Public-private partnerships, digital firms and the production of a neo-liberal education space at the european scale

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Introduction

Those following European Union education policymaking are familiar with the strategic goals for Europe as set out in the 2000 Lisbon Council – to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion (para 5). Observers are also likely familiar with the Commission's strategy to generate structural reform and develop its policymaking capacity, as well as the development of actions around lifelong learning and ICT in order to create what is referred to as a European Education Space. These goals, strategies and actions are, in the words of the Commission, a European response to the challenges posed by globalisation, specifically the means to ensure the transition to a digital, knowledge-based economy and society (cf. Lisbon European Council, 2000; Designing Tomorrow's Education, 2001a).

These initiatives have, for the first time in the history of the EU, placed education high on the political agenda of the Commission, with the specification of the Concrete Future Objectives for Education (2001b) and subsequent translations into actions around a series of indicators that benchmark quality (2001c). At the same time, the Commission has challenged Member States to review and renovate their national education and training systems to deliver "...high educational standards, and to embed a culture of lifelong learning to respond to evolving skills requirements" (eLearning Summit Taskforce, 2001: 2). As Dale (2002: 2) observes, these developments represent "...a very significant sea change in the direction, form and purpose of the relationship between national education systems and the European level." More particularly, he argues, "...these changes may lead to the development not only of a separate and distinctive agenda at national and European levels, but to a new functional and scalar division of the labour of coordination of these educational agendas" (ibid) as a new education space is being constructed at the supranational level.

However, the production of this new space of knowledge production at the supranational scale, a means of overcoming blockages as a result of fixed interests at the national scale, is not a neutral process. As I will show in this chapter, space, scale and the production of space, is a highly political process and the outcome of particular projects and struggles. Drawing on theories of scale and rescaling (Smith, 1993; Swyngedouw, 1992, 1997; Brenner, 1998, 1999, 2004), I intend to show how education is being reorganised in space, not only horizontally but vertically, with different education activities being organised at different scales. In the case I am looking at, both the European Commission and transnational capital have a vested interest in promoting eLearning and public-private partnerships as a mechanism for producing education in this space. It allows the private sector entry to the European market for digital technologies and the learning market, whilst for

the European Commission, the capacity of the private sector is mobilised to ensure the realisation of the EU's political project—a competitive European state space.

This chapter begins by outlining the main theoretical arguments around the production of scale and the reworking of state space before turning to the case study: a detailed critical discourse analysis of the report of the European eLearning Summit hosted by the private sector in Belgium in 2001. I show how this initiative is linked to a wider European project—the creation of a European Education Space being strategically developed by the European Commission—arguing that this project can be regarding as a process of territorialisation at the European scale. In the final sections of the paper I examine how the interests of the private sector are inserted into the European education scalar project through privileging public-private partnerships as a mechanism for development. I conclude by arguing that this new governance mechanism constructs a set of social relations at the European scale that privileges particular interests; the interests of the transnational digital firms and the kind of knowledge that they are promoting.

The production of scale and reworking state space – theoretical notes

Dale's (2002) claim that there is an emerging functional and scalar division in the labour of education is question begging for a number of reasons. First, it makes us ask questions about what it means to talk about scale and a division of the labour of education across scales. Dale's thesis is also highly suggestive of a process that is underway. Finally, and given that education has been a major project of national states, to talk about the rescaling of the labour of education, in this case to the European level, prompts us to ask questions about the implicit assumptions that we have about the nature of the relationship between existing scales and emerging scales and the institutions, projects and politics at these different scales.

In order to appreciate the significance of a project like the creation a 'European Education Space', a term the European Commission uses for its project, and interrogate the causal logics and possible explanations for this emerging policy trajectory at a supra-national scale, I have found critical theories of space and scale (Lefrebvre, 1974; Harvey, 1982; 1989; Smith, 1993) and a political economy of scale (Collinge, 1999, 2005; Swyngedouw, 1992, 1997; Brenner, 1998, 2004) to be particularly useful to help reveal the spatiality of education projects. In spatialising education in this way, I do not intend to infer that this is a consequence of an emerging and expanding European region. Rather, it is to suggest that education projects are always constituted in space, in turn shaping social relations. It follows, then, that an important task for sociologts of education is to understand the consequences (political economic and social) of different kinds of education projects as they are spatially organised. And, as Andrew Sayer (2004) reminds us, while space matters as "all material phenomena necessarily have spatial extension and are spatially located" (p. 267), it does not matter in the same way all of the time. Understanding the spatiality of education policies, projects and practices, means "addressing specific processes, with their distinctive causal powers, situated in specific spatio-temporal contexts" (ibid). The case study that follows, of the creation of a European Education Space, thus situates the project of inserting a new set of interests and politics into this European scale.

Several further things should be said before proceeding in order to clarify what I mean. . The first concerns the question of scale and its production. As Collinge observes:

Scale discourse is powerful as it holds out a

totalising perspective, seeking to integrate different levels of geographical inquiry. In so doing it draws attention to the division of the global social formation into not only a 'horizontal' structure (in which similar activities are organised at similar scales in different places) but also a 'vertical' structure (in which different activities are organised at different scales covering the same places) (2005, p.189).

Scale analysis functions by assembling a series of spatial categories into a hierarchical framework that is used to investigate social change. Both Jessop (2004) and Brenner (1998; 2004), for instance, have focused their attention on statehood and processes of rescaling, arguing that diverse areas of national state power, policy formation and socio-political struggles are being redefined in response to both global and local pressures. Further, Collinge's (1999) innovative contribution to scale analysis – 'the relativization of scale' – distinguishes dominant and nodal scales in a scalar division of labour. Scale dominance refers to the power which organisations at certain spatial scales, such as the national, are able to exercise over organisations over other higher or lower scales, while nodal scales are defined as scales that are non-dominant in the overall hierarchy of scales. They nonetheless serve as the primary loci for the delivery of certain activities. This is a particularly fruitful set of conceptual innovations for my purposes in seeking to understand the way in which education is being reconstituted at the supranational scale.

The second point concerns the idea of statehood. States have and continue be important sites for the constitution of education within national territories. Since the 1970s, statehood has been transformed as a result of changing institutional landscape of contemporary capitalism—in particular the mechanisms, sites and objects of governance. There is now no privileged scale of action as

under, for example, Keynesian Welfare National State (KWNS) (see Jessop, 1999) regime that dominated the post war period. Rather, new scales have emerged or existing scales reconstituted by new political and goverance projects, for instance, the local scale through political projects such as decentralisation. Activity that was once located at the national scale, for instance aspects of education provision or regulation, is being relocated at different scales, in turn constituting new kinds of social relations within and across scales. In other words, the labour of education and its goverance increasingly takes place across a range of scales - global to local - while state power is also being dispersed across these scales - delinking it from its concentration at the national scale. This, in turn reveals the methodological nationalist assumptions at work in much thinking about the state and education (see Brenner 2004 on this point in regard to the state in general).

One final point before turning to the case stud; spatial projects are political projects embracing particular ideas and mobilising par-ticular actors. These processes are, in turn, mediated by the competing interests and histories of specific contexts. It is thus not possible to determine in advance, or indeed read off from the public discourses, the precise outcomes of these projects. With these preliminary remarks in mind, let us now turn to a closer look at how these processes are at work in the constitution of a European education space.

The european eLearning summit and PPPs

In the Summit Declaration held in La Hulpe Belgium on May 10th and 11th 2001, the eLearning Summit Taskforce laid out the challenges facing 'Europe' in meeting the goals of the Lisbon Council (2000); to become the most competitive and knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable

economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion. The purpose of the Summit was to take forward the European Commission's Action Plan presented by the Council of the European Union in March 2001 to the Member States:

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

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

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

Second, according to the eLearning Summit Taskforce, eLearning requires immediate and substantial investments by governments and education and training bodies to generate universal digital literacy. Again, the Taskforce note that the necessary pace of change and the scale of investment in infrastructure, tools, services and content that will be required, "must be significantly increased" (p.2). From there the solution for the Taskforce is an inevitable alternative: that in order to "...provide a step change in the implementation of innovative models of eLearning, the transformation of learning institutions, and the social perception of the role and status of educational practitioners" (p. 3), PPPs should be explored as offering considerable potential as a mechanism for delivering education and training into the future given the capital shortages Member States face in investing in the public sector. In the view of the Summit Taskforce: "Active private sector participation in eLearning and ongoing dialogue with the public sector is no longer a viable option but an urgent necessity" (p. 3) and "a precursor to preparing a fresh stage in sustainable European cooperation" (p. 3). The Taskforce Declaration concludes with the recommendation to the Commission that it should "explore the potential of public private partnerships" (p. 6).

In many respects, the Summit Taskforce report is a remarkable one. To begin, the Summit Taskforce, chaired by IBM Europe, was composed of five companies, IBM, Cisco, Nokia, SanomaWSOY, Smartforce. It was this group, too, who led the development of the Summit and who have had a significant role in subsequent developments including the development of Career Space, an initiative that I will return to later in the paper. The Summit, hosted at the IBM International Training Centre, attracted over 350 participants from the public and the private sectors, including policymakers from national ministries of education and employment, senior officials from the European Commission, and representatives. At the Summit a further 25 companies (3Com, Apex Interactive, Apple, Auralog, British Telecom,

Centra, CEPIUS, Ge.world, Transware, CompTIA, Courseware Factory, De Wilde CBT, Digital Brain, EDS, EdskillsNTO, European Education Partnership, Granada Media, Intel, Interact Group, Manpower, Marconi, Oracle, Sonera), then formed a Steering Group who agreed to take the conclusions and recommendations of the Summit forward. These transnational firms have huge interests in the IT world, including the provision of hardware, software and education and training. Second, the Summit Report observes that education, as we have known it, must be recast. According to the Taskforce, no longer will education be necessarily delivered via an education system and its teachers. Rather, educators' roles, pedagogical practices and educational spaces will be redefined within the framework of a partnership between the public and the private sectors.

If one were to read the report of the eLearning Summit Taskforce disconnected from other events and agendas within the EU, it might be easy to conclude that key interests within the private sector had hijacked the agenda of the eLearning Summit and inserted a seemingly tentative claim to the need for (exploring) public-private-partnerships as a means for creating capacity. However, as early as 1996, the Commission—in setting out the guidelines for future Community action 2000-6 in Toward a Europe of Knowledge, had linked the idea of knowledge and skills for a knowledge economy with the specification of a particular means for bring this about—the private sector. For example, in paragraph 3 of the Report, under the section The Parties Involved – the Commission notes that "there needs to be a commitment to securing greater involvement of the business sector...the dividing line between the world of education and that of the information society is fluid and connections need to be established in both directions."

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

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

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

Embedding a European Education Space – The Lisbon Council

Embedding education in a European space is no straightforward process, particularly as ideas like 'European education' are neither pre-existing nor commonsense categories with identifiable activities and institutions, and because the Commission has had limited desire

(largely because of its commitment to the principle of subsidiarity) and limited capacity to govern that space in policy terms. However, within the context of creating a competitive European knowledge economy, creating a European education space with a particular mandate and capacity that could be governed was critical. The Presidency Conclusions of the European Council in Lisbon, 23-24 March 2000 can be seen as a watershed in this regard (Barcelona European Council, 2001). Here the Council specified a clear mandate for education and training, as well as the means for bringing this about. ICT was high on the agenda. According to the Council, investments in ICT infrastructure and digital literacy were critical to developing the services sector and to overcoming the widening skills gap in information technology. The means to do this was along partnership lines.

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

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

> ...are not only powerful political instruments for creating a knowable, quantifiable and hence more tangible and governable 'European population' and 'European space': rather, they are also powerful moulders of consciousness that furnish the meta-classifications within which identities and subjectivities are formed.

The European Commission Report also raised questions about the costs/benefits of alternative forms of provision; for example, how much learning can be independent, teacher led, peer group led, or, home school or community based (p. 7). Like previous Commission reports, the European Report also argues: "The information explosion demands fundamental rethinking of traditional conceptions of

knowledge, its transmission, delivery by teachers and acquisition by students. ... "All of these areas of knowledge and skills present major challenges to the teaching profession ...Change requires rethinking, reappraisal, re-evaluation of accepted practices, challenging what has always been done and accepted. Change often requires restructuring and re-culturing of organizations. It poses new demands on hierarchies, status and relationships" (my emphases, p. 9).

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

Like previous declarations and reports the Commission identifies the threats to the development of the knowledge economy strategy as lying in both the forces (teachers) and the means (access to computing) of production. That is, teachers lack skills and resist using ICT as they see it as a threat to their jobs (p. 24); the ratio of pupils per computer is still very uneven (p. 52), and in many cases computers in schools are simply not sufficiently up to date to enable them to access programmes that have been developed (p. 53). A preferred solution follows: the flexible knowledge economy means provision should be less institutionalized with individuals assembling their own building blocks of knowledge and qualifications in informal ways and in new contexts (p. 10). The Report obser-ves: "All member states are realizing that the future brings a monumental challenge to traditional structures of education institutions. This means finding ways of educating people beyond school and outside the classroom,

helping them to acquire the skills and competencies that will make them less vulnerable in the global economy" (p. 11). The question then posed is: How would it be possible to create partnership with institutions or organizations which could help to increase the availability of computers in schools? How can schools be guaranteed a real long-term benefit from such an approach?

Following the Council Resolution on eLearning in July 2001 (Council of the European Union, 2001/C 204/02), an Interim Report—eLearning: Designing Tomorrow's Schools—was released by the European Commission in February 2002 which sought to "lay the foundations for concrete and sustainable actions" (p. 2) to meet the Commission's knowledge economy goals with an ICT and digital literacy strategy. With enhancing quality and improving access constantly narrated as the keystones for building the European knowledge society, the report then proceeds to lay out a set of preferred options for what quality and access might mean; flexible and virtual universities, multi-purpose places for learning, the development of an ICT Curricula for the 21st Century, public private partnerships. Again the issue of resources and the means through which resources might be made available is considered: "This need is ever more pressing in a more difficult economic environment" (p. 11) while "Public-Private Partnerships need to be explored" (ibid). At the same time, that this European space is more than a 'learning' space' in a more traditional sense becomes evident at several points in the Report. While recognizing the recent downturn in the ICT sector and consolidations in the market for e-learning products, the Report observes: "The global market for eLearning and services is expected to grow strongly in the forthcoming years, providing both a challenge and an opportunity to European education systems and to related economic sectors such as multimedia publishing" (p. 5). The Report concludes with:

"...it is clear that the eLearning initiative is playing an important role in helping Europe to exploit the use of ICT for education sand training, and to realize its potential to be a world leader in learning products and services, and in terms of successfully sharing resources and know-how in education and training".

A european knowledge economy space: scale and the politics of territorialisation

Before moving to examine the privileging of public private partnerships as a means through which the European knowledge economy space is to be realised, I want to consider the social and political processes at work in creating this territory. In particular, and as outlined in the first part of this chapter, the work of the critical geographers and their analysis of space, scale and territorialisation is particularly helpful for understanding this process of So, too, is Shore (2000) and Rosamond (2002) work, where they point out that categories such as 'the European economy' and 'European competitiveness' are not self-evident entities. Rosamond (2002), in an analysis of the construction of a competitive Europe, argues that 'imagining the European economy' is a rhetorical strategy as part of a more complex process of constructing a regime of economic governance at a supranation scale - the European Union. Rosamond shows how 'ideas' like 'competitiveness', can become "sedimented and 'banal' in the sense of becoming commonsensical and barely discussed" (op. Cit: 158), in the process constructing identities and subjectivities.

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

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

means for bringing this about. In relation to threats, the Commission and key economic actors point to

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

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

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

Key economic actors, like the large transnational firms IBM, Cisco and Nokia, among others, have been actively participating in the creation a European educational space through generating the conditions for their ongoing and future investment in the lucrative education market without the impediments of existing institutional arrangements, problems of state regulation and pressure from civil society about the role of large private for profit firms in the education sector. For the EC to foray into education and training on such an unprecedented scale, unhindered by the local and national politics of the Member States, it must develop its own system of innovation enabling it to realize a 'quantum shift' in the capacity to bring this about. This means developing the means to go beyond the establishment of objectives and benchmarks. It means drawing upon a set of resources made available through the private sector to provide a particular kind of education that is not dependent upon place but, rather, uses new technologies to operate across boundaries. The construction this knowledge economy education space carries all of the hallmarks of the emerging EU economic space, which, as Rosamond observes, is quite distinctive: "It amounts to a quite particular form of economic internationalisation involving the "...freeing of trade and significant deregulation, combined with new rule setting, the development of common policies, the transfer of power to central institutions and the development of redistributive mechanisms" (2002: 162). However, the question to be posed is whether the EC has sufficient regulatory apparatus in place, aside from crude measures of quality like 'the number of computers per pupil', to ensure that social equality is not undermined when the education space is exposed to private for profit interests?

PPPs – Inserting 'Private' Interests into the Education Space

I have been tracing the production of a European education space at a supranational scale and the idea that education and training should be delivered in partnership with the

private sector. In order to deliver this, the European Investment Bank[1]—a substantial financier of PPP projects since the 1980s in the public sector—has prioritised funding education under the Innovation 2010 initiative (i2i) "in order to close the competitiveness gap between Europe and the US/Japan" Brown, 2004: 3). The i2i programme funds three difference areas: education and training, research and development, and information and communication technologies.

PPPs, as part of a wider competitiveness strategy, have considerable resonance with Third Way or 'Neue Mitte' politics which now characterizes many of the restructuring or modernization programmes taking place across Europe, including Germany, Spain, Greece (see Giddens, 2001; Mouzelis, 2001). A fundamental idea is that the state should not dominate the provision of public services; rather a range of patterns that include the market and civil society should emerge which enable consumer choice and market competition.

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

However, the insertion of private interests into the European education space is potentially problematic, particularly when we are talking about the introduction of private-for profit interests into the partnership. In order to think through this in more detail, it is instructive to look at examples of PPPs. In the

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

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

The large transnational ICT firms' interest in creating an ICT curriculum framework that gives substance to and which operates in a virtual European education and training space is tied to its own need to generate profits and to shape the conditions that give rise to

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1. The European Investment Bank is a public institution.

profitability. The curriculum, however, as Apple (1982) argued more than two decades ago in his work on teachers and texts and the logic of curricular control, is no neutral space. Rather, the curriculum is a particular set of discourses, shaped by particular sets of ideas about the world and proper social relationships. The creation of a European education space enables the for-profit firms to enter, not only as providers of infrastructures but also as shapers of ideas about the world.

Concluding Remarks

It is difficult to see how ideas like partnership at the level of Europe can operate with any sense of symmetry of power between the public and the private, especially when it involves powerful companies like Apple, IBM and Cisco systems, in short ICT versions of media owner Rupert Murdoch. As Mouzelis (2001: 447) observes in his comments on Gidden's proposed Third Way; a characteristic of late modern societies is that economic interests have penetrated the cultural realm and that this process has reached unprecedented dimensions. Mouzelis calls for a regulatory approach that would democratize cultural production by bringing into the sphere of 'civil society' where it would function neither on profit or state/party logic (2001: 447-9). If, not, he says, we are drifting from a market economy to a market society, and one that needs to be reversed.

However, not only will it be increasingly problematic to reverse these policy tendencies, given the protections afforded private investors under the terms of the WTO/GATS agreements (see Robertson, Bonal and Dale, 2002), but it assumes a national focus in its analysis. The real challenge such scalar shifts present us with, and which is evident in the case I have been analysing here, is that these are political manoeuvres by political and economic actors to conceal or reveal particular types of politics. Not only is it difficult to contest what is increasingly viewed as a commonsense solution to the challenges of globalisation, but the frameworks which structure the social relations of the European education space are (intentionally) less visible in the political arenas of everyday life. As a consequence, the rescaled functional division of labour and the creation of a European education space is less accessible to challenge.

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