the community’s most valuable asset, and upon which depend all other community policies, if the European economy is to thrive in a competitive world, we also urgently need to develop a stronger sense of European identity amongst community citizens, if the community itself is to survive and prosper (Sutherland, 1985b: 1).

Although some of the ideas advocated by Sutherland had already entered the policy debate, they became oriented under a more economic aspect. For instance, when referring to the European dimension of education, rather than mentioning the promotion of knowledge of foreign languages and cultures (as for instance was the case in the Janne report), Sutherland – while presenting its priorities for education policy to the European Students’ Forum¹¹ in April 1985 - presented the European dimension in more economic terms:

It will enable young people to be better informed, not only on the EU community as such but equally of their rights, freedom of movement and voting rights to promote European solutions to their problems” about their practical rights, for instance benefits available to them under community law on freedom of movement and right of establishment within the EU community” [...] Europe should not only be taught in the classroom, Europe should also be experienced and lived outside of one’s country (Sutherland, 1985b : 2).

¹¹ The European Students' Forum is also known as the “Association des Etats Généraux des Etudiants de l'Europe” (AEGEE); it was founded in Paris in 1985 and is the largest student organisation in Europe.

This suggests that, compared to the previous significance of the European dimension, which was intended in a more cultural and social sense, the “image” of Europe had a more pragmatic meaning linked with the Single Market project. As he stated to the Advisory committee on vocational training in May 1985:

Too often in the past the European dimension of education and training has been seen in the rather narrow terms of teaching about Europe in schools, which implies a rather abstract notion of Europe of citizenship... but what young people know about their rights as young workers, entitled to equal treatment and freedom of movement? (Sutherland, 1985c: 4).

In other words, notions such as the European dimension and students’ mobility were acquiring a clear economic peculiarity congruent with Sutherland’s own ideas about mobility. Coherent with his vision of the economic purposes of education, the idea of mobility was one of “an Italian student training in France and becoming familiar with French products and technical standards, establishing strong friendly ties with French engineers or researchers and developing the habit of thinking European first and not American or Japanese before making economic decisions” (Sutherland, 1985d : 5).

As the quote above suggests, although concerns regarding Europe’s competitiveness already existed in the debate, with Sutherland they became the *main* concern, with other concerns more linked to the social dimension of education losing ground. In addressing the European Parliament in April 1985, Sutherland stated that:

in the last few years, education along with training policy has too often been simply an instrument for keeping young people out of unemployment and providing them with job specific skills, only recently have we begun to place the debate about the community’s education and training systems in a broader world context, looking for instance at the importance attached to both general and higher education by our main competitors (Sutherland, 1985b: 3).

Illustrative of Peter Sutherland’s view of education and of ideas functioning as road maps is the reform he pursued regarding the European Social Fund. As he argued: “in

recent years attention has been almost exclusively focused on the preparation and implementation of programmes for particularly disadvantaged groups, especially young persons. Less attention has been paid to the crucial area of in-service training by industry”(Sutherland, 1985a : 3). For example, the objectives of the European Social Fund, which had been considered the best instrument to assist the most vulnerable groups and regions, were not appropriate according to Sutherland’s interpretation of the problem. Indeed, instead of being “the red cross in a time of economic crisis” and financing “a mountain of persons whose training is not matched to the requirements and opportunities of today” (Sutherland, 1985e: 2) it should have been focused on “priorities interventions on operations of high quality” (Sutherland, 1985f: 1).

This led to the proposal – and approval- of new guidelines for the period 1986-1988, despite some discontent inside the European Commission and among traditional beneficiaries of the Fund¹². However, on the advice of his chief of cabinet Michel Richonnier, this criticism was overcome by persuasive counterarguments regarding the dramatic impact of new technologies on the high level of unemployment, which, although obviously objective and true, nevertheless downplayed the role of the ESF as an instrument for regions and beneficiaries, which were experiencing the crisis but had not been directly affected by technological change. The new guidelines concentrated aid in areas more closely associated with the restructuring of industry and the development

¹²For example, Clinton Davis, at the time European Commissioner for Transport, the Environment and Nuclear Safety, and of labour orientation, wrote a letter to Peter Sutherland in which he was saying that the Community main social challenge is long term unemployment especially among young people, and that the guidelines were neglecting some regions in inner city areas which were experiencing dramatic unemployment. Other criticism came from associations using the ESF for initiatives towards disabled and disadvantage groups (Historical brief on ESF - PSP 371; see also Correspondence between Sutherland and MEPs, lobbyists, constituents, associations and Community groups concerning social matters – PSP-326, closed document).

of new technologies; in addition, they made it compulsory for workers to train in new technologies for up to 40 hours (Sutherland, 1985g). Although not mentioned explicitly, it can be inferred that training in new technologies would have been easier for a medium or highly skilled worker than for a worker from a more disadvantaged target group or those in sectors less associated with the restructuring of industry, such as agriculture.

Political and personal resources: putting the ideas in practice with the Comett programme

While many ardent believers in a shared European education and economic space existed, Sutherland was able to transform such beliefs into reality by virtue of his personal and political resources. In particular, during his year as Commissioner for the DG V he launched and implemented a students' mobility exchange initiative in regard to University-Industry cooperation, named Comett. In recalling the events that led to the approval of Comett, Jones defines Sutherland as "a man who had the fire in his belly" (Interview with Jones) while Kirchberger recalls him as "being creative, ingenious and courageous" (Interview with Kirchberger).

Aware of the long-standing reluctance of Member States to translate policy initiatives into action, evidenced in the mediocre outcome of the Joint Study programmes that were established with the Resolution of 1976, his first move was to promote the Comett programme among different European actors. Indeed, after the launch of the paper *University-Industry cooperation* in April 1985, drafted mainly by his cabinet members Hywel Ceri Jones and Andre Kirchberger (Interview with Kirchberger; Interview with Jones) and presented by Sutherland and Narjes (Sutherland and Narjes, 1985), he worked unceasingly to create a consensus around the programme by initiating several

consultations with advisory bodies, groups of experts and interest groups, such as the European Round Table of Industrialists, Ministers of the Member States, Social partners, the Advisory Committee for vocational training, Universities, the European Parliament, Chambers of Commerce of several Member States, and the European Students' Association (Interview with Jones; Sutherland, 1985h). In doing this, he was able to modulate his approach on the basis of the relevant audiences in virtue of his social acuity skills, as evidenced below.

The programme was presented to the European Students' Association as an initiative not only to strengthen the technological and economic base of the community but also "to promote a strong European identity among students who are the decision makers of tomorrow in the economic and social fields" (Sutherland, 1985d: 1). To the social partners, Comett was framed as an initiative to help workers to update their skills under a narrative claiming that: "entire manufacturing sectors are disappearing and the explosion of new technologies is generating new industries and services implying new types of occupations and qualifications which incorporate higher and more sophisticated technical and human skills" (Sutherland, 1985a : 2). Some criticism came from the Liaison Committee of the Rectors, which, although sharing the Commission's perceptions of the Universities' role, nevertheless stressed that the role of universities could not be "restricted to one of furnishing industry with immediate benefits in research and development terms" (Liaison Committee of Rectors, 1985 : 1). However, their criticism was overcome by a persuasive counter-argument which pointed out in quantitative terms the benefits in terms of economies of scale from the joint set up of training packages between different Member States (Sutherland, 1985hb). In this case, the need to improve business-industry cooperation was successfully framed by emphasizing the economic benefits for the Rectors and thus obscuring potential

disadvantages, such as potential threats to the autonomy of universities as producers of long term knowledge.

Different from the Liaison Committee of Rectors, other actors were more in tune with Sutherland's proposals. For example, the Industrial Research and Development Advisory Committee (IRDAC) and the Union of Industrial Employers' Confederations of Europe (UNICE) were largely consulted during the preliminary phases for the approval of the programme; as Jones recalls: "UNICE kept a continuous close eye on what we were doing, they were consulted systematically and very supportive" (Interview with Jones). In addition, Sutherland found an ally in the European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT). In an internal note sent to Sutherland by his chief of cabinet Michel Richonnier in preparation of a meeting between the ERT and Sutherland to be held on the 14th of June 1985, the ERT was presented to Sutherland as a "very powerful and serious lobby which has established excellent contacts with the Commission since the beginning [...] their diagnosis and policy recommendations are largely shared by the Commission" (Sutherland, 1985i : para 1). However, although the ERT had been constituted in 1983, and, as seen in the previous section had already been involved in the Esprit initiative launched by Davignon, the archival records do not provide evidence of any official contact between the ERT and the DG V before the arrival of Sutherland. Within this meeting between the ERT¹³ and Sutherland, and after the presentation by Sutherland of the Comett programme, the ERT advanced a proposal

¹³According to the draft agenda, the participants were: Pehr Gyllenhammar (Volvo), Umberto Agnelli (Fiat), Carlo De Benedetti (Olivetti), Wisse Dekker (Philips) AdolpheDemeur de Lespaul (Petrofina), Ian Mc Gregor (National Coal Board), Stefan Schmidtheiny (Anova) for the Commission there were present Jacques Delors, Karl Heinz Narjes and Lord Cockfield (Vice president), Stanley Clinton-Davis, Alois Pfeiffer and Peter Sutherland – PSP-385.

to create a European Technology Institute (henceforth, ETI) aimed at improving the effectiveness of European Research and Higher education systems (Sutherland, 1985i). Conceived of as an autonomous institute with its own control of student admission and only devoted to postgraduate teaching, the ETI would “stimulate the European scientific community and higher education systems through a unique example of a high level research and education institution closely linked to industry” (Sutherland, 1985i :2; see also Chapter Seven for the institutionalization of the ETI).

From the draft speaking note prepared for Sutherland by Richonnier, we can infer how the initiative of the ETI was positively welcomed by Sutherland:

I welcome the proposal made by the ERT to create a ETI. This project will help to remedy certain major weaknesses of today’s European education systems [...] lack of university industry cooperation and lack of student mobility within Europe [...] More and more people in the Community are now aware of the necessity to improve our education systems. For its own part, the Commission will take in 1985 the necessary steps to promote a European dimension in the overall efforts to develop our human resources (Sutherland, 1985ib: 1).

Hence, it can be noted that the clear link made by Sutherland between universities and specific industrial sectors provided the ERT with an opportunity to potentially benefit from an education agenda that was more aligned with their interests and this might also explain why there are no records of meetings between the ERT and DG V, antecedent to the one with Sutherland. Moreover, as will become clearer in the next chapter, big European companies were realizing that education could help to accompany the restructuring of European economies in order to face US and Japanese competition and could also help to increase the quality of the preparation of the workforce, while also ensuring adhesion to Europe’s values and economic goals (Van Apeldoorn, 2002). At the same time, it also appears that the role of trade unions was marginalized. As part of

a general trend of decline, which affected their power during the 1980s (Ebbingaus and Visser, 1999), and differently from the initiatives undertaken in the 1970s (as, for instance, manifested in their impulse to the creation of Cedefop in 1975), their priorities seemed marginalized in comparison with the priorities of business. For example, the Joint Declaration of Intent Unice-Etuc-Ceep¹⁴ on social dialogue and new technologies of the 12th of November 1985 recognized the importance of new technologies for competitiveness, stating that they would have a “positive effect on the competitive position of firms, employment and the skills of employees if the employees and their representatives are kept informed of the technological changes envisaged and are prepared for the adjustment involved” (Joint Declaration of Intent, 1985 : 11). This might be indicative of the predominance of business needs, such as the need to provide adequate training for workers and to improve new technologies, while there was no mention of other needs that were more in line with Trade Unions’ requests, such as to safeguard less-skilled workers, as well as the unemployed and migrant children (as, for instance, was advocated in the Memorandum of 1984, mentioned in section two).

Another possible reason why Comett enjoyed a consensus from different political arenas was perhaps the credibility that Sutherland was able to gain. Indeed, his dual capacity, as Commissioner for Education as well as Commissioner for Competition, provided him not only with enhanced privileged access to multiple political venues but also with increased credibility when talking about the importance of Education for Europe’s competitiveness (Sutherland, 1985m). Being well aware of that, he himself underlined his dual mandate; for instance, it could have occurred that while talking to a

¹⁴ Etuc: European Trade Union Confederation; Ceep: European Centre of Public Enterprises.

specific venue about education, he then switched the discourse towards aspects more linked to economic concerns by saying: “let me now put on my competition hat” (Sutherland, 1985a : 5).

In addition, and in contrast to the previous Commissioner of the DG V Ivor Richard, Sutherland was more aware of the importance of having a constant dialogue with all of the actors involved in education policies. For example, he made it his usual practice to attend meetings with social partners. This is evident in his opening speech at the Advisory committee on vocational training - where the Commissioner for Social Affairs had also historically had the role of chairman - where, in regard to attending the future meetings, he stated, “it is regrettable that over time, with the expansion of the activity in the area of social and education policies and the growth of Commission business generally, it has become the exception rather than the rule for the Commissioner responsible to attend committee meetings” (Sutherland, 1985c : 1).

Returning now to the developments of the Comett programme, after enjoying the support of several European actors, the programme was officially presented at the July meeting of the Council in 1985 with a line of reasoning that underlined the importance of the EU level in taking actions to remedy the *common problems* of the Community and in which the cooperation between universities and industries was considered a *necessary action*. This narrative proved to be right, as all of the Ministers present at the meeting agreed on the need to reinforce cooperation and approved the general aims of Comett. In October 1985, the Commission’s specific proposal for Comett began to come under scrutiny. However, despite the positive reactions of Member States during the July meeting, the final decision on the approval of Comett was characterized by thorny debates and strong resistance regarding the legal basis, the role of a planned advisory Committee for issuing the guidelines on the programme and the budget

(Interview with Kirchberger; Interview with Jones; Sutherland, 1985h; Sutherland, 1985j). The way this resistance was overcome provides evidence of the persistency and negotiating skills of Sutherland as a political entrepreneur.

The first concerns were related to the legal basis of the programme, given the lack of a Treaty basis for education, with only vocational training covered by Article 128¹⁵. In this respect, an important intervening factor was the “Gravier” ruling of the European Court of Justice (European Court of Justice, 1985) in which the Court adopted an expansive definition of vocational training (and hence of article 128) by including:

any form of education which prepares for a qualification for a particular profession, trade or employment or which provides the necessary skills for such a profession, trade or employment is vocational training, whatever the age and the level of training of the pupils or students, even if the training programme includes an element of general education (European Court of Justice, 1985 : point 3-summary).

Therefore, thanks to this broader interpretation of Article 128 which included higher education within vocational training (see also Gori, 2001 : 36), Sutherland hoped to have Comett approved only under this article. However, the Member States were severely opposed. In an internal note sent by Michel Richonnier to Peter Sutherland on the 10th of October 1985, and entitled “Comett – The state of play”, Richonnier was summarizing the two main Member States’ concerns. Denmark, Belgium, the United Kingdom and Germany in particular wanted the programme to fall under Article 235 of the Treaty of Rome, which required unanimity among Member States¹⁶.

¹⁵ As we shall see in Chapter Six, section 3, Article 128 will form the basis for the future Article 127 on vocational training in the Treaty of Maastricht.

¹⁶ More specifically, Article 235 stated that “if action by the Community should prove necessary to attain, in the course of the operation of the common market, one of the objectives of the Community and this Treaty has not provided the necessary powers, the Council shall, acting unanimously on a proposal from

The second concern was in regard to the original proposal to create an advisory Committee composed only of Members from industry and universities; as the examination of archival sources reveals, this proposal was contested both by the Economic and Social Committee and by almost all Member States (with the exception of Italy and Ireland) who wanted to have a more direct say on the management and implementation of the programme. The final result was the inclusion of two representatives from each Member State and the decision to grant to the Committee binding powers, and not only advisory ones. At the meeting on 3rd December 1985, the Council rejected the Commission's insistence on article 128 as the only legal basis for Comett and the Commission had to compromise on that (Sutherland, 1985h; 1985k).

The Comett programme was finally approved by the Council on 5th December 1985, under Articles 128 and 235. As stated by an internal note issued by Sutherland's cabinet, "the social affairs Council of the 5th December was one of the most successful we have seen in recent years. The Council agreed to adopt the Comett programme for improved cooperation between industry and universities" (Sutherland, 1985h: para 1). However, with reference to the compromise regarding the inclusion of Article 235, Sutherland commented, "this should not be interpreted as a defeat for us but as a positive step to include Comett in actions in favour of above supervisory level staff" (Sutherland, 1985k: 3). What Sutherland meant by the "above supervisory level staff" was the Comett Committee, in which "for the first time, as far as I know, the Council has agreed to yield some of its political power concerning the selection of guidelines to

the Commission and after consulting the European Parliament, take the appropriate measures" (Article 235, Treaty of Rome, 1957)

a Committee in which the Commission has a fantastic power since it can be opposed to only with qualified majority” (Sutherland, 1985h : para 2; 1985k). Finally, the last political arm-wrestling issue was the allocation of the budget. One of the witnesses of the budget negotiation, André Kirchberger, stated that it was “the voluntarism, if not the audacity” of Peter Sutherland, that resulted in the Commission agreeing to an “estimated amount of 85 million of ECU, i.e. almost 15 times the annual budget for all the activities of DGV“ (Kirchberger, in Pépin, 2006 : 133; Interview with Kirchberger). Comett was officially adopted on 24th July 1986 (Council of the European Communities, 1986).

Thus, with the approval of Comett, the European Commission, for the first time, after the thorny debate of the 1970s and the failure of the Joint Study Programmes, *de facto* assumed a more concrete role in European Education policies cooperation. After a decade in which various ideas were being discussed but not pursued, and the low impact of the Joint Study Programmes, and thanks to the direct and influential role of Sutherland, the European Commission had managed to establish in less than five months a mobility programme that had a real budget (the budget allocated for Comett was 45ml ECU, which was almost seven times more than the whole budget of the DG of Sutherland), a real legal basis in the Treaty and, most importantly, the opportunity for the Commission to issue guidelines.

Sutherland’s ability to exploit a window of opportunity

According to both Jones and Kirchberger, Peter Sutherland had a crucial role in creating a breakthrough in European Education policies but what also mattered was the “atmosphere of optimism and creativity supported by the Delors project” (Interview

with Kirchberger) and the “general atmosphere of moving ahead” (Interview with Jones). Hence, Sutherland’s personal and political resources were not the only factors that mattered. The objective of the Single Market project was to change the orientation and level of importance attributed to education policies in Member States. As noted by Domenico Lenarduzzi, a member of Sutherland’s cabinet who was present on the occasion of a meeting in Cortina D’Ampezzo organized in February 1985 by the Italian Minister of Education Franca Falcucci on the occasion of the Italian Presidency of the Council, “Ministers were able to see that the problems that they each face at home are essentially common problems and that this applies equally to the range of solutions to be considered. The Community should no longer be so cautious in the field of education”(Sutherland, 1985l : 13).

In this respect, Sutherland was also able to act rapidly and use the opportunity offered by the political climate of the period within the Single Market project. As he declared to the European Parliament during the presentation of the Comett initiative in April 1985: “I am convinced that the moment is now ripe, since we have a rather fortunate juxtaposition of circumstances”(Sutherland, 1985b : 2). By making reference to the Adonnino Report and the development of a community dimension in the lives of community citizens, he argued:

education, should, and I think will be, one of the principal targets of the beneficiaries, of the new political interest in a people’s Europe [...]during the course of this year I believe we can make substantial progress in the area of education, profiting from what I see to be a new political climate [...] the aim will be to respond to the perceived lack of human resources required by European industry, to improve its technological base, strengthen cooperation with the community and enable Europe to keep pace with the Japan and USA (Sutherland, 1985b :3).

Hence, he was able to take advantage of a window of opportunity that opened in the mid-1980s, when EU leaders were looking for a mobilizing idea (Interview with Jones) and technological cooperation on which a consensus had already been established. Furthermore, he was able to exploit the spill-over effect that was emerging from the Single Market project, which in turn would have contributed to raising awareness about the role of education as a European policy; as he stated during a speech to the IBM advisory Committee: “we have the task of establishing not only the great European Market but the Europe of citizens as well, in each of this I believe education occupies a central place” (Sutherland, 1986: 12).

Finally, the last factor that helped Sutherland to implement in only few months what had always been perceived as an almost impossible task was the solid team that supported him. As discussed in Chapter Two, teambuilding skills are among the characteristics that a political entrepreneur displays. In this respect, his cabinet included: Hywel Ceri Jones and Andre Kirchberger, who drafted the background proposals for Comett. In addition, Jones was in charge of maintaining contacts with the Industrial Research and Development Advisory Committee (IRDAC), the European Parliament and social partners (Interview with Jones); Michel Richonnier,¹⁷ Sutherland’s chief of cabinet, had an important influence not only on the Comett negotiations by pushing the budget proposal but also in promoting the importance of new technologies and cooperation with industry (Interview with Kirchberger, Interview with Jones).

¹⁷Michel Richonnier, graduated in engineering at l’ École Centrale of Paris and he then obtained a PhD in economics at the University of San Diego in 1972. He also wrote a book “The Metamorphosis of Europe 1976 to 2001” and an article published in the Journal of Common Market Studies in 1984 on “Europe’s Decline is not irreversible”. Both publications were advocating the need of improving the cooperation between universities and industry to face the US and Japan competition and improve Europe’s growth.

4.5 Discussion and conclusion

This chapter has historically traced the developments of European education policy since the beginning of the 1970s and has highlighted the importance of the year 1985 as a crucial moment in the transformation of European education policy.

From the mid-1970s, European education policy gradually emerged as a policy domain on its own. In terms of institutional developments, the creation of a specific Directorate in 1973 that included education, the establishment of Cedefop in 1975 and the first Action Programme of 1976, are all evidence of a growing interest at Community level in education and reflect a recognition of the social implications of the European project. Indeed, the chapter has shown that the creation of these institutions was accompanied by a more social orientation of the purposes of education. In particular with the publication of the Janne report of 1973 and the paper Education in the European Community of 1974, themes such as the inclusion of disadvantaged groups, the recognition of diplomas, mobility, migrant children, knowledge of the history of Europe among citizens and cooperation among education institutions, were introduced into the general educational debate.

However, this early history of European education policy also reveals the difficulty of creating a wide consensus across Member States in overcoming their reluctance to cede to the Commission any power in regard to such a salient policy field. Under the changed structural conditions of the beginning of the 1980s, namely the worsening of unemployment rates and the impact of technological change, the social dimension of education was reinforced and education was understood as a tool to provide employment for all workers and in particular those vulnerable groups most hit by the economic crisis. At the same time, however, a parallel debate encompassing

competitiveness concerns, which looked at education as a tool to provide Europe with a highly skilled workforce, was progressively taking ground. With the appointment of Peter Sutherland as Commissioner for the DG V in 1985, the economic orientation of education was reinforced in the discourse at the expense of the social one and emerged in practice with the approval of the Comett programme for university-industry cooperation.

These conclusions seem to support the first stage of the theoretical argument that a change in the material conditions is expected to bring a problem to the fore; as shown in section two, the indicators regarding unemployment and the debate on the potential dramatic impact of technological change made more urgent the need to tackle these challenges through the better responsiveness of education systems to the needs of all workers affected by these changes and under a rationale highlighting more social concerns. This suggests that, even though a material change is expected to indicate a condition as a problem, the identification of a problem may differ from its interpretation.

In this case, the change in material conditions identified the problem of unemployment which was in turn interpreted as a problem (first social, and afterwards economic) of education. Indeed, pushed forward by a group of high level EU officials such as Etienne Davignon and Karl Heinz-Narjes and embedded within the political relaunch of the European project, education became incorporated within an increasingly dominant narrative in which its main task was that of improving Europe's competitiveness gap in relation to the US and Japan by providing a highly skilled workforce and promoting the image of a "Europe of citizens".

Moreover, the findings further corroborate the argument that, in order for a problem definition to enter the political arena, an ideational political entrepreneur needs to be present and act as the main agent of change. In his short mandate as Commissioner for the DG V, Peter Sutherland emerged as an ideational political entrepreneur who played a key role in the emergence of the problem definition of education as an economic issue. During his term of office as Commissioner for the DG V, he held and advocated clear ideas about education as a factor of economic growth, which constituted a roadmap for his initiatives, such as the reform of the European Social Fund and the Comett programme. In addition, he was genuinely convinced not only of the importance of education for economic competitiveness but also about the possibility of achieving a more supranational role for the Community, as emerged from his personal quotes and interviews.

Thanks to his dual mandate as Commissioner for the DG V and Commissioner for Competition he not only enjoyed direct access to political venues, but his knowledge of specific economic issues probably also helped him to be more credible when discussing education as an issue of European competitiveness. At the same time, from the beginning of his mandate, he showed great persistency in promoting his agenda of university-industry cooperation, as his quote at the beginning of this chapter on the need to fully commit to “the re-emergence of Europe as a major first-class industrial power” reveals. Furthermore, the empirical account has provided evidence of his social acuity skills in creating a consensus among different policy actors, while at the same time exploiting the window of opportunity within the new political climate of relaunch of European integration. This was the case for the Comett approval, where he managed not only to create a consensus among several European actors, including mobilising the interests of business actors such as the European Round Table of Industrialists, but also

to negotiate and overcome Member States' resistance regarding issues such as the budget, the role of the Comett committee and the Comett's legal basis. Additionally, another feature displayed by Sutherland was his teambuilding ability with his collaborators; as confirmed by the interviews, he made them feel as though they were part of a "team" in which each one was contributing.

Finally, the findings also suggest that, perhaps, there are also intervening factors that can reinforce or weaken the role of a political entrepreneur. An explanation of why Peter Sutherland was successful would not be complete without taking into account the favourable zeitgeist within Member States and the catalyst role of the Single Market project. As was also confirmed by the interviews, his achievements in promoting the cooperation through the Comett programme would not have been possible without a favourable socio-economic context, namely the relaunch of the European project and the *Europhile* climate surrounding it. Indeed, the Single Market project needed citizens who politically believed in that but it also needed a qualified workforce that were able to be mobilize and have their qualifications recognized. This might also explain why the specific decision regarding Comett was made possible at one specific point in time and not another. In this respect, the ideas regarding cooperation in education, that had been rejected in the broader zeitgeist of the so-called *Eurosclerosis* of the 1970s, found a more hospitable environment during the 1980s.

All of this means that, in order to emerge in the political arena, a problem definition needs not only a skilled political entrepreneur but also to be aligned with the specific socio-economic context of the time. Ideas that are embedded in a *zeitgeist* that is more fine-tuned with their assumptions are thus more likely to emerge than others and succeed.

However, what happened in 1985 could have happened in 1983, 1984 or 1986 but it did not. In this respect, compared to his predecessor Ivor Richard or the future Commissioner Manuel Marin, and consistent with the expected theoretical characteristics of a political entrepreneur, Peter Sutherland was able to exploit the window of opportunity of what he himself recognized as a “new political climate” to strengthen his arguments about the importance of education for developing individual human capital with mobility, which was seen as a central element for favouring Europe’s growth.

To conclude, the chapter has underlined the significance of the mid-1980s in terms of the policy orientation of the future agenda of education. The emergence of a discourse that emphasized the contribution of education to promoting a highly skilled workforce able to contribute to improving Europe’s competitiveness, the progressive marginalization of themes such as migrants’ children and vulnerable groups, the entrance of new actors into the educational debate such as businesses, and the implementation of an exchange mobility programme are all factors that would significantly affect the subsequent developments of the policy orientation of European education policy, as the next three chapters will show.

Chapter 5

The development of the problem definition (I):

Discourse of crisis and the construction of the ‘Europe of knowledge’ (1985–1997)

5.1 Introduction

The previous chapter traced how the problem definition of education entered the European arena in the mid-1980s. The interaction between changed material conditions, a favourable socio-economic context and Peter Sutherland’s ideational political entrepreneurship resulted in education starting to be defined as a problem of European economic competitiveness, with less attention paid to its social contribution. In addition, and for the first time, the European Commission launched and implemented a mobility exchange programme that enjoyed an autonomous institutional and organisational structure. Building on these findings, the next two chapters move on to discuss the development of the problem definition of education between 1985 and 1997.

Following the emergence of the problem definition in the mid-1980s, two aspects of European education policy were reoriented. First, the rise of a powerful rhetorical policy narrative of crisis emphasised the importance of education as a solution to Europe’s lack of competitiveness. Second, several policy and institutional developments reconfigured the European political landscape, in terms of both substantive policy content and actors engaged in these policy developments. Accordingly, this chapter analyses the policy discourse while the next chapter draws attention to the policy-making process. More specifically, this chapter explores the content of the discourse the European

Commission pushed forward from the mid-1980s, illustrates which actors became legitimised to take part in the policy debate and examines the rhetorical strategies through which this discourse was constructed. As Field argued, through this discourse:

The Commission freely passed judgement upon matters that belonged without question to the sovereignty of Member States [...] the Commission's approach was to create a discourse of crisis, which then made its own proposals sound eminently reasonable under the circumstances (Field, 1988: 50).

Taken together, both chapters correspond with the second stage of the theoretical argument, namely the development of the problem definition. In particular, it is argued that, once emerged, a problem definition can influence which policies are possible to push, which actors are more likely to take ownership of the problem and which institution is involved in the management of the problem (Weiss, 1989). In this case, the way education was defined emphasised problems of European unemployment and EU economic growth lagging behind the US and Japan. In turn, this empowered the European Commission and European big business as legitimate actors to take part in the policy debate, and to propose both their problem interpretation and the solution. Concepts such as lifelong learning, quality of education and investment in skills became developed and articulated within a policy discourse constructed through framing strategies, such as counting, storytelling, and naming, blaming and claiming. In this respect, the chapter also provides a preliminary insight into the importance of the problem definition in conveying interaction between structure and agency, with the discourse addressing "the representation of ideas, the discursive interaction through which actors generate and communicate ideas within given institutional contexts" (Schmidt, 2008: 314).

To contextualise the analysis and gain a deeper insight into the significance of education policy development within both chapters, section two briefly introduces the socio-

economic context of the period. It does so by considering key developments in the European integration process within the “1992 Project” and by looking at the advancement of neo-liberal policy ideas, which suggested investing in human capital and educational quality to raise economic competitiveness.

Sections three and four highlight the key ideas and concepts manifested in education policy discourse during the period 1985–1997. Drawing on the analysis of original archival materials, EU official documents, and in-depth elite interviews, these two sections identify the rhetorical strategies through which the European Commission and other policy entrepreneurs constructed the problem definition of education. In particular, section three traces the discourse the European Commission pushed forward, characterized by the identification between the problems of Europe’s lack of competitiveness (as examined in Chapter Four) and the potential contribution of education to restore Europe’s growth. The section highlights a “narrative of crisis” – and the reaction to it from Member States and other Europeans non-state actors – in which the survival of Europe was strictly dependent on raising the level of skills and investment in human capital and lifelong learning as a solution to the challenges of “globalisation, integration, enlargement, economic polarisation” (Edwards and Boreham, 2003: 407).

Subsequently, and consistent with the theoretical assumption that a problem definition directly affects which actors will be more legitimised to speak, section four focuses on the discourse of European business actors (namely the Industrial Research and Development Advisory Committee and the European Round Table of Industrialists) who – precisely because of the dominant economic view of education – took ownership of the problem. Enabled by their “problem expertise”, these actors proposed their policy solution by actively engaging in the policy debate as ‘ideas carriers’ (Jacobs, 2015). The

final part of section four also evaluates the role of the European Round Table of Industrialists (henceforth, ERT) as ideas carriers according to the two criteria Jacobs identifies: (i) tracking their non-state activity outside political venues, and (ii) providing evidence of their sufficient influence within the same venue (Jacobs, 2015; see also Chapter Three). The final section provides an interim conclusion before moving on to the next chapter.

5.2 The “1992 Project” and the advancement of neo-liberalism

Under the presidency of Jacques Delors and the renewed German–French alliance between Kohl and Mitterrand, the mid-1980s represented a “turning point in the process of European Integration” (Varsori, 2013: 226). Within the “1992” slogan – perhaps echoing the year 1492, a pivotal year for Europe with the discovery of America (Ludlow, 2006: 229) – the core aims of the Delors Commission became completing the Single Market and monetary union, while simultaneously attempting to expand supranational competences in traditional domestic fields such as social policy, regional development, common foreign and security policy (Ludlow, 2013). After the 1985 publication of the White Paper that detailed the legal acts to be implemented in order to complete the Single Market (COM, 1985), the Single European Act of 1986 introduced the qualified majority vote for all policies related to the Single Market, and “combined in one legal text provisions for political cooperation and amendments to the Community Treaties” (Nuttal, 1992: 10). The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the official dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 directly affected the process of European integration in terms of the Community’s political and economic expansion in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Dinan, 2004).

The Maastricht Treaty signed in 1992 significantly changed several dimensions of the Community. It signified: the official birth of the European Union as the new name for the Community; the introduction of a common foreign and security policy and stronger cooperation in the field of justice and internal affairs; the reinforcement of the political identity of the Community through the definition of European citizenship; the extension of qualified majority voting to new competence areas such as the environment, social policy and research and development; and finally, the establishment of a firm timetable and key criteria for the economic and monetary union. These changes represented important political and economic developments for the relaunch of the European project (Featherstone and Dyson, 1999; Ludlow, 2013).

All of these developments took place against an ideological backdrop in which neo-liberal theories and policies, instigated by the US President Ronald Reagan and the UK Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher, were “defeating both the planned economy and Keynesian policies all over the world” (Varsori, 2013: 24). In many ways, the Maastricht Treaty reflected the neo-liberal consensus that, from the mid-1980s onwards, had gradually replaced Keynesianism (Gillingham, 2003). In comparison with the goals of the Treaty of Rome, which aimed to coordinate national economic policies to achieve full employment and price stability, the Maastricht Treaty was more biased towards a neo-liberal model underpinned by a growing belief that the market would ensure an optimum redistribution of wealth (Leibfried, 2005; Scharpf, 2009). Indeed, the main goal Maastricht set was to facilitate the free movement of goods, labour and services through the reduction and removal of administrative, technical and others barriers to free trade, which were considered an obstacle to reducing costs, increasing competition and enhancing economic productivity (Ross, 1995). Hence, the Maastricht Treaty – through the so-called Maastricht parameter, with which Member States had to comply

in order to participate in the monetary union – can also be considered a political and social project; its influence over Member States’ social policies included notions such as cost containment, state retrenchment and cuts becoming part and parcel of the social policy discourse¹⁸ (Muller and Wright, 1994: 10; Gillingham, 2003; Ferrera, 2005).

As an economic philosophy, neo-liberalism provided a “normative approach to economic life” (Thiemeyer, 2013: 86). Blaming Keynesianism for its excesses of taxation, egalitarianism and bureaucracy, the ideology of neo-liberalism was based on the faith of the ability of markets to regulate themselves. Core objectives such as price stability, fiscal discipline, competition and freedom of movement predominated over any other economic and social objectives (Steger and Roy, 2010). As noted by Larner:

Whereas under Keynesian welfarism the state provision of goods and services to a national population was understood as a means of ensuring social well-being, neo-liberalism is associated with the preference for a minimalist state. Markets are understood to be a better way of organizing economic activity because they are associated with competition, economic efficiency and choice. (Larner, 2000: 5)

Within this context, neo-liberal ideas reinforced pre-existing concerns regarding competitiveness, which emerged at the beginning of the 1980s, and further motivated the importance of investing in education. From this perspective, political and economic concerns about the Community lagging behind US and East Asian competitors began to dominate the policy debate (Brown & Lauder, 2001: 120–121; see also Chapter Four).

As Marquand observed:

¹⁸For example, the Social Protocol annexed to Maastricht (signed by all Member States, with the exception of the UK) institutionalised a social dialogue, promoting the consultation of social partners in social issues.

the aim is to strengthen the Community's competitiveness in world markets, particularly in the area of high technology where European companies seemed to be losing ground to their Japanese and American competitors, so as to prevent a relative decline in the economic and ultimately political power and influence of Western Europe vis-à-vis' Japan and the United States. (Marquand, 1988: 212).

These trends coincided with the growth of Japanese and US employment- and information-intensive sectors. In the US, for example, employment in financing, insurance, real estate and business services was growing nearly four times faster than overall employment in community, social and personal services (OECD Observer, 1995). The strong performance of US and Japanese economies was related to their efficient school systems, leading to the claim that “underinvestment in skill formation and low school performance in particular, may be factors of importance in an explanation of unfavourable economic performance” (Husen et al., 1992: 7). Ineffective education systems had led to mass education and reduction in quality, putting at risk – to echo the title of the famous 1983 US report, *A Nation at Risk* – nations and their competitiveness (Gardner, 1983). Hence, cleansed from the more social and egalitarian ideas of the 1970s, education gradually became embedded within a technocratic discourse under the assumption of a causal relationship between quality of education and efficiency of the economy (Sultana, 1994; Lowe, 1992: 582).

Within the Community and international organisations, several reports pointed to the importance of non-physical investment – human capital – under the assumption that investing in knowledge is the main factor for a country's growth¹⁹ (Leclerq and Rault,

¹⁹For example, in UK, the White Paper *Higher Education: Meeting the Challenges* (DES, 1987) highlighted the need for greater links between higher education and industries, while the White Paper on *Higher Education: A New Framework* (1991) emphasised the importance of quality in

1990: 12; World Bank Development report, 1991; OECD Synthesis report on the technology/economic programme, 1991; Rizvi and Lingard, 2006). As the OECD argued, “enhancing the quality of the labour force is likely to be the main avenue for policy interventions oriented at attracting foreign investment activities” (OECD, 1995: 70). The OECD in particular was advancing a specific policy discourse in which investment in education and the upgrading of skills were defined as preconditions for economic growth, requiring “a new policy approach geared towards improving labour-market efficiency and relieving obstacles to growth” (OECD Observer, 1990: 29). As Apple noted, “concerns for efficiency, productivity and human capital have nearly evacuated all other questions about what purposes education, in general, and schooling, in particular, should serve” (Apple, 1992: 127). Moreover, demographic developments and the rise of precarious forms of work required a boost in workers’ participation in the labour market; the demand and supply of labour were matched by an investment in skills (Torres, 2009; Ferrera et al., 2000). Hence, economic considerations of the role of education in contributing to growth and competitiveness reflected a growing consensus on the idea of improving human capital to generate long-term growth (Cohen and Soto, 2007: 52).

higher education. In the Netherlands, the HOOP document on higher education including IRDAC’s recommendations on improving the productivity of the education system.

5.3 The discourse of crisis, education and the survival of the European economy

The European discourse reflected trends and ideas that were developing globally and affecting Western countries. As Thomas O' Dwyer, Director-General of the DG Education, Training and Youth (DG XXII) that was set up in 1995 (see also Chapter Six), observed:

Europe is losing its comparative lead over its major competitors in world markets, and it has less capacity for job creation than its competitors. The Community is suffering from a certain shortfall in skilled labour, as well as an imbalance between supply and demand for skills (O' Dwyer, 1994 : 14).

Between 1991 and 1997, the European Commission published several reports that shared a common “discourse of crisis” constructed around several risks and challenges associated with Europe’s economic outlook. The key element of their policy narrative was an economic logic according to which the role of education was to prepare “qualified human resources to respond to economic challenges and technological mutations” (Novoa, 2000: 40). Taken together, these reports provide a clear picture of how the problem of education was constructed and the ways in which education was framed as the solution to Europe’s lack of competitiveness.

The three Memoranda from the early 1990s: education and human capital

The European Commission’s construction of the narrative of crisis was first sparked at the beginning of the 1990s, when the Task Force Human Resources, Education, Training and Youth (TFHR) - an autonomous sub-unit of DG V set up in 1989, as explained in the next chapter - published three Memoranda: the first on higher education, the second on vocational training and the third on open and distance learning.

In November 1990, prior to these publications, the Task Force organised a conference in Siena – attended by Ministries’ representatives of Member States, over 100 rectors, social partners and representatives of higher education institutions and industries – the conclusions of which had been widely distributed in Member States (CEC, 1990 - Jones private papers). Motivated by the structural changes in the economy and the requirements of the Single Market project to limit the adverse effects of these changes on the labour market, the three Memoranda officially set the policy objective of promoting the enhancement of human capital to tackle the challenges of the period.

The *Memorandum on Higher Education in the European Community* opened by underlining the “strategic importance of the higher education systems in helping to make the completed Internal market work” and stressing the importance of actions in “the field of human resources development to the achievement of Community objectives” (CEC, 1991a: 1). Providing figures and forecasts on populations trends, skills shortages and comparative statistics with the US and Japanese economies, the Memorandum identified five “critical areas” for future developments in higher education: (i) participation in and access to higher education; (ii) partnership with economic life; (iii) continuing education; (iv) open and distance education; and (v) the European dimension in higher education (CEC, 1991a: 41). Notably, the “critical area” of encouraging higher education institutions to partnership with economic life was also a major concern of Peter Sutherland, as well as the motivation behind the Comett programme (see Chapter Four, section four). The Memorandum reflected this concern by clearly stating:

Higher education has a vital role to play in providing a supply-led boost for economic development and in equipping all members of the labour force and young people with the new skills needed to meet the rapidly *changing demands of European enterprises*. (CEC, 1991a: 4, paragraph 12, emphasis added)

The very beginning of the *Memorandum on Open and Distance Learning* established the importance of human capital for the Single Market project:

There is a growing conviction that the European Community must invest heavily in its *human capital* if it is to be in a position to confront and master the challenges of the coming decades. This conviction has been born of the imminence of the completion of the Internal Market requiring for its success a whole new range of skills in management communication and organisation. The measures taken by the Community in relation to the learning of languages and the promotion of mobility during training are designed to foster these skills. (CEC, 1991b: 2, emphasis added)

In a similar vein, the *Memorandum on Vocational Training* further clarifies the notion of human capital with reference to the Single Market, stating that:

European *human capital* is thus a creative and dynamic force in the Community and should be seen as a common resource to be developed by mobility, exchanges and cooperation. The European space should certainly be seen as a forum for competition and as a market, but also as an arena for realising and mobilising the competences of its citizens and workers. (CEC, 1991c: 6, emphasis added)

The passages above seem to indicate a policy narrative that gives a specific meaning to education as a tool for economic growth; in the causal story of the three Memoranda, human capital is depicted as a common European resource that can address the challenges of European enterprises and contribute to the goals of the Single Market project. The passages are also indicative of assimilation into the European discourse of the assumptions of human capital theory, especially its focus on education's economic contribution and conceptualisation of education and skills in productivity terms (Brown and Lauder, 2001: 1). At the same time, by attributing a "European" label to the notion of human capital, the three Memoranda may also represent an attempt to grant the Community a more active role in education policy (Sin et al., 2016: 202). Interestingly, the *Memorandum on Higher Education* and the *Memorandum on Open and Distance Education* contained several cross-references to and citations of the Industrial Research

and Development Advisory Committee (IRDAC) report, *Skills Shortages in Europe*. This suggests a relationship between the Commission's official discourse and business actors' validation of this discourse. Perhaps not by accident, the *Memorandum on Higher Education* was published in parallel with the IRDAC report²⁰.

A theoretical component of a policy narrative is that it tends to emphasise some aspects of reality at the expense of others. In this respect, the three Memoranda seem to suggest a selective interpretation of education under the promotion of a specific set of economic values, while neglecting more social considerations. For example, though it warned that "technology-based media can bias participation in favour of economically disadvantaged consumers" (CEC, 1991b: 15), the *Memorandum on Open and Distance Education* made no reference to disabled students and only briefly mentioned action for students living in rural areas or less familiar with new technologies. As such, the concept of an *open market* in open and distance learning linked with the aims of the Comett programme, specifically to fully exploit the opportunities offered by new technologies and to create partnerships with industries (CEC, 1991b: 11, 13; see also Chapter Six). In a similar vein, although the *Memorandum on Vocational Training* stated that "human resources should be developed from two points of view: economic competitiveness on the one hand, and economic and social cohesion on the other" (CEC, 1991c: 20), it downplayed the importance of vocational training for social cohesion in favour of economic concerns, and only made one reference to disabled people and one to vulnerable groups (CEC, 1991c: 15, 16).

²⁰ As stated in the Memorandum, "it is designed to serve as a basis for discussion, particularly in the universities and higher education institutions themselves. It will be issued together with the recent IRDAC report on 'Skills Shortages in Europe'" (p. 46).

The Memoranda “attracted great interest and good participation of Member States” (Jones, 1990). Indeed, the Council and Ministers of Education were “trusting that they would give rise to wide ranging discussion within all interested circles [...] in particular on questions related to the challenges of the internal market” (Council of the European Communities, 1991). However, Member States coldly welcomed the overemphasis on the economic orientation of higher education (Corbett, 2005; Chou and Gornitzka, 2014: 10). For example, the Swedish Government noted that: “the essence of universities is to provide education on a firm scientific basis, to carry out research and to serve as centres for culture and social development as well as breeding freedom of thought, critical views and inspiring new ideas” (CEC,1993a). The Memoranda were widely diffused; for instance, around 20,000 copies of the *Memorandum on Higher Education* reached universities, national ministries of education, social partners and organisations such as the Industrial Research and Development Advisory Committee (IRDAC), the European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT), the European Trade Union Confederation for Education (ETUCE) and the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe (UNICE), which were also invited to participate in the debate (CEC, 1993a: 7).

Taken together, the three Memoranda seem to provide evidence of how the problem definition shaped the official discourse of the European Commission. At the same time, the wide diffusion of these reports and the simultaneous involvement of Member States and non-state actors to stimulate a debate around education suggest that the European Commission was gradually taking “ownership” of the problem of education. After the publication of the three Memoranda, economic concerns regarding the role of education became interlinked with a discourse emphasising the importance of skills, lifelong

learning and a flexible and mobile workforce to address Europe's lack of competitiveness.

Strengthening the discourse of crisis and risks

The White Paper on *Growth, Competitiveness and Employment* – also known as the *Delors White Paper on Unemployment* – focused on unemployment, and attributed European unemployment levels to low growth, lack of competitiveness and lack of labour market flexibility (CEC, 1993b; Brine, 2006). At the same time, it “represented a significant moment in the development of EU's thinking on human resources issues” (Field, 1997: 187). In particular, a specific chapter devoted to education and training deemed them as playing a key role “in stimulating growth and restoring competitiveness and a socially acceptable level of employment in the Community” (CEC, 1993b: 17).

The policy narrative of the paper created a causal story: supported by *counting* strategies, it named Europe's lack of competitiveness as the main problem to address, and suggesting measures and actions to tackle this problem. In a subsection entitled “The Diagnosis”, the White Paper emphasised the weaknesses of education and training systems by comparing the proportion of school leavers in Europe with those in Europe's main competitors: 42% of students in Europe left school with a secondary qualification, compared with 75% in the US and 90% in Japan. In addition, 30% of students in Europe possessed a higher education qualification, compared with 70% in the US and 50% in Japan (CEC, 1993b: 118). In this respect, these indicators were explicitly employed to create a specific interpretation of the problem by emphasizing the link between education and economic performance. Indeed, the White Paper attributed the blame for this problem of competitiveness to a:

lack in science and technology, lack of skills in particular areas such as information technologies, biotechnologies, combination of technical and management skills, lack of a genuine European market in skills and occupations, a lack of mutual transparency and the limited recognition of qualifications and skills at Community level, the lack of a genuine European area for open and distance learning. (CEC, 1993b: 119).

Having blamed education systems for these “lacks”, the paper proposed solutions in a subsection entitled: “Elements of a Reform of Educational and Vocational Training Systems” (CEC, 1993b: 119). The solution was constructed including the concept of lifelong learning:

promotion of basic skills, better link with business to ensure smoother transition from education to working life, short and more practically oriented forms of training, cooperation between universities and the business world, anticipation of skill needs, developing, generalizing and systematizing *lifelong learning* and continuing training. (CEC, 1993b: 120, emphasis added).

The concept of lifelong learning was hence framed in the official discourse as a key action through which to reform the education and vocational training system (CEC, 1993b: 117–120). Although the notion of lifelong learning dated back to the 1960s²¹, it was not until the 1990s that it became linked to economic and employment issues and lost its social and cultural component (Field, 1997; Hake, 1999: 55). Indeed, the White Paper considered lifelong learning to be “one of the main priorities for addressing the Europe-wide employment issues” (CEC, 1993b: 16). At the same time, education was

²¹Lifelong learning was not a new concept; however, the specific economic connotation it was acquiring represented a significant break from its past. During the 1960s and 1970s, the notion of lifelong learning was more inspired by humanistic, social and cultural objectives – as stated in the publication *Learning To Be*: “only an overall lifelong education can produce the kind of complete education [...] We should no longer assiduously acquire knowledge once and for all but learn how to build a continually evolving body of knowledge all through life – learn to be” (Faure et al., 1972: vi). During the 1990s, the concept of lifelong learning was developed as a response to globalisation and to the changing economic, social and political environment (Hodgson, 2000: 4); it was embraced by the OECD, which identified lifelong learning as the “continuation of conscious learning throughout the life span” (OECD, 1996, *Lifelong Learning for All*, p. 98).

clearly framed within an economic rationale; the paper makes no reference to social issues as specific purposes of education. Although the paper referred to the importance of education for solving the problems of business competitiveness, the employment crisis and the tragedy of social exclusion and marginality (CEC, 1993b: 117), it only touched upon issues related to social exclusion and marginality. For instance, the paper made no reference to equality of opportunity for the most vulnerable groups. The paper's main focus was growth and competitiveness, thus perhaps justifying it paying less attention to more disadvantaged groups; nevertheless, it considered education under an economic logic that excluded other equally plausible logics.

Another report, *Skills for a Competitive and Cohesive Europe: A Human Resources Outlook for the 1990s*, underlined the importance of “human resources as a pillar of economic growth” (CEC, 1993c: 1). By articulating the narrative in three parts – (i) human resources to master the challenges ahead, (ii) overcoming skills gaps and (iii) reshaping education and training – the report constructed a causal story in which Europe's lack of competitiveness was a “common threat”, inadequate skills were the “common problem” and “priority investment in education” was the solution. In this respect, the third part of the report highlighted the “way forward”:

Given skills shortages in the labour market on the one hand, and the economic and social challenges Europe is faced with on the other, there is only one way forward; Europeans should invest in their skills and qualifications whole over the life cycle [...] such an approach also corresponds better to the *need of the economy* because of the rapid structural and technological change taking place (CEC, 1993c: 33, emphasis added).

By providing accurate forecasts and data on skill needs and skills trends, which in turn were derived from the Industrial Research and Development Advisory Committee (IRDAC) report, the publication placed skills at the centre of the causal story of competitiveness and as the dominant policy objective for European economies. Indeed,

the central assumption of the report was that “education and training are key factors in economic development” (CEC, 1993c: 5). The importance of equipping workers with adequate skills was related not only to the provision of skills for the labour market as a whole but also to skills needs and gaps in specific economic sectors and for specific groups of workers. Indeed, the report made several references to studies undertaken by the European Round Table of Industrialists (cited six times) and IRDAC (cited nine times), which focused on the topic of skills shortages in fields such as engineering, computer software and linguistic skills for managers. Conversely, the report lacked references to other aspects of education more linked to social issues and themes, such as equality of opportunity, women or disadvantaged groups.

The mid-1990s: articulating the policy solution

In 1995, Edith Cresson succeeded Antonio Ruberti as Commissioner of the Directorate-General Education, Training and Youth (DG XXII), a separate DG created after the Maastricht Treaty that was in charge of education and training²² (Field, 1998 : 21; see also Chapter Six). Cresson’s appointment injected more impetus into the education agenda through reinforcing the concept of lifelong learning to serve the needs of the European economy (Interview with Kirchberger; Interview with Marsden). Cresson shared Peter Sutherland’s pro-integrationist and pro-business ideas; Field described her as: “an innovator rather than an incrementalist, she had little patience with the idea that the sovereignty of Member States should invariably be allowed to hinder Europe’s

²² This Directorate General will be renamed Directorate-General Education and Culture (DG EAC) in 1999.

collective development as a global power – a development in which education and training had a vital role to play” (Field, 1998: 64).

In this respect, the mid-1990s marked a new period in which the link between education and economic growth became explicitly framed as an economic problem that needed to be addressed through a supply-side solution and, in particular, through lifelong learning.

As Cresson stated:

Lifelong learning has to be a priority. It will contribute to maintaining and strengthening the competitiveness of European industry [...] I trust that the European year of education, which is largely focused on lifelong learning, will contribute to raising awareness of this issue throughout the European Union (Cresson, 1995 : 1).

In 1995 it was published the White Paper, *Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society* (CEC, 1995). Frequently cited by scholars of European education studies, this report – also known as the “Cresson White Paper” is considered to have had a “crucial role in establishing lifelong learning as a guiding strategy in EU policies” (Dehmel, 2006: 53). It marked a new departure for the European Union (Field, 1997: 72) by focusing on individuals as central actors in the educational process (Borg and Mayo, 2005). In continuity with the policy narrative traced so far, economic aims were the key component in the causal story of education’s problems and solution. Indeed, the aim of the White Paper was to “consider the importance of education and training to Europe in the current context of technological and economic change”; it provided guidelines for actions in the pursuit of objectives to build up high-quality education and training (p. 4). To this end, five objectives were identified: (i) encourage the acquisition of new knowledge; (ii) bring schools and the business sector closer together; (iii) combat exclusion; (iv) develop proficiency in three European languages; and (v) treat capital investment and investment in training on an equal basis (CEC, 1995: 1).

The White Paper opened by highlighting the urgencies and dangers of the period's crisis, characterised by "transition and profound change", a "historical opportunity for Europe" and a "period in which one society gives birth to the next". It attributed the reasons behind the crisis to three factors: "the impact of the information society, the impact of the internationalisation of the economy and the impact of scientific and technological knowledge" (CEC, 1995: 6–8). European societies were under threat from US domination and the risk of "cultural uniformity" (CEC, 1995: 18); namely, the risk that the new ICT would lead to a "lowest common denominator", caused by a loss of common heritage and reference points (CEC, 1995: 30). Another element of crisis was identified as the "urgent need to avert a rift in society" (CEC, 1995: 48). The report attributed this rift to the division between "those who can interpret; those who can only use; and those who are pushed out" (CEC, 1995: 26). Therefore, in order to avoid the risk of the challenges of globalisation creating a "watered-down European society" (CEC, 1995: 51), the report urged that the promotion of a European dimension in education and training had to become a necessity (CEC, 1995: 51). Within the European dimension, "a learning relationship" was positioned as the necessary element in structuring the society; "a society of teaching and learning in which each individual will build up his or her own qualifications" (CEC, 1995: 5). This suggests that, even though social concerns were present, they were still framed within a logic of "risk" and "economic efficiency".

In talking about crisis from a more economic perspective and suggesting the "promotion of a European dimension in education and training" (CEC, 1995: 51) through lifelong learning as solution to the challenges of the period, the paper showed continuity with the earlier discourse on competitiveness. However, the paper pushed the concept of

lifelong learning further by linking it to the attribution of responsibility to individuals and their own abilities:

in the learning society individuals must be able to have their basic, technical and occupational skills validated and how they were acquired [...] a personal skills card providing a record of skills and knowledge accredited in this way should be available to all those who want one (CEC, 1995: 19).

In other words, compared to the previous conception of education as a contribution to social adjustments to technological change, this is indicative of a shift towards a supply-side thinking whereby there is a shift from low employability being a risk to those with low employability becoming “the risk” (see also Chapter Four).

The report also proposed making education systems more responsive to market needs: “once the cognitive basics have been secured, two conditions would appear to be necessary if individuals are to be able to exercise responsibility in building up their abilities: adequate information and guidance, access to training along with all the opportunities available for mobility” (CEC, 1995: 35). In this sense, investment in skills was considered a prime factor in competitiveness and employability (CEC, 1995: 73). The White Paper also advocated for more flexibility in the acquisition of degrees. Indeed, though maintaining the validity of paper qualifications, it argued: “we need to make the best use of skills and abilities, irrespective of how they were obtained and to enhance everyone potential by catering more closely for the needs of the individual, business and industry” (CEC, 1995: 15). The White Paper also downplayed the distinction between education and training by stating that: “a broad knowledge base and training for employment are no longer two contradictory or separate things. There is increasing recognition for the importance of general knowledge in using vocational skills” (CEC, 1995: 42).

The ideas advanced in the White Paper suggest the predominance of a discourse more attuned to the needs of the economy and in favour of flexible education systems to meet the needs of industry. This seems to find confirmation in the words of Antonio Ruberti, Commissioner for Research in 1994, who stated that “European companies are making urgent demands on education and training systems” (Ruberti, 1994 : 1). Indeed, as Field noted, “firms like Ford, Michelin and Lucas were reporting the commercial benefits from blurring the boundaries between training and more general learning” (Field, 1997 : 99). The emphasis on the needs of the economy was also reflected in the curricula; as the White Paper stated: “the development of a broad knowledge base, namely the ability to grasp the meaning of things, to comprehend and make judgements, is the first factor in adapting to economic and labour market change” (CEC, 1995: 27–29). The paper also stressed the importance of making education systems flexible and decentralised in order to increase their autonomy and competition: “the most decentralized systems are also the most flexible, the quickest to adapt and hence have the greatest propensity to develop new forms of social partnership” (Field, 1997; CEC, 1995: 48).

Overall, the White Paper seems to support the assumptions of the problem definition through the construction of a causal story that emphasised economic concerns for education while downplaying other aspects. To begin with, the White Paper formulated a specific policy orientation that, by privileging labour market needs, exclude issues more linked to social aims. Even though the White Paper mentioned social exclusion, it only did so once, mentioning “marginal or excluded sectors of the population” and advocating the establishment of “specialized routes and arrangements for bringing marginalized groups back into the mainstream” (CEC, 1995: 19). As such, it framed

social exclusion in terms of labour market outcomes rather than aiming towards genuine social inclusion of all groups.

In addition, although the paper referred to education as personal development and citizenship (that is, in more social terms), it did not make any specific proposals. Indeed, while recognising that the essential aim of education and training “has always been personal development and the successful integration of Europeans into society through the sharing of common values” (CEC, 1995: 4), it downplayed this goal in favour of promoting employability. For example, specific competencies (such as problem-solving and technical competencies) were included, while others (such as self-criticism or more general competencies) were excluded. Moreover, by stressing the personal responsibility of individuals within the lifelong learning perspective, it excluded those who might possess less information regarding school and work choices. Finally, even though the paper mentioned the right of all students to high-quality education, the notion of quality was located less in the provisions of the education system than in the effects of education on individual learners.

The White Paper was consistent with the prevailing *zeitgeist* of the period in that it was dominated by debates regarding the contribution of human capital to economic development. For instance, Europe’s lack of competitiveness was framed as a problem of inadequate education systems or inadequate human capital supply; it was assumed that supply would create demand, thus neglecting other potential measures to create demand. Notions such as lifelong learning; economic competitiveness; individual responsibility of learners; the responsiveness of education systems to labour market needs; flexibility of degrees; informal skills, new curricula and decentralisation were part and parcel of a discourse consistent with the economic imperatives of the human capital approach.

However, and as also previously seen with reference to the Memorandum on higher education, the vision of education the Commission pushed forward was widely criticised for the narrow conception of education it proposed, and in particular for its excessive focus on aspects of education relating to employment and economic growth to the detriment of those relating to social and cultural issues. The Council of Education Ministers attacked “the White Paper for its vocational emphasis and instrumental approach” (Field, 1997: 81). Criticising the paper for advocating “an enlightenment view of social change, in which excessive hopes are placed in knowledge as an end in itself”, they lamented the dominant discourse of globalisation and new technologies in which education was equated to economic growth, as well as the lack of reference to social aspects such as demographic changes, democracy, dialogue between cultures and social exclusion intended as marginalisation (Official Journal, 1996: 2). The Council “took the view that the framework for analysing education and training problems in Europe now and in the future should place suitable emphasis on the cultural and educational aspects as well as the strictly economic aspects of development” (Council of the European Union, 1996).

The Association of European Teachers (AEDE) felt that the Commission’s analysis tended to exclude or suppress the problems of disadvantaged groups, lacked a reference to education as a partnership between parents, teachers and pupils and neglected policy areas such as special needs education, while taking the point of view of industry (AEDE, 1996). On the other hand (and in a softer manner), the European Trade Union Committee for Education (ETUCE) lamented the lack of discussion in the preparatory phase (ETUCE, 2007: 80). The Economic and Social Committee (CES) also criticised the predominant focus on economic growth. Though recognising that the White Paper was a positive and important contribution to the future of the EU, it nevertheless

stressed that the problems of European education and training must be dealt with by the whole of society, and suggested taking into consideration the humanist dimension of the learning society.

The Committee of the Regions (COR) warned of the need for education to promote understanding, tolerance and lamenting that “the objective of the EU is not to set up a European planning authority for training and education” but instead “to promote mutual understanding and tolerance” (COR, Official Journal, 1996: 21). In a note diffused by Agence Europe, the Committee lamented that “a knowledge-based society cannot be based primarily on the aptitude of persons for economic life [...] it feels it is absolutely necessary to give the same attention to promoting personal growth and the aptitude of individuals to participate in social and civil life”, and also recommended “meeting the education and training needs of marginalised adults and in particular of those in disadvantaged groups” (Agence Europe, 3 April 1996). Despite this wide criticism, which did not provide any counterproposals but simply opposed the overemphasis on the economic logic of education, the European Commission continued to advance the link between education and competitiveness.

The redefinition of unemployment as a learning problem

In 1996, Cresson appointed two high-level expert groups, which played advisory roles to the Commission and assisted in formulating proposals and recommendations on the European education agenda: a Study Group, composed of 25 experts and academics and under the direction of Jean-Louis Reiffers, Professor of Economic Science at the University of Aix, Marseille; and an Expert Group on the Information Society, which included the Spanish sociologist Manuel Castells and was in charge of issues connected

to the Information Society (Field, 1997; Interview with Marsden). The Study Group, shortly after the publication of the Cresson White Paper, issued in 1996 a report entitled *Accomplishing Europe through Education and Training* (CEC, 1996). The Report was presented as an independent analysis. The group's independence might have granted it the advantage of enabling the Commission to distance itself from controversial issues, such as those that arose from the previous report for which the Commission was blamed of not having consulted Member States or social partners for its preparation (Field, 1997: 72; Agence Europe, 7 March 1996). Once again, concerns about economic competitiveness were at the centre of the report's policy narrative; indeed, as stated in its executive summary:

the study group members are in agreement that Europe's education and training systems must take three major imperatives into account: the need to strengthen European competitiveness in economic, technological, innovatory, scientific and organizational terms [...] it is only in adapting to the characteristics of future-oriented enterprise that education and training systems could contribute to European competitiveness and to the maintenance of employment (CEC, 1996: Point 10).

The development of the policy narrative began with a story of decline (Stone, 2002):

If Europe is to remain at the driving edge, economic and political progress must be complemented by offering a European vision to her young people [...] this task is an urgent one in order to facilitate the best adaptation possible to new employment conditions and the development of the learning society (CEC, 1996: 15).

As typical of the story of decline, the report was including facts and figures (or counting strategies) used to show the magnitude of the problem of skills and to link it to economic performance. Indeed, by making multiple references to the IRDAC and ERT studies (as done by other Commission publications) and presenting numerical trends and data regarding (low) economic growth and skills needs (CEC, 1996 : 38), the report reiterated the need "to make sure that industry and education deliver fast and flexible

responses to new demands” (CEC, 1996 : 7). Moreover, in comparison with the vaguer terms employed in previous publications, this report succinctly and explicitly defined unemployment as an education problem:

Education and training systems cannot be held responsible for rising unemployment, but they nevertheless carry essential responsibility for knowledge transmission and for equipping young Europeans with the appropriate skills, qualifications and attitudes essential to confronting these challenges well (CEC, 1996: Point 20).

And:

the problem is how to get our systems to take greater account of business sector requirements and thus offer learners the skills and qualifications companies need [...] how to blend in the development of the whole person, which is the prime aim of education, with the quest for quality of human resources in the business sector sense (CEC, 1996 : Point 71).

The proposed solution was rooted in an approach that the White Paper had already mentioned, but that the report better articulated using concrete measures:

More emphasis [needs to be] placed on the individual responsibility for making education and training choices. People need to be prepared for living in a rapidly moving and unpredictable world [...] secondly, organic links between the labour market and the education system must be developed (CEC, 1996: Point 91).

The solutions proposed in the section entitled “The Way Forward for Europe” were:

Defining skills reference charts, introducing systems for accrediting skills, making these accreditation systems widely and continuously available, keeping a simple ongoing check of individual skills acquisition progress, developing recognition of vocational qualifications (CEC, 1996: Point 109).

Besides the economic logic and the focus on skills and individual responsibility, the report also referred to the concept of European citizenship. The concept of European citizenship had been the focus of a previous publication, namely the *Green Paper on the European Dimension of Education* (COM, 1993a). This paper had defined the European

dimension as instrumental to its intended concept of European citizenship as “learning languages, working on joint transnational projects, knowledge of other countries, socialisation through transnational exchanges and a better understanding of Europe today” (COM, 1993a: 115). By drawing on the concept of European citizenship advanced in the Green Paper, the report *Accomplishing Europe* took the concept of European citizenship further by integrating it with the pursuit of economic objectives: “education and training should also enable young people to have a better understanding of their socio-economic environment” (CEC, 1996 : point 3); “labour market competitiveness can therefore be enhanced by encouraging a well-developed sense of citizenship” (CEC, 1996 : point 57).

Interestingly, the notion of European citizenship was connected with the “the added value of community action in the sphere of education” (CEC, 1996: point 13); that is, it was acquiring a political connotation. As such, the definition of European citizenship provided justification for the appropriateness of the EU level of intervention, though maintaining the principle of subsidiarity. In this respect, European citizenship – as defined by the “Adonnino Report”, *A People’s Europe*, examined in the previous chapter – was cleansed of its more social or cultural aspects while reflecting a multidimensional economic logic in which the European citizen emerged as an integrated, successful, individually responsible and mobile citizen who needed to have his professional and vocational qualifications recognised. For instance – and in continuity with Sutherland’s image of a highly skilled worker “thinking as European first” (see Chapter Four, section four) – Jones argued that: “the 1992 migrant worker has more a Yuppie image – the mobile young professional on the European stage”(Jones, 1989).

One element of innovation in this report was the fact that it explicitly and concretely addressed the added value of the supranational level. Whereas the potential of Community action to offer added value to national policies had been referenced since 1985 (CEC, 1986), it had been in vaguer terms. The report (perhaps also due to the “autonomous” nature of its mandate) contained a heading entitled: “What Action Should the European Union Pursue?” Here, the concept of *best practice* was introduced, justified and formulated as:

No interpretation of the concept of subsidiarity should be so restrictive that it prevents Europe – following discussion among the Member States and in collaboration with them – from declaring what the common aims of our education and training systems are to be. Europe must also contribute, through initiatives and projects, to the wide dissemination of best practice and must encourage progress towards those aims. The study group takes the view that these efforts require more close collaboration with the Member States than has been the case to date (CEC, 1996: Point 198).

And:

develop initial and continuing teacher education and training by the identification and discovery of best practices; pinpoint, study and disseminate good practice with respect to productivity and the search for quality in educational establishment and training centres, devise common methods for the evaluation of education and training based on experiences in national levels, in order to benefit from a comparative dimension. (CEC, 1996: Point 199).

Furthermore, the report also suggested the proclamation of a “general aim” and potential areas of actions. This is worth mentioning, as it shares many similarities with the goals of the Lisbon strategy of 2000 and its mantra of the ‘Europe of knowledge’ (see also Chapter Seven):

Proclaim a general European aim that serves as a guide for the different systems [...] the declared aim should make it clear that Europe (i) wishes to remain competitive, but (ii) will not resign itself to having an irreducible core of socially excluded persons and (iii)

wants to promote the development of the person and the education of active citizens (CEC, 1996 : Point 199).

One year later, in 1997, the concept of ‘Europe of knowledge’ had become the official title of the European Commission communication, Towards a Europe of Knowledge (CEC, 1997). As stated in the opening of the report, education was the means through which to achieve competitiveness via the creation of:

A new space for the gradual construction of an open and dynamic European educational area [...] economic competitiveness could only be achieved if education systems started to produce and disseminate quality education [...] everything must be done to build that Europe of knowledge which we need in order to face into the twenty-first century (CEC, 1997: 1).

Hence, it can be observed that by the end of the 1990s, the link between education and Europe’s economic competitiveness had become the key issue in the definition of European education policy. Themes such as lifelong learning, mobility, quality of education and investment in skills became interlinked in a coherent framework articulated around a discourse of Europe’s competitiveness, pointing to the need for high-skill provisions to meet the needs of industry. At the same time, the concept of ‘Europe of knowledge’ was increasingly becoming part and parcel of this discourse.

5.4 European education policy and non-state actors: business ownership

Up until this point, the policy narrative identified in the European Commission’s discourse has frequently referenced studies and analyses of specific business actors – namely the Industrial Research and Development Advisory Committee (IRDAC) and the European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT). Building from this observation,

which suggest a potential fine-tuning between the European Commission and the business education agenda, this section investigates the policy discourse of the IRDAC and ERT and discusses how business actors socially constructed the problem of education and which kind of solution they proposed.

IRDAC's discourse: skills and quality education

As seen in Chapter Four, the Industrial Research and Development Advisory Committee (IRDAC) was established in 1984 by then Commissioner for Industry and Research, Etienne Davignon, with the purpose of actively providing opinions and recommendations for issues related to research and development in the industrial sector (IRDAC, Science and Technology News, Brussels, Spring 1997; Goujon: 2001, 341). However, it was only in 1985 that it became involved in education by providing advice regarding the Comett programme to DG V and emphasising the need of investing in skills (Interview with Jones; Interview with Kirchberger). In 1989, IRDAC established a Working Group – IRDAC Working Party 11/ Education and Training – dealing with “several matters of direct pertinence for Comett, particularly the question of skills shortages and of the training requirements of the Community R & D programmes” (COM, 1990). The issue of skills shortages was addressed in its first influential *Skills Shortages in Europe* report, produced in 1990 and widely cited in European Commission reports²³ (IRDAC, 1991).

²³ For instance, it was published at the same time as the Commission's Memorandum on Higher Education. Other EU publications also often cited it as an authoritative source (for example, *Skills for a Competitive and Cohesive Europe: Accomplishing Europe through Education and Training*, 1997).

Supplemented with forecasts of the challenges posed by technological change and figures on the declining number of workers - thus employing counting strategies to stimulate attention to the link between lack of skills and economic competitiveness - the key problem IRDAC identified in the causal story of the report was Europe's lack of competitiveness, which it blamed on a lack of skills. As stated in the opening of the report, the "competitive position of Europe is lacking"; it "might fail to produce the expected economic benefits" because of the "lack of qualified people" (IRDAC, 1991: 1). According to its analysis, skills shortages were so serious that "immediate action is required from all parties concerned" (IRDAC, 1991: 2). Stating that "IRDAC is convinced that the education and training issues related to industrial competence and competitiveness have an overriding importance in relation to the future of Europe and its citizens" (IRDAC, 1991: 5), the report claimed that Europe's competitive position would continue to be undermined unless immediate action was taken; namely, massive investment in upgrading the skills of the workforce. In this respect, the report claimed that "the card which European must play is *innovation and quality* and being able to use these will depend on the availability of a *highly skilled* workforce" (IRDAC, 1991; emphasis added). When formulating appropriate solutions to the problem, the Industrial Research and Development Advisory Committee (IRDAC) suggested improving the productivity of education systems by enhancing collaborations between education and industry, adopting quality concepts in education and training and increase the numbers of science and technology graduates (IRDAC, 1991). It further recommended the adoption of a "coherent European approach" with the development of "consistent and comparable approaches" to data collection and forecasting (IRDAC, 1991: 3). As such, the report suggested viewing education as a component of the economy, as evidenced by the "quantitative" description of education in terms of growth or productivity rates.

Likewise, the concept of “quality” was discussed from an economic functionalist viewpoint “connected to the need to implement higher educational standards to the detriment of cultural and social factors” (Novoa, 2000: 42).

The concept of “quality” was the focus of the IRDAC’s second report, *Quality and Relevance* (1994). This report emphasised the importance of quality in education, to be achieved through a highly skilled work force, enhanced collaboration between educational institutions and industry, stronger relationships between education and economic life and the encouragement of young people’s participation in science and technology (IRDAC, 1994; Flude and Sieminsky, 2013: 223). In other words, the formulation of “quality” of education was closely related to an economic component, which again seemed to attach less importance to social and cultural approaches to education. As by Walter Schusser (Vice President of Corporate Human Resources of Siemens and Chairman of IRDAC) highlighted in 1994 in the magazine of the Task Force for Human Resources, Education, Training and Youth²⁴:

Education and training have a responsibility to play a full part in helping ensure the sustainability of European economy. *For decades social demand and its internal dynamic have been the main driving force for the development of education.* In the light of the challenges of industrial change, *the time has come to restore the balance and give the urgent needs of the economy higher priority* – while recognizing the broader missions and responsibilities of the education systems [...] IRDAC wants European education to build further on its multiple strengths but at the same time to address the many apparent weaknesses. (Schusser, 1994: 15, emphasis added).

²⁴*Le Magazine* was a publication of the Task Force for Human Resources, Education and Youth. It was designed to provide information and policy articles on European education policy in the aftermath of the Delors White Paper and the second generation of mobility programmes.

In essence, European industrialists clearly identified economic needs as the main concern for education, through a policy discourse that emphasised the needs of the economy over priorities relating to social demands. In addition, the evidence provided so far in terms of IRDAC's policy orientation and privileged channel of influence (in terms of its advisory role to the European Commission) seems to be consistent with the theoretical claim that a problem definition "invites participation by some political actors and devalues the involvement of others" (Weiss, 1989: 98). In this case, the equation "education=economy" favoured business actors taking ownership of the education problem over other actors. For instance, in the magazine issued by the Task Force (quoted above), the voice of "industry" was the only voice present; the contribution of the IRDAC Chairman was placed next to an article from Thomas O' Dywer (Director-General of the DG Education, Training and Youth). Interestingly, the magazine did not contain any contributions from other non-state actors, who could have proposed more social concerns, such as the European Trade Unions Committee for Education or the Association of European Teachers.

The ERT discourse

The European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT), established in 1983, addressed its attention to European education policy in 1985 when Peter Sutherland was Commissioner for Education (see Chapter Four, section four). In contrast to the Industrial Research and Development Advisory Committee (IRDAC), the ERT had not been granted a formal advisory role within the Community; still, in 1987, it set up a Standing Working Group on Education to discuss education-related issues through drafting reports and studies highlighting the importance of education for industry. As maintained in the preface of the ERT's first publication, *Education for Life: A European*

Strategy (edited by Kari Kairamo, CEO of Nokia), the purpose of the Standing Working Group was to address specific problems of education, and in particular:

to identify the main problems related to European education and training from industry's point of view and to draw up practical recommendations for education administrations, institutions and industry itself on how education in Europe could be improved and adjusted to keep pace with a constantly changing competitive environment education is a strategic element in European industrial competitiveness and in corporate efficiency. Failure to adapt Europe's workforce to new technology will severely brake the introduction of wealth-creating processes and services (Kairamo, 1989: 3).

This exhaustive document (over 180 pages), presenting figures and facts concerning the state of the art in Europe for higher, vocational, adult and primary education, blamed "inappropriate or outdated education that has not adapted to changes in technology and restructuring of work" for the increase of unemployment in Europe (Kairamo, 1989: 2–7). The solution it proposed was creating "a European concept of lifelong learning and the need for closer cooperation and partnership between all parties concerned with education and training" (Kairamo, 1989: 3). Hence, the ERT was already explicitly referring to lifelong learning as a means of improving the European economy in 1989 – well before it became a cornerstone of European education strategies (the concept was initially incorporated into the Delors White Paper of 1993, and officially established in the Cresson White Paper of 1995).

The ERT's publications were articulated around the construction of a causal story that openly reflected the specific interests of business actors; namely, tackling Europe's lack of competitiveness through a workforce suited to the needs of industry, and improving workers' mobility through enhancing the transferability of their qualifications (Borg and Mayo, 2015: 18). In the business view, "education is a strategic issue in European competitiveness" (Kairamo, 1989: 1); its importance is also evidenced in Helen

Wallace's handwritten notes, taken during a Royal Institute of International Affairs conference on "European Perspectives on 1992", held in June 1989, in which Keith Richardson (then General Secretary of the ERT) presented the ERT's priority actions and in which Wallace annotated education – together with infrastructure, transport, internal market and taxes – as one of the ERT's main priorities (Wallace, 1989).

Another ERT publication, *Reshaping Europe* (1991), was premised on the view that skills are the drivers of growth: "Europe is faced with an uncomfortable situation, with a high proportion of young people having insufficient numerical skills able to tackle the jobs that will be on offer". In the ERT's diagnosis, "ordinary people have become increasingly sceptical of the ability of national governments acting alone to respond adequately to today's challenges" (ERT, 1991: 18). From this analysis, they proposed several solutions: "increasing quality and attainment at individual level", "matching education to strategic capability required by industry services" and "better compatibility between national educational systems to allow mobility" (ERT, 1991: 18-22). Consistent with the economy–education link in the problem definition, the mobility of a highly skilled workforce was identified as the primary solution for economic growth; as the ERT stated in *Reshaping Europe*, "the standard of basic skills and qualifications must now rise right across Europe" to "facilitate the recognition of qualifications across Europe and remove some of the present obstacles to the free movement of people" (ERT, 1991: 22). Interestingly, these ideas were welcomed in the Delors White Paper of 1993 (as seen in the previous section); although the White Paper did not specifically quote the ERT, it pointed to lack of skills as the main reason for Europe's lack of competitiveness, and advocated better links with business and cooperation between universities and the business world (CEC, 1993b: 117–121; see also previous section).

Considered by the ERT itself as one of the “most influential of all ERT papers” (ERT Highlights, 2010: 53), the 1995 report *Education for Europeans: Towards the Learning Society* (the second part of its title reflects that of the Cresson White Paper, published after the ERT’s report) introduced the concept of “education chain”, which, by linking education stages from pre-primary school to adult learning, could have helped to establish lifelong learning and “learning how to learn” (ERT, 1995 : 6-8). By addressing the “common” problems of European education, the ERT blamed the rigidity of education systems and lack of skills as the main causes of Europe’s lack of growth. As maintained in the preface of the report by Francois Cornelis, CEO of the Belgian petroleum conglomerate Petrofina (acquired in 1999 by Total) and Chairman of the ERT Education Working Group:

The aim of this paper is simply to present the views of working industrialists as to how they believe the education and training process *as a whole* can be adapted to respond more effectively to the economic and social challenges of the day. The ERT hopes that by adding a practical business view to the many cogent and well-documented opinions of specialists in this field, it can bring about the changes in European education which we believe are now urgently required (ERT, 1995: 5; original emphasis).

The first part of the report outlined the problem of the rigidity of education systems:

The world of education is deeply entrenched in national systems where political priorities are determined by political expediency and the need to balance national budgets [...] connection between educational institutions and realities of working life is not existent. In many European countries schools are part of a centralised state system with a great deal of bureaucracy (ERT, 1995: 11).

Connected to the rigidity of education systems, the lack of skills was identified as the second factor undermining the performance of education systems: “gaps in skills, more need of math, science, critical thinking, initiative, creativity, curricula, focus on what is taught instead of learnt” were deemed as “dangerous as they threaten Europe’s ability to

meet the new and complex challenges of today's world" (ERT, 1995: 14). The core message of the report revolved around the concept of lifelong learning; as stated in the report: "education should be a cradle to grave continuous process whereby the whole individual is trained in knowledge, interpersonal and learning skills" (ERT, 1995: 15). Its policy ideas – such as the rigidity of education systems, skill gaps, partnership between schools and industries and, more generally, the incorporation of education with the needs of the European economy – were reflected in the subsequent Cresson report of 1995, *Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society*.

In the second part of the report, the ERT advanced its policy solution to improve the performance of education systems in Europe. In the ERT view, "education should be regarded as a service supplied to students, society and business. Like any service its quality should be evaluated and constantly updated" (ERT, 1995: 29-30). Hence, though aware of the sensitivity of education policy ("we do not advocate a single school education system across Europe" , ERT, 1995: 29), the corollary of the proposed solution was the introduction of benchmarking "to identify weak and strong points of educational systems and to identify the best practices that could be promoted throughout Europe" (ERT, 1995: 30). ERT's proposal regarding benchmarking is worth reproducing in its entirety:

Benchmarking should be used in the formulation of new policies, not forgetting the necessary stage of continuous monitoring of subsequent performance [...] to find the most efficient and workable systems of education at any level, educators should seek to learn from each other's systems, to examine what works well in other countries (and vice versa) and to learn from each other's' experiences [...] in all European countries there is a need for more information on how well the education systems measure up to their goals [...] benchmarking may be particularly useful to help resolve the human and economic waste involved in failure and dropout rates in tertiary institutions such as universities and technical colleges [...] it has therefore become a matter of urgency to set up a European

education information and monitoring system in order to record experience, evaluate results and improve the quality of education on a European level. **The task could well be entrusted to the European Commission** (ERT, 1995: 30; original emphasis).

This quotation is significant because it introduces benchmarking as the most appropriate solution to make European education systems comparable and to monitor their performance, while at the same time offering concrete proposals on what to measure (for instance, dropout rates in tertiary education). In addition, the second part of the quote explicitly attributes a specific role to the European Commission in this monitoring exercise. As will be shown in Chapter Seven, these proposals were implemented with the launch of the Open Method of Coordination of Education in 2001.

Taken together, the policy ideas advanced by the ERT and IRDAC are grounded in a neo-liberal discourse of education, within which economic imperatives revolve around concepts such as a highly skilled workforce, flexibility of education systems, quality and efficiency for labour market needs and the importance of lifelong learning to ensure European competitiveness (IRDAC, 1991, 1994; ERT, 1989, 1991, 1993, 1995; see also section one regarding the neo-liberal discourse in education). At the same time, it is hard not to notice the resemblance between the problem definition of education, which both industrial bodies constructed, and the discourse of crisis, which the European Commission constructed. Hence, it seems plausible that the IRDAC and the ERT acted as *ideas carriers* by playing a role in shaping the political discourse on education and advocating specific policy solutions. Whereas the role of the Industrial Research and Development Advisory Committee (IRDAC) as *ideas carrier* is more straightforward to observe, given its formal advisory role, a causal relationship between the ERT as ideas carriers and its influence on the European education agenda requires further elaboration.

To begin with, both the interviews with Jones and with Kirchberger confirmed that, since 1985, the ERT often manifested a great interests for the education agenda since the appointment of Peter Sutherland (as for instance seen in the previous chapter with reference of their meeting with Sutherland of June 1985). In addition, examining below the ERT's role according to Jacobs' (2015) two qualifying criteria for identifying *ideas carriers* (non-state activity, and sufficient influence within a political venue; see also Chapter Three) may shed further light on the ERT's influence.

The ERT as ideas carriers?

The ERT undertakes its activity in the private sector. Since its founding in 1983, it has been considered one of the most influential lobbies at the EU level by virtue of the economic power of the companies its members represent (Cowles, 1995; Pageaut, 2010: 275). Indeed, the ERT's membership originally included "the who's who of European industrial heavy-weights", namely 17 chief executives and chairmen of the most important multinational companies from different sectors, such as Volvo; Nestlé; Renault; Thyssen; St. Gobain, Olivetti and Philips (ERT Highlights, 2010: 151–159; *Financial Times*, 8th October 1983). It had 50 members in 2010, a collective turnover of "over €1,000 billion and employ[ed] more than 6 million people" (Hix, 2011: 167). Its two main membership requirements are being headquartered in a European country and being "a giant industrial one [company] with national interests and a solid reputation" (Pageaut, 2010: 287). It is therefore clear that the ERT possesses significant economic power and that its main sphere of activity is outside the political venue.

A second element characterising the ERT's members is their privileged access to political venues. Membership of the ERT has always been by invitation only, with

members being chosen on the basis of their career achievement in economic and political areas (Pageaut, 2010). The boundaries between the political and economic roles enjoyed by ERT members are blurred; as shown by Audrey Pageaut in her 2010 study of ERT membership, 26% of the members had political and administrative responsibilities in the European arena, as national Ministers, high-ranking civil servants or European Commissioners (Pageaut, 2010: 283). This was the case for Peter Sutherland, for instance, who was Commissioner for Education in 1985, Commissioner for Competition from 1985 to 1989, and became Vice Chairman of the ERT from 2006 to 2009.

The ERT has held strong political influence within the European Commission since its foundation. Two high-level European Commissioners and Vice Presidents – Etienne Davignon (Vice President of the European Commission and Commissioner for Industry from 1977 to 1984) and Francois Xavier Ortoli (Vice President of the European Commission and in charge of the Commission for Economic and Financial Affairs from 1977 to 1984) – were present at the first ERT meeting, held in Paris in 1983 (*Financial Times*, 8th October 1983). Indeed, both Vice Presidents were in the group photograph taken at this first meeting, which is on the ERT’s website. Additionally, several scholars have emphasized that, during the relaunch of European integration during the 1980s and 1990s, the ERT played the role of mobilising business interests, governments and Community institution” (Holman, 1992: 17; Cowles, 1995; Sandholtz and Stone Sweet, 1998; Van Apeldoorn, 2000; Nollert and Fielder, 2000).

Moreover, within the Community’s institutions, the ERT had frequently met (at least twice a year at the occasion of the European presidencies) European Commissioners and European high-level officials to discuss working papers and reports dealing “with critical issues influencing their corporate markets” (Slowinsky, 1998: 6; Nollert and

Fielder, 2000). For instance, by looking at the dates of the ERT plenary sessions and comparing them with the dates of the meetings of the European Council Presidencies, which are held twice a year, it is clear that the ERT meets before the meetings (and never after). ERT plenary meetings are also sometimes held in the same city in which the meeting of the Council Presidency takes place²⁵.

Furthermore, Keith Richardson, Secretary General of the ERT from 1989 to 1998, confirmed the political influence of the ERT, which he stated has often worked closely with the European Commission and influenced its agenda on several occasions (Richardson, 2000). The quote below is illustrative of the aims and political strategies of the ERT:

Here lay the opportunity and indeed the need for the ERT. It would only handle the very big issues, those of overwhelming importance to the European economy as a whole. And it would overcome the communications problem by only dealing at a very high level, talking to senior people in the kind of language that senior people would find time for. In this sense it becomes possible to restate the reasons why members joined and supported the ERT: it was because they identified issues which mattered to all of them on a European level, they identified their common interests, formulated the central arguments, and debated these with top political decision-makers. It gave them access. It provided a way through the communications morass (Richardson, 2000: 13).

With reference to education policy, the evidence presented in this section has also highlighted the frequent links between the ERT and the European Commission. These have manifested in ERT reports' references to the European mobility programmes (such as Erasmus and Comett), and more generally to the added value of the European level in promoting education for industry needs. For instance, in the preface of the publication

²⁵This information has been retraced by the author by cross-comparing the dates of ERT plenary meetings and the meetings of the Council Presidency (source, ERT highlights, 2010)

Education and European Competence (1989), the ERT stated: “the work of the Commission is warmly supported by industry [...] European educational programmes such as Erasmus and Comett have been put into effective use in the distribution and transfer of knowledge and education resources throughout Europe” (Kairamo, 1989). As also shown in the previous section, the European Commission’s publications also acknowledged ERT reports, and the ERT participated in conferences the Task Force organised. This suggests not only an explicit link between the ERT and the European Commission in advancing a specific agenda for education but also the second qualification criteria for ideas carriers; that is, enjoying sufficient influence within a venue (Jacobs, 2015: 68).

A further component of the ERT’s influence to emerge from the analysis relates to the communication strategies it put in place to increase the visibility of its ideas and concepts. In addition to the ERT’s privileged channels of influence with the European Commission, another aspect of its influence was its ability to disseminate these ideas. For example, the first ERT report *Education and European Competence* was also published as a book, so that it could propose policies and recommendations to policy makers whereas “presenting the same messages to the academic world” (ERT Highlights, 2010: 36). The opening of *Reshaping Europe* stressed high-quality education and training as key priorities; more than 20,000 copies of it were distributed, and it was launched on the French national television programme *La Marche du siècle* with the official support of Jacques Delors (ERT Highlights, 2010: 33).

Likewise, the report *Education for Europeans: Towards the Learning Society* was distributed to more than 30,000 experts and officials dealing with education policy. As Richardson recalled, the “ERT reports had to stand out from the clutter on busy people's desks. Once opened it must not be cast aside. Such was the aim” (Richardson, 2000).

Thus, ERT influence cannot be understood without taking into account the communication strategies through which it advanced its proposals on the education agenda. By diffusing policy ideas among not only European Commission elites but also a wider public of education practitioners and policy makers, the ERT had the opportunity to present its problem definition of education as a vital component of Europe's economic competitiveness. As such, the ERT's discourse production was an opportunity to propose a discourse of crisis, which reflected the economic interests and preferences of European transnational companies. In other words, the ERT discourse can be seen as motivated by a neo-liberal agenda, and as "part of a strategy to maintain capitalist class hegemony in the face of potential labour opposition" through a highly skilled work force and flexible education systems (Van Apeldoorn, 2002: 144). The influence of the ERT as *ideas carrier* can be captured not only in terms of its non-state activity, influence and economic and political resources but also in terms of its moral power, manifested as "external perception of credibility and competence" (Mehta, 2015: 33).

5.5 Interim conclusion

This chapter has highlighted how the European Commission discourse on European education policy during the period 1985–1997 was characterised by a marked reference to Europe's lack of economic competitiveness. In the context of a relaunch of the European project, advancement of neo-liberal ideas and assumptions of the human capital approach, the definition of education as a problem of European competitiveness became constructed through a policy narrative and a causal story characterised by the

positioning of education as a solution to remedy the problem of Europe's lack of economic growth.

Within the construction of this policy narrative, crafted through the attribution of cause, blame and responsibility and enriched by counting strategies, more social aspects of education – such as education provisions for vulnerable groups, or the contribution of education to the society as a whole (beyond labour market needs) – appear to have been neglected. As part and parcel of this discourse of European crisis, the European Commission seems to emerge as a legitimate policy actor in the educational debate. It did this by approaching education from a perspective of a “common European problem” and presenting a compelling narrative that, by relying on the sense of urgency and danger of the European economy, pointed to the need for a common solution.

This chapter has also shed light on the roles and policy ideas of the non-state policy actors that most prominently emerged through the analysis of the European Commission's official discourse. In particular, the findings underlined how the economic logic of the problem definition mobilised European business groups, as well as providing justification for them to have a greater say in the educational debate. From this perspective, and despite a general criticism of the Cresson White Paper, the findings seem to suggest that those actors who could have expressed more social concerns – such as trade unions and teachers' associations – only marginally contributed to the educational debate. As a result of this – as well as its economic and political power and moral credibility to handle the problem – the ERT appears to have played the role of ideas carrier to further orientate European education policy towards specific business needs.

Moving on from the world of ideas and discourse, the following chapter will turn to the world of policy-making, addressing the impact of the problem definition by looking at the policy initiatives and institutional developments of European education policy.

Chapter 6

The development of the problem definition (II):

Working plans, institutional innovations, and policy initiatives

(1985–1997)

6.1 Introduction

The previous chapter showed how the problem definition forged a rhetorical space in which the European Commission and business actors socially constructed their interpretation of the problem of education by producing and diffusing a narrative of crisis and risks for the European economy. Hence, whereas the focus of the previous chapter was on the policy discourse, this chapter moves on to examine the development of the problem definition in terms of its impact on working plans, institutional developments and policy initiatives. To explore these developments, the chapter uses original archival documents (Jones private papers), EU official documents, interviews and secondary literature.

The chapter begins by examining Community Guidelines and working plans during the period 1985–1997. In the context of the Single Market project, the examination of policy programmes reveals how the problem definition directed attention to the importance of raising the quality of education systems, as well as to education's economic contribution to industry's needs through the promotion of a highly skilled and mobile workforce. The chapter then looks more closely at how the problem definition affected institutional developments that occurred after the mid-1980s, particularly the recognition of a supplementary competence for the European Commission in the

Maastricht Treaty (1992), which provided an official boost to the Commission's institutional responsibility. The third part of the chapter considers the specific policy initiatives of the exchange mobility programmes. As seen in Chapter Four, during Sutherland's one-year mandate as Commissioner for Education, the European Commission successfully launched the Comett programme, which aimed to promote cooperation between universities and industry. This chapter examines several mobility programmes implemented after the launch of Comett, documenting the link between their policy goals and the assumptions of the problem definition. Finally, the last part of the chapter discusses the findings of both Chapter Five and Chapter Six, and evaluates their significance in relation to the theoretical argument.

6.2 The impact of the problem definition on working plans and policy priorities

The working plans and policy priorities adopted in the European education agenda since the mid-1980s are evidence of how the emergence of the problem definition of education, examined in Chapter Four, provided endorsement for policy actions and setting specific goals for the education agenda. As will be shown below, in continuity with Sutherland's emphasis on mobility and qualifications and supported by the logic of the Single Market project, the assumptions of the problem definition became included in the objectives of the Community's action for education. When presenting the new medium-term perspectives for the years 1989–1992, the European Commission stated that:

The 1992 target date for the completion of the internal market, the adoption of the Single European Act and the recent decisions of the European Council in Brussels in February 1988, place education and training in a new context in the construction of the European

community. [...] the education and training systems must henceforth help to achieve these objectives and thus to create the conditions for the social and economic cohesion of the community. Without investment in the present and future workforce, and their skills, versatility and entrepreneurial capacity, Europe's capacity to innovate, to compete, to create wealth and prosperity will be impaired. In this sense education and training lie at the heart of the process of European construction. (COM, 1988: 1)

The Commission referenced two main objectives: (i) "raising the quality of basic education", for instance by "links between education and the economy", and (ii) "progressing towards an educated and trained workforce" with a specific focus on the intensification of cooperation at university level, free movement and the mobility of qualified manpower" (COM, 1988). As Manuel Marin – the new Commissioner for DG V, who succeeded Sutherland in 1986 – stated, the two key priorities on which DG V had to take action were the need for a qualified workforce and the need to improve the quality of education within the Community (Politique de l'éducation, 1987).

Hence, the economic imperatives of the Single Market, and the connected aims of promoting mobility and qualifications, legitimised the importance of education in the framework of the European construction process. In addition, the reference to "quality" of education – which then found official recognition in the Maastricht Treaty as it will be explained later, was a further way in which the Community was gradually structuring its action on education. Indeed, the concept of quality was linked to the concept of a skilled workforce within the Single Market project, thus suggesting a more economic use of the concept than a cultural or social use. For example, in contrast with the previous working plans and priorities (see Chapter Four), the medium-term perspectives did not mention topics such as the education of disabled people or migrant workers' children. The latter were only mentioned once, with reference to revising these priorities in the light of changing economic circumstances (COM, 1988: 9). In the same vein, the Council Resolution on vocational education and training in the 1990s

(Council Resolution, 1993) referenced the quality of vocational education and training, with the aim of “encourage continuing opportunities for individuals to develop their knowledge and skills and thus contribute to increased economic and social cohesion as well as to competitiveness of European economies” (Council Resolution, 1993: point 1). Though there was mention of measures to be taken in favour of those more disadvantaged in the labour market, these were referenced in a supply-side manner; namely, as measures to give these groups better access to the labour market. Thus, even though the term “quality” was not clearly defined, it seems likely that its use was aligned with economic imperatives, to the detriment of cultural and social factors” (Novoa, 2000: 92).

As reflected in the official discourse examined in Chapter Five, the topic of skill gaps was closely linked with the issue of quality. Indeed, as the European Commission maintained in its 1993 Guidelines, “the notion of skill gaps as a critical challenge clearly emerges from a wide range of reports from the European Community, the Member States and the social partners” (COM, 1993b). Interestingly, although the Guidelines mentioned several policy actors’ reports in a general manner, the only actor they explicitly specified was the European Round Table of Industrialists, noting that “they made a plea for education and training to be considered as one of the main pillars of the future developments of the European Community” (COM, 1993b).

The equation of the problem definition of education with the economy, and the influence of this equation on official policy guidelines, was further evidenced in the medium-term perspectives of the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop, 1988). The Centre’s medium-term perspectives for the period 1989–1992 cited three main areas of activity: (i) the implementation of a “European labour market”, to be achieved through ensuring comparability of vocational training

qualifications, mutual recognition and the implementation of a “European training pass”; (ii) the development of “Economic and social cohesion within the Community”, proposing topics such as regional development and promotion of continuing training, particularly as a means of combating long-term unemployment and improving the training of young people and women; and (iii) a “European vocational training area” to promote social dialogue and labour relations (Cedefop, 1988 : 1–3). In comparison with the previous Guidelines, which prioritised topics such as disabled people, education of migrants’ children and vulnerable groups, the new Guidelines discarded social issue themes in favour of actions linked to economic needs. For example, the promotion of vocational training of disabled people that was the Centre’s top priority the previous year, was only mentioned twice in the – and even then, as a general rather than specific objective of vocational training (Cedefop, 1988).

So far, this analysis highlights how the issue of education, incorporated in the emphasis on its “European dimension,” gradually gained ground in the European agenda. As Jones maintained, the “1992 Project” became the “catchword for the establishment of a whole series of common policies to build a strong, competitive community” (Jones, 1989). This might also explain why Member States were less hesitant than in the past to recognise the importance of increasing cooperation in education. For example, in their May 1988 meeting, the Ministers of Education within the Council emphasised the: “importance of a full and effective contribution by education systems to the achievement and exploitation of the internal market”, while also endorsing the emphasis the Commission placed “on the need for continuing innovation in the school systems, particularly secondary schools, and for partnership and cooperation with the world of economy” (Council of the European Communities, 1988a). Within this meeting, a Resolution on strengthening the European dimension was adopted with the aim of

launching measures during the period 1988–1992 (Council of the European Communities, 1988b). As one of the “oldest” themes of the European education agenda (present since the 1970s), the articulation of the notion of European dimension within this Resolution exhibited more continuity with Sutherland’s “economic” notion than the Janne Report’s more “cultural” notion (see Chapter Four).

Indeed, the main purpose of the European dimension was to prepare young people to take part in the economic and social development of the Community, and to “make them aware of the advantages which the Community represents, but also of the challenges it involves, in opening up an enlarged economic and social area to them” (Council of the European Communities, 1988b: 13-15). Embedded in the notion of the European dimension, two constitutive elements – knowledge of languages, and mobility – supported economic imperatives. Indeed, lack of knowledge of languages was considered the ‘Achilles heel’ preventing full exploitation of the Single Market’s potential, as the “lack of capacity to communicate is a technical barrier to free movement; it is also a handicap to the increasing business and trading connexions within the community” (Council of the European Communities, 1988b: 14). Hence, the logic behind the idea of mobility stressed the importance of ensuring professionals and workers could move within the Community without facing difficulties relating to recognition of their qualifications. As evidence of the importance of mobility, the Council of Ministers adopted a binding directive to establish a clear system of mutual recognition of professional qualifications obtained after three or more years of higher education. As such, and in continuity with the economic peculiarity attributed to mobility since Peter Sutherland, mobility was considered particularly important for “the highly skilled, and the highly qualified” (Jones, 1990a).

Another element connected with the concept of the European dimension was the very notion of “Europe” contained therein. For instance, in the Council of Ministers for Education meeting of 1989, all five of the Council’s education objectives referenced Europe: a “multicultural Europe”, a “Europe of training for all based on the offer of high quality education and training”, a “Europe of skills” and a “Europe open to the world” (Council of the European Communities, 1989: 5–6). Though formulated at the rhetorical level, the anchoring of education to Europe is indicative of the impact of the problem definition in terms of perceiving education as a common European (economic) issue, as Sutherland maintained. This can be also seen as the anticipation of Europe as a “regulatory ideal influencing the educational policies of its Member States” (Novoa and DeJong-Lambert, 2003: 51), suggesting a gradual legitimization of the European level, which will be formalised in the following decade (see Chapter Seven).

Finally, as shown in the previous chapter, lifelong learning had been emphasized in the policy discourse as a solution to improve the performance and productivity of Europe. In this respect, lifelong learning was also acquiring higher political relevance. For example, in a confidential note of 1998 on the *Strategic Orientations for the Future of Community Education, Training and Youth Policies*, Hywel Ceri Jones was suggesting further strengthening the promotion of lifelong learning and benchmarking with the following justification:

The concept of lifelong learning is a powerful one. It responds to both social and economic needs: the emerging knowledge society; high skills strategy; demographic trends; accelerating pace of change; globalisation; new technologies; empowering people to understand; keep pace and feel secure in a world of increasing complexity; active citizenship and personal fulfilment [...] there remains a significant compartmentalisation of systems between Member States, hindering exchange of good practice and mobility [...] to have an impact we therefore have to do more to engage the Member States in a policy dialogue, based on the identification of common challenges, the search for

common solutions and the identification of examples of good practice
?[sic](benchmarking). (Jones, 1998 : 7)

Jones defined “benchmarking” as:

Developing the capacity of the Commission to monitor and report on developments and to carry out comparative analysis, on the basis of a more systematic reporting obligation for Member States. This could lead to benchmarking of performance against certain criteria or indicators, although it will obviously be important to choose the indicators carefully. (Jones private papers, 1998 : 8)

These passages contain two important elements of the European education agenda, explored in greater detail in Chapter Seven. Briefly: first, the elaboration of the concept of lifelong learning seems to suggest it possesses multiple meanings; in other words, it has polysemantic properties, as it is ambiguously used to refer to several purposes (such as the emerging knowledge society or active citizenship) and external contextual factors (such as demographic trends or global changes in the economy). Second, the proposal that benchmarking is the best way to search for “common solutions” and “good practices” seems to echo the ERT’s recommendations in its 1995 and 1997 reports (see also Chapter Five).

To conclude, this discussion indicates that the working plans and policy priorities of 1985–1997 seem to be coherent with the assumptions of the problem definition; they exhibit a traceable set of goals and objectives based on education’s economic contribution to the Single Market and industry’s need for a highly skilled and mobile workforce. Within the policy programmes (but also the policy discourse, as examined in Chapter Five), the concept of lifelong learning had become an important dimension of European education policy. Indeed, 1996 was declared the “European Year of Lifelong Learning”.

6.3 The institutional impact of the problem definition: the Task Force, education in the Maastricht Treaty, and the creation of DG Education, Training and Youth

The emergence of the problem definition also triggered significant developments in terms of the institutional competences of the European Commission, starting with the establishment of a specific sub-unit for education – the Task Force Human Resources, Education, Training and Youth - and culminating with the recognition of education in a specific article in the Maastricht Treaty of 1992 and the transformation of the Task Force in an autonomous Directorate-General for Education, Training and Youth in January 1995 (DG XXII).

An initial development occurred in March 1989, when the Task Force for Human Resources, Education, Training and Youth (TFHR) was established under the authority of DG Social Affairs, Employment, Education, Training and Youth – and the new Commissioner, Vasso Papandreou (CEC, 1989). The Task Force’s reference to “human resources” appears to indicate policy recognition of the importance of human resources related to education. It was directed by Hywel Ceri Jones, and its initial purpose was to manage the mobility programmes and mobilise consensus around these initiatives (Interview with Jones). Nevertheless, its scope was to “strengthen the influence of the European Commission whilst retaining its discourse of subsidiarity” (Blitz, 2003; Milner, 1993: 42); or, to use the words of Jacques Delors, to “put some flesh on the Community bones and give it more soul and spirit” (CEC, 1989: 7). Indeed, according to an internal document produced by Jones (Jones, 1993a: 3) the activities of the Task Force largely went beyond its initial scope, ranging from the dissemination of ideas (through the publication of reports, workshop and conferences organisations) to acting

as a hub for education policy (through interacting with other DGs and EU institutions, maintaining relations with social partners and external relations with countries of Central and Eastern Europe, US and Japan).

Its budget increased from 120 millions ECU in 1989 to 400 millions ECU in 1993 – an increase of almost 400%, which further indicates the European Commission's growing involvement in education policy (Jones, 1993a : 4). As Jones noted, "it can be affirmed that the [Task Force] TFHR has developed an horizontal presence and transversal competences by enlarging its mission" (Jones, 1993a: 4). In addition, its activities were coupled with a reinforcement of the dissemination activities of the Eurydice unit of the European Commission. Established with the Resolution of 1976 and operative since 1981 (see Chapter Four), the Eurydice unit was in charge of providing information on the development of Member States' education systems and disseminating these information at national level (Council of the European Communities, 1990).

The developments of the Task Force and the strengthening of Eurydice's information activities seem to suggest a preliminary recognition of education in terms of attaining a relatively distinct status. As such, they might indicate a preparatory period leading to a shift of institutional venue for education, in which the European Commission gradually increased its ownership of educational issues. Official discussions on the eventuality of including a Community competence in education started at the Intergovernmental Conference on Political Union in 1991, which negotiated the Maastricht Treaty (Laursen, 2002).

As shown in Chapter Four, education has always been a field in which Member States have jealously guarded their national competence, and strongly rejected any proposal of harmonisation (as in the case of the Janne Report of 1973). Nevertheless, and likely as

a result of developments in the education agenda since 1985, the legitimization of European cooperation in education was now discussed as a concrete possibility – as exemplified in Jones’s confidential note:

At this stage my understanding of the temperature is that the debate between Member States no longer questions *whether* education should be in, but *how* the formulation should be made within clear limits. (Jones, 1990b : conclusion, original emphasis)

And:

The majority of Member States appear to be willing to contemplate the inclusion in the Treaty of a formulation which at least recognises the existing political acquis in the field of educational cooperation at Community level. This would probably involve the use of the terms of the 1976 Council Resolution: to promote closer relations between the educational systems. This could be accompanied by a reference to the need to respect and build on the rich diversity of educational systems and practices and of course to the principle of subsidiarity (Jones, 1990b : point 2)

In addition, the issue of Article 128 of the Treaty of Rome was specifically emphasised. This referred to the development of vocational training policy and the European Commission had used the European Court of Justice’s interpretation of it to justify mobility programmes involving higher education, such as Comett (see also Chapter Four). More specifically, Jones argued that this wider interpretation of vocational training “is one of the vital bridges between economic and social policy, and it is unhelpful to link it exclusively with social considerations”, thus providing further evidence of minor attention to social aspects. At the same time, when discussing the position of Member States regarding Article 128 and other aspects, Jones noticed that the:

UK, originally against any inclusion, considers that it will be in their interest to include the minimum formulation set out earlier, as it could help to eliminate what they regard as the game of creeping competence played through the manipulation of article 128; the German authorities, including some lander appear open for the minimal formulation,

although the federal level is at present more open in its position; some Member States would like to see some additional references included, e.g. foreign language teaching, promotion of a European dimension to education, encouragement of educational mobility and exchanges. (Jones, 1990b : points 6-7-8)

These considerations found their articulation in the Maastricht Treaty , in which – for the first time – the Community’s competences in the field of general education and vocational training were extended through two separate articles: Article 126 institutionalised education, and Article 127 reformulated vocational training policy on the basis of the old Article 128 (see also Chapter Four, section Two, footnote 5) . The Table 6.1 below summarises the provisions and aims of the Community’s action for both articles.

It can be noted from Table 6.1 that the Maastricht Treaty extended the competences of the European Commission, but limited these under the principles of subsidiarity and the cultural and linguistic diversity of education systems (Lenaerts, 1994: 7). On the one hand, the introduction of subsidiarity reflected a clear signal from Member States to delimit further expansion of Community competences, and also represented a “statement about how much Community intervention in education and vocational training Member States intend to accept” (Barnard, 1992; Ryba, 1992; Gori, 2001: 77). On the other hand, the legitimization of the Community competences raised the venue and visibility of European education policy (Ertl, 2006: 8). Additionally, Article 126 also enabled interest groups and other actors to become involved in educational issues. Moreover, it extended the influence of the Community in sensitive areas, such as primary and general education, with the effect of helping the European Commission to overcome Member States’ resistance to contested themes such as language learning (Jones private papers, 1992).

In expanding Community competences in education and training, the Maastricht Treaty can also be interpreted as the result of a complex process, which occurred “on a rather lengthy pathway” (Field, 1988: 57) and codified the European Commission’s role as a legitimate actor in education policy. As Jones wrote in a confidential letter to the Commissioner Vasso Papandreou, “I consider that we have achieved the *maximum possible* and an excellent basis for the next period to capitalise on much of the work that we have been doing with the Member States over the last ten years or so” (Jones, 1991). Hence, this suggests that Maastricht was also a reflection of the fresh impetus that had been brought into European education policy since the mid-1980s under the political entrepreneurship of Peter Sutherland. At the same time, Jones’ quote of having achieved “the maximum possible” is also indicative of the awareness of the European Commission not to trespass the boundaries of its competences and to avoid conflicts with Member States.

The Community’s intervention in education, by “supporting and supplementing” Member States’ actions, had the most immediate effect of helping the European Commission to strengthen exchange mobility programmes – the purposes of which clearly corresponded with the themes of the Community’s actions (Cram, 2005 : 45) – by rearticulating them and reinforcing their economic purposes (see also next section). A further spill-over effect of the Maastricht Treaty was the transformation of the Task Force Human Resources, Education, Training and Youth into a separate Directorate-General for Education, Training and Youth: DG XXII (Pépin, 2006 : 107). This seems to support the theoretical argument that a problem definition also influences which institutions will be involved in its management.

Table 6.1 Maastricht Treaty, Article 126 and 127

Article 126 (education)	Article 127 (vocational training)
<p>The Community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member State and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for their content of teaching and the organization of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity.</p> <p>Community action shall be aimed at:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Developing the European dimension in education, particularly through the teaching and dissemination of the languages of Member States; • Encouraging mobility of students and teachers, inter alia by encouraging the academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study; • Promoting cooperation between educational establishments; • Developing exchanges of information and experience on issues common to the education systems of Member States; • Encouraging the development of youth exchanges and of exchanges of socio educational instructors; • Encouraging the development of distance education. 	<p>The Community shall implement a vocational training policy which shall support and supplement the action of the Member States, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content and organization of vocational training Member States for the content and organization of vocational training.</p> <p>The Community action shall aim to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • facilitate adaptation to industrial changes, in particular through vocational training and retraining; • improve initial and continuing vocational training in order to facilitate vocational integration and reintegration into the labour market; • facilitate access to vocational training and encourage mobility of instructors and trainees and particularly young people; • stimulate cooperation on training between educational or training establishments and firms develop exchanges of information and experience on issues common to the training systems of the Member States.

Source: Maastricht Treaty, 1992

At the same time, the policy orientation of the Maastricht Treaty seems to be consistent with the assumptions of the problem definition. The themes of cooperation in Articles 126 and 127 included topics (such as the development of the European dimension of education, the promotion of cooperation between educational institutions and the exchange of information) that were already listed as priority areas in the Resolution of 1976. However, neither Articles referred to that Resolution's more socially oriented priority themes, such as equal opportunities for access to all forms of education or the education of migrant's children (see also Chapter Four). Article 126 explicitly included

goals more consistent with the assumptions of the problem definition, such as “quality” education and the development of distance education.

Interestingly, Article 127 narrowed the definition of vocational training; it emphasised adaptation to industrial and labour market changes and cooperation between educational institutions and industries, while excluding any reference to more social considerations. Hence, Maastricht is also an example of how the problem definition – namely, the link between education and economic concerns – had a direct influence on the content of articles 126 and 127. Furthermore, after Maastricht, education enjoyed autonomous status at Community level when the newly formed Directorate-General Education, Training and Youth (DG XXII) took on the competences of the former Task Force on Education, Training and Youth (see also Pépin, 2006).

The Amsterdam Treaty of 1997 did not alter the provisions for education and vocational training²⁶; however, its preamble underlined the promotion of “the development of the highest possible *level of knowledge* for their peoples through a wide access to education and training and through its continuous updating” (Treaty of Amsterdam, 1997; emphasis added). In addition, the Amsterdam Treaty committed Member States to the “development of a skilled, trained and adaptable workforce and labour markets responsive to economic change”. Thus, it can be inferred that, by the end of the 1990s, the priorities of education policy had definitely been reoriented towards contributing to economic goals with the notion of ‘knowledge’ gradually acquiring political importance.

²⁶ With the Amsterdam Treaty, Article 126 (education) was renumbered as 149 and Article 127 (vocational training) was renumbered as Article 150.

6.4 The impact of the problem definition on the mobility programmes: creating the “walking, talking, little Europeans”²⁷

After the approval of the Comett programme (see Chapter Four, section four), and thanks to the European Court of Justice’s wider interpretation of Article 128 in the Gravier case and other important rulings²⁸, the European Commission launched and implemented several projects and exchange programmes for university students; teachers; pupils, young people and professionals. By providing a legal basis for mobility programmes, the European Court of Justice thus played a crucial role “in altering the face of European education law”; it enabled the European Commission to undertake more concrete initiatives in the field of education and training, including providing technical, financial and advisory support to Member States (Barnard, 1992: 123; Flynn, 1988; Shaw, 1991; Milner, 1998).

Covering all levels of education (with the exception of compulsory education), the programmes were articulated around different measures and aims to facilitate the mobility of students and workers by enabling them to acquire skills and work experience across Member States (Field, 1997: 98; Ertl, 2003). Whereas programmes such as Comett, Erasmus and Lingua were oriented towards education, the promotion of university mobility and language learning, other programmes, such as Petra and Eurotecnet, were focusing on vocational training. The main aspects of the mobility programmes are summarised in the Table 6.2 below. Through the analysis of their purposes, results and budget allocation, this section will show how the mobility

²⁷The Economist, 11th January 1986

²⁸Besides Gravier, two other important rulings were *Blaizot* of 1989 and *Barra* of 1988, all regarding Community citizens seeking access to education systems of other foreign states (see also Laenarts, 1995).

programmes were commensurate with the policy discourse (Chapter Five), which was itself the result of the emergence of the problem definition (Chapter Four).

To begin with, what can be clearly seen in Table 6.2 is the introduction of several mobility programmes between 1986 and 1991, aimed to promote different exchange activities (such as exchange of participants, promotion of pilot projects, transnational networks) and addressed to different target groups (women, youth, higher education students, workers). At the same time, as examined below, a more in-depth examination of these programmes can provide insight on their potential link with the assumptions of the problem definition.

First, in terms of purposes, the mobility programmes present a coherent set of assumptions in which the idea of mobility seems to suggest an emphasis on economic rather than social aims. With the exception of the Iris programme – the only one that clearly indicates unemployed women as a target group – the mobility programmes are characterised by an emphasis on the needs of workers already in the labour market, (rather than those outside it), and university students. Furthermore, the programme's purposes refer to themes such as language promotion, technological change and cooperation with industry; there is no reference to themes such as equality of opportunity or vulnerable groups (with the exception of Petra but framed in terms of preparation for working life and hence meant to address labour marked needs).

Table 6.2 European Commission education and training mobility programmes

Programme	Year	Purpose	Results and achievements (1986–1992)	Allocation (million ECU)
Comett	1986	Cooperation between universities and industries regarding training in the field of technology	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •205 industry-university consortia (10,000 members) covering all regions of EC/EFTA and most advanced technology areas •Development of European-wide infrastructure for organisation of 7,000 student placements annually •Creation of sectoral networks (agro food, automobile, software engineering) 	206,6
Erasmus	1987	EC action scheme for the mobility of university students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Exchange network of over 1,900 inter-university cooperation programmes, involving 1,200 higher education institutions in inter-university cooperation •EC credit transfer system for the European recognition of transferable course credits, currently involving over 140 universities in five different areas •Creation of European higher education associations 	307,5
Petra	1987	Action programme for vocational training and preparation for adult and working life for young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •European network of training partnerships •Cooperation network of national bodies responsible for vocational guidance •Network of national coordination units 	79,7
Youth for Europe	1988	Action programme for the promotion of youth exchanges in the EC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Youth exchange infrastructure in Europe, involving 14 national agencies and European NGOs 	32,2
Iris	1988	European network of vocational training projects for women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Network of 468 projects for women in new technology, technical areas and enterprise education, addressed to women returners, unemployed women and women's career development 	0,75
Lingua	1989	Action programme to promote foreign language competence in the EC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Exchange network involving over 200 inter-university cooperation programmes •Network of national agencies •Language-training consortia, creation of new networks of organisations involved in language training 	68,8
			•	
Eurotecnnet	1989	Action programme promoting vocational training innovation: a result of technological change in the EC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Network of 277 innovative demonstration projects spanning key technologies, development and dissemination of models, instrument and materials •Network of specialists in innovative training approaches 	7
Tempus	1990	Trans-European mobility scheme for university studies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Network of 637 joint European projects designed to upgrade and restructure higher education in 10 Central and Eastern European countries, involving 1,800 institutions (East and West) •Network of national Tempus offices in Central and Eastern European countries, and of national Tempus contact points in EC Member States 	194
Force	1991	Action programme for the development of continuing vocational training in the EC	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Network of 430 transnational projects bringing together 3,000 enterprises, social partners and training organisations •Network of national coordination units •Collection of data on and development of coherent European statistics on vocational training in firms 	31,3

Source: (COM, 1993c)

Second, the results and achievements of the programmes listed in the Table 6.2 below suggest that – despite the limitations to European competence, which the Maastricht Treaty restated – the European Commission was gradually becoming more influential through the creation of transnational networks, the organisation of seminars and the collection of data. Hywel Ceri Jones confirmed that these programmes were able to foster “growing recognition that, diversity notwithstanding, many of the policy issues are common to all or most Member States and that there is much to be gained from joint discussion, analysis and development of new solutions” (Interview with Jones; COM, 1995). At the same time, whereas the European Commission was intensifying co-operation through the instrument of the mobility programmes, Member States were still stressing the diversity of their education systems by limiting the role of the Commission. Indeed, a confidential document produced by Jones regarding the insertion of education in the Maastricht Treaty, reveals the difficulties for the Commission to advance mobility initiatives beyond higher education and vocational training, with Germany and UK vetoing the inclusion of exchanges for compulsory schools (Jones, 1993b). However, as several scholars have also noted, the mobility programmes “really created a platform for EC intervention into the further and higher education systems of Member States” (Freedland, 1996: 113; Hervey, 1997; Ertl, 2006; Souto-Otero et al. 2008 : 236). Hence, the mobility programmes represented *de facto* the main approach of the Commission during the 1990s to promote cooperation; in this respect, they seem to corroborate the claim that the European Commission took ownership of the problem definition by building and stimulating consensus on European cooperation through these initiatives.

A further element that can be noticed is their budget allocation. In particular, what stands out in the Table 6.2 is that the Comett, Erasmus and Tempus programmes

enjoyed the biggest share of funding. Given also that budget allocation might be a reflection of the main European Commission's priorities, it is important to dwell on these three programmes in more detail. At the same time, they are perhaps the most interesting to examine, as Comett and Erasmus were the earliest of these programmes while Tempus was deemed to play a role in the post-communist educational policies within the integration of Eastern and Central Europe (Council of the European Communities, 1990).

Comett, a direct result of the personal initiative of Peter Sutherland (see Chapter Four) was designed to promote cooperation between universities and industries. Few years after its launch, it can be noted that the concept of 'industries' was quite narrow. Indeed, the main participating industries were big European companies such as Aerospatiale; Control Data; Fabrimental; Digital; Siemens; Philips; IBM; The Marconi Company, Thomson and British Telecom (*La Vanguardia*, 27 July, 1987; European Commission, 1994: 24). Of these companies, Siemens, Philips, IBM and British Telecom were also part of the European Round Table of Industrialists – which, as seen in Chapter Four, had supported Peter Sutherland and the Comett's proposal. In addition, the CEO of Marconi in 1987 was Sir Robert Telford, who was also Chairman of the Industrial Research and Development Advisory Committee (IRDAC) working group, which was set up in 1989 to provide advice on education and industry.

Hence, what stands out is a clear relation between the Comett programme and big European companies. In this respect, criticism was raised against the Commission. For instance, the European Economic and Social Committee (CES) raised concerns that the projects implemented under Comett totally overlooked the training of unions' representatives and the needs expressed by workers, and overall reflected scarce involvement of union representatives in comparison to employers' representatives. The

European Commission was blamed for being “unilateral” and focusing only on certain employers groups at the expense of worker and union organisations (CES, 1988). Echoing the concerns of the CES, the Youth Forum of the European Communities²⁹ (YFEC) was also very critical; its Steering Group on Education, Training and Employment noted that the programme should have been more accessible to small enterprises (YFEC, 1988).

Devoted to the mobility of university students, Erasmus was the second programme that enjoyed greater financial resources. Though inspired by the medieval tradition of travellers in Europe, reflecting individual cultural and personal enrichment (Sutherland, 1985d : 3; Interview with Jones), Erasmus was de facto devoted to strengthening the perspectives of the Single Market and serve to ensure the competitiveness of Europe on the world scene by promoting exchanges of specific target groups of students (Papatsiba, 2005). Indeed, as the European Commission stated, Erasmus should have been “capable of responding to the needs of the Single Market and to the development of a People’s Europe” (COM, 1989 : 7). As Blitz also noted, “the final Erasmus decision discussed economic development before it outlined a cultural dimension” (Blitz, 2003: 205). In terms of participation in the programme, economic and engineer faculties were overrepresented (28% and 15% respectively) compared to other faculties (less than 1% for human sciences). Despite some concerns within DG V – the Commissioner Papandreou lamented that the objective of Erasmus was not to create a “euro-aristocracy” of engineers and economists, but rather to promote their sense of

²⁹The European Youth Forum is a pan European organizations made up of more than 90 National Youth Councils and International Non-Governmental Youth Organisations.

belonging to Europe – the programme continued to focus on highly educated individuals (Fligstein, 2008).

Finally, Tempus – adopted in 1990 with the purpose of strengthening links with Central and Eastern Europe after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 – was also biased towards economic needs. Indeed, as it can be easily inferred from the objectives stated in the Council decisions adopting Tempus in 1990, the main objective was “to aid in restructuring and adapting university education in these countries to meet the new needs of the market economy” (Council decision Tempus, 1990). As also Slovinsky showed in a study of higher education students in Central and Eastern Europe, participation in Tempus “operated to privilege university students with western language skills”, thus reflecting how participation in these programmes favoured students from more favoured socioeconomic backgrounds (Slovinsky, 1998: 3).

Taken together, the rationale for Comett, Erasmus and Tempus seems to corroborate the assumptions of the problem definition; exchange programmes appeared to be oriented towards economic aims and addressed to the needs of big companies through the mobility of highly skilled students. Furthermore, the concept of European citizenship became gradually detached from its more social or cultural aspects (as it had been, for instance, in the People’s Europe Adonnino Report examined in Chapter Four), while reflecting a multidimensional economic logic in which the European citizen was emerging as an integrated, successful, individually responsible and mobile citizen, who needed to have his professional and vocational qualifications recognised.

The mobility programmes found official justification in the formal acknowledgement of education in the Maastricht Treaty, as seen in the previous section. Thanks to the

Treaty's institutional recognition of the Community's action on education, the European Commission was able to launch a new generation of mobility programmes in 1994, which were regrouped into two main strands: Socrates (COM, 1993d) for universities and schools, and Leonardo Da Vinci (COM, 1993e) for actions in the field of vocational training. The European Commission justified this rationalisation as an attempt to:

consolidate its contribution through catalytic action necessary to streamline and rationalise the existing programmes, reducing their number as necessary whilst *reinforcing those aspects which appear to be most promising in terms of European added value* and stimulus they can offer. (COM, 1993f: 1, emphasis added)

In practice, by referring to the reinforcement of the most promising aspects in terms of European added value, the European Commission was strengthening their economic logic. Indeed, it is indicative that Socrates' biggest budget allocation was for higher education at the expense of other levels of education, and that Leonardo Da Vinci focused on the need to improve employability, European competitiveness, lifelong learning and active citizenship. The European Commission emphasised the "growing consensus [that] emerged throughout the European community, as in other parts of the world, that so-called 'human or intangible capital' is the most vital resource of advanced economies" (COM, 1993f : 2). According to Antonio Ruberti, the newly established Socrates and Leonardo Da Vinci Programmes shared three main objectives:

Firstly, to promote quality education and training throughout Europe, through exchanges of experience and the exploitation of complementary approaches and skills. Secondly, to stimulate innovation in this field: innovation not only in curricular content and methods, but also in technology, with special emphasis on new methods for transmitting and acquiring knowledge, such as multimedia tools and distance learning techniques. Thirdly to promote the European dimension in education and training at all levels (Ruberti, 1994 : 1)

As this quote suggests, the policy aims of the mobility programme were consistent with the definition that Sutherland spurred. In terms of policy aims, mobility was intended as a means to improve growth and competitiveness; in terms of participation, the examples of Comett and Erasmus show that the main winners from these programmes were the big companies and those students who were sufficiently advantaged to undertake the exchanges. Even though these programmes were part and parcel of the promotion of the European dimension, it is clear that such a dimension was largely economic. This is also indicative of how the problem definition acted as a template of reference.

6.5 Discussion and conclusion

Both this chapter and Chapter Five traced how the problem definition of education, under the economic rationale that emerged in the mid-1980s, affected the development of European education policy during the period 1986–1997. Chapter Five explored this question via an examination of discourse, and the rhetorical strategies that specific policy entrepreneurs constructed within this discourse, while this chapter examined the policy-making process more closely. This section discusses the key findings of both chapters and evaluates their significance for the theoretical argument.

To begin with, Chapter Five's analysis of European Commission discourse on education highlighted how the problem definition not only shaped the content of the policy debate but also gave legitimacy to specific actors. The examination of Memoranda, Green Papers and White Papers revealed a significant path departure from the decade of the 1970s: the inauguration of an official reporting activity in European education policy, and the European Commission's increasing role as a policy entrepreneur taking

ownership of the problem of education. In essence, through the construction of a policy narrative characterised by rhetorical strategies such as *naming, blaming and claiming, storytelling and counting*, the problems of Europe's lack of competitiveness and unemployment were (re)defined as an education problem that could only be addressed through taking adequate action to promote a skilled and mobile workforce. Hence, two dimensions of in terms of solution to the problem were articulated: an economic dimension, revolving around ideas such as skills, lifelong learning and flexibility of education and training systems; and a political dimension, revolving around the idea of attributing greater responsibilities to the European level through the establishment of monitoring tools (such as benchmarking) to compare the performance of education systems and make them more responsive to labour market needs.

Furthermore, the policy orientation of the publications and policy reports appears to be consistent with the assumptions of the problem definition, in which priority is attributed to European economic competitiveness and labour market needs. Although the analysis of the publications and policy documents highlighted references to social issues and vulnerable groups of students and workers, these references were interpreted as a cost or barrier to accessing the labour market, and ultimately viewed as an obstacle to economic growth. Put differently, the inclusion of vulnerable groups seems to be considered instrumentally as a precondition to labour market participation – as raised, for instance, in the criticism raised by Member States in response to the Memorandum on Higher Education and to the 'Cresson' White Paper. As such, the economic interpretation underpinning the notion of "quality" education was anchored to the need to provide European industries with a highly skilled workforce. This was to the detriment of social aspects, such as equal educational opportunities, social integration of disadvantaged

groups of workers more profoundly affected by changes in the work structure, and the more cultural interpretation of the European dimension.

In addition to the European Commission taking ownership of the problem, the analysis shed light on the role of European industry – namely the Industrial Research and Development Advisory Committee (IRDAC) and the European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT) – in diagnosing the problem and proposing solutions for European education policy. Though the ERT was set up in 1983, it was only during Peter Sutherland's one-year mandate that its interest in education manifested. This could be interpreted as a result of Sutherland's focus on cooperation between universities and industries and the need for a highly skilled workforce. Indeed, the ERT has paid significant attention to education since, as evidenced by its creation of an ad-hoc group on education and promotion of a specific education agenda through its reports and publications. Similarly, in 1985 – a year after Davignon granted it an advisory role in research and development issues – IRDAC started to be involved in the Comett programme, and subsequently played a significant role through its influential publication *Skills Shortages in Europe*.

Conversely, the empirical account highlighted generally weak opposition from counter-actors such as teachers' associations and the European Trade Union Committee for education; given that education policy directly involves teachers, parents, students and normal citizens, their lack of policy initiatives is somewhat surprising. Though they raised concerns regarding the excessive economic focus of education (for instance, by criticising the 'Cresson' White Paper), they did not elaborate consistent counterproposals to address their dissatisfaction. Furthermore, while the Commission discourse (or official events and conferences) widely acknowledged business groups and specifically referenced their work (as also confirmed by the interviews), it only

vaguely mentioned teachers' associations and unions. This seems consistent with the theoretical claim that a problem definition also has the impact of determining which actors will be empowered and which will be marginalised (Weiss, 1998: 117).

Precisely because of the definition of education as a problem of economic growth, business actors (rather than, for instance, teachers' associations) enjoyed a privileged position as legitimate problem handlers. As such, they gained more authority to propose their policy solutions, such as education being a vital investment for industry needs and the proposal that the European Commission coordinate the benchmarking of Member States education systems' performance. Looking at the European Commission and ERT policy reports (as well as the chronological order of their publication), consistent education policy ideas seem to emerge. It is also interesting to note that policy ideas and objectives the ERT advanced were subsequently officially incorporated into the European education agenda (see also Chapter Seven). Hence, it seems plausible that the ERT might have played a significant role as *ideas carrier* (as suggested in the final part of Chapter Five) by influencing the content of the education agenda. This might be explained by the ERT's economic power, political influence within the European Commission and moral power, manifested by its ability to communicate and disseminate its ideas in a persuasive way through a socially constructed discourse.

As also seen in this chapter, this problem definition was incorporated into not only the content of the policy discourse but also the evolution of working plans, institutional settings and policy initiatives, as well as in the ownership of specific policy actors. As such, the policy solution the European Commission and business actors advanced incorporated a set of policy objectives that aimed to achieve economic competitiveness: embracing lifelong learning; investing in a highly skilled workforce; emphasising quality education, using benchmarking to improve the performance of education

systems and promoting mobility. In a nutshell, employability, comparability and mobility, emerged as the three key principles of education policy. In this respect, these three analytical categories will be examined in detail in Chapter Seven.

The trajectory of post-1985 working plans and policy priorities examined at the beginning of this chapter highlighted the strengthening of the idea of education as a factor of economic growth. This manifested in an emphasis on the concept of “quality”, which was interpreted in two ways: (i) a skilled workforce, and (ii) a way to contribute to the competitiveness of European economies. Accordingly, the topics discussed in the official guidelines – mobility of workers, the European dimension, the recognition of qualifications and lifelong learning – reveal a clear economic peculiarity, anchored to education’s contribution to the political and economic construction of the European integration process. Official texts frequently referenced the contribution of education to “Europe”, further reinforcing the concept of a “common problem” of European education policy that had already emerged with Peter Sutherland. At the same time, references to education’s more social purposes – such as its contribution to equality of opportunities or issues such as migrants’ children or vulnerable groups – were mentioned only vaguely or considered of secondary importance.

A second effect of the problem definition that emerged in the analysis was its institutional impact. The establishment in 1989 of the Task Force Human Resources, Training and Youth and the expansion of its activities – not only managing the mobility programmes but also acquiring autonomous status in terms of initiatives and collaboration with other Directorates-General – may indicate the acknowledgement of the European Commission’s greater involvement in the policy field of education, which would have been hard to envisage only a few years earlier (as evidenced by Member States’ reluctance regarding the creation of the Comett committee; see also Chapter

Four). The subsequent transformation of the Task Force into an autonomous Directorate-General in 1995 (DG XXII Education, Training and Youth) seems to suggest that defining education as an issue of European competitiveness also affected the venue in which education was discussed (see also Chapter Seven). Similarly, the inclusion of a specific article on education and another on vocational training in the Maastricht Treaty can be seen as further legitimisation of supranational ownership of education policy, whereas references to the achievement of “quality” education and the lack of formal recognition of more social objectives are consistent with the assumptions of the problem definition. Though the Maastricht Treaty did not establish a common supranational competence for education, it nevertheless represented a turning point in the formulation of education policy by establishing a legal framework for education (Novoa, 2002: 37; Ertl, 2003). Most importantly, in terms of policy content, the Maastricht Treaty constituted the legal basis on which the European Commission then articulated its discourse on development of quality education, promotion of language learning, mobility of students and cooperation between educational establishments.

Examining the exchange mobility programmes revealed which policy goals were moving forward and which were not. Indeed, Erasmus, Comett and Tempus – the three mobility programmes that enjoyed the biggest financial allocation – were all oriented towards more economic goals, such as partnership between universities and industries and the mobility of highly educated students. More generally, the mobility programmes – and their further rationalisation under the Socrates (higher education) and Leonardo Da Vinci (vocational training) streams – seem to suggest a conception of mobility aimed at boosting Europe economic competitiveness, addressed to those already in the labour market and from privileged socioeconomic backgrounds. Finally, the mobility programmes resulted in the European Commission’s greater institutional involvement in

education, manifested in these programmes' results in terms of transnational networks, seminars organisation and dissemination activities in Member States.

These conclusions seem to be consistent with the second stage of the theoretical argument, which argues that the development of a problem definition will be manifested in terms of delineating which aspects will be included in the policy debate and which will not, which actors will gain problem ownership (and thus enjoy greater legitimacy to propose their preferred solutions), and which institutions will be reinforced.

First, in terms of discourse, working plans and policy initiatives, European education policy orientation emphasized the economic logic of education as a vehicle for employability. Informed by a discourse of crisis and risks socially constructed through rhetorical strategies, the problem definition encapsulated a specific diagnosis of the European economy by arguing that ineffective education systems and skills gaps were the causes of Europe's lack of competitiveness and unemployment. Second, the European Commission's institutional capacity in the field of education was strengthened, despite the reluctance of Member States. Indeed, the evidence highlighted the European Commission's ability to not only mobilise different policy actors (as manifested in the organisation of conferences and setting up of networks via mobility programmes) but also successfully exploit windows of opportunities – such as the Gravier ruling or the inclusion of education in the Maastricht Treaty – to further advance the policy discourse of crisis and increase its competences, as evidenced by the institutional developments of first the Task Force in 1989 and subsequently the creation of the Directorate-General Education, Training and Youth in 1995 (DG XXII). At the same time, the findings of both chapters indicate the ways in which the problem definition affected actors' constellations, reflecting the European Commission's and business actors' increasing problem ownership.

However, the impact of the problem definition on policy developments in 1985–1997 cannot fully be understood without taking into account the socioeconomic context (zeitgeist) of the time (examined in the Chapter Five, section two), which was characterised by the predominance of neoliberal philosophy, globalised economic and financial systems and the economic imperatives of technological change (Varsori, 2013: 227). On the one hand, preoccupation with the competitive threat of the US and Japanese economies made Member States more receptive to adopting education agendas that aimed to achieve economic competitiveness via investment in human capital, skills and lifelong learning. On the other, the relaunch of the European integration with the Single European Act and the Maastricht Treaty significantly altered the place of education policy in the European construction process. Anchored to the “1992 Project”, education became driven by the logic of the internal market and subjected to the structural adaptability of European economies to the new global context. Hence, the zeitgeist of the time provided a template for action by helping “political actors to find a solution for specific problems by giving a general orientation” (Thiemeyer, 2013: 86). In this sense, the propitious political climate also helped the European Round Table of Industrialists to advance a solution clearly rooted in supply-side logic, with an emphasis on better adapting education and training systems to the needs of the labour market.

To conclude, during the period 1985–1997, European education policy significantly advanced on the European agenda, and education was viewed as a crucial instrument in the political and economic relaunch of Europe. In this respect, the findings have also provided a preliminary insight into the dynamic (and polysemantic) concept of lifelong learning as a response to the needs of the knowledge economy and in the construction of the ‘Europe of Knowledge’. Additionally, working plan priorities, policy initiatives (such as mobility programmes) and the construction of a discourse of competitive crisis

pointed towards a supply-side policy solution articulated around the three goals of employability, comparability and mobility. However, the full implications of this process did not become apparent until its completion, as the next chapter will discuss.

Chapter 7

The institutionalization of the problem definition as policy solution

(1997-2010)

7.1 Introduction

So far, this thesis has thoroughly analysed the evolution of European education policy since the beginning of the 1970s. More specifically, Chapter Four examined the development of education since the beginning of the 1970s and the emergence of the problem definition of education, showing an agenda that oscillated between social and economic purposes and, from the mid-1980s, became more oriented towards an economic definition of education as a tool to improve Europe's competitiveness. Chapters Five and Six explored the development of the problem definition and its articulation as a policy solution within the discourse of crisis and risks pushed forward by the European Commission and business actors (Chapter Five), and they showed how the problem definition influenced policy programmes, institutional developments and policy initiatives (Chapter Six).

Taken together, the previous chapters have highlighted the emergence of a specific problem definition of education with a prevailing supply-side orientation accompanied by attempts of the European Commission to advance its role in a policy area considered a strict national competence. At the same time, the chapters have also underlined the reluctance of Member States in regard to two aspects: conceiving of education from a purely economic point of view, and allowing any interference from the European Commission in national education and training systems. However - and surprisingly

given the previous concerns - since the launch of the *Lisbon strategy* in 2000, several developments have occurred.

To begin with, Member States agreed on a common strategy for education – the ‘Education and Training 2010’ programme - based on common goals aimed at meeting the needs of the ‘knowledge economy’ to be achieved through the new policy mode of the Open Method of Coordination (henceforth, OMC), a non-binding method of cooperation based on common benchmarks and indicators (Gornitzka, 2006). In addition, further cooperation has been advanced through the ‘Bologna process’ of 1999, which aims to create the ‘European Higher Education Area’ (EHEA) by 2010 to promote employability and mobility through the ‘Copenhagen process’ launched in 2002, which aims to develop a common European framework for vocational education and training.

This chapter corresponds with the third stage of the theoretical argument, arguing that the institutionalization stage is not only influenced by the existing problem definition but is also driven by the economic, administrative, and political viability of the policy solution that will be chosen (Hall, 1993). Hence, in this respect, by bringing together the findings of the previous chapters, this chapter analyses the extent to which the problem definition became embedded in institutions - namely principles, rules and procedures, and venues - and which factors accounted for the choice of the policy solution. In particular, as it will be explained in the last part of the chapter, the developments occurred after Lisbon cannot be fully understood without taking into account the previous stages of the emergence and the development of the problem definition.

The chapter starts by contextualising the main policy developments that occurred at the EU level by the end of the 1990s, noting an increased focus on the coordination of economic policies and a new impetus for the European integration process that started with the Lisbon strategy and was embedded within the Third Way approach (section two). Section three is a descriptive section that has the purpose to illustrate the main developments of the education agenda between 2000 and 2010, while section four analyses the extent to which specific goals about education - namely *employability, comparability and mobility* - became guiding principles in these developments and embedded into rules and procedures within the architecture of the OMC. In particular, this section provides evidence of a continuity between the ideas examined in the previous chapters and the policy outputs of the education agenda and also underlines the unstable preferences of Member States regarding coordination.

The final part of the chapter discusses the institutionalization and highlights the continuity between the problem definition and the policy outputs of Lisbon. At the same time, it explains which factors played a role in the institutionalization of the problem definition as policy solution. In particular, it is argued that, even though the problem definition created consensus around specific problems and solutions of the EU, the final choice was also driven by more strategic considerations. Indeed, the chosen policy solution was economically viable, as it responded to the economic and social problems of the period; administratively viable, as the Open Method of Coordination fitted with the existing institutional settings; and finally, politically viable, in the sense that, thanks to the polysemy of the idea of 'knowledge economy', political actors with different and divergent preferences attributed a different meaning to this concept and hence agreed to endorse the policy choice.

The sources were gathered from EU official documents (programmes, strategies, conclusions, and communications); the Agence Europe Bulletins, and secondary literature on European education policy.

7.2 Main institutional and contextual developments of the 2000s: from the Lisbon strategy to Europe 2020

Despite the improved economic integration due to the Single Market project, the adoption of the Euro and the enlargement of 2004, the beginning of the 2000s was characterised by several economic and social uncertainties for the European Union. On the one hand, the EU economic outlook was characterised by concerns about the “dot.com” bubble, low economic growth and income disparity with levels of productivity and growth still falling behind those of the US (Blaszczyk, 2005). On the other hand, changes in the work structure with more precarious forms of work contracts, and an increasing unemployment rate, in particular for women and older workers with low or obsolete skills, were also creating further pressure for reforms in the light of new social risks (Hemerijck, 2013). International organisations, such as the OECD and the World Bank, were warning about the fact that people might no longer have secure access to well-being and that this would require an increased focus on assessing the threats to social cohesion (Jenson and Sineau, 2001: 16).

In addition, the challenges posed by the enlargement with the entry of 12 ex-communist countries and the creation of a single market of almost 500 million people, added further pressure in regard to the need to develop policies for growth, employment and competitiveness that could also avoid socio-economic disruption (Best et al. 2008). Finally, the attainment of the benchmarking of fiscal and monetary policy to achieve membership of the Economic and Monetary Union enhanced the need for convergence

(De la Porte et al. 2001: 6). Taken together, all of these concerns led to a widespread perception that more needed to be done to improve the EU transition to a knowledge based economy (Trubek and Trubek, 2005).

Within this socio-economic context, the Amsterdam Treaty of 1997 - formalised through the European Employment Strategy - aimed at “developing a coordinated strategy for employment and particularly promoting *a skilled, trained and adaptable workforce* and labour markets responsive to economic change” under the idea of a close link between employment and social policies (Amsterdam Treaty, Article 125, emphasis added). With the Amsterdam Treaty, a coordinated approach to economic policies was launched and then institutionalised with the Luxembourg, Cologne and Cardiff processes (Arestis and Sawyer, 2001). More specifically, the Luxembourg process (1997) launched an annual cycle of employment guidelines based on priorities that Member States had to take into consideration when formulating their own National Action Plans; the Cardiff process (1998) was meant to address structural reforms; and the Cologne process (1999) aimed to create macro-economic policy coordination (Hodson and Maher, 2001 : 724).

Hence, the core rationale beyond these three processes was the coordination of national responses through benchmarking, best practice, recommendations and periodic monitoring, with the main goal being to create overarching policy coordination of EU economic policies by involving social partners, the European Commission and the Council (Hodson and Maher, 2001). Grounded in the principle of subsidiarity, the notion of the “open method” suggested a flexible and non-binding way of cooperation, which also involved the participation of several European state and non-state actors (Van Kersbergen and Verbeek, 1994).

The Lisbon strategy strengthened these already existing coordination mechanisms and proposed an overarching strategy to facilitate the transition to a knowledge based economy and society by 2010 (Rodrigues, 2002). In December 1999, the Portuguese Presidency of the Council of the European Union announced the launch of the Lisbon summit to be held in March 2000 to “give market and business a strong political signal showing that Europe wants new competitiveness and a dynamic economy based on innovation and know how” (Agence Europe, 29 December 1999). Lisbon represented the establishment of the goal of making the European Union “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” (Council of the European Union, 2000).

Achieving this particular goal would involve movement in three policy areas: (i) reinforcing active labour market policies, and particularly increasing the employment rate; (ii) modernising social protection to make it sustainable; (iii) and stepping up the fight against social exclusion. In this respect, the Lisbon Strategy was spread around several areas such as innovation, employment, social protection, social inclusion and education (Mabbett and Schelkle, 2007; Borrás and Radaelli, 2011). Launched during a very favourable political constellation in Europe – with 13 out of 15 social democratic parties in power in EU countries (Lovecy, 2000: 53). - Lisbon was not only the continuation of the competitiveness discourse that had emerged since the mid-1980s (see also Chapter Four), but also the result of political concerns that were attempting to combine competitiveness with social goals (Natali, 2009; Zeitlin, 2008). As argued by Borrás and Jacobsson, the overall Lisbon ideology was characterised by a political desire to “build up a social dimension in the EU [which] may require common

responses in areas where legal competences rest with the Member States” (Borras and Jacobsson, 2004: 186).

However, given that social policy was a sensitive policy field characterised by strong differences at the national level, it was also necessary to identify new policy modes that, beyond the traditional community method, would allow the implementation of the ambitious programme of innovation in, and economic and social modernisation of, Europe, as ambitiously stated in the Conclusions of the Lisbon Summit. Hence, Lisbon introduced the Open Method of Coordination, a new form of governance that had already been experimented with within the European Employment Strategy, based on fixed guidelines, quantitative and qualitative indicators, monitoring mechanisms, evaluation and peer review, and the benchmarking of best practices (European Council, 2000; Kroger, 2009).

Lisbon was embedded within the ideology of the Third Way approach, which took ground in Europe at the end of the 1990s. Mainly developed by US President Bill Clinton and UK Labour Prime Minister Tony Blair, more than a true ideological perspective, the Third Way was an approach to meet the challenges of globalisation, which were bringing changes to work structures and to the rise of flexible specialisations (Przeworski, 2001 : 312; Giddens, 1998 : 20-32). At the core of this approach was a commitment to the active involvement of the State in the management of human capital development, on which innovation and growth increasingly depend. To meet the challenges of globalisation, the Third Way suggested an expansion of education and training through the provision of lifelong learning in order to allow workers to adapt their skills to the new context of labour market flexibility (Arestis and Sawyer, 2001: 6). Lifelong learning and active labour market policies were considered the two main tools to improve the empowerment of workers and their employability. By

regarding human capital as the main driver of economic growth, education would thus contribute to increasing the growth rate (Hill, 1999).

Different from the more traditional social democratic approach, which mainly regarded unemployment as a macro economic problem, the Third Way approach stressed the responsibility of individuals and promoted the role of the State less as a welfare State and more as a social investment State (Giddens, 2000: 52). The Third Way represented a compromise between the goals of competitiveness and social cohesion. It accepted the economic imperatives of competitiveness and globalisation but connected these imperatives with the further aim of promoting social cohesion. Within this orientation, education and skills were conceived as “the supply side policy of the left (Callaghan, 2000: 67). However, the Third Way was not the only ideological hub for the Lisbon Strategy. The idea of recalibrating economic and social policy by finding a compromise between more neo-liberal stances (as advocated for instance by the OECD) with a more social democratic emphasis on solidarity and social cohesion, was also promoted through academic publications, such as the studies published under the Portuguese Presidency by Ferrera, Hemerijck and Rhodes (2000).

However, five years after its launch, it became clear that the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy had not fulfilled its promises and that a revision was needed. As maintained by a report presented by the former Prime Minister of the Netherlands, Wim Kok:

At Lisbon and at subsequent Spring Economic Councils, a series of ambitious targets were established to support the development of a world-beating European economy. But halfway to 2010 the overall picture is very mixed and much needs to be done in order to prevent Lisbon from becoming a synonym for missed objectives and failed promises. (Kok, 2004: 10)

In other words, although the original goals of the strategy remained unquestioned, the compliance was deemed insufficient because of an overloaded policy agenda, conflicting priorities and failing coordination (Communication to the Spring European Council, 2005). In practice, the revision of the Lisbon strategy was more of an adjustment than a marked change. In proposing a “new start for the Lisbon strategy”, the President of the Commission Barroso proposed an enhanced focus on “stronger and lasting growth” and “creating more and better jobs” (COM, 2005 : 24). This reflected an explicit emphasis on economic goals in comparison with the previous more holistic approach of combining competitiveness and social goals; as stated by Barroso, the focus had to be on a limited number of “key actions that promise the highest and most immediate dividends” (Barroso, 2005).

In addition, there was also a change in the terms of governance with a simplification in terms of policy priorities, a streamlining of the guidelines (with the adoption in 2005 by the Council of Integrated Guidelines for growth and jobs, encompassing macro-economic, micro-economic and employment guidelines) and an increase in monitoring and reporting through the encouragement of better political ownership of the Lisbon goals by Member States required to produce National Reform Programmes based on the Integrated Guidelines (Pisani-Ferri and Sapir, 2006).

Whereas the Lisbon Strategy was launched during a period of relative optimism with the adoption of the Euro and the 2004 enlargement and in a context in which there was a majority of social-democratic governments, the ‘Europe 2020’ strategy, which was the follow-up to the Lisbon strategy for the period 2010-2020 was launched within a political context of right-centre dominance, and coincided with the global financial crisis of 2008 and the subsequent collapse of national banking, an increase in the EU unemployment rate, financial stress in EU countries and criticism of the economic and

budgetary coordination in the Eurozone (Marlier and Natali, 2010 : 1). At the same time, ‘Europe 2020’ was launched within the institutional context of the Lisbon Treaty, which had entered into force in 2009 and amended the Maastricht Treaty by establishing new powers for the EU, new areas for a qualified majority in the Council and increased involvement of the European Parliament (see also Piris, 2010 for a detailed overview of the legal and institutional changes of the Lisbon Treaty).

The overall purpose of ‘Europe 2020’ is to build a social and sustainable strategy by integrating economic, employment, and social and environmental goals to achieve “smart, sustainable and inclusive growth” (European Commission, 2010). More specifically, Europe 2020 has five headline targets: raise the employment rate from 69 to 75%; have 3% of member States' GDP devoted to research and development; reduce the rate of early school leavers from 15% to 10% while increasing the completion rate of tertiary education from 31% to at least 40%; and, finally, “Europe 20/20/20”, aimed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 20%, increase the share of renewable energy to 20% and increase energy efficiency by 20%. In terms of governance, the strategy is organised around three integrated pillars: (i) macro-economic surveillance, aimed at promoting growth and employment creation; (ii) thematic coordination, focused on structural reforms in policy areas such as innovation, employment, education and social inclusion through the implementation of seven “flagship initiatives” aimed at boosting growth and jobs³⁰; and (iii) fiscal surveillance under the Stability and Growth Pact, in order to enhance fiscal consolidation and promote sustainable public finances (European Commission, 2010; Marlier and Natali, 2010).

³⁰The seven flagship initiatives are: Innovation Union; Youth on the Move; A digital Agenda for Europe; Resource Efficient Europe; An industrial policy for the globalisation era; An agenda for new skills and jobs; and European platform against poverty (European Commission, 2010).

The seven flagship initiatives are linked to another innovation of Europe 2020, namely the ‘European Semester’, the European Union’s annual cycle of economic and budgetary coordination, which also increases the role of the European Commission (Zeitlin, 2009). Indeed, within the European Semester, the European Council, on the basis of a report from the European Commission, is in charge of identifying the main economic challenges and provides Member States with advice on policies that they should take into consideration when drawing up their National Reform programmes, whose outcomes will be discussed on the basis of a progress report and country-specific recommendations by the European Commission (Marlier and Natali, 2010).

To conclude, this section has provided an overview of the main institutional and contextual developments that occurred at EU level between 2000 and 2010. Taken together, the Lisbon strategy and ‘Europe 2020’ were conceived of to respond to the challenges of an increased global context within the transition to a knowledge based economy. Although they differ in terms of the political and economic contexts – the context of Lisbon being social-democratic and more optimistic and the context of Europe 2020 being more right-centre oriented and embedded in the financial crisis– they both share the underlying goal of promoting economic competitiveness.

7.3 Overview of policy developments in education

As recognised by many scholars, the Lisbon strategy represented a “turning point” for education policy with education becoming “a key component of the European knowledge-based economic model” (Novoa and deJong-Lambert, 2003: 55; Corbett, 2012; Ertl, 2006). In order to meet the goal of becoming the “most competitive knowledge-based economy”, Lisbon called for an increase in investment in human

resources, an improvement in attainment levels, the development of basic skills and competences in the labour force and an increase in European mobility, with knowledge and skills defined as a necessary component of the economic and social reform strategy (CEC, 2001: 6; Gornitzka, 2007). As stated by the Lisbon Council:

Europe's education and training systems need to adapt both to the demands of the knowledge society and to the need for an improved level and quality of employment. They will have to offer learning and training opportunities tailored to target groups at different stages of their lives: young people, unemployed adults and those in unemployment who are at risk of seeing their skills overtaken by rapid change. (Council of the European Union, 2000 § 25)

For the very first time in the history of European education policy, Member States agreed on common objectives, benchmarks and indicators to be achieved within the new policy mode of the Open Method of Coordination. The first important set of developments occurred between 2001 and 2002. In March 2001, the Education Council presented its first official document outlining 'The concrete future objectives of education and training systems', which provided a preliminary indication of the positive attitude of Ministers of Education towards the need for better cooperation in education:

While we must preserve the difference of structures and systems which reflect the identities of the countries and regions of Europe, we must also recognize that our main objectives and result we seek are striking similar. We should build on those similarities to learn from each other, to share our successes and failures, and to *use education together* to advance European citizens and European society into the new millennium. (CEC, 2001 § 37, emphasis added)

Hence, this suggests that, although Member States were once again explicitly rejecting any harmonisation of their education systems, they were nevertheless willing to acknowledge the existence of common objectives that could legitimise them to "use education together". In this respect, the Ministers of Education adopted three concrete strategic objectives: (i) improving the quality and effectiveness of education and

training systems; (ii) facilitating access to all to education and training systems; and (iii) opening up education and training systems to the wider world.

The second capstone, further suggesting a common awareness of the need to strengthen education and training policy cooperation, occurred during the Barcelona European Council of 2002, which approved a common policy framework for European cooperation entitled 'Education and Training 2010', which aimed at achieving "the objective of making these education and training systems a world quality reference by 2010" (Council of the European Union, 2002 § 43). Within the 'Education and Training 2010' programme, more concrete objectives were formulated together with a detailed follow-up and benchmarks and indicators for measuring progress (Council of the European Union, 2004). More specifically, five benchmarks were adopted:

- a) to reduce the percentage of early school leavers to no more than 10%;
- b) to ensure that at least 85% of young (20-24 years old) people complete upper secondary education;
- c) to cut the percentage of low-achieving pupils in reading by at least 20%;
- d) to increase the number of graduates in mathematics, science and technology by at least 15% and to decrease the gender imbalance in these subjects;
- e) to have 12.5% of adults (25-64) participate in lifelong learning.

As part of the implementation of the goals of this programme, ten working groups were established, together with standing groups on indicators and benchmarks, composed of national experts from national Ministries of Education (CEC, 2004a). As noted by Pépin, "Education and Training 2010 has been used to refer to the whole process of implementing the Lisbon Strategy in the field of education and training" (Pépin, 2006:

219). In this respect, ‘Education and Training 2010’ represented the creation of a common policy framework for advancing European cooperation in education and training systems, which, in comparison with the developments examined in the previous chapters, was supported by concrete instruments, common principles and tools such as benchmarking, indicators, and the exchange of best practices. As stated by the European Commission:

The period since the decisive Lisbon summit has seen a number of significant developments in education and training at EU level. For the first time, substantial political cooperation is taking place at European level in these areas and there is an effort to integrate all initiatives into coherent education and training policies at European and national levels. (European Commission, 2004a: 5)

Fully embedded in the policy framework of ‘Education and Training 2010’ are the ‘Copenhagen Process’ and the ‘Bologna Process’ focusing, respectively, on cooperation in vocational education and training and on higher education. Launched by the Copenhagen Declaration of November 2002, the Copenhagen process defined a clear set of priorities for (voluntary) European cooperation in vocational education and training (Council of the European Union, 2002). More specifically, the Copenhagen process set out four main priorities, which were to be reviewed every two years in follow-up Communiqué:

- (i) reinforcing the European dimension of education and vocational training in order to enhance and facilitate cooperation, mobility, and transnational activities in order to give more visibility to the EU sector of vocational education and training in an international context;
- (ii) promoting transparency, information and counselling;
- (iii) the recognition of competences and qualifications, including non-formal and informal learning;

- (iv) cooperation in the field of quality assurance, namely the promotion of cooperation and the exchange of models and practices; together with criteria and common qualitative principles in the field of VET.

At the first follow-up to the Copenhagen process, the Maastricht Communiqué, these priorities became translated into concrete instruments and tools. For instance, during the ‘Maastricht Communiqué on the future priorities of enhanced European cooperation in Vocational Education and Training’ (European Commission, 2004b) a single European framework for the transparency of qualifications and competences – ‘Europass’ (Europass Decision, 2004) – was adopted, with the aim of facilitating the recognition of European citizens’ skills and qualifications (Pépin et al. 2006 : 238). In addition, the Maastricht Communiqué identified further areas for policy actions, such as the development of a ‘European Qualifications Framework’ (EQF) aimed at linking qualifications systems at the national and sectoral level, which would be officially adopted as a Council recommendation in 2008 (Coles, 2006) and the development of a ‘European Credit Transfer system for vocational education and training’ (ECVET) to enable the transfer and recognition of learning outcomes across the EU (European Commission, 2006). Another common framework approved by the European Council in 2004 and adopted as Recommendation in 2009 was the common framework for ‘Quality Assurance in Vocational Education and Training’ (EQAVET), which specified a common set of indicators for quality criteria, aimed at improving the transparency and consistency of VET policies across Member States (European Parliament and Council, 2009a).

The Bologna process for higher education, although originally initiated as an intergovernmental initiative among Member States (Walknehorst, 2008), is also part of

the overall EU strategy for cooperation in education and training and is also linked to the Lisbon process by way of Education and Training 2010 (Gornitzka, 2010 : 54). The Bologna process originated in 1988, when, on the occasion of the 9th centenary of the foundation of the University of Bologna, Rectors of European Universities signed the ‘Magna Charta Universitatum’, stressing the importance of freedom of research and teaching, as core values of the very essence of the university. Almost ten years later, in 1998, Ministers of France, Germany, UK, and Italy signed the Sorbonne Declaration, aimed to create a common reference framework within a foreseen European Higher Education Area, and in 1999 the Bologna Declaration, which started the Bologna process, was signed by 29 States (15 EU, Norway, Iceland, Switzerland and 11 candidate countries).

Bologna aimed at the construction of a European Higher Education Area through the establishment of convergence in national higher education policies (Litjens, 2005: 209) as a “key way to promote citizens’ mobility and employability and the Continent’s overall development” (Bologna process, 1999). Embedded within the goals of the Lisbon Strategy and framed under “the need to establish a more complete and far-reaching Europe” (Bologna process, 1999) Bologna was articulated around the following goals: (i) the adoption of academic credit systems that are comparable and recognisable; (ii) the adoption of a two cycle system; (iii) the creation of a credit system; (iv) the promotion of mobility; (v) the promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance; and (v) the promotion of a European dimension of higher education (European Ministers of Education, 1999).

Besides the Copenhagen process for vocational education and training (VET) and the Bologna process for higher education, further developments occurred in the field of mobility programmes with the establishment of the ‘Integrated Programme for Lifelong

Learning’, which merged all of the mobility initiatives regarding European cooperation in education (COM, 2004). For the first time since the launch of Comett in 1985 (see Chapter Four), the European Commission covered in a single programme all of the learning opportunities from childhood to adult learning (Gornitzka, 2010: 539). In particular, the programme was articulated under four sub programmes to fund projects at different levels of education: Comenius (school education), Erasmus (higher education), Leonardo (vocational education and training), Grundtvig (adult education) and transversal actions, such as study visits of teachers and trainers.

Coincidentally, along with the mid- term review of the Lisbon Strategy in 2005, which gave the Commission more political power in the management of the Open Method of Coordination (Borras and Radaelli, 2011), two new European Agencies were set up. The first was the Executive Agency for Education and Culture (EACEA), which was to be in charge of implementing the “Integrated Lifelong Learning Programme” (CEC, 2004b; see also next section) and providing information on educational policies in Member States through its network Eurydice. The second was CRELL –the Centre for Research on Education and Lifelong Learning - which was established to “increase the European Commission’s research capacity for developing new indicators” (Council of the European Union, 2005). CRELL is linked to the European Commission by an administrative agreement according to which the Commission can ask CRELL to produce research based on a specific area of interest, such as the development of benchmarks on employability or student mobility (Saltelli et al. 2011).

In addition, the links between education and industry were also institutionalized with the set-up in 2008 of the European Institute of Technology (EIT), an autonomous Institute created with the purpose of promoting cooperation between industry and research. As stated in the founding regulation, the objective is to “contribute to

sustainable growth and competitiveness [...] by promoting and integrating higher education, research and innovation of the highest standards” (European Parliament and Council, 2008; see also Elder, 2012: 173). This idea was not entirely new. Indeed, the aims of the EIT recall very similar proposals advanced by the European Round Table of Industrialists to Peter Sutherland in 1985 regarding the creation of – precisely – a European Technology Institute to promote high level research closely linked to industry (see Chapter Four, section four).

With the follow-up to the Lisbon Strategy, ‘Europe 2020’, ‘Education and Training 2010’ was replaced by ‘Education and Training 2020’.

‘Education and Training 2020’ is based around four key priorities: making lifelong learning and mobility a reality; improving the quality and efficiency of education and training; promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship; and enhancing creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship (Council of the European Union, 2009). Within this programme, the EU provides advice in regard to policy reforms as well as a forum for the exchange of best practices and the sharing of information and statistics. Based on the governance mechanism of the Open Method of Coordination, the implementation of ‘Education and Training 2020’ relies on the establishment of specific thematic working groups, made up of experts and stakeholders who provide advice and expertise for the preparation of legislative proposals and policy initiatives (Villalba, 2015). Similarly to the previous programme ‘Education and Training 2010’, there are benchmarks set. The five benchmarks of ‘Education and Training 2020’ (Council of the European Union, 2009) are:

- a) the share of early school leavers from education and training should be less than 10%

- b) the share of 30-34 year olds with tertiary education attainment should be at least 40%
- c) the share of low-achieving 15 years old in reading, mathematics and science should be less than 15%
- d) at least 95% of children between 4 years old and the age of starting compulsory primary education should participate in early childhood education
- e) an average of at least 15% of adults (25-64) should participate in lifelong learning

As it can be noted, the benchmarks show several aspects of continuity with those of ‘Education and Training 2010’, with an increase in the targets level of participation in lifelong learning (from 12.5% till 15%). However, there are also two changes. First, a new benchmark on early childhood education has been added; second, the previous benchmark on increasing the completion rate of upper secondary education has been replaced by a new benchmark focusing on tertiary education attainment. Though not stated clearly, it might be inferred that this latter benchmark privileges a focus on high skills (Vero et al. 2012: 3).

Hence, within ‘Europe 2020’, education is an inherent corollary to the EU’s overall strategy for growth, jobs and innovation. For instance, it is not only central to three of the five targets of ‘Europe 2020’ (namely research and development, early school leavers and tertiary education; see also previous section) but is also central to three of the five flagship initiatives of Europe 2020: ‘Youth on the Move’, which aims to “enhance the performance of education systems and to reinforce the international attractiveness of Europe’s higher education” (European Commission, 2010); ‘An agenda for new skills and jobs’, which aims to promote employment, lifelong learning

and skills; and ‘Innovation Union’, which aims to improve investment in education, research and innovation (European Commission, 2010).

7.4 Analysing institutionalization: ideas embedded in principles, procedures and venues

As described in the previous section, the launch of the Lisbon strategy led to several policy developments in regard to education in an “unprecedented move” to contribute to the goals of Lisbon (Chou and Gornitzka, 2014: 1). This section moves from the factual developments of the previous one to analyse how specific ideas about education became embedded in institutions by focusing on principles (employability, comparability and mobility), procedures and formal structures (the instruments within the Open Method of Coordination) and venues (policy venues and actors’ interactions).

Principles: Employability, Comparability and Mobility

The first institutional innovation was the decision taken by the Education Council in 1999 to adopt a “rolling agenda” for education, which set out three themes that would be analysed by the Council regardless of the different rotations of the Presidencies, namely: i) the role of education and training in employment policies; (ii) the development of quality education (to be achieved through evaluation and comparison); and (iii) the promotion of mobility, including the recognition of qualifications and periods of study (Agence Europe, 26 November 1999; Novoa and Lawn, 2007). Put differently, this meant detaching the education agenda from the specific preferences of each Presidency, thus ensuring more long term consistency in terms of the prevailing and recurrent themes. In addition, the three priority themes - employment, quality and

mobility - not only seem to suggest a reinforcement of the political impact of education at the European level, but at the same time, as examined below, also reflected an explicit codification of those educational objectives that had been identified since the mid-1980s (see Chapter Four, Five and Six).

Employability

The goal of employability has a long history. In particular, under the “discourse of crisis” of the 1990s, education policy was discussed in terms of its contribution to the needs of the labour market. This was, for instance, reflected in the several publications issued by the European Commission and business actors (such as the Industrial Research and Development Advisory Committee and the European Round Table of Industrialists) that pointed at the role of education in restoring Europe’s economic growth and solving the problems of unemployment and Europe’s lack of competitiveness (see also Chapter Five). The Lisbon strategy explicitly recognised the importance of education as part of European economic and social policies and the role of lifelong learning as a priority to promote employment (Council of the European Union, 2000: 3). Although the Lisbon strategy was presented as a compromise between economic competitiveness and more social goals, such as social cohesion and preventing social exclusion, this latter goal was interpreted as a function of economic success (Zeitlin, 2009). As stated by the Commission, “in economic terms the employability and adaptability of citizens is vital for Europe to maintain its commitment to becoming the most competitive and dynamic knowledge based society in the world” (European Commission, 2001: 6).

Employability as a principle specifies the goals of education policy that should be directed towards competitiveness. For example, in the report of the Council and the

Commission on the follow-up to the objectives set out by 'Education and Training 2010', it is stated that "the promotion of employability and mobility within an open European labour market, as a complement to the single market for goods and services must be a priority, thereby placing new demands on education and training" (Council of the European Union and European Commission, 2004). The focus on employability is evident in particular in the educational targets set out in the 'Education and Training 2010' and 'Education and Training 2020' programmes, which clearly reflect a rationale whereby targets such as a reduction in early school leavers, improving attainment in tertiary education, and participation in lifelong learning will contribute to fulfilling labour market needs. In all these respects, a well skilled workforce is considered the key to economic growth under the assumptions to improve "the supply side of the employment equation via education and training development" (Vero et al. , 2012 : 10).

Lifelong learning is strictly linked to employability, which was emphasised as an instrument of employment policy by the 'Delors' White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment (1993), the 'Cresson' White Paper Teaching and Learning: Towards the Learning Society (1995) and the ERT's report Education for Europeans: Towards the Learning Society (1995), which introduced a specific notion of lifelong learning under the image of the "education chain". Its policy significance increased after the Lisbon Strategy, with investment in lifelong learning being regarded as a tool for increasing employment rates, tackling unemployment and increasing EU competitiveness (see Chapter Five). This is, for instance, the main message of the 'Memorandum on lifelong learning of 2000', which focuses on the promotion of active citizenship and the strengthening of employability through an investment in the skills required by the knowledge society (CEC, 2000; CEC, 2001).

To achieve these goals, the Education Council invited Member States to set in motion lifelong learning strategies by 2006 (European Council, 2004; Pépin, 2007: 130). In this respect, translated into practice, European tools, such as the European Qualification Framework, Europass, and the European Quality Assurance Framework for VET (see also below) are all instruments aimed at stimulating cooperation and dialogue between education and the labour market in regard to employability of workers, comparability of knowledge, skills, competences and qualifications, and transparency.

Employability is also a key goal of the Copenhagen process, which is concerned with vocational education and training (VET). As stated by the Council and the European Commission, “vocational education and training have a vital role to play in reaching the Lisbon goals, in terms of providing people with the competences and qualifications, which respond to the rapidly evolving needs of the labour market” (Council of the European Union and European Commission, 2004 : 5). For instance, within the Copenhagen process, several policy instruments were implemented to promote mobility, such as Europass, the European Qualification Framework – EQF and the European Credit Transfer system for VET (Cedefop, 2010). For example, while the purpose of Europass is to support workers' labour mobility by allowing their qualifications to be understood, the rationale of the European Qualification Framework is to contribute to improving the link between education and the labour market, by making qualifications more comparable, as already delineated during the 1980s and 1990s (Coles, 2006; see Chapter Four, Five, Six). The promotion of employability is also related to the updating of skills such as IT, the learning of foreign languages, creativity, innovation and social skills, which, compared to more specific skills, might have more relevance in global labour markets (COM, 2002).

Finally, employability is also the goal of the Bologna process, where it is defined as the “ability to gain initial meaningful employment, or to become self-employed, to maintain employment and to be able to move around within the labour market” (Bologna conference, 2009). In other words, employability means that programmes of study need to be organised in such a way as to be “relevant to the European labour market” (Novoa, 2002:149). In the original Bologna Declaration, and the follow-up declarations/Communiqué (made every two years to assess progresses) the issue of employability has often been considered of great importance. For instance, it has been referred to as follows: “to promote European citizens' employability and the international competitiveness of the European Higher education system” (Prague Communiqué, 2001); “students may achieve their full potential for European identity, citizenship and employability” (Berlin Communiqué, 2003); “[...] universities to ensure that their doctoral programmes promote interdisciplinary training and the development of transferable skills, thus meeting the needs of the wider employment market” (Bergen Communiqué, 2005). The most recent Communiqué states that, “fostering the employability of graduates throughout their working lives in rapidly changing labour markets is a major goal of the EHEA³¹” (Yerevan Communiqué, 2015).

Comparability

Comparability is the second principle institutionalised with the Lisbon strategy through the policy mode of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), which sets out quantitative objectives to be achieved. The OMC includes several tools, such as the identification of common goals, the diffusion of progress in achieving these goals, best

³¹ European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

practices, common principles, measurement through benchmarks and indicators, and the comparison of policies among Member States (Corbett, 2012). In this respect, the indicators serve to bring together different national goals and aspirations for education in a more coherent way at the European level with the purpose of organising a “league table for nations” (Novoa and deJong-Lambert, 2003: 59). Comparability “is not only being promoted as a way of knowing or legitimizing but as a way of governing. That is, comparing must not be seen as a method but as a policy” (Novoa, 2000: 144). Indeed, as stated by the European Commission:

a culture of evaluation is needed within education and training systems. Effective long-term policies must be based on solid evidence. For Member States to fully understand and monitor what is happening in their systems, they need channels for producing and accessing relevant research, a statistical infrastructure capable of collecting the necessary data and mechanisms to assess progress as policies are implemented (European Commission, 2006 : 6; emphasis added).

The quote above seems to echo the recommendations already contained in the report ‘Accomplishing Europe through Education and Training’ (1996), which emphasised the importance of a “comparative dimension” in order to identify and discover best practices to improve the quality of the education systems in Member States (see Chapter Five). In addition, the need for “comparable approaches” for data collection and forecasting was also among the main recommendations of the IRDAC Report ‘Skills Shortages in Europe’ (1991) and the ERT’s Report ‘Education for Europeans’ (1995), which proposed the introduction of benchmarking to identify not only the strengths and weaknesses of educational systems but also best practices that could be promoted (see also Chapter Five).

Comparability also takes place under “joint reflection” and the “common principles”. For example, within the Copenhagen and Bologna processes, there is a bi-annual

meeting among Ministers of Vocational Education and Training (in case of Copenhagen) and Ministers of Education (in case of Bologna) together with social partners and other associations, who meet to evaluate progress, and define or revise the priorities. At the end of these meetings, a joint statement is issued, which usually assesses the objectives and defines further steps for action. In addition, joint reflection is also achieved through the national reports that were implemented in the framework of the Copenhagen and Bologna processes. Within the area of lifelong learning, part of the OMC process is the creation of a European inventory under the coordination of the European Commission and Cedefop with common principles for the validation of formal and informal learning together with the recognition of learning outcomes (Souto Otero et al. 2008).

Comparability is also intended in terms of the recognition of qualifications and their transferability. For example, the Copenhagen process is aimed at developing instruments for the mutual recognition and validation of competences and qualifications. In this respect, instruments such as the European Qualification Framework have the purpose of comparing qualifications to support the mobility of workers, relying upon the national qualifications frameworks of Member States. This is an example of “standardization in the way it seeks to improve the transparency, comparability and portability of qualifications in the EU” (Lawn, 2011: 263). The European credit system for VET aims at recognising and validating skills acquired abroad, thus making them more comparable, and promoting comparability of qualifications. Regarding the Bologna process, together with employability, comparability is one of the main goals, which will be achieved through the adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees. As stated in the Prague Communiqué of 2001, ‘Towards the European Higher Education Area’, the main goals

are the “adoption of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees”, an identical “degree structure based on two main cycles”, and a “common system of credits”.

Furthermore, comparability is the specific goal underpinning institutional initiatives. In addition to the intensification of the activities of the Eurydice network for the exchange of information on education policies (Pépin, 2006: 80), in 2005 the Centre for research on education and lifelong learning – CRELL (see also previous section) - was created. Its purpose was to increase “the Commission’s research capacity in terms of the development of new indicators” (Council of the European Union, 2005). CRELL has been particularly active in the development of indicators and benchmarks regarding employability, multilingualism and student mobility in order to make them comparable within the different EU education systems (Villalba, 2015: 78; Lawn, 2011).

Mobility

Finally, mobility is the third principle embedded in the new education policy agenda since Lisbon. Mobility had already been institutionalised in terms of policy initiatives since the mid-1980s with the launch of the Comett programme for university-industry exchanges and the other first and second generation mobility programmes (see Chapter Four and Chapter Six). In this respect, mobility programmes need to be recognised as an “important platform for institutionalizing policy making capacity at the EU level” (Gornitzka, 2015 : 112). During the 2000s, mobility has gained importance not only in terms of widening mobility activities but also in terms of creating specific tools to promote workers' mobility through the recognition of qualifications.

In terms of mobility programmes, the new ‘Integrated Lifelong Learning Programme’ (see also previous section) promotes mobility around different stages of education and

vocational training; indeed, its different sub-programmes cover secondary education (*Comenius*); higher education (*Erasmus*); vocational training (*Leonardo da Vinci*); adult education (*Grundtvig*) and actions aimed at promoting cooperation, network creation, the exchange of practices and innovation in education and vocational training (*Transversal Actions*). Taken together, all of these programmes share the objective of increasing mobility, not only in quantitative terms – meaning increasing the amount of exchanges - but also in qualitative terms, such as through cooperation among education institutions, transparency and the comparability of qualifications (see also Dehmel, 2006) . As argued by Gornitzka, the Lifelong Learning Programme has created “the motives, means and opportunity to establish and consolidate stakeholder associations, transnational expertise communities and administrative networks” (Gornitzka, 2010: 538).

At the same time, mobility has also been incorporated within the main goals of the Copenhagen and Bologna processes with the creation of instruments targeted towards the recognition and validation of competences. In this respect, as seen in the previous three chapters, ideas such as the recognition of periods of study abroad, the recognition of diplomas and the transferability of qualifications had already emerged in the mid-1970s, with the recognition of qualifications having been specifically foreseen by the Maastricht Treaty and also advocated by the European Round Table of Industrialists. However, as seen in the previous chapters, it had always been difficult to make progress on this issue due to the reluctance of Member States.

Linked to mobility and part and parcel of the Copenhagen and Bologna processes is the European Qualification Framework (EQF), which was formally adopted in 2008 with the purpose of linking the education and vocational education and training systems of different countries in order to make it easier for citizens to work or study abroad

(European Commission, 2008). At the same time, by improving the transparency of qualifications, citizens will be able to evaluate the value of their qualifications, and employers will appreciate the profile, content and significance of workers' qualifications and educational institutions. It is thus clear that the purpose of the EQF is to strengthen the mobility of workers and students by enabling them to be mobile beyond their national contexts. It will also reinforce the pathway from professional life to training under a lifelong learning perspective (Lester, 2015).

Another example of how mobility is institutionalised with the European education agenda is the so-called 'Europass', which was established in 2004 with the purpose of supporting the labour and geographical mobility of EU citizens (European Parliament and Council 2004). Europass is articulated in five documents, which should help citizens to show their competences. It contains the 'European Curriculum Vitae', a uniform format for the curriculum; the 'Europass mobility', aimed at recording the entire period spent undertaking education or vocational training activities, such as an apprenticeship, or a period of study undertaken in another university; the 'Europass Diploma supplement', which describes information on the education pathway taken by the student, such as the level, context and content of studies; the 'Europass-Supplement certificate', which clarifies the professional qualifications possessed and provides information on the competences acquired, and on the accredited centres; and the 'Europass language portfolio', which allows citizens to present the language competences acquired (Cedefop, 2012).

Finally, the last instrument devoted to mobility is the 'European Credit Transfer System' (ECTS). This had been foreseen in the Adonnino report, People's Europe and was established within the Erasmus programme in 1989. It was originally conceived to "provide a means by which students undergoing or having completed higher education

and training may receive credit for such training carried out at universities in other Member States” (Council decision Erasmus, 1987). For higher education, the ECTS started on a voluntary basis, before being officially made a priority in the Bologna process (Pépin, 2006 : 138). The ECTS makes study programmes easier to read and compare, improves students' mobility and also helps universities to restructure their study programmes (European Commission, 2014) while its purpose for vocational training (labelled ECVET and the object of a specific Recommendation to Member States of 2009) is to enable the transfer, recognition and accumulation of learning outcomes (European Parliament and Council, 2009b).

Rules and procedures: the Open Method of Coordination and transnational groups

The issue of promoting cooperation in European education policy has always been a component of the education agenda. Indeed, efforts to promote cooperation in education go back to the mid-1970s; for instance, the Janne Report of 1973 and the report Education in the European Community of 1974 elaborated the idea of cooperation in education. However, Member States strongly opposed Janne’s proposals regarding the potential harmonisation and standardisation of their education practices, even though they were more open to the idea of cooperation intended as the exchange of views and information (see Chapter Four). Nevertheless, apart from the information activities carried out by the Eurydice unit, Member States’ response to cooperation was always tepid. Under the political entrepreneurship of Peter Sutherland in 1985, cooperation took shape through mobility programmes, which represented the main dimension of cooperation during the 1990s (see Chapter Four, section four; see Chapter Six, section four). At the same time, linked to the development of the Single Market project, the

concerns about the competitiveness crisis and the European Commission and business discourse on the role of education for Europe's economic development, the idea of cooperation in education was revived and also inserted in the Maastricht Treaty (see Chapter Five; see Chapter Six, section three).

Despite these attempts, cooperation was still framed in a vague way and weakly designed in terms of institutional design. However, more concrete proposals regarding improving cooperation and coordination around European education policies were made by the European Round Table of Industrialists in 1995; one of these proposals was to use benchmarking "in order to record experience, evaluate results and improve the quality of education on a European level", a task that was to be assigned to the European Commission (ERT, 1995: 30; see also Chapter Five, section four). As mentioned earlier, after the launch of the Lisbon strategy, and more specifically after the establishment of the Education and Training 2010 programme (and its recent follow up Education and Training 2020), cooperation in European education policy became institutionalised under the Open Method of Coordination (OMC).

The Open Method of Coordination (OMC) was articulated in the shape of rules and procedures aimed at producing common solutions and common actions regarding an acknowledged range of common problems (Gornitzka, 2005). In this respect, and perhaps partially as a spill-over effect of the coordination in employment policy (as examined in section two), the OMC can be regarded as an example of the institutionalization of coordination. The OMC is based on soft law, the setting out of common objectives and monitoring measures and the exchange of best practices, peer review and mutual learning as mechanisms (Villalba, 2015: 73). By employing guidelines, quantitative and qualitative indicators and benchmarks, targets and

monitoring, the OMC is considered a “means of spreading best practice and achieving greater convergence towards the main EU goals” (European Council, 2000 § 37).

The governance architecture of the Open Method of Coordination includes the creation of working groups that are in charge of implementing the common objectives, proposing opinions on indicators and benchmarks and planning mutual learning activities (Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks, 2003). The composition of these groups is heterogeneous; they can include civil servants representing national ministries, government employees, agency employees, academics, private consultants, representatives of social partners, and stakeholders from international organisations such as the OECD and the Council of Europe (Laffan and Show, 2005: 18-19). These groups are now formally involved in the Copenhagen and Bologna processes (Corbett, 2012: 158).

For example, within the Copenhagen process, the network ReferNet was created by Cedefop in 2002. This is a network of reference and expertise that provides information on European vocational education and training (VET) systems and produces annual policy and thematic reporting on the state of the art regarding the progress in Member States in relation to the European education agenda³². Hence, within the institutionalization of transnational cooperation, educational representatives from Member States can be considered communities that are connected “in transnational settings on the basis of shared cognitive and normative ideas about a common policy enterprise” (Schmidt, 2008: 310). For instance, this is also the case with Peer Learning Activities (PLAs), thematic workshops and seminars organised by the European

³²ReferNet:<http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/it/events-and-projects/networks/refernet>(accessed 19/2/2017)

Commission with the aim of gathering national and local authorities, social partners, and educational providers to share their experiences around a specific topic related to the European education agenda (Souto Otero et al. 2008 : 241). In addition, a PLA is also organised by the European Commission with the purpose of collecting information on Member States' education practices and exploring potential avenues of policy action (Villalba, 2015: 80).

However, it would be wrong to assume that the adoption of the Open Method of Coordination in education was a smooth process that was welcomed by Member States.

First of all, the end of the 1990s was characterised by difficulties and criticism from Member States regarding the management of the two main strands of the mobility programmes (Leonardo in particular), which were exacerbated by the resignation of Edith Cresson, the then Commissioner for Education, who was charged with fraud and corruption, which in turn led to the resignation of the whole Commission (Ertl, 2006: 12).

Moreover, although the Open Method of Coordination had already been employed in economic, monetary and employment policy (Kroger, 2009; see also section two), the proposal to adopt the OMC in education did not receive a warm welcome, despite the reassurances to Member States that the OMC would not imply a shift in terms of education becoming a supranational competence. Indeed, as stressed by the President of the European Council, Guilherme de Olivera Martins: “we are speaking of convergence and not harmonisation. We want to make a comparison to see what is being done elsewhere and under no circumstances do we want to impose any sort of model” (Agence Europe, 14 June, 2000). The concept of convergence vs non harmonisation was re-stated on several occasions, in order to overcome the resistance of Member

States and to reassure some of them that this would not have implied a loss of sovereignty (Agence Europe, 20 march, 2000; Agence Europe, 6 June 2000). For example, Germany and the Netherlands expressed strong opposition to this new European cooperation in education, which they considered an interference in their education systems (Agence Europe, 13 February, 2001). More than once, the German government raised several concerns regarding the adoption of benchmarks for education, which were overcome by reassurance that the European Union would not interfere in their policies (Agence Europe, 13 January, 2001; Agence Europe, 4 February, 2003; Agence Europe, 26 November 2003). Indeed, as stated by the Commissioner for Education Vivian Reding: "Germany, with its Länder for education policy does not wish to be excluded from international comparisons. But, the Länder believe there is a problem when comparison entails decisions. What Germany fears here is EU interference with regard to education" (Agence Europe, 7 February, 2003)

Thus, this suggests evidence of a policy debate that included diverging and unstable preferences among Member States regarding the proposal of the Open Method of Coordination, and hence, makes unlikely to attribute the changes in the education agenda to their strategic interests. Instead, it is more plausible to think that, empowered by the problem definition, the European Commission consciously framed the issue of coordination in terms that would create consensus by making appeal to a European 'added value' in achieving the objectives of education (see also section three). Indeed, the Report on the 'Concrete Objectives of Education systems' stated that:

[...] The report then proposes an approach to the 'open method of coordination' proposed by Lisbon, which takes into account of the degree of subsidiarity attaching to education; and concludes that the *objectives* set out in the report *cannot be achieved by Member States alone, and thus need cooperation at European level* (European Commission, 2001 : 16; emphasis added).

Hence, this passage is indicative of how the European Commission, while being cautious in avoiding to overstep its competences, was portraying the Open Method of Coordination as a necessity in order to achieve ‘common objectives’ by emphasizing the importance of the supranational level to achieve them.

Venues and actors interaction

The European Commission has also become a more active actor in national education policy. As argued by Gornitzka, “with the introduction of the OMC, DG EAC³³ gained in practice more leeway as an arena and hub for education policy in Europe” (Gornitzka, 2015 : 113). Motivated by the importance of providing evidence, in terms of providing and sharing knowledge (European Commission, 2009), the European Commission became increasingly involved in Member States' education policies as the “organizer that carried the OMC process” (Gornitzka, 2015 : 113). For instance, since 2005, Member States have been required to publish an annual report in which they assess national progress in terms of having achieved the benchmarks and indicators of Education and Training 2010, whereas the European Commission publishes a report every two years, which provides cross-country comparisons and an assessment of progress and discusses issues that require improvement (Capano and Agostini, 2012).

Furthermore, within the European Semester, the European Commission provides Member States with Country Specific Recommendations in relation to the progress achieved in relation to the priorities of the Education and Training 2020 programme (European Commission, 2013). In addition, in 2012, the European Commission

³³ DG EAC – Directorate-General Education and Culture – is the former Directorate-General Education, Training and Youth (see also Chapter Six).

launched the “Education and Training Monitor” (European Commission, 2012), which contains quantitative information on, and comparative analyses of, EU Member States' Education systems.

The increasing role of the European Commission is visible not only in the coordination of more supranational processes, such as the Copenhagen process for VET and the Education and Training 2020 programme, but also in the Bologna process, in which the European Commission has managed to “take on and take over a central role [...] a role that acquired a very particular consistency by associating Bologna with the Lisbon strategy” (Amaral and Neave, 2009: 277). Indeed, in 2004, the Education Council agreed on the European Commission’s proposals to incorporate the Bologna targets into the Education and Training 2010 programme with the Bologna process becoming part of the Lisbon follow-up (Corbett, 2011).

7.5 Discussion: Explaining institutionalization

Since the launch of the Lisbon strategy, European education policy has been organised around a comprehensive strategy with policy programmes and instruments that aim to meet the goals of the knowledge economy. In this respect, the objectives of ‘Education and Training 2010’ and ‘Education and Training 2020’ have codified a specific means of cooperation that is to be achieved through the Open Method of Cooperation and the establishment of common guidelines, indicators and benchmarks that are intended to stimulate national reforms through the exchange of best practices and peer learning.

Indeed, the analysis above has shown how specific ideas about education, namely employability, comparability and mobility, have become institutionalised into a common set of principles and policy goals and included within new policy processes,

such as the Copenhagen process and the Bologna process. In a similar vein, the launch of several instruments around the three concepts of employability, mobility and comparability, such as the ‘European Qualification Framework’, the ‘Europass’ and the ‘European Credit Transfer System’ is a further manifestation of how these three principles represent the source of justification and legitimation of what the objectives of education should be.

Furthermore, the empirical analysis has provided evidence of a greater involvement of the European Commission not only in terms of institutional expansion, as manifested in the setting-up of new agencies (such as CRELL and EACEA), but also in terms of the redefinition of its role. Indeed, although the Open method of Coordination combines an intergovernmental logic with a more supranational one and hence it cannot be considered a pure EU supranational process, it nevertheless enhances the involvement of the European Commission as the main coordination agent of this process through standard setting and constant monitoring (Ertl, 2006). Despite there being no change in the legal competences of the European Commission since the Maastricht Treaty of 1992³⁴, it can be said that the European Commission has gone beyond its original competence of “supporting and supplementing” Member States' educational policies in favour of a more active and visible coordination role under the OMC. Taken together, all of the policy developments that have occurred in regard to the European education agenda since the 2000s are evidence of the institutionalization of a particular supply-side view of the function of education.

³⁴ Indeed, the Lisbon Treaty (TFEU) that entered into force in 2009 did not change the legal basis for education (now Article 165 TFEU) and vocational training (now Article 166 TFEU).

Given the developments that have occurred since the launch of the Lisbon strategy, it might be plausible to think that Lisbon was indeed a “watershed” for European education policy (Gornitzka, 2006). However, by looking at these developments from a long term temporal horizon – as has been done in this thesis - it appears evident that the Lisbon strategy did not represent the starting point of a new course of action for European education policy; rather, it was the result of a gradual development that started in the mid-1980s with the establishment of a specific problem definition of education that, rather than being just purely rhetoric, had indeed a visible impact on how education was shaped.

In this respect, the evolution of European education policy examined in the previous chapters seems to suggest the significance of the pre-Lisbon period in the sense that it served “the Commission to increase mutual understanding of Member States, develop mutual trust, examine the limits of its newly acquired competences and develop new ideas about how to drive policy-making forward” (Souto-Otero et al. 2008 : 236). Put differently, it can be suggested that the gradual developments that occurred after the mid-1980s had the effect of persuading Member States of the existence of a “common problem” – unemployment and the lack of European competitiveness - which in turn required a “common solution” – in the shape of supply-side policies characterised by the institutionalization of employability, comparability and mobility and embedded within the governance architecture of the Open Method of Coordination and its monitoring mechanisms.

Furthermore, the developments that occurred after Lisbon also seem to suggest how, besides the European Commission, specific actors acted as leading ideas carriers. Indeed, the set-up of an Open Method of Coordination to benchmark and monitor Member States education systems had already been suggested by the European Round

Table of Industrialists in the mid-1990s (see Chapter Five); the same can be said for the proposal of creating a European Technology Institute advanced by the ERT in 1985 (see Chapter Four). Similarly, several of the proposals contained in the ERT's discourse of the 1990s – articulated around the notion of education as a tool to improve competitiveness– seem to be reflected in terms of the substantive content of the post-Lisbon education agenda (see Chapter Five). This evidence seems also to be consistent with the words of Keith Richardson, former Secretary General of the ERT, who stated that:

Lisbon traced the direct link from globalisation to job creation by means of competitiveness as clearly the ERT had done in *Reshaping Europe* and in so many other reports over the previous decade, and Lisbon's long list of policy specifics reflected the familiar ERT priorities all the way from benchmarking to lifelong learning. (Richardson, 2000: 25)

Additionally, the empirical analysis seems also to suggest that the problem definition developed after the mid-1980s remained constant in comparison with the changes in the material context. Indeed, alterations in the material conditions – the Single Market project, the EMU, globalisation, and the enlargement up until the 2008 financial crisis (with a significant difference between the optimistic political climate of the Lisbon Strategy and the uncertainty of Europe 2020 due to the economic crisis) - had a modest effect in terms of the variations in specific ideas about education.

However, what is left unexplained is why Member States with diverging preferences and a long-term strong reluctance towards cooperation, and unstable preferences (as for instance seen earlier regarding the policy debate about the OMC) suddenly agreed on a common approach under the coordination of the Open Method of Coordination. As highlighted in the previous three chapters, the history of the evolution of European education policies has often been characterised by a tension between the wish of the

European Commission to have more power in the policy field of education on the one side, and the reluctance of Member States to give up their power in this sensitive policy field on the other.

Hence, this begs the question of why the institutionalization of cooperation under specific ideas happened at a certain point of time. Why did these ideas, which emerged in the mid-1980s and were articulated throughout the 1990s, become adopted as a policy choice only in the 2000? As suggested by the theoretical argument, a problem definition is more likely to be institutionalised as policy solution when three conditions are met simultaneously: it is economically, administratively and politically viable. The remainder of this chapter discusses the extent to which the supply-side policy solution of education as a tool to meet the needs of the knowledge economy met these three conditions.

Economic viability

The first element to take into consideration is the zeitgeist of the 2000s, namely a common belief that it was necessary to adapt the European social model through an increase in competitiveness and productivity in order to meet the challenges of a global economy (Bulmer, 2008 : 608; see also section two). Within this political climate, underpinned by the ideology of the Third Way, education was considered a productive factor in order to solve the challenges of globalisation, as well as those posed by the knowledge based economy and the skills requirement in the post-Fordism economy (Shapira et al. 2001; Schellinger, 2016).

The Lisbon strategy received an enthusiastic reaction from several European state and non-state actors. Tony Blair praised the “end of the social model of the 1980s and the

transition to an active employment policy”, and French President Chirac was “struck by the unity displayed among Member States”. Aznar stated that, “we are on the right track for rivalling the United States and achieving full employment” (Agence Europe, 25 March 2000). The European Trade Union Confederation welcomed the Lisbon Strategy as a “turning point for its balanced and integrated approach between economic, social and environmental policies” (Etuc, 2000 : 1); and Janssen, the chairman of the European Round Table of Industrialists, praised Lisbon for “transferring many of the nation-state’s powers to a more modern and internationally minded structure at European level (Janssen, 2000). Within the framework of Lisbon, although remaining a Member States’ competence, education was seen not only as the “first domino on the path to full employment” (Latham, 2001 : 32) but also as the main tool to meet the needs of the knowledge economy and combat social exclusion. For example, Blair and Schroeder co-authored “Europe: The Third Way - die NeueMitte”, which proposed a general framework for European social democratic parties in which the role of the welfare State was supposed to promote work through education, training and active labour market policies (Blair and Schroeder, 1999).

This means that the broader political and ideological climate of the times was receptive to the idea of education as a tool to meet the needs of the knowledge economy and might have contributed to providing credibility to the already existing interpretation of the problems of education, helping political actors to focus on the problems of unemployment and lack of competitiveness and to see education as a solution to these problems. In other words, the idea of education as a tool to meet the needs of the knowledge economy was consistent with the perceived problems of the time and was hence economically viable (Hall, 1993). In a more counterfactual fashion, these very ideas about education would probably have been rejected in the zeitgeist of the so-called

‘Eurosclerosis’ of the 1970s, in which education was more oriented towards social and redistributive goals than preparing and empowering individuals (see Chapter Four, section two).

Administrative viability

A second factor that facilitated the institutionalization of the idea of education as a tool to meet the needs of the knowledge economy was its administrative viability, namely its alignment with the existing institutional setting. Administrative viability refers to “the dominant perceptions held by officials in reference to what can be implemented” (Hall, 1989: 374). This means that a policy solution needs to be “practicable within existing national institutions and, hence, compatible, with the institutionally shaped interests of key policy actors” (Schmidt and Thatcher, 2013: 36). In practice, this was the case with the Open Method of Coordination, which was a flexible policy mode, given its emphasis on voluntary and non-binding participation and, hence, did not infringe upon national sovereignty (Chalmers and Lodge, 2003). As stressed by the Commissioner for education Viviane Reding:

we are in the process of making a Europe of education by a step by step evolution rather than revolution. No education minister is willing to give up national prerogatives but we are ready to cooperate with European colleagues and to copy the best of what they practice (Agence Europe, 9 November 2000).

In this respect, the choice of the Open Method of Coordination as a voluntary method of cooperation responded to the concerns of Member States regarding preserving their national competences in education while at the same time enabling them to use the Open Method as a template to tackle structural problems in their national contexts (Hemerijck and Berghman, 2004). At the same time, the administrative viability is also reflected in the governance architecture of the OMC: by empowering stakeholders to

participate and to be involved in the several working groups established around the different European processes and policy initiatives, the OMC has contributed to increasing their participation in the wider European educational agenda “in which actors are drawn to work within it and to produce it” (Lawn, 2006 : 272) .

Political viability

Finally, the third characteristic is the political viability of the idea, theoretically defined as its ability to speak to different interests, manifested in its ability to be polysemantic and be interpreted as having several meanings, each of which appeals to the interests or ideals of a particular group. In this respect, as it will be explained below, the idea of the knowledge economy – which is the overarching assumption of the Lisbon Strategy – seems to possess the characteristics of being polysemantic.

As seen in the previous chapters, the concept of ‘knowledge’ with reference to education and human capital had emerged during the 1990s. Investment in knowledge had been recommended by the World Bank and the OECD; the importance of investing in knowledge and skills also figured among one of the five objectives of Cresson’s White Paper (which was widely criticised), and was referred to in the report ‘Accomplishing European through education and training’ of 1996; in addition, the notion of a Europe of knowledge was explicitly referred to in the second Cresson report ‘Towards a Europe of Knowledge’, which emphasised the creation of an “open and dynamic European education area” (European Commission, 1997 : 2); and, finally, an investment in knowledge policies, and, hence, in education, was among the objectives of the European Round Table of Industrialists (see also Chapter Five).

In other words, the concept of ‘knowledge’ with reference to the EU had already emerged well before the Lisbon mantra and was indeed part of the preamble of the

Amsterdam Treaty (see Chapter Six). This means that the term knowledge had already played a role in the previous developments of European education policy in which it had then been presented as a pre-requisite for growth. Since the Lisbon Strategy, the term ‘Europe of Knowledge’ has been malleably used by national and supranational actors.

A first polysemantic use of the term of ‘Europe of knowledge’ is made by the European Commission. With the launch of the Lisbon Strategy, the term ‘Europe of knowledge’ became the main aim of the European Union; perhaps not coincidentally, this echoed the proposals of the report ‘Accomplishing Europe through Education and Training’ of 1996, which had precisely suggested the proclamation of a “general aim” for the European Union (see Chapter Five). In this respect, the European Commission used the term knowledge economy and knowledge society interchangeably, namely linking knowledge to both economic and social goals. For instance, as Maria Joao Rodrigues, one of the ideological architects of the Lisbon strategy, stated in the preface of the publication ‘The new knowledge economy in Europe’: “knowledge is becoming the main source of wealth of nations, businesses and people [...] A new paradigm is emerging creating knowledge based economies and societies” (Rodrigues, 2002 : 3; Natali, 2010 : 2). Moreover, three different dimensions of this notion can be detected. First, under more socially inclusive terms, the term knowledge is associated with the notion of knowledge-based society, namely referred to education contributing to social inclusion and civic education and creating cohesion among Europe’s citizens. Second, it is presented as as a tool for knowledge-based policy, with investment in research and innovation considered an instrument to improve Europe’s growth (European Commission, 2000). This is for instance the aim of the ‘European Research Area and the ‘European Higher Education Area’ aimed at strengthening European scientific and

technological resources (Chou and Gornitzka, 2014). Third, knowledge is also intended under more humanistic values: indeed, the 1998 Sorbonne Declaration (which then paved the way to the Bologna process) stated: “The Europe we are building is not only that of the euro, the banks and the economy, it must be a Europe of Knowledge as well” (Sorbonne Declaration, 1998).

The term ‘Europe of knowledge’ appears to be used in a polysemantic way also by Member States. As argued by Dehmel, the term ‘knowledge’ (being it referred to economy or society) can have multiple meanings: it can refer to the various preparations that individuals undertake during their lives; the various education forms and qualifications that people attain; what an individual learns through his/her life experience; and, finally, market interests and employment (Dehmel, 2006). Along these considerations, this polysemy of the term knowledge seems to be reflected in the debates among Member State shortly before and after the Lisbon Strategy. For instance, for Germany and France, it meant improving the unemployment rate among young people and equipping them with skills (Agence Europe, 4 June 1999; 7 June 1999); Finland underlined the role of knowledge economy in the context of new job opportunities offered by the Information and Communication Technologies (Agence Europe, 25 November 1999); Greece underlined the role of knowledge economy/society under several dimensions such as employability, social cohesion, citizenship, linguistic diversity and e-learning (Agence Europe, 4 February 2003); while Italy and Ireland underlined the significance of lifelong learning to meet the needs of the knowledge economy (Agence Europe, 28 October 2003; Agence Europe, 19 January 2004).

Finally, the term knowledge is not only open to several interpretations that can be used for different goals as seen above, but it has also scientific legitimacy within the academic community (Jenson, 2010 : 71). Indeed, the idea of knowledge

economy/society has also been formulated in a polysemantic way by intellectuals and scholars and embedded within the “social investment strategy” in which investment in human capital (and hence education) can promote different goals such as economic growth, social inclusion, and social capital in order to meet the changing needs of the economy (Morel et al. 2012; Esping-Andersen et al. 2002: 27; Giddens, 1998).

7.6 Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter has charted the developments occurred in European education policy and it has shown how key ideas on education became institutionalised since the Lisbon Strategy of 2000. Within the architecture of the Open Method of Coordination, the European Commission and the Council jointly identify objectives to be achieved, with the European Commission being in charge of monitoring of Member States performance through policy instruments such as benchmarking, indicators, and common guidelines. The current policy framework for cooperation in education – ‘Education and Training 2020’ is characterized by a policy orientation in which the goals of employability, comparability and mobility are considered as prerequisites to deliver high levels of knowledge-based growth and jobs. Although harmonization of European education systems is explicitly excluded, the notion of ‘coordination’ is among the main drivers of European cooperation in education, as manifested within the policy initiatives of the Copenhagen process for vocational education and training and the Bologna process for higher education.

Against these policy developments, the empirical analysis has highlighted an ideational continuity between the pre-existing assumptions of the problem definition of education as a solution to improve Europe’s economic growth and the substantive content of the

policy framework for education established since the Lisbon Strategy. The examination of public statements, official communications and the content of the policy debate reveals a significant ideational consistency with how problems and solutions for education had been articulated since the mid-1980s. Hence, as predicted by the third-stage theoretical argument, the interpretation of the problems and solutions of education had already been defined well before the policy choice was made. Additionally, the assumptions of the problem definition not only became embedded in the institutional architecture of the European education agenda but they also proved to be resilient despite the changing economic conditions after the 2008 economic crisis.

However, at the same time, the analysis has shown that, even though the problem definition helped in providing a common conceptualization of the problems and solutions at stake - and hence narrowed the range of potential choices - political and strategic factors also played a role. As posited by the third-stage of the theoretical argument, a chosen policy solution should fulfil three criteria: economic, administrative, and political viability. This is particularly important in the context of European education policy, given also the peculiarity of education in terms of sensitive domestic competence and institutional complexity (as also evidenced in this chapter regarding Member States' reluctance towards the OMC education).

Hence, in this respect, the chosen policy solution, namely the supply-side orientation of education, appears to have fulfilled these three criteria. First, it was economically viable as it was embedded within the Third Way approach and the existing consensus among political actors around social and economic objectives. Second, it was administratively viable because the Open Method of Coordination was presented as a voluntary 'solution' to a 'common problem' and hence respected Member States' national competences in education, as indeed it was constantly reiterated by the European

Commission. Finally, it was politically viable in the sense that the idea of the ‘knowledge economy’, that had been articulated since the mid-1990s, became the catchword that was presented as a prerequisite for Europe’s economic growth but it was also linked to social goals. Indeed, the empirical analysis has provided evidence of the polysemy of this idea and on how different actors – being them Member States, academics or Commission’ representatives - attributed a different meaning to this concept. In other words, the idea of ‘knowledge’ which was formalised under the Lisbon Strategy, seems to have acted as coalition magnet by promoting a specific set of (supply-side) policies that nevertheless had a different meaning for the actors embracing them, with the term ‘knowledge’ referred to economic, social or research and innovation policies.

Chapter 8

Conclusions

The question that motivated this thesis was to explain the puzzle of the transformations of European education policy; in other words, to investigate the causes of its supply-side orientation and the shift in the institutional responsibilities of the European Commission since the Lisbon Strategy of 2000. The thesis began by arguing that conventional approaches to EU integration fail to explain these transformations. On the one hand, while a liberal intergovernmentalist explanation aptly explains the stage at which a specific policy solution for education was chosen, it has little to say about how Member States' interests were (re) defined. On the other, in the case of supranationalist explanations, it has not been fully explained how the consensus around a specific educational problem was constructed, considering the limited competences of the European Commission in this policy field. Taken together, both lines of explanation privilege an emphasis on the *form* of a policy rather than on its *content*, namely they pay less attention on how a particular policy orientation emerged and why a certain set of ideas became favoured over another.

By approaching the puzzle of European education policy from an ideational (and historical) perspective and through a systematic analysis of original and confidential sources, official EU documents and in-depth elite interviews, the thesis found that a specific set of ideas influenced these transformations. In a nutshell, the Lisbon strategy was not only a taken for granted “watershed” dictated by economic imperatives or institutional constraints – as it has been considered by the majority of

the literature – but also represented the culmination of a lengthy policy process driven by the way in which the problem of education was defined.

More specifically, the thesis has shown that the problem definition of education as a factor of economic growth that emerged in the mid-1980s, acted as an ‘attention heuristic’ that skewed the focus towards specific problems of the Community and empowered those actors who were more fine-tuned with its assumptions, namely the European Commission and the European Round Table of Industrialists. In turn, this problem definition influenced the adoption of a specific policy solution, manifested in the set-up of the Open Method of Coordination and articulated around a structured European education policy framework. At the same time, the chosen policy solution was also favoured because it also fulfilled three criteria, namely economic, administrative, and political viability—the latter defined as the ability of one idea to act as coalition magnet and aggregate actors with otherwise divergent interests. In this case, it was the idea of the ‘knowledge economy’ that acted as coalition magnet and thus helped European policy actors with different interests to reinterpret these interests in new ways.

The remaining part of this chapter proceeds as follows. First, it justifies the adoption of the ideational approach and briefly summarizes the three-stage argument outlined in Chapter Two. Second, it presents the empirical findings of Chapter Four, Five, Six and Seven and evaluates their correspondence with the theoretical argument. Third, it suggests some theoretical implications that can open new research perspectives for the ideational literature and EU public policy studies. Finally, the last part of the chapter highlights the value of the thesis in adding new knowledge to the growing body of scholarship in the field of European education policy, discusses its limitations, and identifies future research areas.

8.1 Overview of the three-stage theoretical argument to explain the puzzle of European education policy

The task of this thesis has been to explore in a structured fashion the policy orientation of European education policy and its consequences. Given that education is strictly an area of Member States' competence, it is a sensitive policy field linked to nation-building and States' identity, and is characterised by ambiguity and high issue complexity, what explains the transformations which occurred after the Lisbon Strategy of 2000? When they have not been taken for granted and considered as inevitable consequences of globalization, conventional approaches in EU integration studies have explained these changes under the two main theoretical lenses of liberal intergovernmentalism and supranationalism.

In the case of liberal intergovernmentalist approaches, the changes in European education policy have been linked to Member States' strategic interests to 'kick-start domestic reform agendas' in education that might be difficult to pursue on a purely domestic basis (Knodel and Walkenhorst, 2010 : 138). However, making the assumption that Member States intended to increase cooperation in education and that the rise of the EU policy agenda was the consequence clashes with the fact that Member States have always been opposed to any interference of the European Commission in their domestic competences. In this respect, this line of explanation leaves unexplored the process through which a common consensus around specific ideas about education policy originated in the first place. On the other hand, a supranationalist approach, while it aptly points to the policy entrepreneurship of the European Commission with its informal agenda setting power and operational

infrastructure of information, experience and research capacities (Pollack, 2003), fails to give a comprehensive account of the mechanisms and political strategies through which education policy was framed in a way that would have achieved a broad coalition of Member States in support of a specific education agenda. Finally, both explanations have paid virtually no attention to the potential role of non-state actors in influencing these transformations. Almost nowhere in these approaches is the role of non-state actors considered or, where present, it appears embedded in a domestic-supranational dichotomy that overlooks the transnational level (Cowles, 1995).

Consequently, against the limitations of the existing explanations, the thesis adopted an ideational framework of analysis to elucidate not only the substantive content of the policy but also to detect how the consensus around a specific policy orientation was formed and by which actors it was advocated. Drawing eclectically from ideational theories, social construction of problems and agenda-setting perspectives, the thesis developed a three-stage argument based on a causal mechanism starting with (i) the emergence of a problem definition, moving on to (ii) its development and impact in the policy-making arena, and ending with (iii) the institutionalization of the problem definition as policy solution.

In the first stage, a problem definition is expected to emerge when three factors occur simultaneously: a changed material context (which brings the problem to the fore in the policy debate); a favourable zeitgeist (namely a social, cultural, and political context) that is likely to increase the chances of the problem entering the political arena; and the presence of an ideational political entrepreneur. Regarding the latter, an ideational political entrepreneur is an individual qualified by the following characteristics: holding specific ideas that function as a road map; possessing political and personal resources, such as team building, social acuity, persistency, credibility,

and access; and having the ability to exploit a window of opportunity, such as a crisis or a focusing event (Dahl, 1961; Kingdon, 1984; Mintrom and Norman, 2009).

Once it has emerged, in the second stage a problem definition is expected to act as a template for policy action by affecting the policy debate, institutional settings and actors' empowered to discuss it (Weiss, 1989). Themes that are more aligned with the assumptions of the problem definition are more likely to be emphasized, while those that are not are more likely to be marginalized. Furthermore, the problem definition influences the venues in which it is discussed, and it thus has the potential to provide legitimacy to some institutions over others. Finally, the way a problem is defined is expected to influence which actors take ownership of it and which do not. At the same time, actors are expected to take ownership of the problem not only by virtue of their fit with the assumptions of the problem definition but also by virtue of their power: material resources but also moral power intended as authoritative knowledge and credibility. By acting as ideas carriers, actors are expected to articulate the problem definition and its policy solution through a socially constructed discourse, framed through rhetorical strategies such as story-telling, naming and blaming, and counting (Stone, 2002). As for the first stage, a favourable zeitgeist increases the likelihood that a problem definition will develop.

In the third stage, the problem definition is expected to become institutionalized as policy solution. Here, the problem definition developed in the two previous stages acts as a cognitive and normative framework that influences whether a coalition can be built around a chosen policy. However, if a particular policy is to secure influence and be adopted, the chosen policy solution also needs to address more strategic and pragmatic concerns. Hence, it is expected that a winning policy solution will fulfil three conditions: (i) it is economically viable – hence, it resonates with the prevailing

zeitgeist, namely widely held moral views or economic objectives on which there is a broad consensus among political actors; (ii) it is administratively viable - namely it fits existing institutional settings, and, finally, (iii) it is politically viable, in the sense of having some appeal in the political arena (see also Hall, 1989). Regarding the latter, political viability has been defined as the capacity of an idea to be polysemantic and, hence possess multiple meanings that can aggregate actors with otherwise different interests that thus come to support the idea (Parsons, 2016; Jenson, 2010).

8.2 Summary of the findings

Taken together, the four empirical chapters have highlighted the transformations of European education policy from a ‘Grey Zone’ in the 1970s into a ‘European educational space’ constructed around the polysemantic concept of ‘Europe of Knowledge’ after the 2000s. In doing so, the chapters have stressed how these transformations occurred through an incremental and evolutionary process whose implications could be understood only when the process itself was complete.

Under the banner of the ‘knowledge economy’, the substantive content of European education policy is now characterised by the elevation of a pro-market purpose of education with a supply side orientation that has prevailed over other purposes, such as education for stimulating personal development and social inclusion. In addition, these changes have been accompanied by a shift in the institutional responsibility of the European Commission that, through the benchmarking and monitoring tools of the Open Method of Coordination, performs a more incisive role in Member States’ education systems.

Indeed, even though the legal competences of the European Commission are still the same as those recognised in the Maastricht Treaty of 1992—namely to ‘support and supplement’ Member States’ educational policies—the European Commission can now issue Country-specific Recommendations and is in charge of the overall monitoring of Member States’ progress according to the goals and objectives set by policy programmes, such as ‘Education and Training 2020’. In a nutshell, although there is no such thing as a ‘common European education policy’, there are nevertheless ‘common principles’, ‘common guidelines’, ‘common tools’, and common policy processes that represent a significant departure from the original features of European education policy (see Chapter Seven). As Xavier Prats Monne’, the former director of Directorate-General Education and Culture, eloquently put it: “we cannot tell Member States what to do, but we can tell them how they are doing and what they should do to improve their education systems” (London, November 2013³⁵). Given the absence of explicit legal educational competence for the European Commission, this statement is indicative of the extent to which the European Commission has, *de facto*, developed new competences beyond its legal mandate.

Through an investigation of the longitudinal history of European education policy from 1973 to 2010, the empirical chapters have shown that these changes should not be taken for granted or merely attributed to functional constraints, but they instead were the result of a lengthy, incremental, and complex policy process that started with the emergence of a specific problem definition of education in the mid-1980s

³⁵ Intervention of Mr Xavier Prats Monne’ at the conference “Education, Economic Development and Social Justice in a Global Context”, organised by “Policy Network”, London, 28th of November 2013.

that, in turn, gradually developed and impacted the political landscape in the following decade and, finally, became institutionalised as policy solution at the beginning of the 2000s.

Emergence of the problem definition

Emerging in the mid-1970s as an autonomous policy domain at European level—through the creation of a Directorate in 1973 (DG XII), the setup of the European agency for vocational education and training Cedefop in 1975, and the establishment of the Education Committee and the first ‘Action Programme on Education’ of 1976—European education policy was characterised by a policy orientation encompassing different economic, social, and cultural themes. In this respect, the Janne report of 1973 and the report Education in the European Community of 1974 represented the first attempts to advance specific themes for cooperation, such as the recognition of diplomas and cooperation among higher education institutions, inclusion of disadvantaged groups, emphasis on the education of migrants’ children, and promotion of the European dimension of education, intended under its double dimension of mobility and knowledge of the history of Europe among citizens. However, these early developments faced the opposition of Member States that were strongly reluctant to cede any competence in this policy field and that also considered education more as social policy than economic policy (see Chapter Four).

It was in the mid-1980s that the problem definition of education as a factor for Europe’s economic growth emerged. Consistent with the first stage of the theoretical argument, three factors can account for this emergence: *a changed material context, the presence of an ideational political entrepreneur, and a favourable zeitgeist.*

On the one hand, under changed material conditions of the beginning of the 1980s, namely unemployment and technological change, the social dimension of education was reinforced with education meant to support social adjustment to the newly changed material conditions. On the other hand, new concerns regarding the competitiveness gap with the US and the need to provide European companies with a highly skilled workforce able to compete with the US and Japan economies were coming to the fore. The appointment of Peter Sutherland as Commissioner for the DG Social Affairs, Employment, Education, Training and Youth (DG V) represented a shift in the policy orientation of education. In this respect, Chapter Four has demonstrated the emergence of problem definition of education as a factor for economic growth was driven by the ideational political entrepreneurship of Sutherland who, thanks to his personal and professional resources, managed to overcome the oppositions from Member States in order to get the approval of the first exchange mobility programme—Comett—to promote university and industry cooperation. In doing so, depending on whom he was trying to convince, he used a different line of reasoning that would appeal to the specific audience he was addressing to (such as students' associations, rectors, member states' and social partners). In addition, Sutherland was also able to exploit the favourable zeitgeist of the period, namely the willingness of Member States for greater cultural, political, and economic integration, as manifested in the Adonnino People's of Europe report and driven by the Single Market Project (see Chapter Four).

Development of the problem definition

The emergence of the problem definition proved not to be temporary, but *it impacted the policy-making arena in terms of themes discussed, actors empowered, and*

institutional initiatives. In this respect, Chapter Five and Chapter Six have shown how since the mid-1980s the economic dimension of education was reinforced with the European Commission and business actors taking ownership of the problem. To begin with, as shown in Chapter Five, the European Commission articulated the problem definition by constructing a ‘discourse of crisis’ in which education was seen as a solution to Europe’s lack of competitiveness. Through the publication of several Memoranda, Green Papers, and White Papers, the European Commission rhetorically constructed a selective interpretation of education framed as a solution to Europe’s lack of competitiveness. The textual analysis of these documents has also shed light on the rhetorical strategies used to frame the policy narrative, such as naming and blaming, storytelling, and counting, that, by functioning as ‘attention’ mechanisms, were shifting the attention towards themes such as quality of education, the need for investing in a highly skilled and mobile workforce, investment in lifelong learning, and cooperation between education institutions and business. Conversely, themes more socially oriented, though still part of the official discourse, were framed within a logic of economic efficiency and seen as preconditions to labour market participation.

Whereas the European Commission was taking ownership of the problem, the reaction of Member States and specific non-state actors was characterised by strong criticism of the economic view of education, for instance, as manifested in the criticism of the Memorandum on Higher Education and the Cresson White Paper of 1995 (see Chapter Five). Nevertheless, as predicted in the second stage of theoretical argument, the problem definition that emerged during the one-year mandate of Peter Sutherland had the effect of empowering and mobilising actors more finely tuned in their assumptions.

Chapter Five has shown how business actors such the European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT) and the Industrial Research and Development Advisory Committee (IRDAC) became actively engaged in the European political landscape through the publication of influential reports that pointed to the need for improving European economic competitiveness through investment in a highly skilled and mobile workforce, lifelong learning, and better links between higher education institutions and business. The (neo-liberal) content of the business education agenda was not only aligned with (and sometimes preceded by) that of the European Commission agenda, but it also advocated specific policy solutions: indeed, the main ERT proposal of 1995 (and, hence, well before the OMC education was launched) was that of creating a European system for benchmarking and monitoring Member States' education systems with the European Commission having a coordinating role.

Thus, in this respect, the Industrial Research and Development Advisory Committee (IRDAC) and the European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT) acted as ideas carriers, portraying the reform of education systems as indispensable for restoring Europe's economic competitiveness (see Chapter Five, section four). While IRDAC derived its authority from a formal acknowledgment of its role as advisory body, it might be said that for the ERT this was the result of its material but also moral power and privileged links with the European Commission. By contrast, the empirical analysis has suggested a relative absence of Unions and Teachers' Associations from the educational debate, hence supporting the argument that the way a problem is defined not only empowers specific actors (as, in this case, European business) but also marginalizes others.

But the impact of the problem definition was not limited to the discourse. It also expanded the competences of the European Commission. Chapter Six has shown

how the European Commission advanced its formal position in terms of institutional and policy making initiatives. The setup of a specific Task Force Human Resources, Education, Training and Youth for managing the mobility programmes in 1989, the subsequent official recognition of the role of education with the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, and the formalisation of several exchange mobility programmes whose priorities reflected the assumptions of the problem definition, together represent evidence of the way the problem definition was gradually embedded into formal rules and institutions.

At the same time, Member States' preferences could not account for these developments. Member States were indeed not only opposed to the overemphasis of the economic view of education, but they were also reluctant to consider any shared competence with the European Commission, as the limitations posed by Member States during the negotiations of the Maastricht Treaty have underlined (see Chapter Six, section three). In addition, the development of the problem definition also occurred in a specific zeitgeist embedded within the '1992 project' and anchored to the advancement of neoliberal ideas and assumptions of the human capital approach, thus suggesting that the analysis of ideas cannot be completely separated from the broader social, economic, and cultural context of a specific time.

Institutionalization of the problem definition as policy solution

Taking into account these developments, it becomes gradually evident that what happened since the Lisbon strategy—more than being a real 'watershed', as considered by most of the scholarship—represented instead the culmination of a complex process that needs to be read in conjunction with the emergence of a specific problem definition and the way its articulation impacted the political landscape. In

this respect, Chapter Seven has highlighted how the *institutionalization of the problem definition was affected by the two previous stages, but it was also the result of policy solution that was economically, administratively, and politically viable, this latter factor related to the ability of the idea of 'knowledge' to act in a polysemantic way.*

The official role of education within the goals of the Lisbon Strategy (2000) to make Europe 'the most dynamic and knowledge-based society of the world' seems to support the argument for the institutionalization of a specific problem definition of education as a tool designed to meet the needs of Europe's competitiveness. In this respect, Chapter Seven has shown how specific ideas about education codified in the previous decade—namely employability, comparability, and mobility—became embedded in the design of institutions and became the corollary of the Lisbon and the post-Lisbon policy agenda 'Europe 2020' (2010). The establishment of specific policy frameworks—such as 'Education and Training 2010' and 'Education and Training 2020', together with the Copenhagen and the Bologna process—are all evidence of the continuity between the content of previous ideas and their manifestation as policy outputs. Moreover, the developments that occurred after Lisbon seem also to be the result of a direct ideational agency of the European Commission and the European Round Table of Industrialists, which had already advocated ideas such as the creation of the European Technology Institute (see Chapter Four) and the creation of the Open Method of Coordination for education (see Chapter Five).

In others words, the findings of Chapter Seven suggest the influence of a pre-existent cognitive and normative framework that redefined European unemployment as a 'common European' educational problem that had to be addressed through

investment in skills and lifelong learning in order to meet the needs of the knowledge economy. Within this framework, the idea of knowledge economy became the catchword that - by virtue of its polysemantic concept intended as lifelong learning, social cohesion, employability, and investment in research and innovation - was able to speak to different interests and hence acted as coalition magnet by overcoming the reluctance of Member States and persuading them of the need to improve cooperation on the Education policy. However, what also needs to be taken into consideration is the role of the Open Method of Coordination as a viable policy instrument that enabled Member States to achieve flexible and voluntary coordination in education policies. In addition, the favourable zeitgeist of the Third Way, pointing to the combination of social and economic goals, represented a further contingent facilitating factor that impacted the existing problem definition. Finally, despite changing material conditions between 2000 and 2010—characterised by the financial breakdown of 2008—the empirical analysis has provided evidence of the resilience of the problem definition with the reinforcement of the economic orientation of education, its embeddedness within European economic policies, and the strengthening of the institutional responsibilities of the European Commission.

These empirical findings highlight the value of process tracing as the chosen methodology for examining the influence of ideas.

The three-stage argument developed in order to explore the transformations of European education policy is primarily ideational as it attributes explanatory power to the influence of a problem definition in the policy process. Although it does acknowledge the importance of objective material interests and the role of institutional factors in shaping political outcomes, it explicitly considers how ideas intervene in this process. In this respect, the use of a qualitative method as process

tracing has represented a powerful empirical approach to parse out other explanatory factors and to show the role of ideas as ‘autonomous causes’ (see also Chapter Three).

It is true that a qualitative approach cannot speak directly to causation, as the only way to truly ascertain causation is through randomization; as process tracing relies on a historical perspective, causation cannot be ascertained as history cannot be randomized. However, it has been possible to address one element of a causal relationship, namely that a problem definition and a corresponding policy solution were already available to policy-makers well before the policy choice. At the same time, the empirical analysis has provided evidence of the ‘stability’ of ideas versus material causes; in other words, it has highlighted how the assumptions of the problem definition, as it emerged since the mid-1980s, were only slightly moved by material conditions. This suggests that the role of objective material interests in driving these changes should not be overemphasized given that it had only a modest effect on the trajectory of ideas.

Additionally, the strength of process tracing has been that of challenging explanations that attribute the transformations of European education policy to Member States’ interests; indeed, each empirical chapter has provided evidence of their opposition and reluctance to cooperate. In the same vein, it has also been possible to elucidate the mechanisms and to reconstruct the dynamics through which the European Commission successfully exploited a ‘common European problem’ to create consensus and increase its institutional role. Finally, through process tracing it has also been possible to discover the ‘ideational power’ of the European Round Table of Industrialists in the European education agenda.

8.3 Theoretical contribution to ideational analysis and EU public policy studies

The findings of this thesis complement existing ideational debate but they also open new perspectives of research. On the one hand, this thesis contributes to current debates including those investigating the origins and influence of ideas; the role of policy entrepreneurs as ideas carriers; the political viability of ideas as policy solutions. On the other hand, the empirical findings suggest new and intriguing research paths regarding the role of ideas as problem definitions in providing legitimacy to actors and institutions.

Origins and influence of ideas

To begin with, the findings support conventional ideational arguments that ideas are central to policy-making. However, although the ideational literature has persuasively shown whether and how ideas matter, there has been an implicit tendency to focus on the effects of ideas rather than elucidating how they originated in the first place, hence paying less attention to the origins and sources of the ideas themselves (e.g. Goldstein and Keohane, 1993; McNamara, 1998). Conversely, by unpacking the trajectory of ideas into emergence, development and institutionalization, the argument developed in this thesis has shed light on the role that the definition of a problem plays in influencing subsequent stages of the policy process. Therefore, the key contribution of this thesis has been that of offering a three-stage theoretical argument that has allowed to move beyond a static conceptualization of ideas as solutions to given (and perhaps taken for granted) problems and instead has captured how problems are defined in the first place and with what kind of implications.

Additionally, the dynamic conceptualization of ideas as problem definition, policy solutions and zeitgeist has also provided a better formulation of the different functions that ideas perform. The three-stage argument presented in this thesis seems to suggest that, before becoming policy choices, policy problems undergo an ideational construction. This does not mean denying the importance of material conditions or institutional constraints in defining the range of available choices. Instead, it means incorporating ideational aspects in order to elucidate how cognitive structures influence the behaviour of policy actors.

In this respect, the case of European education policy seems to suggest that ideas are more likely to influence policy choices when they are able to frame a problem in new terms and in terms that suggest a solution that can appeal to a different range of actors. Moreover, another aspect detected in this thesis is that ideas are more likely to exert influence when they can be interpreted as possessing several meanings that can appeal to the interests or ideals of a particular group. Finally, the findings also suggest how the socio-economic, ideological and historical context of a period, or zeitgeist, can facilitate or instead hinder ideas' acceptance. In this case, as shown in Chapter Seven, all these conditions happened simultaneously at the beginning of 2000s.

However, the obvious limitation is that the three-stage argument has been tested only on one case; therefore, to verify its validity and generalizability it would be necessary to test it also on other policy fields. For instance, it could be tested on EU public policy fields similar to education in which the European Commission lacks formal competence and that are characterized by ambiguity and institutional complexity (such as pensions or health policy).

The role of policy entrepreneurs as ideas carriers

The empirical material has also confirmed the importance of policy entrepreneurs as main agents of change. In this respect, the contribution to the ideational literature is twofold.

A first contribution has been to elucidate the mechanisms and rhetorical strategies employed by policy entrepreneurs in advocating their policy proposals; in doing so, it has shed light not only on *what* they do but also on *how* they actively pursue their goals (see also Mintrom and Norman, 2009). Additionally, the empirical material has highlighted the importance of policy entrepreneurs not only in proposing policy solutions but also in socially constructing policy problems; in other words, differently from Kingdon (1984), they do not only wait for a problem for which they have an available solution, but they also act as “problems entrepreneurs” or ideas carriers by constructing specific policy problems and by advancing their solutions to these problems. Hence, the concept of policy entrepreneurship could be better incorporated within the dynamics of the construction of problem definitions in order to analytically strengthen Kingdon’s notion of policy entrepreneurs but also insert more agency into Kingdon’s problem stream.

Political viability of ideas

Another contribution of this thesis has been to elaborate on the concept of political viability referred to the function of ideas as policy solutions (Hall, 1989). In this respect, it has been suggested in Chapter Two that one of the characteristics through which one idea becomes politically viable depends on its intrinsic qualities, namely its potential for ambiguity or polysemy, i.e. its capacity of being understood in several ways, each of which appeals to the interests or ideals of a particular group. In this case,

the empirical findings have highlighted how the idea of the ‘knowledge economy’ acted as coalition magnet whereas other ideas, such as harmonization, proved to be unfit to create consensus and were hence abandoned. Further studies could explore how specific ideas, by functioning as coalition magnets, helped to construct favourable political coalitions (see also Beland and Cox, 2016). For instance, it would be interesting to investigate other ideas that seem to have a potential for ambiguity and polysemy, such as the idea of *sustainability* in environmental policies; or the idea of *active ageing* in health policies; or the idea of *social investment* for social policies (but see Jenson, 2010 for the polysemy of the idea of social investment in Europe and Latin America).

The ‘regulative’ role of problem definitions

Finally, further research could explore what emerged since Chapter Five - and more clearly in Chapter Seven – with reference to the effects of a problem definition. The empirical findings are consistent with Hall’s notion of policy paradigm according to which the way a problem is defined specifies “not only the goals of policy and kind of instruments that can be used to attain them, but the very nature of the problems they are meant to be addressing” (Hall, 1993 : 279). However, the findings further expand the notion of policy paradigm by showing that a problem definition, besides providing a template for action to policy makers, regulates the role that different actors have in a system of relations. In other words, a problem definition has the potential of conferring legitimacy on some set of actors and institutions over others.

In this case, the definition of education as a solution to Europe’s problems of economic competitiveness was marked not only by a growing consensus about the value of education as a factor of economic growth, and by the development of new policy tools

such as benchmarking and indicators, but it also contributed to provide more legitimacy to certain actors and institutions. More specifically, the problem definition acted with a *regulatory* function in the sense of legitimising policy actors and institutions such as European business and the European Commission. In this respect, European education policy, although it strictly remains under Member States' competence, appears to be characterized by a governance mode that relies on an opaque narrative with an apparent dispersion of authority in which the European Commission acts as a hub for coordination among several working groups, experts, national stakeholders, and business actors (see also next section).

These findings suggest that, even though the power of actors in making their ideas influential is a crucial component of the process, ideas themselves further contribute to the influence of power of those who push them and to the continuity of institutions. As argued by Hall and Lamont, institutions “do not simply shift material incentives, but colour people's interpretation of the world” (Hall and Lamont, 2013: 23.5). Hence, an intriguing research path could be to explore whether and how a problem definition can create 'entry' or 'exit' options by legitimising actors' power and the development of institutions.

8.4 Empirical contribution, limitations, and future research areas

Despite a growing acknowledgment of the importance of European education policy in the field of European studies, scholarly interest has predominantly focused on investigating the implications of European strategies and initiatives in Member States' educational systems or the effects of neo-liberal trends rather than analysing the origins and drivers of these changes. The findings of this thesis not only

complement existing studies but also add new and original knowledge in terms of the political-economic causes of the transformations of European education policy.

To begin with, by process tracing the developments which occurred in European education policy from 1973 to 2010 through extensive use of primary sources and original archival materials, this thesis has traced a clear and sequential pathway from ideational origins to policy outcomes constructed around a specific problem definition of education, which ended with its institutional anchoring. Ideas such as the contribution of education to Europe's economic competitiveness, the need to have a highly skilled and mobile workforce, and the importance of investing in lifelong learning, were all ideas that had already emerged during the mid-1980s. The same ideas became articulated over the course of the 1990s through the construction of a policy narrative that pointed to education as the solution to Europe's lack of competitiveness, which in turn was institutionalized under the umbrella concept of knowledge economy launched by the Lisbon Strategy of 2000. The empirical analysis showed that what spurred coordination of European education policy was the institutionalization of a specific problem definition that grew since the mid-1980s and was incrementally constructed by the European Commission and by the European Round Table of Industrialists.

Hence, these findings cast the existing literature examining the recent emergence of European education policy in a whole new light as they provide an original perspective that extends the analysis to the process which prefigured the changes that took place since the Lisbon Strategy.

Second, the in-depth focus on the *input side* of the policy formation process has been particularly fruitful in providing new insights on the trajectory of specific ideas and

on the role that specific actors played as ideas carriers. Which themes moved up in the policy agenda and which not? Whose actors' ideas mattered? In other words, who are the winners and losers of the 'Europe of Knowledge' agenda?

In terms of the content of European education policy, the process of change led to the subordination of the social aims of the 1970s to the competitiveness imperatives, which manifested themselves in the increasing links between education and EU economic policies. At the same time, social themes, such as social inclusion, citizenship, personal values and personal development, though remaining policy objectives in the official discourse, have been relatively marginalized in practice. As exemplified in the image of the 'knowledge economy', the winning idea is a skilled and mobile workforce committed to the generation of economic growth. For example, this is evident in the shift in the benchmarks of Education and Training 2020 compared to those of Education and Training 2010 with the reinforcement of policy objectives aimed at increasing participation rate in tertiary education (see Chapter Seven). Even though the commitment to a social dimension in education is part and parcel of the different follow-up Communiqué of the Bologna process, the focus on fostering the social dimension remains "rather abstract" (Powell et al., 2012 : 248). Furthermore, within the Working Group on vocational education and training established under the programme Education and Training 2020 in 2014, "of the 20 guiding principles established by the Working Group, none refer to the issue of social inclusion, the main focus being on establishing apprenticeship systems and on deeper cooperation between vocational schools and the business sector" (Bartlett and Cino Pagliarello, 2016 :306).

In terms of policy actors, the European Commission appears to be the first winner of the 'Europe of Knowledge' agenda. The empirical chapters have provided evidence

of its capacity to establish not only operational leadership thanks to its organisational structure and resources but also moral authority in articulating a common European problem to be solved through specific solutions. Despite Member States' resistance, the European Commission acted as a central ideational actor with the capacity to persuade and create consensus around common goals and policy objectives, while often carefully modulating its approach to avoid contrast with Member States (for instance, by frequently reassuring them that no harmonization of education systems would be pursued). Although Member States are still key players, and the Council plays an important role in setting the overall objectives of the education agenda, the European Commission now plays a greater role in influencing Member States' educational policies and providing assessments of their progress within the Annual Growth and Stability Pact and within the convergence of the EU semester (see Chapter Seven). Another example of the European Commission's entrepreneurship is its participation in more intergovernmental processes, such as the Bologna process, in which it became a "full member till becoming indispensable to the Bologna process alongside stakeholders" (Corbett, 2012 : 161).

In these respects, the findings are consistent with the arguments of the 'creeping competences' of the European Commission through a technocratic route to agenda setting (Pollack, 1995). Furthermore, they concur with those who have emphasized the role of the European Commission as a successful policy entrepreneur in education policy (e.g. Keeling, 2006; Souto-Otero et al. 2008; Warleigh-Lack and Drachenberg, 2011). However, the thesis has complemented these arguments by adding a closer analysis of the ideational aspects of this process. In doing so, it has shed light on the mechanisms and rhetorical strategies through which the European Commission was successful in creating a common consensus around specific objectives for education

by making appeal to common ‘European’ interests (see also Cini, 1996). Finally, the findings also support previous studies that have emphasized the importance of the Delors’ Commission in the relaunch of the European integration project (e.g. Ross, 1995; Jabko, 2006) and they hence enrich this strand of literature by focusing on an unexplored policy field as education that appeared to have been part and parcel of this relaunch.

The second winner of the ‘Europe of Knowledge’ agenda is European business, which now has an ‘official’ seat through structured partnerships and initiatives with the European Commission (Garben, 2012). The empirical analysis has provided important and novel insights on the powerful influence of business actors—namely the European Round Table of Industrialists (ERT) and the Industrial Research and Development Advisory (IRDAC) —in the advancement of a specific education agenda. As shown in the empirical chapters, the content of this agenda reflected business’ preferences for a highly skilled workforce able to be mobile and flexible in order to provide large companies with the skills and knowledge required to improve Europe’s economic competitiveness. Conversely, unions and teachers’ organisations seem to have emerged as the losers in this process. Although, as seen in the empirical chapters, they raised their concerns over the economic orientation of the policy, they nevertheless did not suggest any alternative, and, whereas they continue to warn against the loss of a social view of education (Copeland, 2012: 233), they appear to have constantly lost ground as legitimate actors whose voices are heard. In this respect, this thesis has been the first attempt to document and unpack, over a long period of time, the role and influence held by private and non-state actors as agents of change in the policy formulation of European education policy.

Limitations and areas for further research

As highlighted, the thesis has developed a three-stage theoretical argument to explore the transformations of European education policy between 1973 and 2010. Though the findings have provided important insights on the policy process of these transformations, it is also important to acknowledge the existing limitations, which also suggests several avenues for future research.

A first limitation is that this study has conceived education policy as “one block”, namely it has examined it as a single, homogeneous level of analysis. The analysis should be replicated and unpacked according to different educational levels – such as secondary education, vocational education and training, or higher education. Similarly, further research could focus on the process of how single instruments and tools emerged, such as the European Qualification Framework or the European credit transfer system. Doing so would allow us to understand if these dimensions can indeed be taken together and whether we can find ideas influencing policy along the lines of the three-stage argument.

In a similar vein, the thesis has charted the transformations of European education policy from 1973 to 2010. Although the analysis of a long time horizon has been advantageous in terms of offering a view over a complete (or almost complete) policy cycle, it nevertheless could not cover all the aspects of the policy developments over this period. In particular, due to time and resources constraints, it was not possible to provide a comprehensive account of all the actors involved in the policy process. Hence, further studies could investigate the role of specific actors that have not been explored in this thesis or have been only partially mentioned. This would include a closer examination of the role of individual Member States, which could be better captured through a careful examination of archival sources such as Council meeting

minutes and national archives; the role of the European Parliament and – more generally – the influence of political parties; and the influence of the European Court of Justice. Finally, an in-depth exploration of the Historical Archives of the OECD could better capture and identify the links (also in terms of causality) between the European education agenda and the policy ideas pushed by OECD (see also Dostal, 2004).

Moreover, it might be promising to investigate another aspect that was only touched upon in this thesis, namely the significance of the mid-1980s as a turning point for the content of education policy towards ideas of efficiency and modernization. In particular, comparative studies could examine common or divergent patterns of ideational change in European countries – such as the UK, the Netherlands, and France – and in the US (but see Braun and Merrien, 1999 for a cross-country comparison in higher education and Flude and Sieminski, 2013 for a comprehensive overview of supply-side reforms in the UK).

Additionally, future studies could explore the role of European trade unions and teachers' associations that seem to have played a marginal role in the development of European education policy. However, they are relevant actors and in many EU countries they represent a strong veto point against education reforms and, in this respect, their relative absence as powerful actors at European level seems somehow surprising. Conversely, further research could corroborate the significance of the European Round Table of Industrialists as agenda-setter for the European education

agenda; however, given the difficulty of archival access³⁶, this could only be done through interviews and further exploration of secondary literature and official ERT documents. Finally, further studies could address more in greater depth how epistemic communities of academics and other intellectuals advanced specific ideas about education. These would include, for instance, as detected in this thesis (but not limited to them), the academics who contributed to the Jeanne Report of 1973, the two Study Groups appointed by Cresson in the mid-1990s, and the group of European economists, such as Maria Joao Rodrigues, Maurizio Ferrera and Manuel Castells, who played a role within the conceptual framework of the Lisbon Strategy.

In other words, by expanding the horizon of analysis to include more actors and institutional factors, it might be possible to identify the trajectory of specific ideas and hence better substantiate or challenge the main findings of this thesis.

8.5 Conclusive remarks: Towards a new problem definition of education?

As a final reflection of this thesis, further research avenues could be foreseen with reference to potential challenges (and changes) in the current policy orientation of European education policy.

Even though the policy framework of Education and Training 2020 (and its underlying assumptions) is still in force, there might be hints of a new course of policy action. Indeed, in 2015 the Education Council adopted a Joint Report from the

³⁶ Although the ERT possesses its own historical archives, they are not publicly accessible. To the author's knowledge, the only scholar who has been granted access to their archives is Maria Green Cowles.

Commission and Member States on new six priorities for 2016-2020 (Joint Report, 2015). Whereas the new priorities do not differ from those already stated in Education and Training 2020, a new priority concerning *inclusive education, equality, equity, non-discrimination and the promotion of civic competences* is the real novel element.

The insertion of this priority is linked to the severe social tensions that Europe is currently experiencing: the levels of inequality being at their highest levels in 30 years, the delicate economic situation that risks creating tensions internal to Member States, existing seeds of radicalisation and marginalisation, the challenges posed by the growing inflow of migrants who will also need to be integrated into education and training programmes. These social tensions are all elements that might challenge the current supply-side policy orientation of education and they might also contribute to the rise of a new zeitgeist.

Against these challenges - which, in many aspects, recall those experienced in the mid-1970s and at beginning of the 1980s - could a new problem definition emerge? And, if so, could it evolve along the stages foreseen by the three-stage argument that this thesis has outlined, namely by being pushed by an ideational political entrepreneur and ending with the institutionalization of a new problem definition?

These questions might be important to consider in future studies, should a new problem definition eventually emerge.

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