Comparing Governance of International Organisations
- The EU, the OECD and Educational Policy

Kerstin Martens & Carolin Balzer
martens@empas.uni-bremen.de  carolin.balzer@sfb597.uni-bremen.de

University of Bremen
Collaborative Research Centre
‘Transformations of the State’
Linzer Str. 9a, D-28334 Bremen
http://www.staatlichkeit.uni-bremen.de

Paper presented to the
European Consortium for Political Research (ECPR)
Joint Sessions, Workshop 1
International Organisations and Policy Implementation
Uppsala, Sweden, April 13-18, 2004

Abstract

How do international organisations (IOs) influence domestic policy implementation? In the field of educational policy, IOs increasingly play a particularly important role in shaping national debates and policies. Comparative studies as conducted by the OECD, for example, reveal strengths and weaknesses of individual educational systems and raise questions of ‘best practice’. International initiatives such as the EU’s Bologna Process even compel national policy makers to restructure their systems in such a way that students and staff will be able to move with more ease between systems and receive fair recognition of their qualifications in the near future.

The aim of this study is to explore forms of governance through which international organisations exercise influence on national policy makers. For the purposes of this study, the EU and the OECD serve as case studies and will be compared in order to analyse differences in governance according to different types of international organisations. Drawing on institutionalist approaches, an analytic grid will be designed in this study for systematically investigating the forms of governance as exercised by international organisations. Following on from that, the analytic frame will be evaluated by the empirical material deriving from interviews with representatives of the OECD and the EU and from the analysis of official documents of both organisations.

The research presented in this paper is part of a research project on International Education Politics conducted at the University of Bremen, Germany. The aim of the project is to explore new international dynamics in educational politics and their effects on states and individuals. Research for the project is conducted under the framework of the Collaborative Research Centre Transformations of the State. Consisting of 15 projects, the Centre is presently the largest German research group examining current dimensions of change in statehood in different policy fields and from diverse perspectives. The Centre is funded by the German Research Foundation (DFG).
Comparing Governance of International Organisations
- The EU, the OECD and Educational Policy

1. Introduction

How do international organisations (IOs) influence domestic policy implementation? In the field of educational policy, IOs increasingly play a particularly important role in shaping national debates and policies. Within the framework of international organisations, debates about international standards and comparable quality of education are conducted, programmes and reforms for exchange between educational institutions across-borders are discussed and conditions for international trade in educational services are finalised. Such developments reveal the trend to increasingly treat education as an issue-area in which processes and dynamics are taking place above the national level of policymaking. Thus, through the activities of international organisations educational policy has developed significantly into a field of international governance.

The aim of this paper is to explore international dimensions of governance in educational policy by exploring the role which IOs play in this process. For the purposes of this study, the EU and the OECD will be examined, analysed and compared in more detail as these two organisations are the most prominent organisations active in the field of education policy. Moreover, each of these two organisations stands as an example for a particular type of organisation, namely supranational versus intergovernmental. Such distinction serves to analyse differences in governance according to types of international organisations. With such an analysis, this paper seeks to contribute to exploring how, when and why international organisation exercise governance.

In recent years, the OECD’s programmes in education increasingly attracted worldwide interest by the media, policy makers and the educationists. In particular in the late 1990s, its contributions to standard-setting and to quality assessments of educational systems increasingly became a point of reference for domestic policy makers. The EU’s educational policy too received priority attention since the 1990s to “become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge based economy in the world” (Council Conclusions, Lisbon, 2000). It is the political will to build a common European educational space until the year 2010, embracing higher education and research as well as vocational education and training. The realisation of these goals entails far reaching reforms in the national education systems, many of them already visible.

Studying educational policy in the context of intergovernmental organisations provides a ‘hard case’ study. Traditionally, educational policy is characterised by being firmly anchored in the domestic political system. Education politics is one of the main domains of the modern welfare state as the design, formulation and implementation of policies in this field forms part of the realm of national politics. Thus, educational policy is an issue-area in which international governance are least-likely to be observed. Thus, it serves as an example for a ‘crucial test’ (King, Keohane and Verba 1994) of whether evidence for international governance as exercised by intergovernmental organisations can be observed.

The paper proceeds as follows. In the first part, an analytic grid will be designed for systematically investigating the forms of governance as exercised by international organisations. Drawing on institutionalist approaches, the major components of governance will be extracted and adopted for the purposes of this study. Following on from that, the theoretical frame will be evaluated by an empirical investigation about governance as exercised by the EU and the OECD. A particular focus will be given to the two most leading initiatives of these international organisations, namely the EU’s so-called Bologna process to establish a European area of Higher Education and the OECD’s programme of educational indicators with which it evaluated the educational systems of the participating countries.
The paper presented in this workshop presents a first and partial step in the attempt to analyse and evaluate the significance of internationalisation processes in educational politics by focusing on the influence of international organisations. At the current stage of the project, theoretical accounts are formulated provisionally and tentatively in order to guide the descriptive empirical inquiry. For the empirical part, a major part of the analysis derives from semi-standard expert interviews with staff members of and governmental representatives to the OECD and the EU and from the analysis of official documents of these organisations.

2. Governance of Intergovernmental Organisations
   – Developing a Theoretical Grid

The notion of governance has attracted increasing attention over the last couple of years and became applied in various strings of literature. Originally, the term governance was synonymous with government, as it was the sole source of power and the provider of the rule of law (Brown 2001: 130). However, its content has significantly evolved over time. As other actors began to gain influence and to shape the political process, the term gradually became applied to the collective impact of the various actors participating within the defined sphere of domestic politics. Governance thus has to be “seen as the pattern or structure that emerges in a socio-political system as a ‘common’ result or outcome of the interacting intervention efforts of all involved actors. This pattern cannot be reduced to one actor or group of actors in particular” (Kooiman 1993: 258).

As a result, the content of the notion of governance thus shifted to presenting the framework of rules by which all the participating parties agreed to abide (Young 1994: 15; O’Brien et al 2000: 2). In comparison to government, governance is thus not restricted to activities of the a priori defined representation in parliament, rather it is more encompassing and embraces not only governmental organisations but also informal mechanisms and regulatory mechanisms in a sphere of activity which function effectively even though they are not endowed with formal authority (Rosenau 1992: 3-6). In fact, it “refers to a change in the meaning of government, referring to a new process of governing … governance refers to self-organizing, interorganizational networks characterized by interdependence, resource exchange, rules of the game and significant autonomy from the state” (Rhodes 1997: 15).

In particular, with the attribute global, governance increasingly symbolises the rules, norms and organisational structures intended to address transboundary questions as well as referring to all the actors which are involved in finding solutions for problems of world-wide concern (Groom and Powell 1994: 81). Global governance thus encompasses not only the relations among states and the performances of international organisations, but also includes links between individuals, people and groups across borders (Woods 1999: 39). As Rosenau (1995: 13) defines, “global governance is conceived to include systems of rules at all levels of human activity – from the family to the international organization – in which the pursuit of goals through the exercise of control has transnational repercussions.”

As a result, governance has increasingly been associated with the management of international relations in the post-Cold War era. In particular, multilateral systems of regulations and international organisations make up the structures of governance in the interdependent global system. Unlike the Westphalian model of sovereign states, the absence of any central authority is emphasised in the concept of global governance; therefore, it presents a model of ‘governance without government’ (Rosenau and Czempiel 1992). Thus, the notion of governance refers to the sum of the modes of governing through formal and informal types of regulating social processes. It also expresses the capacity of international organisations to develop and shape policy making in international relations.

---

1 For an overview on the various theoretical accounts of the notion of global governance and their specific supporters, see Hewson and Sinclair (1999) and Desai (1995).
Dimensions of Governance – An Institutionalist Approach

Following such accounts, in this paper, the modes of IOs by which member states adhere to their policies will thus be interpreted as governance. Drawing on a sociological perspective on institutionalism the forms of governance as exercised by intergovernmental organisations will be examined. For the research objectives of this paper, three dimensions of governance will be distinguished: (1) governance by co-ordination, (2) governance by opinion formation, and (3) governance by instruments.

(1) Governance by co-ordination

Governance by ‘co-ordination’ refers to the ability of an international organisation to provide the means to organise, manage and handle procedures which promote initiatives in educational policy. Governance by co-ordination marks the special capacity of an international organisation to ‘pull the strings together’. It encompasses its activities such as the organisation of conferences and meetings where the diverse and significant actors come together, but also factors of its infrastructure such as the size of the organisation, the number of staff (manpower) and their professional background and network they bring into the organisation.

Through such co-ordinative governance, international organisations can give incentives, initiate projects, and shape initiatives. IOs are able to influence political processes by organising, influencing and speeding up programmes and processes in educational policy. In particular individual staff members or groups of members can be very influential through their organisational position in the design and carrying out of projects because they have the necessary expertise and experience (Haas 1992).

(2) Governance by ‘opinion formation’

Governance by ‘opinion formation’ refers to the capacity of an international organisation to initiate and influence national discourses about educational issues. It is thus ‘thematic’ governance and refers to the manufacture as well as the content of such discourses. It encompasses the material, facts and information an international organisation generates, such as internal communications, memos and the like as well as official output, such as books, brochures and other material. Moreover, it also includes the models and concepts which the international organisation creates and further develops, such as assessment schemes, policy proposals or benchmarking mechanisms.

With governance by ‘opinion formation’, the intergovernmental organisation generates visions and values which shape policymaking of its member states. Thus, within the forums of international organisation new ideas, concepts and models are raised, analysed and further developed (Cox and Jacobson 1973). These foster processes which lead to the origination of new constitutive norms or generate normative pressures (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 891, DiMaggio and Powell 1991) Moreover, by such thematic reflection about issues of current affairs, international organisations develop models for action and concepts for assessment. With such activities international organisations also produce standards for evaluation and mutual scrutiny (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998: 891), because a state’s own policies are mirrored in those of the others.

(3) Governance by instruments

Governance by ‘instruments’ encompasses the ability of an international organisation to initiate, develop and apply mechanisms to influence national policies in education.
instruments is a rather direct and ‘technical’ form of governance and includes the regulations to which states need to adhere due to their membership in the organisation as well as it refers to the resources the organisation is having at its disposal. Thus, governance by instruments includes the processes by which an international organisation pushes and organises the design of binding decisions for its member states and translates the outcome into policy proposals. It also includes the resources the organisation is able to use for advancing its projects, such as financial means.

Governance by instruments thus encompasses the body of legal acts and other formal acts to which states by membership agree to comply with (Reinalda and Verbeeck 1998: 6). By such ‘instruments’, an international organisation is equipped with means and modes to exercise governance over its member states. Governance by instruments thus refers to the capacity of an international organisation to draft and prepare legal decisions, international arrangements and agreed principles which influence national policies. With such instruments of governance, international organisation produce regulative norms, which organise and constrain the behaviour of states (Finnemore and Sikkink 1998). It is a strong form of governance, because such regulations have strict binding character and can be directly applied to member states. Often, however, such regulations need to be translated into national decision-making first, before affecting state behaviour.

3. International Organisations and Governance in Education
– Comparing the EU and the OECD

Since the last decade, intergovernmental organisations started to be highly active in the field of education and play an increasingly important role in shaping national policy making. The processes and programmes initiated, designed and organised by international organisations influence domestic policy makers in how to reform and transform national educational systems. To address this issue, we will concentrate on two international organisations, namely the EU and the OECD. Both these international organisations present particularly significant players in the field of education and have a long history of involvement with educational policy.

According to the original objective on economic cooperation, the focus of the European Union (former European Economic Community) in the field of education, always laid on vocational education and training to enhance free movement of labour. This competence area was later extended to higher education. All activities until the 1990’s centred around the recognition of and exchange between member states. It is especially interesting to use the EU as case study, since the former concept of mutual recognition seems to have been opened up in the last years to the goal of a European educational space. The surprisingly strong involvement of the EU-institutions in educational policy and their forms of activities in the 1990’s is therefore worth analysing in detail.

The OECD is a particularly interesting case of an intergovernmental organisation due to its enduring work on educational policy. Although not particularly mentioned in its statutes, educational policy has always had its stake in the organisation and, over the years, it increasingly received a broader position in the OECD’s range of activities. However, mainly during the course of the 1990s, the activities of the organisation in the field of educational policy have attracted far more attention than before. The statistics the organisation collects and generates, the indicators for education it develops and analyses, and its thematic reflections and discursive contributions to current trends in educational policy are increasingly referred to.

For each IO, in this paper, one of its main activities has been chosen. To analyse the forms of governance in the field of educational policy in the EU, the Bologna-process serves as example. This process envisions the creation of a European space for higher education, in which students can move with ease and have fair recognition of their qualifications. Initiated
in 1999, ministers of education from 29 countries have agreed to reform the structure of their higher education systems in such a way that it will enable to conduct university studies and doctoral programmes across borders by the year 2010. In fact, “Bologna has become a new European higher education brand, today easily recognized in governmental policies, academic activities, international organisations, networks and media” (Zgaga, 2003: 7).

The Bologna-process had led to the most intense reform of higher education in Europe. Many signatory countries have by now reformed their higher education policy with clear reference to the Bologna process. By today, most countries introduced a higher education with a two-cycle-structure, the Bachelor and the Master degree, as it was agreed in the Bologna declaration. As a further consequence of the impact of Bologna, the development of convergence in European higher education systems seems to be in the making. The example of Bologna and its success was followed by another so-called Bruges-Copenhagen-process to establish a coherent framework for cooperation in the field of vocational education and training. The initiative of the European Commission to erect an overarching framework for European education 2010 is the most ambitious goal, getting all individual initiatives in the bag.

In the case of the OECD, its activities with educational indicators will serve as the example for studying the IO’s modes of governance with more intensity. The indicator programme has long been on the agenda of the organisation. However, mainly in recent years, it attracted most attention and increasingly served as a reference point for academics, politicians and practitioners alike. In particular, the discussion about the results deriving from the OECD’s Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA 2000), have shown how such international comparative studies can influence and shape domestic debates and initiatives. Conducted with 265,000 pupils of the age of 15 in 32 principal industrialised countries, PISA proves international information on student outcomes, which gives countries benchmarks and regular updates on how students perform.

Particularly in the German context, this study has triggered enormous discussions about reforming the educational system. Most importantly, the PISA study showed the deficits of the German system. In comparison to other participating countries, German pupils have scored significantly below average in elementary skills, such as reading, writing and problem solving. In particular, the deficits of the German system in wiping out difference due to class background and its insufficiencies in integrating children with a migration background became exposed. Due to such poor results, PISA introduced a wide-ranging discussion about reforming the German educational system. New concepts about teaching capacities, organisation of schools and the content of the syllabus have, for example, been on the agenda of the German Ministry of Education and Research.

The EU and Educational Policy

In 1963 “general principles for vocational training” were already adopted by the council of the European Economic Community (EEC). To pursue the agreed principles of free movement of labour, as envisaged by the six initial member states, the recognition of qualifications and vocational certificates was an important and integral part to reach that goal (see Treaty of Rome 1957, Art. 128). However, only in 1974 a first meeting of the ministers of education in the council was set up and educational policy received an institutional frame. Ensuing this meeting, a set of action lines were finalised, which provided the basis for work until Maastricht 1992 (Blanke 1994: 23) and even constituted the work on community level until the 1990s (Müller-Solger 1990: 807).

In the 1980s, several first projects in the field of vocational training (PETRA, FORCE, Commett etc.) were introduced and implemented by the European Commission. With the launch of the Erasmus programme in 1986 to enhance the mobility of students of higher education in Europe, however, disputes on the degree of competences of the Commission
emerged. To settle this argument, the European Court was addressed which in its decision emphasised that higher education needs to be regarded as part of the preparation for work (Berggreen-Merkel, 2000: 52). Combined with the enforcement of legal acts by simple majority, this assessment increased the competences by the Commission significantly. In reaction, member states feared the fortification of the Commission and their prerogative in educational policy.

As a consequence, the concept of a common educational policy as set in the treaty in Rome, Art. 128, was reconsidered and Art. 127 of the treaty of Maastricht accentuated instead the principles of subsidiarity and even banned harmonisation in order to circumvent interference of the European Commission in national educational systems. This decision marked a shift in the work of the Commission and characterises its activity until today. Whereas the programmes of the 1980s were the first acts in the field of education that were legally binding, after Maastricht, the European Commission did not have such means at hand any longer. Hence, apart from the programmes like Leonardo and Socrates, the work of the Commission expanded merely by nonbinding acts and bottom-up approaches instead of top-down approaches.

In the late 1990’s the developments in the field of educational policy in the EU accelerated. In several policy fields, matters of education climbed up in the agenda of the European Union. Most importantly, the conclusions of the European Council in Lisbon 2000 demonstrate the culmination of the rise of educational policy. On the way to becoming the most competitive economy in the world by 2010, education is meant to play a major role in the knowledge-based society. In addition, two other processes were introduced which were highly concordant with the Lisbon goals: the Bologna-process (1999) as well as the Copenhagen-process (2002) envisions the establishment of a European education area.

**Governance by co-ordination and the European Commission: from exclusion to inclusion**

In 1999, 29 European countries signed a declaration in Bologna, committing themselves to establish a common European higher education area until the year 2010. This route is now publicly known as the Bologna Process and is associated with the European Commission. The initiation of this process, however, can be traced back to single minister’s initiative and deliberately started without the EU’s incorporation. It was the French minister for education, Claude Allègre, who was searching for solutions to reform the French higher education system and invited the Italian, German and English education ministers, facing similar problems, to come up with a European solution to their problems in a voluntary multilateral agreement (interview 2). They signed a declaration in Sorbonne at the occasion on the 800th anniversary of the University of Paris.

This Sorbonne Declaration endeavours to create a European area of higher education by “harmonisation of the architecture of the European higher education system” (Sorbonne Declaration May 1998). A university structure with a system of two cycles and the use of credits were the two main ideas on the way to create this European higher education space. With the Sorbonne Declaration, other European countries were appealed for joining these four countries in their objectives. In spring 1999, the general directors for higher education of the EU member states and the European Rectors Conference (now European University Association) prepared a draft for a declaration to establish the proceedings on a wider European level, which was signed in June 1999 by education ministers of all EU member states and 15 other European states in a meeting on the invitation of the Italian education minister Luigi Berlinguer in Bologna.

In Bologna it was also agreed to meet in a biennial modus to analyse progress, possibly redefine the goals and decide on further steps. The first of such follow-up meetings took place in Prague in May 2001, the second one in Berlin in September 2003. Moreover, other
participants joint the process. In Prague, the Council of Europe, the EUA, EURASHE, ESIB and UNESCO/CEPES have been accepted as observers, and Croatia, Cyprus and Turkey as new members. In Berlin 2003, the list of members was expanded to 40 states by the acceptance of Albania, Andorra, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Holy See, Russia, Serbia and Montenegro and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia.

It was only in Prague, that the European Commission was invited to become a full member of the process. During the preceding meetings, it was explicitly not meant to invite the European Commission to join the process. In fact, it was the goal of the initiator of the process to find a European solution to tackle domestic problems, not a process to bring educational policy on the European agenda as a policy field (Interview EU2). In Prague, instead, the decision to allow the Commission in the process was very much pushed by the Swedish presidency and accepted because of the necessity of having a coordinating organ. It was also acknowledged that the activities the Commission was involved in during earlier years were very much concordant with the goals of the Bologna process (Interview EU2 & EU3).

The greater incorporation of the Commission is mirrored in better co-ordination activities. In the beginning, the Sorbonne declaration reflects the vision of four education ministers from Italy, Germany, France and Great Britain to create a European education area. Resulting from the meeting in Sorbonne, as a next step it was decided to find more ministers to join this vision. To reach this goal, the general directors for higher education and the European Rectors conference prepared a draft to be proposed to a wider audience in Bologna one year later (Interview EU3). In 1999, this paper was signed without many changes as the Bologna declaration and more concrete targets were set. “In any case within the first decade of the third millennium”, it was agreed, the European higher education area shall be established with the six above mentioned goals (Bologna 1999). But no further commitments were set providing a road map on how to reach those goals. Intergovernmental cooperation and cooperation with nongovernmental organisations as well as with universities was proposed only.

Only with the Commission’s official entry into the process in Prague the need for a structure of the follow-up work was articulated more explicitly. A follow-up group and a preparatory group were set up with the support of the Commission. The follow-up group was constituted by representatives, new participants and the European Commission, chaired by the EU-Presidency. Its creation was encouraged with the aim in mind to arrange seminars to certain areas according to the main targets of the Bologna process. The preparatory group is composed of the representatives of the countries hosting the previous ministerial meetings and the next ministerial meeting, two EU member states and two non-EU member states (elected by the follow-up group), the European Commission and the present EU-Presidency. It is especially their task to work on a draft to be presented at the next ministerial meeting.

During the Berlin meeting in 2003, the road map to reaching the set targets was spelt out even clearer. To give the process further momentum, it was decided to concentrate on three of the set targets, namely the effort to put up quality assurance systems, to introduce systems of two cycles and the recognition of degrees and periods of studies. Moreover, it was also agreed that by 2005, a quality assurance system at institutional, national and European level shall be build up, the implementation of the cycle system shall have started and a diploma supplement shall be given out to all graduating students from 2005 onwards.

Moreover, as a result of the Berlin meeting, the follow-up structure was altered in order to foster the implementation process. Most importantly, a Board became established, the preparatory group was expanded and a secretariat was set up. These measures were introduced to take stock of the progress achieved in the Bologna process and mirror a new quality in the process. The Board, chaired by the EU Presidency and composed of three participating countries elected by the follow-up group, the European Commission, the next host country, the preceding and the following EU Presidencies as well as the Council of Europe, the EUA,
ERASHE and ESIB as consultative members. The Secretariat supports the overall follow-up work. The follow-up group has the new task, to organise a stocktaking report.

Such modes of implementation as set by the European Council propose this kind of target achievement. The Lisbon European Council in 2000 not only set thematic impetus but also introduced special modes of governance. As a consequence for the educational sector, the European Council appealed to introduce the Open Method of Coordination in this field. The Open Method of Coordination contains certain specified elements: setting specific timetables to achieving the goals, establishing indicators and benchmarks, setting specific targets and periodic monitoring, evaluation and peer review.

Governance by opinion formation: from redefining the Commission to adding new targets

The role of the European Commission in terms of forming public opinion can be seen on the one hand in the forefront of the Bologna declaration and then also in the redefining and adding new targets to the ongoing process. In other words, “[a]lthough the Bologna process was initiated mainly as an intergovernmental process, there is an evident and growing convergence with EU processes aimed at strengthening European co-operation in higher education” (Zgaga, 2003: 7).

The original declaration of Bologna identified 6 main goals. First, it is envisioned to adopt a system of easy readable and comparable degrees. Second, it was agreed on a system of two cycles to be put in practice in all signatory countries. Third, a system of credits, such as the ECTS shall be established. The promotion of mobility by overcoming obstacles was pronounced as another goal, as well as the cooperation in quality assurance and the acceleration of the European dimension.

None of these goals (except the system of two cycles) of Bologna, however, are new or have not been addressed by the European Commission in the previous years. Rather, Bologna can even be understood as very important in mainstreaming many of the activities the Commission has been trying to do for the last 15 years (Interview EU3). It was even said in one of the interviews that the Bologna process would not have taken place without the activities of the Commission in putting them on the agenda again and again and the pristine reason to work together came from the European Union (Interview EU4).

In 1993, for example, in the White book on “Growth, Competitiveness, Employment” the goal was already mentioned to “establish a genuine European area of […] skills and training by increasing the transparency, and improving the mutual recognition of qualifications and skills; to promote European level mobility among teachers, students and other people” (White book 1993: 122). Similarly, questions of student mobility have also been addressed by the European Commission since the late 1980’s within the ERASMUS and SOCRATES programmes. Moreover, mutual recognition was seen to be developed “by the generation of the system of ‘credit’ transfers” (White book 1995: 55), accompanied by pre-operating studies for the introduction of ECTS in the European Commission. In the White book “Teaching and Learning. Towards the Learning Society”, the idea of a European method an accreditation was also introduced.

Since the Commission is a full member of the process since Prague, it actively influences the targets and goals of the undertaking. In particular, it uses its mandate to have the floor for a great amount of time during conferences, spreading ideas about how to proceed with things and what to do (Interview EU3). Moreover, with its seats in the preparatory group responsible for the draft outline to be discussed at the Conferences, the European Commission has greater options to influence the content of the Bologna process. In fact, certain developments indicate that the readjusting of the Bologna goals is highly concordant with the newer Commission activities.
One year after the Bologna declaration, the European Council met in Lisbon in 2000. The heads of states then agreed on the strategic goal to make 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 cohesion” (Lisbon Presidency Conclusions 2000: 2). They then called upon the member states to reach six targets in the area of education. Next to very concrete measures like an annual increase in per capita investment in human resources, two targets are especially worth mentioning. A European Framework should define the new basic skills to be provided through lifelong learning. Next to that, the means for fostering the mobility of students, teachers and training and research staff shall be defined (Lisbon Presidency Conclusions 2000: 7). Lisbon also emphasises the important role of research in this context and underlines the need to establish a European Area of Research and Innovation.

In Prague in 2001, the ministers agreed to supplement the Bologna goals by three more, namely lifelong learning, the enhancement of competitiveness to other parts of the world and also the involvement of higher education institutions and students in the process. This catalogue of targets was added by one more aspect in Berlin 2003. There it was agreed to include the research area in the Bologna process. That the European research area was included in the communiqué of Berlin was another step towards giving the Commission a more important role in the Bologna process since this used to be a pure EU-context (Interview EU3).

Diverse communications by the Commission in the last years underline that the thematic interest of the Commission has been included in the later Bologna process, especially the aspects of lifelong learning, research and the competitiveness-aspect. Here one can mention the communication “The role of the University in a Europe of Knowledge” (2003), which was higher acknowledged by all sides in the Bologna process. In July 2003, the Commission also published a communication on “Researchers in the European Research area, one profession, multiple careers”. In addition, another communication on “Making lifelong learning a reality” (2001) is closely linked to the discussion around Bologna.

Governance by instruments: shaping process through financial capacities

The Commission has only limited instruments at hand. Only in the recent conclusions of the European Council Spring meeting in Barcelona 2002, the Bologna process was more explicitly mentioned and included in the calling for activities. The European Council calls “to introduce instruments to ensure the transparency of diplomas and qualifications (ECTS, diploma and certificate supplements, European CV) and closer cooperation with regard to university degrees in the context of the Sorbonne-Bologna-Prague process prior to the Berlin meeting in 2003” (Barcelona Presidency Conclusions 2002: 19). This means that the nonbinding character of the Bologna process has at least for the EU member states changed to a more obligatory status because of the legislative competence given to the EU in Barcelona (Interview EU3).

In March 2004, the Commission and the Education Council proposed the European Council an overall framework “education and training 2010”, under which the European Commission plans to include all current activities, including the Bologna process. In other words, the Bologna process has been more and more integrated in the Commissions work and is an integral part of a bigger target by now.

Financial instruments, instead, were the most important means to push the Bologna process forward. In fact, the Commission supported it from the beginning by funding a lot of the early activities. Although no official member of the Bologna Process until Prague, the Commission contributed financially to research projects and seminars. Indeed, there would not have been a follow-up to the Sorbonne declaration and preparation of Bologna without the financial support of the European Commission (Interview EU2 & EU3).
However, financial support by the European Commission has by now reached a new stage. In recent times, a change can be observed in the way the Commission distributes money. Over the last years, quality measures seem to have become a more important issue for funding by the European Commission. For example, universities were formerly supported for simply introducing the ECTS-schemes in their institution; by now, however, the Commission’s financial contribution is bound to the quality of the introduction of those schemes (interview 3).

**The OECD’s work on Indicators in Education**

The OECD’s project on international indicators is a highly significant part of its work on educational policy. Today, it is the project in the area of education for which the organisation is most known and respected for. In particular, its publications about educational indicators since the early 1990s attracted a lot of attention from politicians, the media and the general public alike. However, the OECD has a long history of working with indicators in education. In fact, compiling statistical information on educational issues is one of the oldest projects the organisation has been active in since such kind of project was initiated shortly after its own establishment.

Already in the 1960s, when interest in the use of statistical information for educational planning grew, the organisation began to conceptualise indicators for systemic statistical comparison of educational performances (Henry et al 2001: 85). It was realised that for better and more efficient educational planning, a basis for the gathering and comparison of statistics in this field of policy was needed in order to provide national policy makers with the wide-ranging information needed. In 1964, on a conference of the European Ministers of Education in London, it was recommended that the OECD generates a model handbook for the various factors which are significant for effective educational investment planning (Papadopoulos 1996: 58). The OECD’s efforts to compile such a model handbook resulted in the so-called ‘Green Book’ which continued to be widely used as guidance for gathering educational statistics in the OECD context throughout the 1970s.

In the mid-1980s, however, new dynamics pushed and promoted the indicator project once again within the OECD context. With the establishment of the International Indicators of Educational Systems (INES) project and annual publications on educational indicators, the OECD developed to be the most important organisation working with and on educational statistics. Moreover, it took over to revise and further develop the International Standard Classification of Education (ISCED) manual, initially developed by UNESCO. Finally, with the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the OECD’s developed to be one of the most important organisations generating educational indicators. Through such projects, the OECD enforced its reputation in educational research and became the leading international organisation in this field, influencing national policy makers in education with its results and research.

**Governance by co-ordination: from resistance to activism**

From the mid-1980s onwards, a couple of countries – the US, France, Austria and Switzerland, in particular – put pressure on the OECD to conduct more statistical work on educational indicators. In particular, the US repeatedly called for developing the project on educational statistics further. In 1984 at a meeting in Paris, “[t]he US delegate was said to have put a great deal of pressure, and in very direct language, for OECD to engage itself in a project collecting and analyzing statistical ‘inputs and outcomes’ – information on curricular stan-

---

2 For more details about the early history of educational indicators, see Henry et al (2001: 85) and Papadopoulos (1996: 30, 58).
dards, costs and sources of finance, learning achievements on common subject matter, employment trends and the like” (Heyneman in Henry et al 2001: 87). In fact, at one stage the US was even threatening to withdraw its support from the OECD’s Centre for Educational Research and Innovation (CERI) if its demands were not met (Henry et al 2001: 87).

Through a series of conferences, a new phase of work on educational statistics was gradually initiated. In November 1987, the US government hosted the first meeting in Washington which gave the incentive for more work on educational indicators within the OECD context. New and feasible approaches to developing comparative statistics were discussed in order to agree on a small set of indicators which could be collected in the participating countries. In March 1988, the French government hosted the follow-up meeting in Poitiers (Henry et al 2001: 87, Interview OECD1). During the second meeting, participants put the emphasis on how to design indicators for educational evaluation (Alexander 1994: 14).

As a result, the OECD’s work on educational indicators became more organisationally institutionalised from the late 1980s onwards. On the basis of these conferences and the issues they raised, the new research project was approved by the Governing Board of CERI in May 1988. With the establishment of INES, the OECD began to take a pivotal role for improving the quality of education statistics at the international level (Bottani 1996: 280). INES’s primary purpose was “to do explorative work on construction of indicators based on existing sources or reasonably accessible new data” (Henry et al 2001: 88).

Such initial efforts were reviewed a year and a half later in Semmering at the first General Assembly of project participation hosted by the Austrian authorities (Alexander 1994: 14). Participants of this meeting were satisfied with the first attempts undertaken by the OECD, and their assessment of the work conducted then led to the second phase of the INES project. Assisted by the secretariat of the OECD, some countries took the leadership of Working Groups or Networks to prepare aspects which should gain further attention (Henry et al 2001: 88). At the second meeting held in Lugano-Cadro, Switzerland in September 1991, the resulting first draft of Education at a Glance was presented. Most significantly, the content and the number of indicators were more precisely defined (Bottani 1996: 280).

OECD staff members, however, were first sceptical about the possibility of conducting such a project on outcome indicators. In fact, “[w]ithin CERI, a culture of distrust towards performance indicators had grown up over the years” (Henry et al 2001: 87). As mentioned in an interview, “we purposefully avoided anything which amounted countries to compare themselves – we avoided comparisons, explicit comparisons” (Interview OECD2). However, CERI could not turn aside pressure for a new initiative from governmental side to develop such outcome indicators and had no choice than to concede (Henry et al 2001: 87).

However, the exploratory work ended in December 1989 with consensus and enthusiasm for the project, as it demonstrated “that it was possible to overcome the initial resistance” in relation to the project (OECD Doc. 1995: 1). Moreover, “against CERI’s expectations, ‘the indicators received a splendid political reception’” (Interview with OECD staff member in Henry 2001: 88). In fact, “[t]he CERI Governing Board now stood solidly behind the Indicators project. It instructed the various Networks, technical groups, and the secretariat, to draw up a handbook to provide a clearer account of the conceptual and organisational framework for data collection and management, and led to a set of refined international education indi-

---

3 At the first INES General Assembly in Semmering, the initial list of indicators comprised 160, however, everyone was aware that such a size is unmanageable for adequate gathering of educational statistical data. During the second meeting in Lugano, the figure of indicators was reduced to 50, which was considered ideal and had derived from the conceptual framework which had provided guiding principles for the development of the set of indicators (Bottani 160: 280). For more details on the concept and the choices made see Bottani (1996: 285).

4 “CERI’s position on indicators was reflected in the decision to place the INES project in the charge of a member of the secretariat with a philosophical background in the expectation, perhaps, that it would not succeed” (Interview with OECD staff member in Henry et al 2001: 88).
cators. It also stressed the need to disseminate information about indicators, which created a climate of support among policy makers and analysts across member countries and even beyond” (Henry et al 2001: 88).

Today, OECD staff members manage the educational programme from the headquarters in Paris where they bring together the information. They co-ordinate the gathering of educational statistics, develop meaningful indicators and organise the presentation of educational statistics. Despite such voluminous work, in the OECD secretariat itself, however, only a small number of people are actively involved with the indicator programme. For example, only four people run the PISA programme. Instead, a major part of work is conducted outside the OECD (Interview OECD3). That is to say, the majority of the work, namely the collection of statistics is done by national people. The OECD staff members, instead, only manage the collection and generation of indicators (Interview OECD4).

Most importantly, however, OECD staff members develop the schemes for collecting and gathering the statistics needed. They enjoy the freedom to design and change the content of indicators. In fact, most of the initiatives concerning the work with educational indicators today come from the inside of the OECD as staff members make suggestion and proposals for revisions and developments, often in co-operation and exchange with experts, practitioners and politicians. In brief, unlike in the past when states took the lead, the OECD today is an active supporter of the indicator programme in education and significantly designs and shapes its content.

**Governance by opinion formation: quantitative and qualitative shifts**

Before the 1990s, the OECD’s publications on educational statistics were rare and irregular. The organisation had only occasional produced volumes with educational statistics. Using the ‘Green Book’, it published volumes on International Educational Indicators in 1974 and 1975, and again in 1981 (Papadopoulos 1994: 190). With the new interest and resulting institutional set-up with INES, the OECD began to gather education statistics systematically and to generate significant indicators. As a consequence, the OECD’s publication on educational statistics became more regular and rigorous. Since 1992, it annually publishes *Education at a Glance*.

Over the years, *Education at a Glance* developed to become an important source for education data. Today, it is, in fact, widely recognised as the most significant publication in the field of educational statistics. With 36 indicators, *Education at a Glance* provides comparative data about the functioning of education systems in member countries. These were first organised by three areas of interest, namely (1) demographic, economic and social context of education, (2) costs, resources and school processes, and (3) outcome of education. By 1998, however, the original categories had been reorganised and expanded to cover six themes (Henry et al 2001: 84).

*Education at a Glance* is conceptually further developed every year and new refinements are added. Most key indicators stay the same over the years and therefore enable to compare and contrast over time and across countries. Occasionally, however, some new indicators are added, whereas others are reported from time to time only. “In Education at a Glance we have 36 indicators presented each year. We had to find a good balance between new indicators, innovation and also some indicators that people want to see updated each year” (Interview OECD4).

Most importantly, with the establishment of INES, the OECD’s work on educational statistics also went through significant shifts as regards the content of its work. In major difference to how the OECD collected educational statistics in the past, the project since the late 1980s laid a much greater emphasis on recording ‘outcome measures’ than ‘input measures’. Until the mid-1980s onwards, the OECD had mainly recorded what governments and people invested into the educational process, such as private and public spending, staff expen-
diture, enrolment, number of staff and similar. With *Education at a Glance*, a greater emphasis is laid on the effectiveness of the educational system, and the statistics also record aspects, such as labour force participation, education and work among the youth population, achievement in mathematics and many more. With the 2003 edition, such outcome measures were even for the first time put to the front of the 400 pages edition what shows the growing significance of such data.\(^5\)

Moreover, the PISA project is the most advanced of the INES programme and presents the project which attracted a lot of attention in recent times. Its purpose is to test how prepared pupils at the age of 15 are to meet the challenges of today’s knowledge societies when they approach the end of compulsory schooling. PISA is the most comprehensive and rigorous international effort to date to assess student performance and to collect data on the students, family and institutional factors. More then 250000 students, representing almost 17 million 15 years olds enrolled in the schools of the 32 participating countries, were assessed in 2000. In 2000, the first PISA survey was conducted in 32 countries, and by 2002, another 13 countries completed it. The survey is repeated every three years, with the primary focus shifting to mathematics in 2003, science in 2006 and back to reading in 2009.

Due to the sophisticated methodological approach taken in PISA, the project has become particularly successful and resisted against all criticism. Most importantly, methodological considerations and political aims were kept separated, and therefore, PISA found broad acknowledgment on the political level as well as on the scientific level (Interview OECD5). In order to arrive at such consent, the OECD took its time to design the methodology, in fact, from the idea and the development to the implementation of the PISA project, it needed five years (Interview OECD5). In 1995, OECD staff members presented first ideas on how they envisioned the programme. Countries, however, were first sceptical about such a project and asked for further design. By 1997, instead, all states supported the project and recommended its implementation (Interview OECD5).

Initiated and co-ordinated by the OECD, more than 300 scientists from different member states were taking part in the formulation of the project and the actual implementation (Interview OECD5). With PISA, the OECD created a frame with which educational systems could be coherently measured (Interview OECD5). Moreover, for the first time, it was generally accepted that it is possible to measure performance in an international comparative way (Interview OECD6). Due to the widespread acceptance of the PISA projects, over the last 3 to 4 years, indicators as designed and collected by the OECD were the priority number one of states when future projects were discussed (Interview OECD5). In brief, with its publications and projects, the OECD created greater conscience for the evaluation of educational systems and is able to exercise governance as its influences opinion formation.

*Governance by instruments: toothless tiger*

Legal acts do not play a significant role in the OECD context, although the organisation has in fact, various legal instruments at its disposal. Whereas agreements, conventions and decisions are legally binding for those members who vote in favour, recommendations, declarations, agreements and understandings are not legally binding, however, they have some moral force. “Since unanimity voting is the rule, OECD legal acts cannot be adopted if there are votes

\(^5\) Since 1996, *Education at a Glance* is also accompanied by an analytical supplement which comments in greater detail on selected themes of key importance to governments, policy makers and the public. *Education Policy Analysis* concise analyses on policy relevant themes based upon selected international education indicators. As describes by the OECD, “[t]he main purposes of Education Policy Analysis are: To assist education policy-makers and others concerned with education policy to make better decisions by drawing on international and comparative work, to draw out the key insights and policy implications arising from OECD education activities, international data and indicators, and related studies, and to present findings, analyses and discussions in a succinct and accessible form” (Education Policy Analysis 2002: 133).
against the act. Abstention, however, is no hindrance for the adoption of an act” (Marcussen 2004). Compared to other international organisations, however, the OECD produced only few legal acts. All in all, there are 188 acts in force by now and the amount according to the field varies tremendously. Moreover 7/8 of all legal acts are non-binding (Marcussen 2004).

In the field of education, the OECD itself has no legal instrument on its side to push or force decisions on its member countries to implement policies decided on. In fact, with only one declaration, the field of education is one of the lowest in which the OECD has produced legal acts. (The environment with 63 legal acts is the highest). The document was written in 1978, and is entitled the ‘Declaration on Future Educational Policies in the Changing Social and Economic Context’ and was declared after the Ministers of Education of the OECD member countries at that time (and Yugoslavia) had met under the framework of the Education Committee of the organisation.

In this document, the ministers declare that in the light of the changing economic and social context, they agree that some aims deserve to be considered as a priority in the formulation of policies in the signatory countries. However, aims remain rather vaguely formulated. These aims included a diversity of issues, among other things, the promotion of the continuous development of educational standards, the adoption of educational measures which contribute to the achievement of equality between the genders and many more. The declaration in particular emphasises the support for young people at different stages of the educational process, e.g. to be able to make educational choices, handle the transition to adult work, contributions to solving the problem of unemployment, or to obtain usable vocational qualifications (OECD Doc. 1978, ED/MIN(78)4/Final).

Moreover, the declaration does not give the organisation any measures at hand which it could apply when its member states do not adhere to their self-set principles. It merely “calls for efficient use of the resources made available to the educational sector, for continued improvement in the functioning of educational services, and for maintaining education as one of the most important sector in public budgets” and “calls also for closer co-operation between all those involved in education – the authorities, teachers and parents and the students themselves – as well as employers and trade union organisations and other concerned groups in society” (OECD Doc. 1978, ED/MIN(78)4/Final).

Similarly, the OECD cannot influence initiatives by financial means in order to exercise impact on states, rather, it is dependent on its member states which are willing to conduct a programme. Usually, sufficient countries have to be interested in a suggested programme to have it conducted within the OECD context. The running costs, instead, for personal etc. are covered by the annual contributions of the OECD member states. These are a fraction of their GDP. Most of the projects, however, are financed by additional funds coming from the participating countries or foundations. In OECD words, running costs for the Directorate are covered under the Part I budget of the organisation, projects, such as the indicator project fall under Part II budget. In sum, the OECD has no real instruments at its disposal to exert governance on its member states.

4. Concluding Remarks

It was the aim of this paper to explore the forms of governance by which international organisations exercise influence on domestic policy makers. For that purpose, in this study the analysis concentrated on the two major players in the field of educational policy, namely the EU and the OECD. For each of the two organisations, the most recent and prominent activity was examined in more detail. In the case of the EU, the Bologna process was chosen; for the OECD, the indicator programme served as case study. Applying an institutionalist approach, a theoretical grid was established in which it was distinguished between three forms of governance (coordination, opinion formation and instruments).
From the empirical part, two lessons can be learned when comparing the forms of governance of the OECD and the EU in the field of education. First, it became clear that today the two organisations use very similar forms of governance. For both organisations working with ‘opinion formation’ and with ‘coordination’ seems to be the strongest forms of exercising influence. To a certain extent, this is surprising, since the EU— as a supranational organisation— would have been expected to try to introduce rather legal instruments. On the other hand, educational policy has always been a matter of soft governance only in the EU. Whether the Open Method of Coordination will be a stepping stone towards legislations will have to be seen in the future. Perhaps, the Bologna process might prove as a good example to analyse this development.

Second, both organisations incorporated initiatives into their institutional framework for which the original impetus was laid outside of them. Moreover, they successfully developed these initiatives even further. In the case of Bologna, the Commission was not involved in the beginning although many of the ideas were formulated earlier by the organisation. Today, instead, the Commission even is the motor of the process and the Bologna process forms an integral part of its overall programme of work. As far as the OECD’s indicator programme is concerned, the organisation was first sceptical about and ideologically against such an undertaking. Today, however, the indicator programme in general and the PISA project in particular, are the most prominent and successful initiatives of the OECD in the field of education.

In sum, the piece of work presents only a preliminary and provisional step of a wider analysis. To this point, we concentrated on describing the forms of governance as exercised by international organisations in the field of educational policy. From here, this work needs to evolve on two fronts. First, the theoretical framework needs further elaboration. Most importantly, the precise shaping as well as the specific implications of the different forms of governance— in particular, opinion formation and coordination— need further explanation. Second, too little is known about the implications of IO governance on the national level. Therefore, systematic case analysis of chosen countries and the impact of the two initiatives described here need to supplement this study.

5. References

Barcelona European Council (2002), Presidency Conclusions, 15 and 16 March 2002
Blanke, Hermann-Josef 1994, Europa auf dem Weg zu einer Bildungs- und Kulturgemeinschaft (Köln/Berlin/Bonn/München: Carl Heymanns)
European Commission 1993 COM (93) 700, Growth, competitiveness, employment. The challenges and ways
forward into the 21st century. White paper. Brussels


Kooiman, Jan 1993, Modern Governance (London)

Lisbon European Council (2000), Presidency Conclusions, 223 Ind 24 March 2000


Sorbonne Declaration (Ministers in Charge of Germany, Italy and United Kingdom), Joint Declaration on harmonisation of the architecture of the European higher education system. Paris, 25 May 1998
