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## **Embracing the Global: Crisis and the Creation of a New Semiotic Order to Secure Europe's Knowledge-Based Economy**

*Draft*

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## Introduction

*Today's challenge is globalization. Change, technological and societal, takes place at a breathtaking speed. The question is whether to resist this change, or rather to manage it. In order to be able to protect and promote freedom, security and prosperity, to deliver on the expectations of our citizens, we need to reap not forgo the benefits of globalization. We must engage and shape it in accordance with our values and principles. That means Europe must open up. It must open up internally, in relations between Member States and between its institutions and its citizens. It must open up even more to the world, during this period of rapid change.*

*...Why this urgency? I have just come back from China and India, and what I saw was a vivid demonstration of the sheer speed and scale of the changes going on in the world...*

*...So, let's hold onto this fact. That the drivers of globalisation are human beings, and the winners from globalisation are human beings. Globalisation is being led by all of us, by the choices we make. It is driven by the imagination and creativity of millions of people, through technological innovation and scientific progress (Barosso, 2005a).*

There is a new urgency in European Commissioner President Juan Manuel Barosso's speech delivered to the *European Ideas Network* in Lisbon in September 2005. Titled *Building an Open Europe*, Barosso calls on the imagined citizens of Europe—Europeans—to act decisively in these “dangerous times” (p. 5); to not “hide behind borders and hope that globalisation will go away”. President Barosso goes on to offer his audience some frank advice about how to respond to the challenges facing Europe: to actively engage with globalisation by delivering on the new Lisbon Strategy objectives (p. 4) through focusing on innovation and investment in order to secure for Europe a knowledge-based economy.

The tone of Barosso's speech sits in a sharp contrast to the confident and heady optimism of the Lisbon Strategy launched in 2000 by the European Council in Lisbon; that “...the Union was experiencing its best macro-economic outlook for a generation” (p. 2) and that this would provide a sound foundation for strategically realising the Lisbon agenda – that is, developing Europe as a globally competitive, socially cohesive, knowledge-based economy (European Council, 2000: 2).

Months before Barosso's (2005a) speech, Wim Kok had submitted a Report—*Facing the Challenge*—from the High Level Group<sup>1</sup> to the Mid-Term Review of the Lisbon Strategy. The Report argues that progress had been disappointingly slow because Member States had failed to act on the strategy with sufficient urgency (Kok, 2004: 6). In Kok's view, an overloaded agenda, poor coordination, conflicting priorities, and above all, lack of determined political will, had widened the growth gap between Europe and its competitors, North America and Asia (Kok, 2005: 5), while many of the key Lisbon

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<sup>1</sup> The European Council held in Brussels in March 2004 invited the Commission to establish a High Level Group (HLG) headed by Mr. Wim Kok to carry out an independent review to contribute to the Mid-Term Review of the Lisbon Strategy. The mandate for the HLG was to identify measures which might form a consistent strategy for the European economies to achieve the Lisbon objectives and targets.

targets<sup>2</sup> had not been reached. The summary line in the left hand margin leaves the reader with little doubt about what to do. Europe *“Must Act Now”* (p.17). A sense of crisis now permeated the European agenda demanding a new kind of imaginary and action.

In this chapter I will be arguing that this ‘crisis’ discourse by Barosso and Kok goes some way to helping explain the emergence, since 2005, of 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. These discursive and material shifts, both in reaction to and enabled by the Lisbon crisis, reflect a rebalancing of social forces within the structures of Europe and signal the emergence of a new form of structural selectivity. Drawing upon cultural political economy as an approach (see Jessop, 2004), and critical discourse analysis as a methodology (Chouliaraki and Fairclough, 1999; Fairclough, 2003), this chapter sets out to trace the emergence, discursively and materially, of this new external/global face as part of a new imaginary for Europe’s knowledge-based economy to resolve a crisis of the Lisbon strategy. The chapter concludes by arguing these strategies reveal a more culturally and economically imperialistic Europe. This undermines the idea of European civility and stains the iconic status of the European Social Model, both of which give significant legitimacy to the European project globally.

### **Constructing a New Semiotic Order – Notes for Doing Cultural Political Economy (CPE)**

How might we systematically ‘read’ and analyse discourses critically, like those put out by the European Commission and other actors on the creation of a European knowledge-based economy? There are several points to be made here about the semiotic in relation to this particular chapter.

The first concerns approaches to policy by education policy analysts. There is a considerable literature which offers insights into what is described as the messy and contingent world of text production and distribution in education (cf. Ball, 1994; Taylor, 1997; Ozga, 2000; Olssen et al, 2004). While useful, in general these approaches are unsatisfactory for my purposes for they do not enable sufficient analytical purchase on the relationship between the production, circulation and mediation of discourses, their connection to the deeper structures of power that shape the state/economy/education relation,<sup>3</sup> and how these discourses take material and in some cases institutional form. The result of this disconnection is to present education policy discourses as largely representational or ideational, and so on, operating in and on the cultural sphere. However, if we connect the representational and ideational to the material, institutional and relational moments of discourse, as Harvey argues we should in order to register the processual nature of social relations (see Harvey, 1996: 78-79), we are able to see them as

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<sup>2</sup> These targets included increased levels of investment in Research and Development (R&D) and education, higher employment rates, teacher training in digital literacy.

<sup>3</sup> In saying this, I am not suggesting all policies in the education sector are reducible to the economic. Clearly the agenda for education systems is much broader than this, and that other social relations (gender, race and so on) are being produced and reproduced (Robertson and Dale, 2000).

moments in a wider social process. The European knowledge economy is simultaneously a project, process and product.

Second, this chapter draws primarily on ‘official’ or publicly available policy texts such as those surrounding the launch of Lisbon 2000 and the new Lisbon 2005 strategy. This kind of text necessarily filters out much of the contestation which takes place over the ideational and representational. We can only fully appreciate the complex and messy process of policy formation by actors by undertaking ethnographically-oriented research in institutions and the wider society. An ethnography of European policymaking in education combining official policy texts with observations on the political and institutional context of agenda setting, drafting, and so on, such as Jones (in this collection) and Muntigl, Weiss and Wodak (2000), show us how strategic selectivity is created and reproduced in the formation of drafts and official texts and the way agents inside and out of institutions strategically mobilise discourses to ‘produce’ and reproduce political economies (Hay, 2002).

Jessop’s ‘Cultural Political Economy’ (CPE) approach elaborated in the first part of this book is particularly appealing for the purposes of analysing the production of a European knowledge economy. Jessop (2004: 161-62) outlines a set of broad ontological, epistemological and methodological claims which are particularly useful for approaching the analysis of Europe’s rearticulated and reconstituted knowledge economy project from 2005 onwards. First, through processes of semiosis, objects and subjectivities are socially constructed; they are also co-constituted and co-evolve in wider ensembles and social relations. Second, CPE emphasises the co-constitutive role of semiosis. That is, agents have agency but agency is shaped by the extra-semiotic features of social relations. Third, CPE involves combining critical semiotic analysis as a methodology with critical political economy as an approach. This involves an explicit engagement with the cultural and semiosis, that is, the inter-subjective production of meaning. The production of meaning, however, is never able to produce self-reproducing closure as discursive relations are tendential, vulnerable to disruption, and plural. Fourth, because of their complexity, ‘actually existing’ economies can only be imagined. Imagined economies, however, have significant, though only partial, correspondence to real material inter-dependencies; “imagined economies are discursively constituted and materially reproduced on many sites and scales, in different spatio-temporal contexts, and over various spatio-temporal horizons” (Jessop, 2004: 162). Finally, in capitalist societies, imaginary economies tend to be shaped by those economic, political and intellectual forces who tend to manipulate power and knowledge in order to re/produce new boundaries, geometries and temporalities in a spatio-temporal fix that seeks to displace or defer capitalisms crisis tendencies.

So, how might we ‘do’ this critical semiotic work? Fairclough’s approach to critical discourse analysis is a useful starting point, though there are several ways at which we can undertake systematic analysis. In this specific case, I am interested in the representational, ideational, material, institutional and relational moments of the ‘new Lisbon’ strategy to lever in a new more globally-oriented free market vision of education and the knowledge based economy. It stands back rather than takes a close textual reading to look at the discursive shifts that mark off the distinctive nature of the 2000 Lisbon agenda from the 2005 new Lisbon strategy. My focus is thus on the ‘why’, ‘how’, and ‘with what material and social consequences’ of this ideational and representational shift for the role of higher education in the production of the imagined European knowledge-based economy. I examine a range of ‘official’ policy texts identified as the main education and

policy initiatives (EC, 2007), as well as the Mid-Term Review of Lisbon by Kok (2004), the new Lisbon strategy (EC, 2005), EU President Barosso's speeches in the period that followed, official policies on Erasmus Mundus, and more recently the report by Pavel Zgaga to the Bologna Follow-up Group on the external dimension of Bologna. Though different genres (e.g. political speech, staff working papers, communiqué), all of these texts belong to a particular order of discourse—official policy texts (Fairclough, 2003: 24).

### **Crisis, the 'New' Lisbon Strategy and the Knowledge Economy**

At the Lisbon European Council in March 2000, the heads of State and government promised to make the EU, by 2010, “the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustained economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion, and respect for the environment” (Lisbon Council, 2000). This imagined economy, “where young people move across Europe for further education and prepare for new jobs and new activity areas”, and “companies increase their competitiveness by designing and producing knowledge intensive goods and services, more able to answer the customised needs in Europe and global markets” (Rodrigues, 2003: xv), shaped by a vision and ambition for the long term strategic development of Europe. Central to shaping this imaginary for a European knowledge-based economy was the poor economic position of Europe in relation to the United States around research and innovation capacity and how that gap might be closed.

The Lisbon Summit in 2000 and the strategy which was articulated there, was intended to “find a European way to evolve to the new innovation-and knowledge-based economy using distinctive attributes ranging from the preservation of social cohesion and cultural diversity to the very technological options” (Rodrigues, 2003: 14). Rodrigues' account of the Lisbon process is particularly important for she was not only Professor at the University Institute, Lisbon and President of the Social Sciences Advisory group to the European Commission but special adviser to the Portuguese Prime Minister, Antonio Guterres, in charge of preparing the Lisbon Summit.

The main strategic orientations of Lisbon 2000 were to combine supply side economics with macro-economic and social concerns; to develop information technologies, R&D policy for institutions, enterprise policy, economic reforms that targeted job creation, macro-economic policies that focused on employment and structural change along with education and training, a renewed social model, new priorities for school-based education, active employment policies focused on lifelong learning, new social protection politics, national plans to reduce social exclusion, and improved social dialogue between European civil society, the economy and structures of government (Lisbon, 2000). The European Council, however, faced a major challenge; of how to get the support of national governments. This is because Member States want to keep control over their own agendas, and because national policy preferences, when taken together from across Europe, are much more heterogeneous. Delegating more power to the EU in order to undertake the tasks outlined above—particularly in those areas, like education where the principle of subsidiarity invokes sensitivities around boundaries, is a highly political issue.

The Open Method of Coordination (OMC)<sup>4</sup> was invented to overcome this problem. The OMC is an open intergovernmental process of policy coordination to enhance integration, where open means soft governance (Zeitlen and Pochet, 2005). Governments are urged to commit themselves to common policy objectives while implementation is left to them. To ensure the direction of implementation, a series of structural indicators or benchmarks were developed which enabled Member States to see their progress in relation to each other (benchmarking) backed up by peer learning, peer review and the exchange of good practice. Walters and Haahr (2005: 116; 120) argue that not only did benchmarking open new ways of historicizing and particularizing European integration, but that the OMC deployed a range of technologies to foster agency within and across the governmental apparatus of local, national and European institutions.

The strategies that informed Lisbon drew self-consciously on the expertise of European researchers, including evolutionary economist, Bengte-Ake Lundvall, regulation theorists Aglietta and Boyer, Gosta Esping Anderson's work on comparative systems of welfare, and Manuel Castells' concern with informationalism. Taken together their work was regarded by the Lisbon architects to "...provide interesting tools with which to think about the role of structural policies and of institutional reforms in fostering growth and employment" (Rodrigues, 2002: 13). Rodrigue's (2002: 10-13) account of the theoretical paradigm used to shape the Lisbon agenda is particularly interesting. She argues that there was a rejection of simple economic modelling and methodological individualism in favour of a more complex conceptual framework. This ideational moment represents an explicit rejection of a model of economic development based on homo-economicus. It also draws heavily on ideas of learning and the importance of the socially-embedded nature of economies. In wider political terms, this ideational agenda reflected the dominance, still, of centre-left governments in Europe (Collignon, 2006: 5), though this hold was increasingly tenuous and under pressure from social and political forces committed to neo-liberalism and neo-mercantilism (Apeldoorn, 2001: 78).

By 2005, the 2000 Lisbon strategy was presented as in crisis. The Mid-Term Review (European Commission, 2005b), informed by the work of the High Level Group chaired by Wim Kok (2004), concluded that the Lisbon strategy had failed to deliver a satisfactory economic growth performance and that Europe was falling far behind both the USA and Asia. The spectre of China and India, as threat and opportunity (Kok, 2004: 12), now added a new level of threat to the external challenges. For Europe to compete, it needed to "...develop its own area of specialisms, excellence and comparative advantage which inevitably must lie in a commitment to the knowledge economy in its widest sense... Europe has no option but to radically improve its knowledge economy and underlying economic performance if it is to respond to the challenges of Asia and the US" (Kok, 2004: 12). Europe was thus a long way from achieving the potential for change that the Lisbon 2000 strategy promised to deliver. The problems were seen to lie not only in difficult economic conditions which had faced the US and Europe with the dot.com collapse, but in "a policy agenda which had become overloaded, failing coordination and sometimes conflicting priorities" within Member States and across the region (European Commission, 2005: 4).

The EC's 'new Lisbon' Communication argues that a new start is required with investment, innovation and jobs at the centre (EC, 2005a: 4), while macroeconomic

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<sup>4</sup> Collignon (2006: 11) notes that it came about largely by accident when several Member States, including Germany, resisted having their hands tied.

management and social cohesion—reflections of the dominance of centre-left governments in Europe at the time when the Lisbon agenda was negotiated (Collignon, 2006: 5)—are represented in entirely economic rather than social terms (as a socially inclusive economy – see EC, 2005: 26). This new ideational moment combined a Schumpeterian focused on innovation and entrepreneurship, human capital theory, supply-side economics and freer conditions of trade. The *Presidency Conclusions* of the European Council acknowledged the mixed results of Lisbon, and called for urgent action in the re-launch of the Commission’s proposed ‘new’ Lisbon Strategy (European Council, 2005: 3).

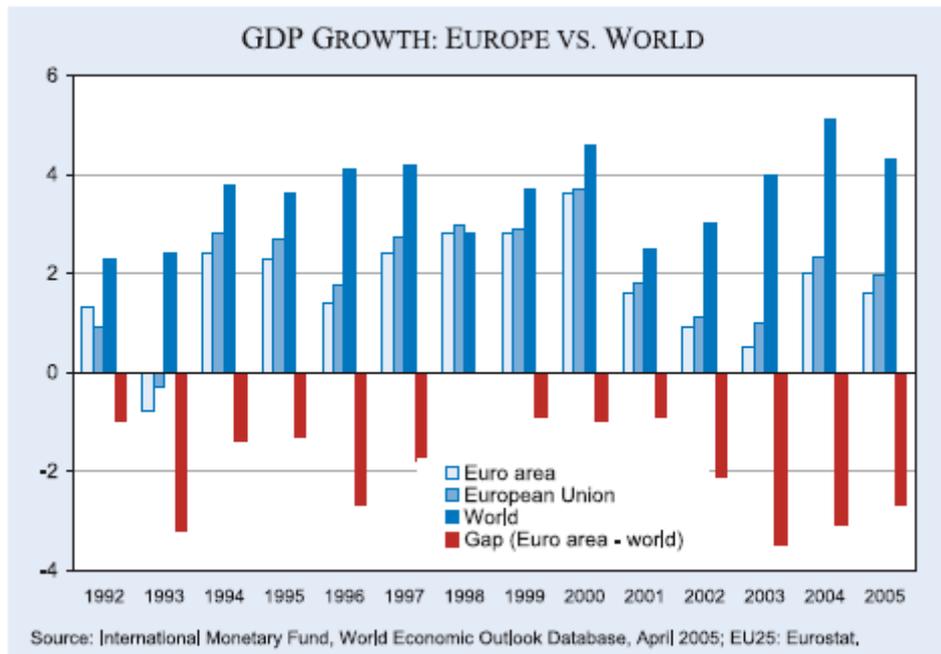


Table 1: GDP Growth: Europe vs. World

The ‘new Lisbon’ strategy reflects an important shift in the nature of the hegemonic project. The strategy embraces a new imaginary as to how a European knowledge economy can be secured. While continuing many of the themes that were outlined in a final Communication by the EC tabled in 2003 *The Role of the Universities in the Europe of Knowledge (TRUEK)*, ideas like ‘innovation’, ‘knowledge’ and ‘education’, while present in the Lisbon 2000 and the *TRUEK* discourse, are now moved to centre stage and given new meanings. For instance, with innovation, particular areas (digital technologies, biotechnology and the environment), are viewed as key to “...making a reality of our vision of a knowledge society” (EC, 2005a: 8). Innovation in contrast to the Lisbon 2000 agenda (of economies as socially embedded) is now shaped by Schumpeterian economics and draws on theories of human capital. ‘Knowledge’ is reduced to research and development to produce value in the marketplace. The following two statements from the Communication illustrate these discursive moves.

In advanced economies such as the EU, knowledge, meaning R&D, innovation and education, is a key driver of productivity growth. Knowledge is a critical factor with the Europe can ensure competitiveness in a global world where others compete with cheap labour or primary resources (EC, 2005a: 21).

The strong emphasis on knowledge, education and innovation in our renewed Lisbon strategy will give people the opportunity to climb the productivity ladder and guarantee that overall our productivity grows quickly” (ibid: 13); while ‘education’ will endow learners with “...the human capital and skills needed in a dynamic knowledge-based economy” (EC, 2005a: 27).

The Communication continues to be preoccupied with the level of expenditure in R&D in Europe, especially in comparison with the United States. Not only does the EC Communication argue that levels of expenditure should be increased, but more researchers need to be trained.

The EU is currently spending only 2% of GDP, barely up from the level at the time of Lisbon’s launch. We must achieve faster progress towards the EU target of 3% of GDP for **R&D expenditure**. This requires increased and more effective public expenditure, more favourable framework conditions and powerful incentives for companies to engage in innovation and R&D, as well as more numerous well trained and motivated researchers (EC, 2005a: 21).

There is also an important discursive shift in how the global is represented. In the 2000 Lisbon strategy, the global is invoked as a status, as in ‘globally’-competitive knowledge economy. In the new Lisbon strategy, the global is a ‘dimension’ composed of ‘third markets’ that should be opened to freer trade (ibid: 19) while knowledge producers and knowledge production are activities in this global marketplace.

One week after the March 2005 meeting of European Council, Jose Manuel Barroso delivered a speech to the European Universities Association Convention in Glasgow. Entitled *Strong Universities for Europe* (2005b), Barosso argued that the state of education in Europe was nothing short of “miserable” (p.25), and that “something is rotten in the state of Europe’s research and education” (p. 7):

...we can already see that universities in Europe attract fewer students and in particular fewer researchers from other countries than their US counterparts. In 2000, Europe attracted some 450,000 students from other countries, while the US attracted nearly 555,000, mostly from Asia. More worrying still is that the EU continues to attract far fewer graduates than the US in core subjects for innovation like engineering, informatics and maths. And three quarters of EU-born students studying for their PhD in the US say they prefer to stay there after graduating. As regards researchers, there are also grounds for serious concern. Without an increase in the number of researchers, Europe will not only be able to secure and expand its role in science, technology and innovation. We need 700,000 additional researchers, partly to replace our rapidly aging research workforce and partly to ensure we can fully exploit the commitment made by Member States to boost public and private spending on research. And, while the number of researchers is rising, today’s level of around 6 for every 1000 members of the workforce still lags behind Japan for example, with 9 researchers per 1000. So, clearly, to paraphrase a certain Danish university student made

famous by Shakespeare; something is rotten in the state of Europe's research and education (Barosso, 2005b: 5-7).

While universities continued to be viewed as key institutions in the new Lisbon strategy, the European Commission (2005a) now saw their role in the production of a European knowledge economy was primarily focused on their relationship to industry (hence the concern with knowledge transfer) as sites for the generation of innovation, on how universities might become more globally competitive, and how university's structures of governance and financing should be 'modernised' to enable Europe to compete in the global market for minds and markets. In bold font, the European Commission's Communication states:

**Universities' contribution to the creation and dissemination of knowledge through the Union must be reinforced.** The Commission will come forward with ideas on how to increase the potential and quality in research science in order to be more attractive and build better links with industry. The Commission will also propose guidelines to improve their research collaboration and technology transfer with industry. It will address the question of how to enable European universities to compete internationally. In many ways, the existing approaches to financing, governance and quality are proving inadequate to meet the challenge of what has become a global market for academics, students and knowledge itself (EC, 2005a: 23).

In the communications on universities and the knowledge economy that follow the Lisbon crisis, however, not only is there a new tone of urgency, but there is no discursive space for 'questions for debate' as there is in the EC *The Role of the Universities in the Europe of Knowledge* (2003) Communication (see pages 13, 16, 18, for example).

In April 2005, the European Commission issued a Communication *Mobilising the Brainpower of Europe: Enabling Universities to Make Their Full Contribution to the Lisbon Strategy (MBE)* (EC, 2005b). The Commission again points to structural problems in the universities that now necessitate change urgently. For instance, in the opening paragraph, the communication states "universities, motors of the new, knowledge-based paradigm, are not in a position to deliver their full potential contribution to the re-launched Lisbon strategy" (EC, 2005c). Education, research and innovation all feature as the key ideas, again underpinned by a cocktail of neo-liberal theories; human capital, free market and Schumpeterian economics. A number of challenges are identified. First, under the heading 'human capital and innovation gaps', it is pointed out that only 21% of the EU working age population has achieved tertiary education whilst in the US it is 38%, in Japan it is 36% and in South Korea it is 26%. Second, human capital gaps are seen as arising from a commitment to education as a public good and the lack of private investment, and that "tertiary enrolments have been stronger and grown faster in other parts of the world –mainly thanks to much higher private funding" (p. 3). Third, while the EU educates more science and technology graduates and produces more PhD students overall, it "employs only 5.5 researchers per 1,000 employees, which is marginally less than Canada and South Korea, but much less than the US (9.0) and Japan

(9.7)". Added to this, the Communication notes that "there are no European union universities in the top 20 in the world, and relatively few in the top 50".<sup>5</sup>

A number of key bottlenecks are identified in *MBE* as the cause of the problem of universities inability to launch the Lisbon 2005 strategy: uniformity, insularity, over-regulation and under-funding (p. 3-4). Uniformity is viewed as the result of egalitarian policies and practices (and thus good), but bad in the sense that these programmes tend to target the same group of best-qualified academic learners. However, the sentence is followed by a claim that tends to contradict this statement; that the consequence is to produce fewer centres of world class excellence. Discursively, then we begin to see that what the Commission has in mind are institutions and programmes that focus on the production of a new intellectual elite. If the Lisbon 2005 strategy were to be realised, this intellectual elite, would be anchored in disciplines like science and technology rather than in the arts and humanities and drive the economising of the academy.

Insularity is presented as arising from the locally embedded nature of higher education institutions. *MBE* notes that languages, histories and different regulations, produce a fragmented and thus 'unreadable' university sector (EC, 2005b: 4) which it is suggested makes it difficult for Europe to present itself as a coherent entity and thus destination for overseas students. *MBE* points out other ways in which higher education institutions are viewed as insular; graduates have limited knowledge of industry and as a consequence they "lack the kind of entrepreneurship and skills sought on the labour market" (p. 4). As a result "Most universities are strongly dependent on the state and ill prepared for worldwide competition over talent, prestige and resources" (p. 4). Over-regulation—by which *MBE* means legislatively (democratically?) driven change is seen as "hindering modernisation and efficiency...impeding lifelong learning and mobility" (p. 4). Finally, under-funding of universities is presented as producing "investment deficits in the knowledge sector" (p. 4). The communication compares the EU (1.9% GDP) with the US, Japan and South Korea (all with around 3% of GDP) arguing that the effect is to produce a poorly funded higher education sector that is not only unattractive but is inefficient. In a discussion paper prepared for the UK Presidency of the European Parliament, Luc Soete (2005: 9) argues that higher education institutions need to open themselves to private funding if they are to 'activate knowledge' and that there needs to be concentration of research funding in a small number of world class higher education institutions.

A "core modernisation agenda" for higher education across Europe is proposed by the EC Communication (2005): "attractiveness, governance and funding" (p. 5). These all cut at the heart of 'the idea of a University' as a high modernist structure. Developing "attractiveness" means becoming a new kind of entity; it means embracing strategies (e.g. curricula, access, engage in the Bologna Process) to recruit local and global talent, changing "governance" structures will deliver new structures of accountability, while "funding" means asking students (fees) and industry (private investment in research) to contribute more to the enterprise. In essence, the ECs *Mobilising the Brainpower of Europe* (2005b) seeks to give birth to a new kind of university and subjectivity—the entrepreneurial university and new innovator or ideas for the economy (Marginson and Considine, 2000).

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<sup>5</sup> This is drawn from the Shanghai Jiao Tong Index of top global universities. It is interesting to note that Oxford and Cambridge, both universities in the UK and in the top 20 of the Shanghai Index, do not seem to count here as European.

EC policies, however, are mediated, not only by the *real* politics of Member State agendas and existing higher education institutions, but the politics of negotiating the European Council and European Parliament. This is all too evident in the Communication from the Commission to the Council and European Parliament *Delivering the Modernisation Agenda for Universities: Education, Research and Innovation (DMAU)* (2006). Despite the close imitation of the US model implied in communications like *MBE* and Barosso's speech, in the opening paragraph of *DMAE* the Council and Parliament are reassured by the Commission that "these changes are necessary to regenerate Europe's own approach, not to replicate any imported model" and that changes are "equally necessary to **reinforce the societal roles** of universities in a culturally and linguistically diverse Europe" (EC, 2006: 2, bold in original). Nevertheless, much of the content of the earlier communications are repeated, with the EC pointing out (in bold) "**Continuing globalisation means that the European Higher Education Area and the European Research Area must be fully open to the world and become worldwide competitive players**" (EC, 2006: 9-10).

### **Global 'Minds and Markets': Strategies to Build a European Knowledge Economy**

Until 2005 much of the European initiative around higher education had been largely internally focused and committed to a regionalising project (Robertson, 2006a). Europe's<sup>6</sup> strategic 'higher education' relations with the global were mediated through structures like the Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM) (see Robertson, 2006b), bi-lateral negotiations such as the Trans-Atlantic Dialogues (with the USA) and via the activities of particular Member States. Though economically anchored, in the main these initiatives tended toward a softer cultural approach, such as the diffusion of European values, the insertion of Europe into the Asian imaginary, or the cultural embroidering of economically-oriented approaches as we see below with the EC funded Erasmus Mundus Programme.

However, Lisbon 2005, the new political project, was now the new strategic selectivity in what knowledge counted in the higher education sector. A massive injection of new and renewed policies and programmes were levered into place in order to produce an ideational, representational, institutional and relational shift in the modern European university.

In this final section I briefly elaborate on three 'globally-oriented' strategies being promoted for the European higher education area to build a knowledge economy; to attract the best brains from around the world; to make European universities an attractive destination for students; and third, the globalisation of processes like Bologna and Tuning in order to recruit new brains and build new markets. Taken together, these 'brains' are intended to be the innovators, entrepreneurs and value creators for the European economy.

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<sup>6</sup> I am referring to Europe as *sui generis* and distinct from Member States externally managed education relations.

## Talent – Attracting the Best Brains (Back)

Given the challenge to develop the pool of brains available in Europe, a number of global initiatives were promoted and re-branded. One key policy and programme instrument is the Erasmus Mundus (EMP) programme launched in 2004 with a Euro230 million budget. Erasmus Mundus funds Masters' programmes across European Union universities and includes third world countries. We can see the shift in the legitimating discourse when we compare European Commissioner Viviane Reding's speech in 2004 with that of her successor Commissioner Ján Figel in 2006. Reding states:

[Erasmus Mundus] will have scholarships for the best students and scholars from other continents to take part, letting them benefit from the varying academic and research strengths of universities in different European countries with different European cultures, alongside their European counterparts (Reding, 2004: 1).

Erasmus Mundus is presented as a benign opportunity for students and academics to participate in university life that is rich with opportunities for sharing, learning and exchanges amongst equivalents. Despite its links to the Lisbon 2000 strategy and the pressure to produce Europe as a globally competitive economy, the discourse intends to legitimate itself by drawing on cultural rather than economic values. Two years on, Ján Figel evidently felt more confident to pronounce on the economic value and outcomes of the programme.

Europe's universities are now attracting more of the world's best graduate students and teachers, thanks to the Erasmus Mundus scheme. With Erasmus Mundus, Europe's universities are encouraged to get together to attract leading talent from around the globe, with obvious benefits to their level of excellence. Ultimately, when Europe's universities benefit, the EU economy benefits too, as does our dialogue with other cultures (Figel, 2006).

In the post Lisbon 2005 era, the Erasmus Mundus Programme has been significantly expanded. In a press release in June, 2006 (EC, 2006a) the European Commission stated "...the programme had proved so popular that it had to be expanded".<sup>7</sup> Moreover, demand is represented in the press release as coming from specific Asian countries, such as India and China, so that additional funds have had to be injected into an "Asian Windows" programme. India also features large in the overall numbers reported in 2006 (EC, 2006a). Of the 1377 students awarded scholarships, 319 were selected from India and 170 from China; this was followed by Thailand (53), Malaysia (51) and Brazil (43). Only 36 students came from Russia while 28 came from the United States of America. Higher education institutions have also been drawn into EUs Asia regional strategy aimed at recruiting Asian 'minds' and competing in the Asia Pacific region for student in the international market for overseas students (see Robertson, 2006a).

A second prong of the globally-located talent strategy is to attract leading researchers back to Europe. For this purpose, Marie Curie (MC) policy and programme instruments

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<sup>7</sup> In the 2006-2007 academic year 1,377 students and 231 university teachers were selected, up from 140 students and 42 academics in 2004-5. The intention is to recruit up to 250 Master's programmes and around 5,000 scholarships.

have been refined. In the 2007-13 Framework 7 programme of funding, the international dimension has been strengthened, with funds targeted at the 'return and reintegration' of leading researchers (many of them based in the USA). Alternatively, students who have been studying in Europe for at least 4 out of the prior 5 years are eligible to apply for fellowship funds from MC to continue research in European universities. These kinds of initiatives are intended to keep 'talent' in Europe so that they can continue to contribute to research and development in Europe.

## **Destination Europe**

As outlined earlier, the modernising agenda for Europe's higher education area means making it more 'attractive' to students as a destination for study, as a means of injecting finance into the higher education sector through overseas student fees, and hopefully retaining these students once they have completed their studies. While several of the EU member states are very active in the higher education global marketplace (UK, France, Germany), other European countries are seen to be dragging their feet.

An EC commissioned report on the perceptions of European Higher Education in Third Countries (ACA, 2006)<sup>8</sup> was submitted to the Commission. The purpose of the research was to develop recommendations for a European brand to be marketed at third countries by "identifying the expectations of foreign students, the strengths and weaknesses they perceive in European higher education, as well as by finding out about Europe's relative standing in comparison with its competitors" (p. 7). The ACA Report argued that the EU would have to determine a brand for itself if it was going to be able to compete with the USA and Australia as the preferred destination for students (p. 9).

Overall, Europe is not perceived as a union as regards higher education. There is a perception of 'Europe' as an entity in general terms and as an economic union. However, when it comes to cultural aspects and higher education, most students saw Europe as a range of very different countries (ACA, 2006: 10).

Regardless of the student's chosen destination in the survey (e.g. Australia or the USA, as opposed to Europe), "all students ranked the US first for issues linked to innovation, competition and dynamism (most dynamic universities and most competitive society) and Europe for the most traditional universities. The results reveal a clear regional pattern. Europe has a better standing in Russia and Latin America, while the US and Australia are at the top in the Asian target countries.

The ACA report noted that respondents in general saw that the most substantial discrepancies were cost-related issues (both tuition and living costs) and student support" (ACA, 2006: 11). Discrepancies in tuition fees across Europe are viewed as a serious problem by those hoping to generate a competitive higher education market at the level of Europe. In a EUA survey in 2005, 7 of the EU 27 countries charged fees to all students, 7 charged fees to some students, and 13 did not charge fees at all, including 'foreign' students. Implementing a regime of student fees, even for international

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<sup>8</sup> Six countries were targeted: China, India, Mexico, Brazil, Russia and Thailand. 11,471 students filled in paper questionnaires, while 9,000 students completed an on-line questionnaire.

students, is regarded as a very controversial move in a number of EU Member States (see Huisman and van de Wende, 2004: 354). Proposals to the Finnish Parliament to charge international students tuition fees were overturned in 2006, suggesting that it is going to be particularly difficult to transform the fee structures for higher education, particularly in the Scandinavian countries.

### **Globalising European Higher Education - Structures and Tools for Translation**

The Bologna Process and associated projects like Tuning (Gonzalez and Wagenaar, 2005) are now also being globalised in order to help contribute to the European knowledge economy project.

The Bologna Process (launched in 1999) is aimed at creating a European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Within the EHEA, staff and student mobility is to be enhanced by the alignment of national quality assurance agencies, uniform degree structures, the adoption of a credit transfer system and a common way of describing the qualification (diploma supplement). The scale of the Bologna Process initiative can be appreciated in the following facts: that it involves around 5,600 public and private institutions hosting 16 million students and is growing. The EHEA is conceptualised as a vast reservoir of talent for the economy and a vehicle through which a coherent 'European' sensibility could be built. By constructing the EHEA it is also possible to make it intelligible as a single system (rather than the sum of many) and thus a destination and market for international student.

In an EC Communication in 2006, the Commission argued that "Ministers see the European Higher Education Area as a partner of higher education systems in other regions of the world..." and noted that... "The role and visibility of higher education in EU external relations is increasingly toward neighbouring countries (European Neighbourhood Policy), in relation to industrialised nations (OECD/G8) and with developing countries (Alban, Asia Link etc" p. 7).

TEMPUS, an EC funded programme for higher education cooperation with Europe's neighbours, has also strengthened the global in its 2007-2013 programme of work. TEMPUS's mandate is to help 'modernise' higher education in Eastern Europe, Central Asia, the Western Balkans and the Mediterranean region. TEMPUS programmes are more recently tasked with supporting these universities "...to make the necessary curricular changes that are emerging from the Bologna process" (Europa, 2007).

Similarly, the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) has been given the mandate to elaborate and agree on a strategy for the 'external dimension' in order to strengthen the attractiveness of the EHEA. (BFUG Work Programme, 2005-2007). This strategy, to be with other regions rather than countries (BFUG, 2005), is to be tabled at the London 2007 Ministerial meeting (see Zgaga 2007). The task is to create the conditions for international mobility (mode 4 of the GATS agreement), recognition structures, cooperation and attractiveness (see, for example, Nordic Bologna Process Official Seminar to be held in September, 2006). Written by Pavel Zgaga, a key figure in the Bologna Process, *Looking Out: The Bologna Process in a Global Setting* represents the first full engagement with the strategic globalisation of European higher education.

The Tuning project, started in 2000 and running parallel to Bologna, is a methodology or ‘tool’ developed to translate teaching inputs into learning outcomes across Europe. Tuning thus provides the means for curriculum translation in a range of discipline areas expressed in terms of student outcomes. However Tuning has become increasingly global in its ambitions and actions. In 2003, the Tuning Group—supported by the European Commission—launched its Latin American venture Tuning America Latina, funded under the ALPHA programme. This is an ambitious initiative. In the new-Lisbon period, this initiative has been given a high level of prominence and expanded rapidly. Tuning now involves 18 countries (including Argentina, Bolivia, Cuba, Mexico and Venezuela) and 180 universities. The subject areas that are being dealt with include Education, History, Medicine, Geology, Physics and Mathematics. The venture involves surveying students, employers and universities views on learning outcomes and competencies in the specified subject area, and then assembling these competencies so as to develop a tool of translation within the Latin American region, and in relation to the EU (Wagenaar, 2006). As Figure 1 (drawn from one of the presentations given by Wagenaar, 2006) shows, the scope of ambition is not confined to Latin America. Russia, Asia and Africa are all on the radar for Tuning.

Taken together, these varied initiatives around the perimeter of a now sprawling Europe, into Asia and Latin America, directed at transforming countries higher education systems to bring them into line with the European Higher Education Area, are a direct threat to the United States of America and Australia. Both are major exporters of higher education services. The United States higher education institutions, and their research and development institutes, are also highly dependent on recruiting graduate/post graduate international students, especially from China and India. By synchronising the structure and content of undergraduate studies in these global spaces, the EU is hoping to compete more effectively with the USA for the brains that would power the European knowledge-based economy.

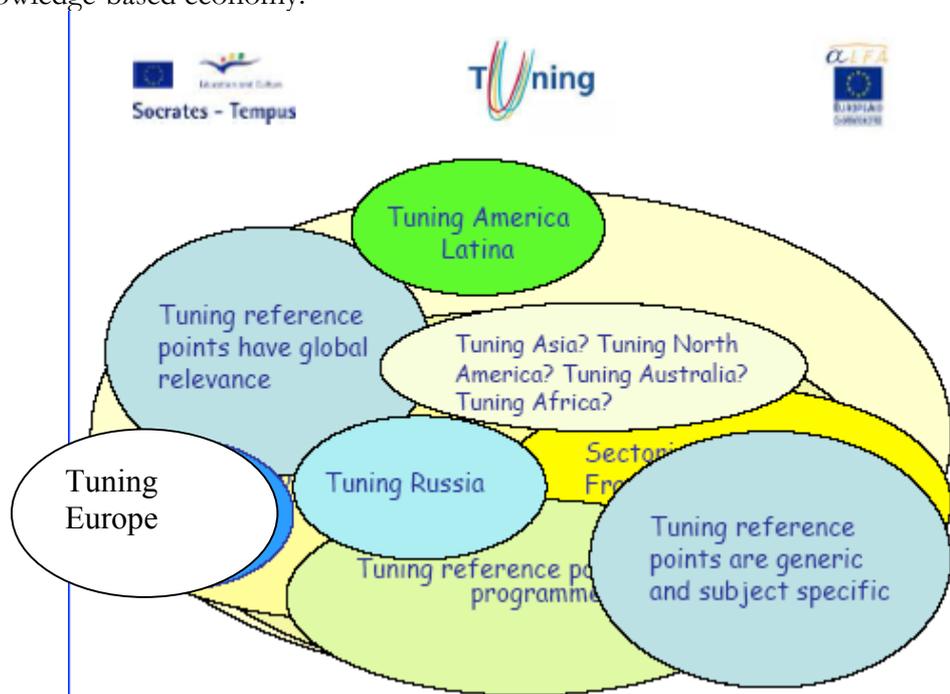


Figure 1: Tuning Latino Americano – And Beyond

## Mind the Gap: Capacity, Capability and Legitimacy

This chapter has examined the European Commission's project of re-imagining the European knowledge economy—the 'new' Lisbon 2005 strategy—following the crisis of the Lisbon 2000. I have argued that the post Lisbon 2005 strategies signal an important ideational and representational shift in the discursive moment of this political project; a shift that now privileges a neo-liberal set of ideas in shaping Europe's knowledge-based economy. In the education sector this has resulted in strategies directed at embracing the global both as a potential market for the European Higher Education Area and as a source of human capital.

There are, however, considerable gaps - of *capacity*, *capability* and *legitimacy* - between this new re-imagined European knowledge economy and the real multifaceted and multi-scalar economy of Europe. By capacity I mean the limited and flexible nature of financial and human resources that can be directed toward the realisation of the EU's expanding agenda. By capability I mean the inability of the European-level actors, like the European Commission and the Council of Europe, to use technologies of power to direct and embed action. This arises largely as a result of the limited range of formal instruments the EU has at its disposal to govern Member States. By legitimacy I am referring to the perceived right to rule. This arises in the education sector because principle of subsidiarity places political limits on the EU's governing of Member States in this sphere. Gaps arise because questions of capacity, capability and legitimacy place limits on the power of the EC to mobilise, strategise, materialise and embed the discursive into the institutional fabric of education in Member States. As I have shown, in the Mid-Term Review Kok blamed the Lisbon 2000 crisis on an overloaded agenda, poor coordination and conflicting priorities—or capacity, capability and legitimacy.

As I have argued, discourses are always contingent and partial, and it is not possible to get self-reproducing closure (see Jessop, 2004). There will always, therefore, be a gap between the semiotic order and the material. However, perceived failure to secure sufficient closure, while it can be used to make political points and to enable new political projects to gain ground, can also have undesirable political effects. A good example here is the EC's use of indicators and benchmarks to both constitute and govern the European knowledge economy. In the education sector indicators and benchmarks were established to promote greater levels of investment in education as well as new learning and practices. However, if Member States choose to ignore these indicators and benchmarks, then the strategy effectively fails and the gap remains. Failing to close the gap in key areas, such as the levels of investment in higher education or increased enrolments in tertiary qualifications, creates a new crisis, as we saw with the Mid-Term Review. While a crisis discourse was mobilised strategically by social forces within the EU committed to a neo-liberal agenda for the reform of the universities, the EC has not been able to acquire sufficient new resources or a new set of mechanisms to govern that might overcome the problem of capacity or capability. Kok's (2004) proposal to name and shame recalcitrant states in order to ensure greater compliance were not taken up by the European Commission—largely for tactical and legitimacy purposes. It might be argued then that failure to alter capacity and capability will in turn produce a further crisis of legitimacy.

Nor has the Open Method of Coordination, a governance tool developed to manage the politics of subsidiarity and different levels of development across the European space, been particularly effective (Kok, 2004). While a 'better regulation' agenda has

been made a priority by the EC, Radaelli (2007: 191) argues that “discourse tends to produce task expansion” and the “proliferation of objectives”. This is likely to make governance worse rather than better. Radaelli also notes that current evidence suggests that tools to achieve ‘better regulation’, such as the ‘Regulatory Impact Assessment’, are being unevenly diffused across Europe. The outcome of this is that other tools are gaining in popularity.

The Open Method of Coordination is also premised on arguments that if all of Europe pulled together by deepening and widening integration, this will lift every European boat. However, as Collignon (2006: 7) points out, cooperation among Member States to ensure the realisation of particular goals—in this case in the higher education sector—is dependent on the costs and benefits being matched for every particular actor. Not all Member States share the European Commission’s view as to what a European Higher Education Area should look like – particularly as the Lisbon 2005 model being pursued is perceived to be American. Capability is also undermined by the ECs trade liberalisation policies. Paradoxically this has opened up the space for Member States (like France and Germany), to pursue national interests as a means of protection against the global (McGuire, 2006). This undermines the production of a European space and identity.

Capability and legitimacy gaps are also the result of the perceived mission and mandate of higher education. Though they may vary in the strength of their claims, universities across Europe’s Member States mobilise the discourse of autonomy in order to limit both government and private sector intervention. Drawing universities more directly into the economy, as proposed by the Lisbon 2005 strategy where a very limited ‘knowledge’ mandate (innovation in science and technology) is privileged, means forgoing a wider knowledge agenda that has characterised the modern university. Not all universities, or indeed Member States (cf. Italy, Greece) are eager to embrace these proposals—particularly those that open higher education to the global market. Nor, as I have shown, do all universities unreservedly support programmes like Erasmus Mundus (ESIB, 2007), which is seen as contributing to brain drain in low-income countries. For this reason Erasmus Mundus will continue to pose questions about the legitimacy of the EU’s globally-oriented knowledge—based economy.

Embracing the global, not just rhetorically but materially and institutionally, as we see with the expansion of the Bologna Process and Tuning Project into the neighbourhood spaces surrounding Europe, Asia and Latin America, is thus particularly risky. While attempting to meet the US head-on in its battle for minds and markets, it nonetheless tarnishes Europe’s image of ‘social Europe’ (which it that it has been able to promote in the international community as opposite to US mercantilism). Going global by embracing the market, has created more than a stir in the US and Australia where these countries have the lion’s share of the higher education export industry (see Robertson and Keeling, forthcoming). Both countries are reviewing their own internal strategies in an effort to reposition themselves in the market. In the face of heightened competition, the EU may well face greater governing problems for the European Commission if it is (i) unable to get traction in that market in Europe (capability gap) because (ii) the ‘globalising’ project is seen as alien to the idea of a ‘European’ university and European civility (legitimacy gap). Given these gaps, one conclusion we might draw is that Lisbon 2005 strategy may well face the same crises as the Lisbon 2000 strategy. This, in turn, would undermine Europe’s imagined knowledge-based economy.

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