North by northwest: quality assurance and evaluation processes in European education

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Governing processes in Europe and within Europeanization are often opaque and appearances can deceive. The normative practices of improvement in education, and the connected growth in performance measurement, have been largely understood in their own terms. However, the management of flows of information through quality assurance can be examined as a new form of governance, not just at the national level but within the broad policyscape of the European Union.

The shaping of policy through data and the constant comparison for improvement against competition has come to be the standard by which public systems are judged. Indeed, public systems of education are recreated, and Europe is formed. The mediation of travelling policies and policy discourses across Europe constitute a polymorphic policyscape in which quality assurance and evaluation (QAE) has become a major instrument.

Keywords: Europeanization; quality assurance; fabrication; policyscape; governing

Introduction

For some years now, there has been a steady increase in research on the performance of education systems in Europe, both nationally and internationally (Henry et al. 2001; Rinne 2000, 2003). This evidence contributes to the emergence of the ‘evaluative state’ (Neave 1998); the ‘performance-evaluation nexus’ (Clarke 2004), involving audit, inspection, evaluation and regulation, can be viewed through changes in the institutional steering or governing of school systems (Lindblad and Popkewitz 1999, 2000, 2001a, 2001b). The development of quality assurance and evaluation (QAE) as a form of governing is, therefore, of major significance in understanding education policy and the development of a knowledge society/knowledge economy as a key European objective (Ball 2006; Lawn 2003). This Special Issue presents ongoing research work derived from the ‘Fabricating Quality in European Education’ project. Funded through national research councils in three countries (England/Scotland, Finland and Denmark, and university funding in Sweden), and with the European Science Foundation, ‘Fabricating Quality’ focuses on the governance of education through policy convergence and divergence in QAE across the five different education systems, and the extent of the Europeanization of education across them.

In particular, this Special Issue presents papers which bring education into the field of social science enquiry and into theorizing about the key issue of changing
education governance in Europe (Lawn and Lingard 2002; Nóvoa and Lawn 2002). Developments in performance measurement and management have been largely understood as vehicles for improved policy-making and better-informed pedagogic school practices. This has been at the expense of social science concepts which enable changes in the management and flow of knowledge and information, and linked to new forms of governance, to be explored at education sites (Castells 2000a; Desrosieres 2002; Power 1997).

For the purposes of this paper (and the Special Issue in general), the notion of Europeanization contains several explanatory elements reflecting the complexity of processes which include, first, transnational flows and networks of people, ideas and practices across European borders; second, direct effects of EU policy; and, finally, the Europeanizing effect of international institutions and globalization. The structure of this introductory essay follows this explanatory framework. We start from the role of networks and elites in promoting this new way of thinking about education in Europe. We are making a case for the significance of actors, national and European, in constructing this space, being the middle-(wo)men in this flow of policy ideas and practices. We move on to interrogate more direct policy orientations, and in particular, the recent shift from what we call ‘from culture to numbers’; the governance of education in Europe seems to be increasingly distanced from an emphasis on using education as a platform for creating a common identity and space, towards creating a different kind of culture, that of numbers and of comparison, where Europe is newly reconfigured as a single, commensurable space. Next, we move into a discussion about what Europeanization means through the lens of globalization and the extent to which global, transnational forces promoting QAE are being reflected in the Europeanizing processes that we are observing. Finally, the paper concludes with some preliminary ideas and key questions that the research on QAE across the five different contexts has raised.

Networks and actors: the new policy elite in Europe

The expansion of global capital and production flows, international governance and the regulation and marketization of public services has disrupted the state’s capacity to ensure that the national system remains open to ‘local’ control and to configure what happens within it. The market appears to be the dominant European discourse and there is constancy about the search for the delivery of common taxes, rules of production and consumption and joint initiatives and innovations that are necessary for it. Europe is an idea which allows the challenge facing the nation-states within it to become manageable as globalization is beyond the scope of nation-states to domesticate or manage by themselves. In this sense, Europe is not homogeneous, yet it has common features: it is open to the market, it seeks to create a union which manages risk, and it governs itself by consensus and regulation. Europeanization is the process of formation of the EU, the processes which are attached loosely or formally to this formation, or set in motion by it. It is also a political, spatial, networked phenomenon which is a specific element of globalization dealing with the new transnational state which affects many interactions within it. The governance of the European education policy space appears as being increasingly ‘produced’ through building relations between actors in networks and communities. According to Jensen and Richardson (2004), the project of European integration is fundamentally concerned with the construction of a single European space, what they term a monotopia, capturing the
idea of a one-dimensional (mono) discourse of a space and territory (topos). The single market and single currency are examples of a concerted attempt to create Europe as ‘one space’ by removing constraints to the physical movement of goods and people for the sake of mobility, accessibility and connectivity, which are seen as answers to social and economic problems like exclusion, peripherality and uncompetitiveness (Jensen and Richardson 2004, 223–4). As a result, according to Delanty and Rumford (2005, 125), a Europe of global competitive flow has become hegemonic over the alternative idea of a Europe of places. The projects of Europeanization seem increasingly dependent upon the co-operation and joint resource mobilization of national policy actors who sometimes lie outside governmental hierarchical control (Shore 2000). Further, policy networks accommodate the blurring of state/civil society boundaries that is such a feature of current policy-making, with the growth of co-operation or dispersed responsibilities among state and non-state agencies, and the engagement of actors from the private and voluntary sectors in the delivery of services. Also, it is important to stress that Europe is to be understood as fluid and changing, although this is mediated by older language barriers, regional histories and immovable national projects. It is itself swept by international pressures, political, financial, technological and cultural, and it is simultaneously located in and produced by the global, the idea of the European and the national. It is operating at different speeds: with high velocity and scale through a cosmopolitan cross border elite, and with low velocity and local embeddedness in distant sectors.

The elite, operating in political and managerial areas of transnational government, commerce, business and public service, is fluid, heterogeneous and polymorphic. When the elite operates within transnational governance, networks and partnerships and outside the old national and local ways, it becomes more diffuse and at the same time more obvious. Castells (2000a) has called the space in which it operates, the ‘space of flows’, a new connecting and shaping of social practices, including the managing of the space in the interests of dominant interests. It is this idea which has replaced the older national forms of conductive processes of control. It is not though a form which can be controlled easily and within firm boundaries. There are many areas of Europe which are not connected to this space, its elite and its imaginaries. Dislocated by circumstance, location, political history, capital ownership and scale of community, cosmopolitanism is exchanged for sense of place and tradition in which Europeanization emerges as a distant regulation or an impossible scale. Here the presence of the local appears to outweigh all outside influences or to disguise their transnational pedigree.

The flow of Europeanization is enhanced and shaped by the indicators and data produced in the construction of Europe as a legible, governable, commensurate policy space. Comparison is a key element of the management of multinational companies and is dependent on numerical data: the scale, velocity and scope of the uses of numerical data to manage grow exponentially all the time. Comparison for constant improvement against competition has come to be the standard by which public systems are judged, indeed as the project of Europe is now judged. While states originally managed this process of comparison in a limited way, the flow of national data internationally has increased. Comparison is now cross border; it is both an abstract form of competition and an element of it; it is a proxy for other forms of rivalry. Comparison is highly visible as a tool of governing at all levels – at the level of the organization [to manage] and of the state [to govern]. The next section explores the interrelatedness of the concepts of ‘Europeanization’ and ‘globalization’, both of
which frame much of the thinking behind QAE, both at the EU and the national level of the cases explored.

**Europeanization through the lens of globalization**

Although most of the writing on globalization deals with its various economic, cultural and political characteristics, here the focus will be on aspects relevant to understanding the changing political and policy strategies of Europe and the processes of Europeanization as part of the ‘global’, including the transition from culture to numbers, discussed in the next section of the paper. The focus is on political and cultural globalization and their relevance to understanding Europeanization. Political globalization will be linked to a consideration of the new scalar politics of education policy production and practices, while cultural globalization will be linked to the effects of what we might describe, after the anthropologist James Clifford (1997), as ‘dwelling in travel’.

A central political feature of globalization has been a rescaling, manifest in a new scalar politics, which has reconstituted relations between the local, national, supranational and global (Brenner 2004). This has witnessed new regional politics (e.g. NAFTA, APEC), changing roles of supranational political arrangements (e.g. EU, ASEAN), strengthened roles for international agencies (e.g. World Bank, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD]), and also reconstituted the state, its structure and ways of functioning at the national level, which has also come under regional and local pressures from within. This has seen a rescaling of statehood (Brenner 2004) with the state now sitting within national, European and global hierarchies and networks. In this new scalar politics, the nation-state is not powerless, but its new form and ways of functioning are both manifestations of globalization and responses to it. Similarly, the changing form and *modus operandi* of the EU and European Commission can also be seen as manifestations of globalization and responses to it, seeking to constitute a unified economy and single market in the context of a post-Cold War world of neo-liberal market capitalism, dominated by one established and another emerging superpower. And education has taken on greater policy salience within the EU as it has been constructed as central to the strengthening of Europe as a knowledge economy as mandated in the Lisbon Declaration and as a single market. The enhanced policy influence of Europe in all policy domains, including education, can be seen as part of the new scalar politics, articulating with and responding to globalization.

The idea of nations as strategic actors (Castells 2000a) is an important one, because there is a tendency in talk about globalization and new scalar politics to reify globalization and to construct an account of the powerless state (Weiss 1997). The nations of Europe are also strategic actors within Europe, as well as more broadly, while Europe itself also seeks to be a strategic actor in the context of globalization. We also need to recognize that different nations have varying capacities to be strategic actors and thus to mediate global and European pressures. Political pressures from international organizations such as the OECD and from supranational agents such as the EU are always in a sense mediated by the national – the nation-state as strategic actor. What we might see after Bourdieu (2003) as the different amounts of ‘national capital’ possessed by a given nation are central to the nature and strength of national mediation and strategic actions of nation-states. For example, a study of new forms of governance in European education demonstrated that the ‘net-benefactor’ nations of
Europe were in a weaker position vis-à-vis OECD and EU policies, than were the more powerful central economies of Europe (Lawn and Lingard 2002). Thus we need to recognize that pressures from above the nation are always manifested in vernacular ways within the nation, reflecting national histories, traditions and politics. These include the pressures of Europeanization. The degree of mediation reflects the amount of ‘capital’ possessed at the national level, which in turn is indicative of the asymmetrical relations between nations within the EU and within globalization.

The concepts of flows, mobilities and scapes (Appadurai, 1996; Castells 2000a; Urry 2000) have been developed by social theorists to help us understand economic, political and cultural globalization. Appadurai (1996) talks of cultural globalization as being manifested in the disjunctions between various flows, which he articulated as **ethnoscapess** to refer to the flows of migrants, tourists, students and we would add politicians, policy-makers and European level policy actors; and, in particular, **ideoscapes** to pick up on the quickened global flows of ideas. On the latter, we can see the enhanced flows of policy ideas and discourses in education which have accompanied globalization, what Ball (2006) has called **policyscapes** and what have also been called globalized policy discourses (Taylor et al. 1997). Quality assurance in education can be seen in this light. Shore (2000) in his study of Europeanization and the building of Europe has shown how the flows of national civil servants between the European Commission and the nations constitute this policyscape. Castells (2000a) makes an important distinction between the new networks of policy elites and others, which flow across the boundaries of nations and the older hierarchical relations of governing within nations. For Castells, power is now exercised in the space of flows, rather than located in the place of the nation. This is the binary of motion and fixity in the rescaling of contemporary politics (Brenner 1998). We can see here the tension, for example, between the flows of financial capital and the attempts of governments at the national level to produce national economic policies. It is not a question though, in the context of Europe, of the politics of flows and networks as opposed to national politics and policy-making in the hierarchies of nations, but a question of the relationships between the two and the extent to which the latter can mediate the former.

Picking up on this fixity/motion binary, Delanty and Rumford (2005) illustrate the spatial dynamic of contemporary Europe as a tension between territoriality, that is, places marked out by established geographical coordinates, and the fluidity represented by ‘network Europe’. In theoretical terms, this is Brenner’s tension between fixity and motion (1998) – the confrontation between the logics of places and of networks and flows, set against an increasing awareness of the impact of globalization. According to Delanty and Rumford, nation-state understanding of places has provided a particular imagery of territoriality – boundedness, cohesion, social solidarity, functional integration of administrative levels – which still exerts a powerful influence on the way we think about European space. On the other hand, there is recognition that distinctly European spaces in different fields are emerging, but that the properties, dynamics and potential of these spaces are not sufficiently understood. To understand this emergent European space, new images have been introduced: networks, flows and scapes – all of which emphasize the fluidity, mobility and interconnectedness, which are characteristic of contemporary Europe and the European policy space.

Castells (2000b, 14) argues that the network society is constituted by the space of flows – ‘social practices without geographical contiguity’ in a world of mobility and
networked connections, both European and global. Many dominant functions in societies (financial markets, transnational production networks, media systems, etc.) are organized according to the logic of flows, as are many contemporary social movements. For Castells, the network society signals the advent of the information age, relying on a space of flows and the decline of industrial society relying on a space of places. This is the tension in contemporary politics referred to above between networks and hierarchies, flows and fixity, both supranational and national. The concept allows us to understand the interweaving between travelling policies and embedded policies (Ozga and Jones 2006). Policy ideas such as quality assurance travel across national borders both within Europe and globally; nation-states today dwell in such travel, as do policy-makers at the national and supranational levels. The strategic actions of national policy-makers are about mediating these travelling policies and policy discourses, and as noted they have varying strategic capacities to do this. They attempt to capture such travelling policies and rearticulate them at the national level. Conversely, some nations attempt to export their national policy solutions to other nations; the balance between importing and exporting education policies is also reflective of the positioning of a particular nation within global and European power relations.

Indicative of this reality is the coming together of what Nóvoa and Yariv-Mashal (2003) call the ‘global eye’ and the ‘national eye’, as comparison has become central to the emergent form of networked European governance. A European governing through comparison, benchmarks and indicators has seen the constitution of a European space of commensurability as another manifestation of the rescaling of politics and policy-making. According to Nóvoa and Yariv-Mashal (2003), international criteria and comparison are used to provide evidence that legitimates political actions, through such devices as the ‘international spectacle’ and the politics of ‘mutual accountability’.

The new scalar politics associated with Europeanization, new forms of governance through networks and flows and a new commensurate policy space in education are also complemented by the Lisbon Declaration’s focus on the development of human capital across Europe as central to the production of Europe as a knowledge economy. This links to the economization of education policy, whereby education has become a central arm of economic policy for the production of the requisite skills, dispositions and human capital thought to be necessary to national and European economic competitiveness. It is this human capital framing of education policy, which has challenged the subsidiarity argument about the place of education within Europe. Education, though, has since its universalization and massification been central to the construction of national identity, central to the creation of the ‘imagined community’ of the nation (Anderson 1991). Schools have also been very much local institutions. In the context of globalization and European talk of subsidiarity, education has been a policy domain that nations have attempted to hold on to. Nonetheless, the rescaling of politics and flows of policy actors and policy ideas and discourses, along with the construction of a commensurate European space of measurement, have challenged this national autonomy and reconfigured the processes of policy-making, extending the networks and location of the policy-producing community. The challenge has come in the cases dealt with in this paper by processes of Europeanization and the flows of globalized discourses, but we also need to recognize the relationships between Europeanization and the politics and discourses produced by other international agencies such as the OECD in the context of globalization.
Reflecting the new scalar politics, of which Europeanization is perhaps the paradigm example, there has been a spatial turn in social theory. Brennan (2006) has suggested that the centrality of space and place in contemporary globalization theory manifests the apparent ‘overcoming of temporality’ (2006, 136), with this new theoretical optic ushering in a transition from ‘tempo to scale’, from ‘the chronometric to the cartographic’ (2006, 136). He makes a distinction between space and place, which helps in understanding dwelling in travel and the networked and hierarchical relationships in contemporary governance and government, in the nations of Europe and at the European level. He distinguishes between space and place in the following ways. He observes that, ‘“Space” is more abstract and ubiquitous: it connotes capital, history, and activity, and gestures towards the meaningless of distance in a world of instantaneous communication and virtuality’ (2006, 136). Place in contrast, he notes, connotes ‘the kernel or centre of one’s memory and experience – a dwelling, a familiar park or city street, one’s family or community’ (2006, 136). The space/place relationship is played out in particular ways in contemporary education policy, the local and the specific – the vernacular – against global and European flows and the constitution of post- and supra-national spaces. The dwelling of national quality assurance policies in education is continually affected by the flows in the European and global space. Many of the flows associated with globalization are also linked to the new information technologies. These ICTs have also had an impact on temporality and our experience of it. Brennan (2006, 128) notes that the elision of temporality associated with such technologies gives emphasis to what he calls the ‘year zero’ of the now. Quality assurance and other indicators and performance measures, central to the audit culture at both national and European levels, in their present and future focus, are indicative of this new temporality associated with globalization. They are about constructing the future. We can also see that different speeds are associated with the flows of space and the dwellings of place. Nonetheless, despite the a-historical QAE practices that shape European education systems today and for the future, Europeanization is not a new concept. The next section focuses on the shift from anchoring this ‘project’ in a relatively unproblematicized, but hugely celebrated European past, to governing the new Europe by benchmarks, indicators and standards within the audit turn.

From culture to numbers: the audit turn in European education

Indeed, the concepts of indicators, benchmarking and quality assurance have had a relatively short presence in the history of the European education systems. However, in this brief space of time they have become the new dominant discourses in the process of fabricating the space of European education. Even though an interest in measuring educational performance through numerical data was evident as early as the mid-1970s, the turning point towards an increased interest in setting standards for education systems in Europe was the Lisbon Council of 2000. According to the Presidency conclusions, ‘the European Union is confronted with a quantum shift resulting from globalization and the challenges of a new knowledge-driven economy’ (Council of the European Union 2000, n.p.). Apart from setting specific objectives, such as an increased investment in human resources, the establishment of a European framework for lifelong learning and the fostering of educational mobility, the Council also suggested a new style of policy formation, the ‘Open Method of Coordination’ (OMC) (Council of the European Union, 2000). Indicators and benchmarking are at the heart of this new policy tool, since OMC was declared as the new ‘soft’ form of governance.
Further, it was in Lisbon where education, as a policy field, began to be displaced by ‘learning’ (European Commission 2001), another increasingly important exemplar of ‘soft governance’ in Europe. According to the Lisbon Council, learning promotes the development of Europe as ‘the most competitive knowledge economy in the world’ (European Commission 2001; Gornitzka 2006; Sedel 2004) and hence constitutes the future for its economies, populations and institutions. European education has thus shifted from its institutionalized and ordered realm of subsidiarity to become a new fluid, flexible and cross-national phenomenon; that of learning. Redefined as such, it has acquired increased significance in EU policy-making; it has become the cornerstone of Europeanization; the space in which Europe is being produced. The twentieth-century idea that ‘education is, by definition, the space for the construction of national identity’ (Nóvoa 2000, 46) has been transformed: ‘learning’ has become the space for the construction of European identity.

According to Anders Fogh Rasmussen, Prime Minister of Denmark, commenting on the Treaty of Lisbon, ‘the good thing is that all the symbolic elements are gone, and that which really matters – the core – is left’ (Jyllands-Posten, quoted in Shore 2000, 88). Indeed, many of the ‘old’ European ‘symbolic elements’ after the Lisbon treaty have gone for good. Although some of the Euro-symbols of the 1980s, the Erasmus programme and other constructs of the older European ‘common culture’ project still hold strong, the language of numbers has gained an ‘extraordinary’ significance, as a top official from the Commission argued (Grek 2008).

For a long time in the history of the European education space, education governance was exercised through technologies of the ‘self’ (Foucault 1978), which had systematically been working towards establishing new normative categories and constructing new meanings: these were notions like the ‘common European values’, the ‘common culture’, or the notion of ‘Europeanness’. According to Shore, ‘constructing Europe requires the creation of “Europeans”, not simply as an objectified category of EU passport holders and “citizens”, but, more fundamentally, as a category of subjectivity’ (2000, 30). The strategy and the tactics involved in the construction of a European subjectivity, by often being astonishingly direct and almost propagandistic, were sometimes harshly criticized and rejected (Delanty 1995). The old European myth was indeed one of high, elitist European culture, a myth of Enlightenment ideals commonly created and treasured by the European peoples – white middle- or upper-class men, in their majority. Nevertheless, these ideals had a strong social dimension which became particularly appealing and promising after the devastation and despair of the two World Wars. The Member States of the Union were invited in a project to build a social Europe which would establish itself as the significant ‘Other’ against the inhumanity of an economic system of winners and losers, which was accelerating to global dominance.

However, it soon turned out that the ‘people’s Europe’ (Shore 1993) was not sufficient to respond to the demands of the new millennium. Despite subsidiarity, the field of education served for over three decades in the project of the creation of a European common identity. In history and geography, in narratives and tradition, Europe became a ‘classical’ value, timeless and undisputed. Education and culture, through over-emphasizing commonalities and sidelining differences, were handy crutches in lifting the idea of Europeanization.

At the same time, during this first era of the construction of the European education space, national education systems remained more or less the same; they welcomed exchanges and networks as the additional European ‘extra’, which offered
a fresher flavour of cosmopolitanism in their somewhat stale school curricula. Despite the systematic efforts to create a common European education space, education (or rather, schooling) in the pre-Lisbon era remained largely a national topic. In the face of globalization and the dominance of the knowledge economy, new and urgent technologies of persuasion had to be devised; the voluntary nature of the previous arrangement was too loose to respond to the severe economic challenges of both the education and the wider market. Creating, regulating and monitoring, or in other words, governing the European education space now had to be based on statistics and what Rose (1991) calls ‘governing by numbers’. In fact, one of the greatest post-Lisbon developments in the history of the EU is the weight given to education and training in Europe; first, for the EU, from being an area at the periphery of policy-making, education and learning have now become central in constructing Europe itself. Europe does not need to pre-exist in the hearts and minds as it was before – it is being created, sorted, systematized, scrutinized and constantly improved through the new soft governance tools of comparison and benchmarking. Hard EU regulation, in areas such as agriculture or trade for example, often meets the resistance and criticism of ‘Euro-sceptics’; ‘soft’ law (Lawn 2003), on the other hand, is self-imposed and self-adhered; it is effective, manageable and economical; it looks optional and ‘light-touch’; it seems objective and forward-looking; it relates to current concerns. Second, for the member-nations, in the field of education, Europe has become the relatively friendlier face of globalization; it gives them a platform to raise their voice; it offers them a quality assurance framework, which they would otherwise have had to devise on their own; it often provides them with ‘best practice’ advice, leaving the content of the curriculum intact; it often offers them a scapegoat, which they can readily blame in order to justify reform.

However, no matter how misguided ‘Euro-romantics’ have been, Rasmussen is also seriously wrong – the ‘core’ is not stripped of ideological and symbolic weight. The new technology of the governance of the European education space through quality assurance processes is not only to be seen as the project of fulfilling Brussels’ requirements of achieving specific goals and objectives. Instead, it has to be examined as the deeply penetrating, consciousness-moulding and thus serious business of constructing new categories of (educational) thought and action – the project of re-inventing a ‘new’ European identity of competitive advantage and responsible individualism. According to Hacking, ‘the bureaucracy of statistics imposes not just by creating administrative rulings but by determining classifications within which people must think of themselves and of the actions that are open to them’ (1991, 194). At their best, these new governance technologies have offered a more coherent and organized framework for the improvement of the quality of education systems across Europe; at their worst, they are simply transforming education cultures and traditions, every aspect of teaching and learning, into tables and graphs, devoid of meaning, political context or any sense of history and place.

This collection of papers attempts to illuminate the shift to ‘governing by numbers’ not merely as a discursive, cosmetic or surface change, but in fact as the process which has become one of the central components in building the new Europe of the knowledge economy. There seems to be a serious imbalance in the history of the construction of the European education space: from almost obsessively focusing on the ‘big’ history of a remote past that belonged to few and was of interest to even fewer, Europe now displays a compulsive anxiety to forecast, control and shape a one-way future; QAE has become a major instrument in operationalizing these efforts.
QAE in Europe: cases from the north/northwestern periphery

As previously discussed, in the complex spatial dynamic of contemporary Europe, global education policy reforms (travelling policies) have a tendency to emerge, diffuse around the globe and reshape socially and politically different societies with dissimilar histories. Embedded policies are to be found in ‘local’ spaces (national, regional or local), where global policy agendas come up against existing practices and priorities (Ozga and Jones 2006, 2–3). With this process, global policy paradigms are producing local manifestations and finally shaping up diverse and distinctive policy-scapes (Ball 2006).

What makes policy travel or flow across Europe, within wider policy spaces, is of interest here. What problems are solved in this way? What remains stubborn against the external? What appears to flow but only thinly? What is used as camouflage, mimicry or mimesis? Our research reveals similarities and differences between our national sites. More to the point, it has produced evidence of apparent travel and flow when there are only discursive simulacra, a common language but uncommon contexts. For example, the emphasis on self-evaluation, common to the five countries in different forms, and increasingly common to Europeanization processes in QAE varies nationally – and even locally, as seen in cases of Denmark, Finland and Sweden. It can be understood as an addition to other QAE practices (like ‘hard performance indicators’) or it can be taken as a substitute for more strict and centralized forms of governance. For example, as Ozga in the case of England discusses, school self-evaluation evidence is to be ‘the starting point for inspections’; in Denmark, Andersen et al. manifest how it is considered as a ‘fixed element in the evaluations conducted by the Danish Evaluation Institute’. The Scottish system of self-evaluation, according to Croxford et al., prescribes indicators rather than self-chosen goals. Further, Simola et al. and Segerholm discuss the ways in which, in Finland and Sweden, the municipal providers of education are obligated to evaluate what they provide, but not in any particular or fixed fashion. What appears to be most significant is not the discourse or the variations on practice, but that ‘the local space for manoeuvre has been successively narrowed by an increased amount of QAE activities’. It connects the use of data to ideas of responsibilization and self-steering that inculcate new norms and values that transform the conduct of organizations and individuals in their capacity as ‘self-actualizing’ agents, so as to achieve political objects through ‘action at a distance’ (Rose 1992).

Processes of Europeanization are subdued or hidden within this complexity; they appear to be global, national and local at the same time. On the other hand, the sudden entry of the state into international comparison and an evaluation culture opened the door wide to ‘outside’ influence: the crisis in Denmark following the PISA results of 2003 was a crisis of governance, about means and ends, faced with overpowering international judgements. The Swedish obligation upon the municipalities to continuously evaluate and follow-up the local school plan shifted downwards the responsibility for finding solutions for improvement and quality. At the same time, the national state uses new data to produce comparisons on progress between schools, municipalities and nations, particularly nations which it feels are ‘natural comparators’, within a process of ‘informative steering’.

Where do European-wide processes, producing data standards, translating text, mediating meanings or agreeing exchanges, which enable flow take place? What speeds up and what slows down policy exchange, and the concomitant elements (experts, data
and technologies) which support or inhibit flow and comparison? The papers from Sweden and England indicate that some countries are leaders in QAE processes, for example, by successful international comparison or by their own benchmarking.

However, diversity is present across the project, and so are its explanations. Danish explanation is rooted in strong ideas of ‘vertical’ enlightenment, and its shaping of system and behaviour, while although Finnish discursive power is strong, developed while ‘riding the OECD slipstream’, internal system variation is wide, embedded in region and place. In Sweden and Scotland, the discourses and tools of QAE have remained recognizable over time but their meaning and practices have altered; they appear to have tightened and their explanation shifted around key terms, like profession, country and improvement. The most ‘advanced’ regulatory state, England, known across Europe for evaluatory practices, like inspection, seems to be moving swiftly into a new post-regulatory condition, ‘intelligent accountability’. As the papers in this Special Issue show, a consistent feature of European QAE is that the solution to managing outcome-based systems has become a major labour process in itself. ‘Measure fixation’, ‘governing from behind’ and the privacy of evaluation data (its lack of flow within systems) are producing performance overload (‘evaluation bloat’). It is not just a dominant feature of the new education work, it has begun to reshape it significantly. Indicators become not a numerical observation of the system but a force to restructure it.

Governing through data in systems created and expectant of older relations is a major, new confusion while appearing as a simple, logical governing process. So Europeanization is both a harmonizing and a dislocating process. We would argue that this is revealed within the study of the relationship between evidence data and governing in Europe. Space and place are in a tense relation to each other; it is not easy to dwell quietly in this flow.

Notes
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2. A European Commission resolution emphasized the significance of information sharing between Member States and the need for education statistics (OJ C 38, 19 February 1976). Eurostat started publishing data from national statistics since 1978, nonetheless it was only after the 1990s that it began producing more statistically comparable data.

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