

V. Goals, drivers and rationales of youth policies with regard to ESL

By identifying and comparing the 'drivers' and the 'rationales' underpinning the policy-making and implementation of policies, we aim to shed some light onto the education field under consideration.

Policy 'drivers' in policy making act as legitimating instances of both discourses and political practices, i.e., they put forward broader goals to be addressed (Knight 2004; Edler et al 2009) than those addressed by specific policy and measures. Examples are 'meeting labour market needs', 'quality enhancement and assurance', 'promoting qualification of the human resources', and providing 'full education for all'. These drivers are to justify and bring legitimacy to the pursuit of specific policy objectives.

Analytically, the aim is to distinguish between drivers and rationales. Rationales are the assumptions that promote the values legitimating the policy-making and the implementation process developed by particular political instruments. Rationales are the ultimate instances making sense of political choices in education: 'social justice', 'economic competitiveness', 'enhancement and consolidation of citizenry'.

This draws on the classical distinction between politics and policies. Rationales refer to the set of values that endorse political choices. Policy and its goals are to be understood by linking rationales, policy drivers and policy goals.

For analytical purposes, drivers were classified as '**political**'. (e.g. emphasis on the European or national agendas), '**economic**' (e.g. emphasis on the development of the economy and on the links to the labour market), '**educational**' (e.g. development of the individual and cultural dimensions, acquisition of educational skills) and '**social**' (e.g. equality, equity, equal opportunities, social inclusion, social cohesion, well-being, personal autonomy).

The aim was to identify the dominant drivers as expressed by main decision-makers and recent political-legal documents, and to make visible the similarities and differences between countries. While recognising that these drivers appear in the national contexts with different weights and combinations, we aimed at grasping and identifying those that hegemonically inform and shape policy-making and implementation.

Rationales (that are not always explicit) of the way in which dominant drivers consign and refer to a set of values and worldviews emerged from the interpretation. Actors' talks and texts can be classified as political, economic, educational and social, as well.

In Table 1, dominant drivers and rationales of policy-makers and official texts are identified within the period 2010-2013. Table 2 identifies drivers and rationales as expressed by different education stakeholders, i.e. associations, local authorities and leaders of on-going projects in the same period. From both tables it is possible to gain a perspective on

- the drivers underpinning ESL-related policy-making and policy implementation
- the perceptions of various stakeholders about European policies
- the perspectives and tensions among stakeholders about drivers and rationales on ESL

Country	Goals/Drivers	Rationales
Belgium	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> youth employment and labour market insertion; being competitive in the current knowledge economy reducing social stratification and enhancing social mobility opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> economic competitiveness social justice
United Kingdom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reducing youth unemployment/NEET figures by raising attainment and improving young people's labour market opportunities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> assumption of direct link between educational outcomes and labour market opportunities free market principles in education as a mechanism for raising attainment
Sweden	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> increasing competences to adjust to the labour market by means of vocational tracks and skills directed at children and youth with social problems, disabilities and migrants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> adjustment to the labour market reduction of social inequalities and social exclusion
Portugal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> lowering the age of vocational training in education for the school "less able" populations reducing costs in education 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reinforcement of the link between education and the labour market within a neo-meritocratic conservative view
Netherlands	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reducing social exclusion, youth unemployment and invest in knowledge economy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> increase quality of education, reinforcement of the link between education and the labour market
Poland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> equal access to universal, uniform and free education ESL as not a priority of educational policy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ESL as a problem of specific groups reinforcement of the link between education and the labour market within a neo-meritocratic conservative view reduction of social exclusion and inequalities
Spain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> improving graduation rates at the end of compulsory education reducing youth unemployment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ESL not seen as the main problem of youth education major concern about NEET youth
Hungary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> improving graduation rates at the end of compulsory education reducing youth unemployment 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ESL as a problem of specific groups
Austria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> improving education/training conditions and increasing qualification levels of disadvantaged children/youth youth employment and labour market insertion 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> fight social exclusion, poverty and inequality of educational opportunities reduction of follow-up costs (economic and social) due to inadequate education

Table 7 - Dominant goals/drivers underlying policy-making on ESL by policy makers on the national level (2010-2013)

Firstly, this table only refers to goals/drivers and rationales outlined between 2010 and 2013 in the context of the 'European crisis', as mentioned above. Hence, in general, they were identified as being of 'economic' nature. We do not deny that pervasive economic drivers and rationales have been informing education policies before the recent crisis. However, the financial and economic crisis brought with it an overemphasis on the economy, enhancing its influence on social and educational policy making.

Secondly, the majority of the selected countries appear to concentrate their 'drivers' in seeing school education (and education at large) as an instrument for the labour market. The following drivers appear to mark the political agendas: marketisation of the education and training system (UK); the increase of competences to adjust to the labour market by means of vocational tracks and skills (SW); the lowering of the age of vocational training in education for the school "less able" population (PT); the increase of employability of youth (SP); education based on competences for labour (HU).

In UK, the last three decades have been marked by constant ideology-driven policy interventions promoting the marketisation of the education system, managerialism, increasing school autonomy, and a discourse of individual aspirations, choice and responsibility. While the New Labour government introduced a number of reforms explicitly aimed at combating social exclusion and social inequalities in education along neo-liberal education reforms, the Coalition government seems to have fully adopted the ideals of neo-liberalism. (UK, Final Report, 2013: 37).

The concern about the labour market can also be identified in Portugal, as well as in the Netherlands. In Portugal, the current government justified the disinvestment in areas such as project work, citizenship and artistic education, by the need to prioritise the articulation between education and labour. The emphasis on vocational education is visible also in Sweden, Spain and Austria. This major driver - as it is 'driving' the influence of an 'economic' rationale in education policies - reflects the rationale that education 'should', more or less directly, serve the value of labour market 'needs' and employability.

This emphasis might, at least partially, be related to the 2000 Lisbon Strategy and to the EU 2020 strategy (see above) to modernise its social system to promote economic growth. However, this agenda formally puts a similar emphasis on drivers related to sustainability as well as to the importance of education to deal with social exclusion and to promote social cohesion. Moreover, in this analysis, it becomes clear that when talking about ESL, as in Hungary, Portugal, Poland, policy makers and official documents appear to assume that ESL is associated with specific groups - immigrants, ethnic minorities (e.g. Roma), or 'less able' people.

The white working classes appear not to be mentioned. Regarding the specific groups mentioned, drivers are the 'improvement of qualifications of disadvantaged populations to respond to the needs of the labour market' (AU) or 'increase competences to adjust to the labour market by means of vocational tracks and skills directed at children and youth with social problems, disabilities and migrants' (SW). The critical question seems to be: what are the social and political assumptions underlying this link between ethnicity or immigration and ESL? Integration in the labour market seems to be the answer, as the policies and drivers informing the struggle against ESL appear to converge on the matching of social and economic concerns by means of education - and vice versa.

Finally, drivers other than these can also be identified, in spite of the fact that they are not dominant. In Belgium, along with the influence of the economic driver, a 'social/educational' driver of reducing social stratification and enhancing social mobility opportunities appears as a distinct one. These drivers are in line with political perspectives of the social democrats'/green parties' (and to a lesser extent the Christian Democrats') on social equality. However, the latter are underrepresented, both in terms of public discourses and in terms of seats in the Flemish Parliament. In the same vein, the educational driver in the Polish case ('compulsory education and schooling, universal, uniform and free education') can also be pointed out.

Table 7 also reveals the articulation between drivers and rationales. Apparently, the economic rationales and the emphasis on the need to relate education and training to the labour market needs are dominant. Social and educational rationales also come into play, we argue, by resolving social and educational issues by means of their articulation with the economy and labour market, and vice-versa.

Table 8 presents a selection of drivers and rationales of state and non-state local stakeholders. It results from a methodological concern about gathering the diversity of voices at different levels and shows the lack of consensus within and between levels of political construction.

Country		Drivers	Rationales
Belgium	Political stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • maintenance of early tracking to keep the top-position in the OECD ranking and to provide the labour market with high performers. • postponement of pupils tracking to combat high social stratification in educational outcomes and ESL rates (social democrats/greens) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • economic/competition • social and educational equality
	Educational stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • reduction of social and educational inequalities • reducing the hierarchical structure of educational tracks • reinforcement of professionals' roles in school and study choice, as well as parental and student roles in study choice • reinforcement of teachers' role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • social and educational equality • 'empowerment' of educational professionals

United Kingdom	Political stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • increasing the autonomy of schools and colleges; freeing schools from local authority control (GLA) • closer co-operation between education and the business sector (GLA) • provision of relevant skills to young people (GLC) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • improve education standards • equipping young people w/ useful skills to enhance their labour market opportunities
	Educational stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • enhancement of vocational training (local authority, LC) • equipping young people with relevant skills (LA, LC) • raising academic attainment to the detriment of vocation education and training (LC) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • young people at the core • education and training for the labour market • academic achievements and qualifications more valuable
	Social stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • closer co-operation between education and training and the business sector (youth workers) • raising academic attainment to the detriment of vocation education and training (youth workers) • adapt policymaking to the needs of young people and the economy (youth worker) • address the needs of the young people facing the economic crisis (youth charity) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • preparation for the labour market • academic achievements and qualifications more valuable • young people at the core
Sweden	Political/educational stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • raising the role of knowledge to the detriment of competences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • academic knowledge as an investment of the future of the country
	Educational stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction of perspectives other than those of the labour market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • social mobility through higher education

Portugal	Educational/ Social stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> educational certification (project leader) inclusion of disadvantaged communities by way of non-formal education (project leader) integration through alternative learning (2nd chance educ.) make school paths meaningful (art school) vocational education as alternative to mainstream education (vocational school) teacher's intercultural awareness (intercultural teachers association) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Education and social inclusion
	Economic stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reinforcement of continuous vocational training (AIP) improvement of the qualification of Portuguese human resources in formal education (AIP) retrieval of students who are getting behind (AIP) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> economic: labour productivity, business competitiveness and workers' remuneration
Nether-lands	Educational/ Social stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> improve macro efficacy in vocational education (adapt education offer to labour market demands) increase motivation of students 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> obtainment of basic qualification by close collaboration between municipality, schools, social workers, and business sector
Poland	Educational/ Political stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> address educational needs of immigrant and Roma students at risk of ESL (local authority) keep students in education from early age to higher education (local authority) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> social and educational inclusion

Spain	Political/ Educational/ Social stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> address school failure and poor qualifications diversification of the 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> students achievement and post compulsory training
	Economic stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> diversification of the training offer and adaptation to the labour market 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> education and labour market inclusion
Hungary	Educational stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> address Roma youth educational failure (teachers) raise the schooling and education of the new generation (teachers) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> inter-ethnic integration resist the intergenerational reproduction of social and educational
	Economic stakeholder	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> reduction of compulsory school age reduction of schooling for poor, mainly Roma, children provision of discipline and basic skills, mainly Roma children dual vocational school and vocational examination increase the number of students in vocational schools 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> labour market as part of the solution school to compensate 'deficient' family background exclusion of the most problematic students social and educational segregation
Austria	Political stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> structural education reform strengthen the economy early childhood education, structural education reform 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> social and educational quality youth employment
	Economic stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> improvement of the qualification of young people adaption of qualification to the labour market promotion of basic competences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> preventing labour market exclusion empowerment of young people collaboration between schools and enterprises
	Educational stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> introduction of education standards and promotion of basic competences emphasis should clearly be shifted onto prevention school desegregation/equal educational opportunity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> educational and social inclusion employability

Table 8 - Selection of drivers and rationales of state and non-state local stakeholders

When comparing Table 7 and Table 8, a more nuanced picture concerning drivers and rationales becomes visible. Local state and non-state stakeholders express the importance of a 'close collaboration between school and business sector'. However, others express drivers such as responding to young people 'aspirations', 'youth empowerment', or bringing 'young people at the core'.

The majority of educational stakeholders – project leaders, representatives of education and cultural associations, local educational authorities – appear to hold to such drivers. Rationales such as 'social and educational equality' and 'education and social inclusion' are expressed more frequently and are shared by several educational, social and political stakeholders. However, one is aware that the social concern may also be built on the basis of a 'deficit' perspective, which labels minority students and their families negatively and hinders assumptions about assimilation.

Therefore, commonalities as well as distinct forms of expressing drivers and rationales are traceable between Tables 7 and 8. How can these commonalities be defined? How should they be interpreted? Moreover, looking at the distinct drivers, how are they voiced and enacted in the dominant drivers identified above? In what ways are 'alternative' drivers configured and influenced by the 'powerful' drivers? How to interpret tensions between and among them?

Tensions in actors' drivers and rationales

Tensions can be found in stakeholders' drivers and rationales within countries and in the European Union. These strains go beyond the simple polar oppositions – e.g. between educational development and labour market integration.

Educational, social or economic stakeholders do not always share common views on education that may be seen as a group perspective. Illustrating this diversity, evident clashes may be found between economic and educational stakeholders as in Hungary, but the rhetoric about educational and social inclusion may be shared by these categories of actors in other countries (e.g. Portugal), however, with different meanings.

The main tensions seem to emerge between the search for equality and equity – with a view to social and educational justice – and the provision of qualifications, allowing the entrance into the labour market, with a view to individual and social competitiveness. These tensions relate to the fact that they vacillate between the focus on the individual and on the knowledge economy.

The focus on individuals seems to be based on the view that increasing qualifications will enhance the individuals' opportunities for well-being and personal achievement (UK and NL), whereas the focus on knowledge economy aims at the economic growth of the country and the attainment or maintenance of a comfortable position within the EU (the view of Flemish nationalists in Belgium). In the Dutch case, this tension is replicated between promoters of basic qualification (to increase economic and social integration, political and economic stakeholders) and their antagonists, mainly social stakeholders, who assume that not everyone is capable of achieving the basic qualification, which means they are excluded.

Different statements were voiced, bringing to the fore three main ideas related to the social justice rationale: i) the need to provide different education to pupils, to assure they are empowered to deal with their life chances (UK London); ii) the social and educational integration of immigrant and Roma students, addressing their educational needs and keeping them in education from early age to higher education (Poland); iii) and the idea that school failure and ESL are unavoidable for some groups and individuals and that early entrance into the labour market may be the solution (e.g. economic stakeholder from Hungary).

Other tensions are present in the reform of education in the diverse countries. The reduction of the hierarchical structure of educational tracks (as pointed out in the Belgium Report) might be in tension with educational injustice and exclusion. In the selected countries, early tracking by means of early vocational training may bring about social and educational stratification and the reproduction of social inequalities.

This means that the promise of social mobility, by way of education, may be imperilled, especially in terms of social cohesion. The aim to include minority segregated children in education and the labour market can also be in tension with the diversification of vocational offer, as argued by some educational stakeholders. The latter are aware of the mismatch between training and job opportunities (Spain). While academic paths are increasingly valued, VET – under its diversified forms – is still a 'poor' educational 'option' in terms of social and labour market recognition (Portugal, Spain).

In recent years, most countries have made the attempt to raise the age of conclusion of compulsory education (e.g. Portugal), whereas some stakeholders argue for the need to lower the compulsory education age allowing earlier labour market insertion (e.g. economic stakeholder in Hungary). Stakeholders from other countries demand that knowledge rather than skills should be at the core of education, as skills-based education may have negative consequences for the country (e.g. Sweden local governing body).

The Belgian, Spanish and Austrian cases are examples where different political parties accentuate different dimensions of the educational policy drivers, bringing to the fore the tension between the economic rationale of competitiveness and the combat against social stratification.

In sum, the analysis shows that there are tensions concerning drivers and rationales underpinning ESL policies. In some cases, they assume potentially violent consequences in social and individual terms, as in school segregation of immigrant and minority groups, challenging European values and citizenship.