
Hard Measures for Soft Stuff: citizenship indicators and educational policy under the Lisbon Strategy

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ABSTRACT How far is the European Union a vehicle for inclusion and empowerment of a new range of policy actors in education? This article explores the role of actors in policy formation through a case study. It examines European Union attempts since 2000 to develop indicators of 'active citizenship' and 'education and training for active citizenship'. It is based on two main sources: policy documents on the development of indicators and benchmarks; and a case study of an exercise (2005-07) to develop such indicators, initiated by the European Commission's Directorate General for Education and Culture. It shows that policy actors have attempted to take advantage of the Open Method of Coordination, often seen as a neo-liberal control mechanism, to ensure that citizenship remains on the policy agenda.

The Maastricht Treaty (1992) gave the European Union (EU) some legal 'competence' over education for the first time: specifically, to make 'a contribution to education and training of quality and to the flowering of the cultures of the Member States'. Lawn argues the EU has since developed into a distinctively new kind of educational 'space', empowering new actors through 'soft governance' by a 'range of particular governing devices (networking, seminars, reviews, expert groups, etc.)' (2006, p. 272). In contrast, Mitchell points to 'increasingly neoliberal forms of governmentality' in EU education; in particular, she sees the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), with its apparatus of indicators and benchmarks, as indicating 'the extension of neoliberal governmentality in all spheres of social and civic life' (2006, p. 390).

This article attempts to throw empirical light on this debate. The evidence is drawn from EU efforts, since 2000, to develop indicators of active citizenship and active citizenship education. It points to the importance of the role of policy actors within the EU's bureaucratic framework, shows how citizenship has been maintained on the policy agenda, and suggests that – despite its emphasis on indicators and benchmarks – the OMC should not simply be seen as a neo-liberal control mechanism. There are two main sources of data: policy documents on the development of indicators and benchmarks; and an exercise over the period 2005-07 to develop 'indicators of active citizenship', initiated by the European Commission's Directorate General for Education and Culture (DG-EAC). This involved, *inter alia*, work by an Expert Group and a Research Network. The present author was a member of the Network; his participation has contributed to the evidence base.

Education, Indicators, and the Lisbon Process

Indicators have grown as a feature of EU governance, especially since 2000 as an aspect of the OMC under the Lisbon Strategy. Modelled on the European Employment Strategy's 'non-binding, soft-law instruments of peer review, benchmarking, and persuasion' (Rhodes, 2005, p. 290), the OMC involves 'fixing guidelines' for the EU and 'specific timetables for achieving the goals', 'establishing, where appropriate, quantitative and qualitative indicators and benchmarks against the best in the

world', 'translating' the guidelines 'into national and regional policies by setting specific targets and adopting measures, taking into account national and regional differences', and 'periodic monitoring, evaluation and peer review organised as mutual learning processes'. Indicators and benchmarks were to be 'tailored to the needs of different Member States and sectors as a means of comparing best practice' (European Council, 2000, para. 37).

In the wake of Lisbon, a senior civil servant in DG-EAC (Hingel, 2001) explored how it might 'contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging co-operation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action' (Maastricht Treaty, Art. 149.1, quoted Hingel, 2001). Building on developments in education over 25 years, he argued there was 'a momentum of deepening co-operation in education':

not only is a European Space of Education in its making, common principles of education are being agreed upon between Member States, leading logically to a European Model of Education. (Hingel, 2001, p. 4)

Deepening cooperation had involved 'gradual trust-building between Member States and Member States and the Commission', supported by European integration and 'internationalisation/"Europe[a]nisation" of the economy and labour market' (p. 14). Lisbon's invitation to Ministers of Education to 'undertake a general reflection on the concrete future objectives of education systems, focusing on common concerns and priorities while respecting national diversity' (Council of the EU 2001, p. 4) in the light of the Lisbon goals was 'revolutionary' (Hingel, 2001, p. 15). It would 'implicitly' give the EU a 'mandate to develop a "common interest approach" in education going beyond national diversities', increasing 'the European dimension of national educational policies' and 'the dynamics of inter-governmental cooperation', as well as extending the 'community dimension to education policy co-operation between the Member States'. In education, he argued, 'more convergence and more intense interrelationships between educational systems' went 'hand in hand with subsidiar[ity]' (Hingel, 2001, pp. 19-20).

While the OMC provided a 'general paradigm', therefore, each policy area would have to develop 'its own precise mode of procedure' (p. 20). Existing methods of cooperation in education, being 'subject both to majority votes in the council and to codecision procedures of the European Parliament', had 'greater legitimacy' than the European Employment Strategy. However, they lacked 'the follow-up and the culture of evaluation, meant as warnings to Member States which are failing to implement guidelines' (p. 20). 'What would be the equivalent of guidelines for the education field: Indicators, benchmarks, objectives or recommendations?' he asked. Agreement on 'tools and procedures' was essential to 'rely and capitalise on the premises and assets already in place' in education (Hingel, 2001, p. 20). The key for Hingel lay not only in mechanisms to measure progress and ensure compliance, but in how standards were set. In a policy environment shaped by subsidiarity, a high degree of consensus was essential.

Within DG-EAC, the agenda was carried forward at two levels. A set of 'concrete future objectives of education and training systems' was developed. Adopted by the Council of the EU in 2001, these responded to its request that Education ministers reflect on 'concrete future objectives' (Council of the EU, 2001, p. 4). Second, an expert Standing Group 'to give advice on the use of indicators as tools for measuring progress towards the common objectives set within the framework of the work programme on the future objectives of the education and training systems' (DG-EAC, 2003a) was established in 2002. In July 2003, after consulting eight 'working groups' (covering the objectives developed since Lisbon), this Standing Group on Indicators and Benchmarks (SGIB) issued a 'final list of indicators' for education and training.[1]

Some 29 indicators were proposed, spread across the eight objectives (a mean of 3.6 per objective; one objective had a single indicator, one had six). The objectives covered improving education and training for teachers and trainers, developing skills for the knowledge society, increasing the recruitment to scientific and technical studies, making the best use of resources, open learning environment, making learning attractive, improving foreign language learning, and increasing mobility and exchange. The indicators proposed for the last of these are illustrative:

- Inward and outward mobility of teachers and trainers within the Socrates (Erasmus, Comenius, Lingua and Grundtvig) and Leonardo da Vinci programmes;
- Inward and outward mobility of Erasmus students and Leonardo da Vinci trainees;

- Foreign students enrolled in tertiary education (ISCED [International Standard Classification of Educational Levels] 5 and 6) as a percentage of all students enrolled in the country of destination, by nationality (European country or other countries);
- Percentage of students (ISCED 5-6) of the country of origin enrolled abroad (in a European country or other countries) (DG-EAC, 2003a).

‘Supporting active citizenship, equal opportunities and social cohesion’ (Objective 2.3) was not addressed in this report; neither were several others apparently significant for citizenship: ‘strengthening the links with working life and research, and society at large’ (3.1), ‘ensuring access to ICT for everyone’ (1.3), ‘developing the spirit of enterprise’ (3.2), and ‘strengthening European co-operation’ (3.5). However, the Standing Group specifically suggested ‘social cohesion and active citizenship’, ‘equity’, ‘mobility’, and the ‘social background of tertiary students’ as ‘priorities for the development of new indicators’.

Identifying and developing indicators was proving hard. In February 2004, a joint report from the Council and the Commission emphasised ‘the need to improve the quality and comparability of existing indicators’; the SGIB and other working groups were asked to suggest new indicators. A ‘lack of relevant and comparable data’ caused difficulties in some areas (Council of the EU, 2004). Nearly a year later, a Commission Staff Working Paper (CEC, 2004a) explained that indicators had ‘twin roles of monitoring progress towards agreed objectives and functioning as a means for identifying good practice’, and should therefore be ‘based on pertinent, valid, and comparable data, and ... accepted by users as reasonably accurate measures of the matter they address’. Data ‘already available’ or in ‘forthcoming EU-level surveys’ were most desirable, on efficiency grounds. Although developing new indicators was ‘a long-term process’ (CEC 2004a, p. 4), some would be required, however; work would take place against three schedules:

Short-term activities (up to 1 year) ... give priority to using existing data sets available on an international level. Indicators based on such data can be prepared in the short term and at low cost.

Medium-term activities (1 to 3 years): In some cases data is available on a national or other level but has not yet been examined or processed on an international level. In other cases medium-term action involves adding questions to already existing survey vehicles or launching pilot projects. The Commission has initiated studies in some areas to assess data availability and comparability and to develop strategies for collecting data.

Long-term activities (3 or more years): If data is needed which is available neither on a national nor an international level, and which cannot be collected administratively, long-term strategies are required: in this case the developmental process will take at least three years. In most long-term strategies data must be generated via surveys. (CEC, 2004a, p. 4)

In practice, developing citizenship indicators seemed likely to prove a medium- or long-term exercise.

Citizenship Indicators and the ‘Crisis’ of the Lisbon Strategy

‘Active citizenship’, along with other matters pertinent to citizenship, had featured on the post-Lisbon development agenda for education indicators from the outset. A working group on ‘open learning environment, active citizenship and social inclusion’ (Group G) discussed ‘practical problems and obstacles encountered’, and ‘good practice examples’ from the member states, distilling ‘140 good policy or practice proposals’ grouped into ‘six areas of greatest interest’. However, it made no progress on citizenship indicators as such. The SGIB suggested that ‘distribution and mean performance of students, per country, on the PISA [Programme for International Student Assessment] reading literacy scale, broken down by sex’ might serve. Although this made use of data collected for other purposes, Group G ‘rejected’ it as having ‘only a very vague relation to active citizenship education and social inclusion’ (DG-EAC, 2003b, p. 17). Group G suggested instead an ‘input indicator for education for democratic citizenship, based on data on investment per lessons taught in national curricula at school, in adult and youth education and vocational training or special funds and institutions’, and asked the SGIB to establish ‘a *task*

force’ to check whether various studies and surveys [2] provided enough ‘reliable material for an *output indicator for civic education*’ (DG-EAC, 2003b, p. 17; emphasis in original.) In this light, the SGIB could hardly do more than list ‘social cohesion and active citizenship’ as a priority area for development (DG-EAC, 2003a). While not scheduled for urgent implementation therefore, it remained on the agenda.

As is now well established, by 2003 a sense was developing – not merely in education, but across the range of policy areas – that the EU would fall short of the Lisbon goals. In November 2003 *Education & Training 2010: the success of the Lisbon Strategy hinges on urgent reforms* (CEC, 2003) argued that while it would be ‘premature’ to measure progress, working group reports, national reports, and indicators

all point to a situation in which *efforts are being made in all the European countries to adapt the education and training systems to the knowledge-driven society and economy, but the reforms undertaken are not up to the challenges and their current pace will not enable the Union to attain the objectives set.* (CEC, 2003, p. 3; emphasis in original)

In March 2004 the European Council asked the Commission to establish a High Level Group; chaired by Wim Kok, this reported in November. *Facing the Challenge* argued that far from becoming ‘the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world’, Europe’s ‘growth gap with North America and Asia’ had ‘widened’ (High Level Group, 2004, p. 6):

if we are to deliver the Lisbon goals of growth and employment then we must all take action. To achieve them ... means more delivery from the European institutions and Member States through greater political commitment, broader and deeper engagement of Europe’s citizens, and a recognition that by working together Europe’s nations benefit all their citizens.

Robertson (forthcoming) sees the Kok report as contributing to a ‘crisis discourse’ and, from about 2005, to

a set of globally-oriented ‘education’ policies and programmes shaped by a new set of ideas about the production of a European knowledge economy. Together, these policies and programmes mark a significant shift away from a social market/ ‘fortress Europe’ as the means to create a knowledge-based economy toward a newer vision; a more open, globally-oriented, freer market Europe.

On this basis, we might expect citizenship indicator development to have been shelved. It was not. Several reasons stand out. While Kok’s central thrust was neo-liberal, his report retained ‘social Europe’ rhetoric: ‘higher growth and increased employment’ were necessary to ‘sustain Europe’s social model’, and ‘far more emphasis ... on involving European social partners and engaging Europe’s citizens’ was required (High Level Group, 2004, p. 7). His call for ‘more delivery from the European institutions and Member States’ (p. 6) ensured the OMC and indicators remained central. Within the Commission, a large apparatus was committed to indicators and benchmarks. In DG-EAC, the SGIB pressed forward. From 2004, the Commission issued substantial annual progress reports: the first, under the title *Progress towards the Common Objectives in Education and Training: indicators and benchmarks* (CEC, 2004b) extended to 114 pages; more recently, *Progress towards the Lisbon Objectives in Education and Training: indicators and benchmarks 2007* (CEC, 2007a) contained 194 pages. The EU’s various committees, including the Council and its meetings of Education ministers, clearly expected to see such reports, with their statistics, tables and charts. A Commission Staff Working Paper, *New Indicators on Education and Training* (CEC, 2004a), issued in the same month as the Kok report, had emphasised the need for indicators on ‘social inclusion and active citizenship’, and set out a strategy to this end (pp. 17-18).

In addition, the Lisbon Strategy’s economic ‘crisis’ coincided with profound political challenges. New member states from central and eastern Europe, with very different political and cultural histories, and traditions of citizenship and democracy, significantly extended the range of economic inequality within the EU. Growing internal migration would present challenges for social inclusion and cohesion. EU expansion brought challenges to governance. In some respects problems of bureaucratic management (getting things done in a massive yet diverse polity), these were also intensely political. European Citizenship as a legal category remained new. Despite growing recognition, since the mid 1990s, of the importance of connecting ‘Europe with its

citizens' (CEC, 2001, Executive Summary), citizens' identification with the EU and its institutions had not increased. Many of the problems – expenses frauds and the like – were similar to those besetting politics at national level. But concern over political legitimacy was thrown sharply into focus when European Constitution referenda in France and the Netherlands demonstrated deep disenchantment with the European project in member states not previously thought 'Eurosceptical'. The problem of legitimacy was associated not only with a widespread decline in political participation, but – as Putnam (2000) argued – with declining civic participation as well. Finally, problems of social cohesion and political legitimacy were exacerbated by fallout from '9/11' and the 'global war on terror', including growing racial and religious intolerance, and a rise in 'Islamophobia'.

The Apparatus of Indicator Development

In the event, therefore, the year following the Kok report saw not a shelving of citizenship indicator work, but the beginning of serious development. In January 2005, the European Council noted 'the development of the necessary data for new indicators can be a long-term project, at times lasting 5-10 years'. However, the new Centre for Research on Lifelong Learning (CRELL) in the Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC) at Ispra, Italy, would 'significantly increase' the Commission's capacity for such work.[3] Established in August 2005, CRELL would support DG-EAC's work on indicators and benchmarks. More specifically, the Council proposed 'prompt implementation of strategies' to develop indicators of 'social inclusion and active citizenship' (*inter alia*), and their 'inclusion ... in the annual monitoring report' (i.e. *Progress towards the Common Objectives in Education and Training*) (Council of the EU, 2005).

To begin with, the strategy for social inclusion and active citizenship focused largely on social inclusion, where data were 'already available from existing surveys ... or will be available from surveys currently being launched'; there were 'considerable gaps' relating to active citizenship (CEC, 2004a, p. 17), and medium- and long-term work was required. In the medium-term:

The study on active citizenship indicators, which will be launched at the end of 2004, will develop additional indicators on active citizenship based on existing data and will analyse the feasibility of using existing Eurobarometer and IEA data. (p. 18)

In the longer term, introducing 'active-citizenship related questions in future rounds of existing international student achievement surveys' might be possible (p. 18). The suggested use of 'existing' Eurobarometer and IEA data, and of new questions in 'existing' surveys, accorded with the Council's call for 'full use' of existing data while working 'to improve their comparability, relevance and timeliness' (Council of the EU, 2005).

To initiate work, DG-EAC commissioned a study by an Amsterdam-based consultancy, Regioplan, on *Indicators for Monitoring Active Citizenship and Citizenship Education* (de Weerd et al, 2005). Running to 191 pages, and submitted in December 2005, this was to identify key indicators and assess data availability. It concluded that current knowledge about citizenship education and its impact on active citizenship was 'limited': many assumptions had been made, but there was 'little empirical evidence' (de Weerd et al, 2005, p. 137). It considered many potential data sources (23 surveys proposed by DG-EAC, and two others). It proposed various potential indicators of citizenship education, but few allowed conclusions to be drawn about how active citizenship could be effectively promoted (p. 137). The Civic Education Study (CivEd) conducted by the IEA was the 'main source of international data on indicators of citizenship education', other sources offering 'only limited additional data' (p. 137). With regard to active citizenship per se, however, data were available for 'most of the indicators ... we have identified', the 'best dataset' being the European Social Survey (p. 155).[4]

The second step, in line with a consensual approach to establishing standards and measurements under the OMC, was that CRELL, JRC's new research centre, in cooperation with DG-EAC, instituted a project on active citizenship. As part of this, CRELL established a Research Network on 'Active Citizenship for Democracy': this comprised some 20 external members, with about five from the Commission and two from the Council of Europe (membership shifted slightly from meeting to meeting). External members, selected by CRELL, included 'key experts from across Europe' with 'competencies' in one or more areas: 'skills and competencies for active

citizenship, formal education for active citizenship, non-formal education for active citizenship including VET [vocational education and training], Adult Learning and youth training/youthwork, impact from active citizenship (CRELL, 2006a) education and training on citizenship in practice, and indicators on active citizenship'. Members were university academics, and staff of independent research institutes and community education non-governmental organisations (NGOs). There was a 'general balance of gender and European countries' although 'first priority' was given to 'making sure that all forms of expertise are covered' (CRELL, 2006b).[5] The Council had urged 'co-operation with other international organisations ... , ensuring the development of indicators with a wider world reach' (Council of the EU, 2005), and the research network was therefore a joint enterprise with the Council of Europe, whose experience in citizenship education, notably through its Education for Democratic Citizenship programme (EDC) since 1997, was extensive. The Network, which met five times [6], was to 'create definitions', establish what 'skills, competencies, attitudes and values ... facilitate active and democratic citizenship', 'examine the effect of education on actual practice', work on the 'creation of indicators' and 'questionnaire modules ... to provide data for indicators', and respond to tenders for research. Its members would provide 'specialist consultancy towards the development of research papers (between meetings)' (CRELL, 2006f).[7]

Perhaps because a network selected on the basis of expertise alone (rather than of member states' nominees) is not how the Commission normally works, it was considered necessary for DG-EAC to form an 'Expert Group' comprising Ministry of Education nominees.[8] This was to parallel the Research Network, informing member states of CRELL's research results and advising on which research developments should be included in the Commission's annual monitoring reports on education and training. All member states were invited: such expert groups tend to be dominated by those countries most concerned about the topic in hand, however, and by no means all member states were in practice represented.[9] Neither were all group members government officials in the narrow sense: the Lithuanian representative was employed at the National Examination Centre, for example, while Germany was represented variously by a researcher from an independent educational research institute, and a representative of one of the Länder.

To simplify slightly, while the Network was to generate ideas and contribute to research, the Expert Group would hear research reports, provide advice from the perspective of member states on what should be carried forward, and – hopefully – lend legitimacy to the project's conclusions. However, a small research team at CRELL (led by Bryony Hoskins) had the task of turning researchers' and experts' disparate contributions and comments into coherent research-based indicators which could eventually lead to policy proposals.

The Network at Work

However carefully chosen, and expert, the Research Network was tackling technically complex and often politically contested issues. Its members' expertise was uneven. Many were principally educators. Others were experts in social survey methodologies. A few were political scientists. Some educators were instinctively opposed to quantitative measurement; some were initially unfamiliar with, and/or resistant to, the growing significance of quantitative indicators.

At the opening Network meeting, Commission and Council of Europe representatives set out the background. Experience in other areas, a representative of the DG-EAC Analysis and Statistics Unit explained, suggested about two indicators:

At least one ... should be education related. Since active citizenship is a complex issue some indicators might have to be combined to composite indicators in order not to inflate the total number of indicators too much. (CRELL, 2006c, p. 3)

There were technical presentations on indicator design and development, accounts of the Regioplan findings, and presentations on the ICCS and the ESS; issues began to emerge.

First, definitions had to be agreed, for 'active citizenship' and 'active citizenship education'. This proved challenging. By the end of the first meeting, two definitions of 'active citizenship' were under consideration:

– Social responsibility, and participation in political activities or civil society, accompanied by mutual tolerance and respect for human rights.

– Participation in political, organisational/associational and community life characterised by mutual tolerance, non-violence, shared responsibilities and respect for human rights and the rule of law. (CRELL, 2006c, p. 5)

The three ‘competing’ definitions of ‘education for active citizenship’ were:

- Appropriate formal and informal learning opportunities at any stage of the life cycle that facilitate or encourage active and democratic citizenship.
- The exercise of informed participation is supported and strengthened by appropriate and effective learning in a variety of contexts throughout the life-course that provide knowledge, skills, understanding, attitudes, capabilities and values necessary for active citizenship.
- Assuring opportunities for appropriate and effective learning in a variety of contexts throughout the life-course supports and strengthens the exercise of informed participation, founded in knowledge, skills, understanding, attitudes, capabilities and values necessary for active citizenship. (CRELL, 2006c, p. 5)

Each of these discussions turned on the meaning of specific words, with implications for the nature of citizenship and education, and for the availability of suitable data and measurement methodologies. These ‘continue[d] to be developed’ as the project progressed; the definitions eventually adopted were:

- *Active citizenship*: ‘Participation in civil society, community and/or political life, characterised by mutual respect and non-violence and in accordance with human rights and democracy’ (Hoskins, 2006, p. 4; CEC, 2007a, p. 97).
- *Education and training for active citizenship*: ‘Learning opportunities (formal, non-formal and informal) that occurs [sic] at any stage of the life cycle that facilitate or encourage active citizenship’ (Hoskins, 2006, p. 5; Hoskins et al, 2008, p. 13).

Second, the distinction between input and output indicators proved complex. In principle, education might seem an input, with people’s citizenship *activity* as the output. It rapidly became clear this is a vast oversimplification. As the Regioplan study had noted:

what is considered the output of citizenship education ... (e.g. political attitudes and values) is the output of a much broader socialisation process The processes of socialisation for political and social participation are extremely complex and are ... never-ending An active citizen who participates, learns from participating. Therefore, what has been referred to as ‘outcome’ in fact forms the input for future citizenship behaviour. (de Weerd et al, 2005, p. 30)

What were, *prima facie*, measures of citizenship activity – such as national propensity to vote, or trade union membership – were also, therefore, inputs – learning opportunities.

Third, the agreed definitions had to be translated into constructs. The second meeting involved extensive discussion of the components of *active citizenship* (broken down into political, social and cultural domains), and *education and training for active citizenship* (broken down into skills and competences, knowledge, attitudes and values). It also considered an 81-page overview of the various international surveys, including a list of relevant questions they used (CRELL, 2006g).[10]

Fourth, as Regioplan had suggested, serious weaknesses existed in the data available – at least for comparative purposes. The function of indicators in the OMC is to compare not only the EU as a whole against international benchmarks, but also the relative performance of member states. With high political risks attached, this can be controversial. Among the weaknesses were imbalances in educational data as between learning in schools and adult learning, and as between formal learning in schools and colleges and non-formal and informal learning – in family, community and workplace.

Problems of data adequacy arose in relation to active citizenship education:

A reoccurring problem is that the focus for many international surveys is upon formal education and ... the curriculum of schools and that the target population are usually students toward the end of compulsory schooling. As active citizenship is learned as much through non-[formal] and informal learning environments it is difficult to obtain the full picture in relationship to learning outside schools. (CRELL, 2006e, p. 8)

This was compounded by 'much less information' being available about adults than for school students.

For measuring active citizenship, the ESS's merits were strong. The first ESS had contained a 'rotating module' on citizenship, involvement and democracy; this was seen as a potential data source for a composite indicator. A bid was therefore developed to repeat this (with improvements) in the 2008 ESS.[11] For measuring education and training for active citizenship, the ICCS provided robust comparative data – although its focus on the school experience of 14-year-old children was unfortunately narrow.

Outcomes: reports and policy impact

Building on the research network, the CRELL team developed two indicators. *Measuring Active Citizenship in Europe* (Hoskins et al, 2006; see also Hoskins & Mascherini, forthcoming) presented a 'definition and framework for developing composite indicators of active citizenship, the process of building a composite indicator and the results obtained' (Hoskins et al, 2006, p. 6). The 'Active Citizenship Composite Indicator (ACCI)' covered 19 European countries, with '63 basic indicators' covering four domains (political life, civil society, community life, and values). Data were 'principally' drawn from the 2002 ESS.

Overall ... the Nordic countries Norway, Sweden and Denmark score highest. ... Among the western European countries high scores are recorded by Austria and the Benelux countries although with different profiles Generally eastern and southern European countries figure lower in the rankings. ... Not surprisingly the overall ranking has a strong correlation with the results of the dimension of Civil Society. (Hoskins et al, 2006, p. 24)

Measuring Civic Competence in Europe (Hoskins et al, 2008) set out a Civic Competence Composite Indicator (CCCI), drawing on the IEA's 1999 Civic Education study. This covers four dimensions: citizenship values, social justice, participatory attitudes and cognitions about democratic institutions. Again, a summary does little justice to complex findings, but:

In contrast to ... rankings such as the Active Citizenship Composite Indicator, the CCCI ranking ... do[es] not in general show clear geographical patterns, and where patterns do occur these do not follow typical European scoreboard results (e.g. Innovation, GDP and gender equality [and the ACCI]). (Hoskins et al, 2008, p. 62)

Both reports are heavy with caveats. In particular, the CCCI is not a measure of lifelong learning of citizenship, nor even of all citizenship learning in compulsory education, but relates only to school students aged 14 years.

At the time of writing it is too early to assess the permanent impact of this work. Both indicators are explicitly early exploratory steps. Their principal achievement is to have maintained a place for active citizenship within the Lisbon agenda. The Commission Communication on *A Coherent Framework of Indicators and Benchmarks for Monitoring Progress towards the Lisbon Objectives in Education and Training* (CEC, 2007b) invited the Council (of Education ministers) to adopt, 'as a basis for providing strategic guidance and steering to the Education & Training 2010 strategy' (p. 3), a list of '20 core indicators, which are coherent with identified political priorities within the Education & Training 2010 strategy' (p. 8). Among these was 'civic skills'. While nine indicators already existed, and data for others could be obtained within the European Statistical System:

In the area of *civic skills* (7), the Commission is co-operating with Member States to identify data needs and to prepare a European module in the forthcoming International Civics and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS), which will be carried out in 2008/09 to cover the needs relating to education for active citizenship. (p. 12; emphasis in original)

In the light of this proposal, in May 2007 the Council invited the Commission 'to make use of, or further develop, sixteen of the [twenty] proposed core indicators' (Council of the EU, 2007, p. 7); among these, it should 'pursue the development' of civic skills indicators (p. 8).

In the same vein, a substantial section on citizenship indicator work in the Commission's (annual) Report on *Progress towards the Lisbon Objectives in Education and Training* (CEC, 2007a) noted that active citizenship is 'a key component of the Lisbon strategy to create social cohesion,

putting the spotlight on democratic and European values, participation in democracy and civil society' (p. 96). The data on education and active citizenship were 'limited in ... scope, content, frequency and freshness' (CEC 2007a, p. 97); the Commission would therefore support new surveys, including a 'European module' for the 2008/09 ICCS.

The Sources of Critique

If Robertson (2007) is to be believed, EU education since 2005 has been 'embracing the global, not just rhetorically but materially and institutionally'. The continuing development of citizenship indicators over this period, however, suggests the 'European educational space' provides opportunities for actors other than the running dogs of corporate capitalism, and for discourses other than the neo-liberal. Ironically, this argument is supported by an examination of the opposition to citizenship indicators, which reflected long-standing tensions about the role of the EU rather than the concerns of corporate capital.

As Zeitlin observes, critics have seen the OMC as 'a Trojan horse' enabling the EU

to encroach illegitimately into policy domains reserved by the Treaties ... to the Member States ... [This has been] a particular concern of the German Länder, which fear that OMC processes may thereby erode their reserved competences under the Federal Constitution in fields such as education (Zeitlin, 2005)

National and regional concerns such as these probably contributed to the Council's 2007 'cull' of the Commission's 20 proposed indicators – a cull which, as we have seen, civic skills survived. They appear also to have been the driving force behind criticism of EU citizenship indicator development. German representatives submitted a Position Paper 'Concerning the Report "Measuring Active Citizenship in Europe" (Hoskins et al, 2006)' 'on behalf of the Standing Conference of the Ministers of Cultural Affairs of the Länder in the Federal Republic of Germany and on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Education and Research' (Expert Group, 2 March 2007). Some of its criticism was explicitly political. The work 'cause[s] considerable bureaucratic expenses' and 'contradicts the Commission's initiative to reduce bureaucracy' (Otte & Abs, 2007). DG-EAC's 'realm of interpretation' was not specified: 'Does the Commission only deliver the data? Do they analyse data with respect to the problems, which stimulated the development of an indicator? Do they set targets? Do they give recommendations?' (Otte & Abs, 2007)

Other criticisms were both technical and political. Active citizenship should not be the purview of education (or, presumably, DG-EAC) alone:

The reduction of development and interpretation of the indicator to the field of education would not do justice to the complexity of the issue (e.g. distribution of active citizenship over the population, responsibility for establishing opportunity structures). (Otte & Abs, 2007)

The ACCI was culturally biased. 'Components ... typical for Western European countries dominate ... without any compensation'. The 'whole report is more of a naming and shaming game than an analytic help for policy making of the EU or its member states' (Otte & Abs, 2007). Results 'depend[ed] on historical developments within a specific country' – it was 'not surprising', for example, that electoral participation fell when compulsory voting laws were repealed (Otte & Abs, 2007).

The notion of a comparative composite index was attacked. Comparing 'repeated measurements for one country' would make 'much more sense' than a single, time-limited survey: 'more concrete and limited indicators' might be preferable (Otte & Abs, 2007). The ACCI had a number of specific weaknesses. Volunteering 'on a low organisational level' was excluded. 'Forms of participation' were specified in advance, but – as 'blogs' demonstrate – new forms are continually evolving. With no longitudinal perspective, 'no comparison of development within countries' was possible. Values were poorly represented. Critical thinking – 'more central for democratic citizenship than the pure level of activity' was not covered. The data, based on a 2002 survey, were of limited relevance (Otte & Abs, 2007).

A detailed rejoinder to this critique ('The Commission's Response to the German Position Paper' 2007) was circulated to expert group and research network members. It formed the basis for

passages in the 2007 Progress Report (cf. CEC, 2007a, pp. 97-99), such as the need to strengthen 'intercultural validity':

With a large number of indicators on formal and structured participation (reflecting data availability), it could be claimed that the ACCI reflects a northern and western European approach to active citizenship and might not fully reflect other types of experience or less organised activities. (CEC, 2007a, p. 98)

In a similar vein, the Progress Report commented that the ESS 'focuses predominantly on formal and structured participation and includes only one question on informal participation and no data on new forms of participation' (such as 'blogging' or "'smart mobs" organised via SMS or e-mail'), that its results covered only two-thirds of EU member states, and the data were five years old. There was 'no benchmark for an "ideal" level of active citizenship' (CEC, 2007a, p. 98); the composite indicator could only be 'a first step'.

The minutes of the Expert Group (3 December 2007), however, suggested that the German critique would persist. Turning to the new CCCI, German representatives again questioned its 'reliability' and 'alignment of single items with curriculum goals and validity of the construct measured'. More generally, 'Germany asks how one could think of the CCCI as a helpful instrument in the context of evidence based policy'. And at the end of the meeting,

Germany asked for a general orientation and state of the art as regards the indicators in the field of active citizenship in the overall process of indicator development, e.g. what will be the next steps towards the Council, how the indicator will be used, if there will be policy implications etc. (Expert Group minutes, 3 December 2007)

Commission representatives maintained their position, however: the IEA's ICCS survey would bring 'new impetus'; a Communication in the area of civic skills was possible (Expert Group minutes, 3 December 2007).

Conclusion

The purpose of this article has been to shed light on how, within the EU's educational 'space', a range of actors has worked within the OMC's framework of indicators to promote active citizenship in education and society. Their rationale, briefly put, is that to survive in the post-Lisbon world, the 'soft stuff' of 'social Europe' must meet the requirements of 'hard' measurement: only if citizenship can be 'measured' will it be central to policy. Through this process, active citizenship and active citizenship education has been maintained on the policy agenda, despite globalisation, national and regional autonomy, and the 'crisis' of the Lisbon Strategy. Neo-liberal narratives of EU educational policy tend to overlook the extent of contestation, and the resilience – against the odds – of alternative discourses.

Notes

- [1] These did not, in fact, cover all the areas set out by the Council: the Council had agreed a work programme, prioritising the main tasks (Council of the EU, 2002).
- [2] The studies and surveys listed were: 'CIVICs study, CivEd (Civic Education Study) of the International Association for Evaluation of Educational Achievements (IEA), DeSeCO Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development study on 'Competencies for Civic and Political Life in Democracy' and the World Values Survey ((DG-EAC, 2003b, p. 17).
- [3] The Joint Research Centre (JRC) is in effect a Directorate General of the Commission.
- [4] The Regioplan report proved important in agenda setting. For the Commission, it set the groundwork for a decision to allocate 1.6m euros in its 2007 work programme for 'co-financing' European countries' participation in the IEA survey (Expert Group draft minutes, 2 March 2007; the draft minutes of 22 September 2006 show only a 'final decision' was awaited). The Research Network (see below) included both an IEA researcher and two researchers leading the International Civic and Citizenship Education Study (ICCS; the successor to CivEd); many Network members presumed from an early stage that, whatever else emerged from their work, support for ICCS would be recommended.

- [5] The documents do not specify members' nationalities, but institutional affiliations of members present at the second meeting illustrate their locations: Germany, the Netherlands, United Kingdom (3 members each); Austria (2 members each); Croatia, Denmark, France, Hungary, Italy, Portugal, Romania, and Slovenia (1 member each)(CRELL, 2006d). Network members encompassed key international surveys (the IEA and ESS), and there was 'institutional representation' from the Network of European Foundations and Eurydice (CRELL, 2006b).
- [6] For two days in each case at the Joint Research Centre in Ispra, Italy (January 2006), at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg (May 2006 and July 2007), and at DG-EAC in Brussels (January-February 2007); and for a single day in September 2006, following a two-day conference at the JRC, Ispra.
- [7] Several research papers were presented to the September 2006 Ispra conference: Abs & Veldhuis (2006), Holford et al (2006), Krek et al (2006), Ogris & Westphal (2006), Salema (2006).
- [8] Members of both Expert Group and Research Network attended the conference (Ispra, September 2006), but otherwise Group and Network met separately.
- [9] Draft minutes of three of the Expert Group's five meetings list representation from 12 countries (at each of two meetings), and eight countries (for the remaining meeting); of the countries represented, a relatively high proportion were not EU member states (Croatia, Norway, and Turkey).
- [10] Listed were: the IEA Civic Education Study (CivEd 1999, ICCES 2009); the European Social Survey (2002, 2004, 2006 and 2008); the World Values Survey (1999 and 2006); the Eurydice project on Citizenship Education at School in Europe (2005); the EUYOUNGART study ('Political Participation of Young People in Europe: Development of Indicators for Comparative Research in the European Union', an EU FP5 research project); various OECD studies (PISA, the Programme for International Student Assessment; Adult Literacy and Lifeskills survey, ALL, previously the International Life Skills Survey, ILSS; and PIAAC, the Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competences); various Eurostat studies (Adult Education Survey 2005/06; EU-SILC Statistics on Income and Living Conditions; Time Use Survey); and the Eurobarometer survey.
- [11] The bid did not succeed.

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