

## Brussels comes via Helsinki: The Role of Finland in Europeanisation of Estonian Education Policy

*Anu Toots*  
*Tallinn University*

### ABSTRACT

Europeanisation has manifold impact on national public policies. One of them is increasing interest to learn from reform experiences in other member states and adjust domestic policies accordingly. Education as a traditionally very national field of policy has only recently become an object of Europeanisation. Yet, today common EU objectives and benchmarks in education and training stimulate member states to look more carefully to the countries that perform well.

The current paper deals with this new multi-level situation in policy-learning where EU member states draw lessons from each other in order to adjust their domestic policies to the EU objectives. The education policy of Estonia, which used to draw lessons from the neighbouring Finland, serves as an empirical case for investigation. The aim of this paper is to study whether the role of Finland in the adjustment of the Estonian education policy to the EU objectives has evolved in time. The analysis revealed a significant evolution in arguments and instruments of lesson-drawing. Study findings suggest that Finland has played a catalyzing role in the Europeanisation of the Estonian education policy only for a short period. Today the EU has become a more important arena of learning than the neighbouring Finland.

**Keywords:** open method of coordination, policy transfer, policy learning, policy actors, "Work Programme on Education and Training 2010", education reforms

### Context: "Comparative turn" in EU education policy and member states

Education has been traditionally regarded as a field of explicit national responsibility. Yet, since the Maastricht treaty, the EU has increasingly expanded its interest in education both in terms of education areas and governance instruments. Reasons why education is on the top agenda today are manifold. Firstly, more than ever, a close link between education and the nations' economic performance is stressed. According to the Lisbon strategy, Europe is aiming to provide everyone not just a job, but a better job. Additionally, Europe is supposed to become the world's most

competitive economy, and education systems must contribute to this aim. It is worth noting that together with European educational statistics, data of the US and Japan as the main economic competitors are expansively provided in Commission reports. (COM 2007, COM 2008) Secondly, European countries have common concerns regarding national education systems and their linkage to the labour market. The level of students' achievement, the compatibility of national standards with the demands of the international labour market and the openness of the educational system to innovations are issues intensively discussed in member states.

The policy choice for the EU in this situation was to decide whether to allow member states to autonomously seek best practices around the world, or to govern the process through EU mechanisms. The latter was chosen by adopting the "Common objectives in education and training 2010" at the Barcelona summit in 2002. The new method of policy governance (open method of coordination), already successfully implemented in European employment policy, has been expanded to education. While preserving national differences of education systems and allowing the choice of policy instruments, the EU sets common objectives and regularly evaluates progress towards them. However, even more remarkable than the formulation of common objectives is the way how those objectives are presented – by statistical indicators and benchmarks. This feature refers to some similarities between EU education policy and neoliberal practices in Anglo-Saxon countries where encouragement of competition and the publication of schools' league tables are typical. According to Novoa and deJong-Lambert, market competition was the initial departing point of the EU policy towards creating benchmarks in education. Inter alia, the European Round Table of Industrialists played an important role in promoting benchmarking as a tool for guiding policies. According to the secretary general of the round table, "The idea was to establish criteria relevant to competitiveness and then publish figures in a regular and systematic way that would encourage each country to try catch up with the best practices elsewhere, but without dictating the specific policy measures needed." (cited in Novoa and deJong-Lambert 2003, 46) Today Europe puts more emphasis on the quantitative measurement of educational outcomes than it used to do. In the 1980s and 1990s, international comparative surveys carried out by the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievements (IEA) attracted attention amongst policy-makers mainly in the US and in the Far East. Yet, in Post-Lisbon Europe, data from IEA TIMSS and PIRLS studies and from OECD PISA and PIAAC surveys serve as formal benchmarks in measuring educational progress. (COM 2007, COM 2008) Measurement of civic skills (as one of the 16 core indicators for monitoring progress towards the Lisbon objectives) is based entirely on the IEA studies. (Hoskins et al. 2008) In the coming IEA International Civic and Citizenship Survey (ICCS 2009), a special European Regional Module was elaborated on request of the EU Commission. Also, the European Commission provides financial support to the member states (mainly in Central and Eastern Europe) covering up to 80% of participation fees in ICCS.

These developments illustrate the growing importance of international and supranational actors in education policy. The "comparative turn" in education policy started by the OECD (Martens 2007, 44) was soon adopted by the EU Commission. Harmonisation of statistical data within OECD, IEA and the European Commission

is not simply a process of collecting data. This is also a process of constructing a European identity based on statistical indicators. Through the arrangement of categories and benchmarks, a definition of the “best system” is proposed suggesting others to learn and move in this direction. (Novoa and deJong-Lambert 2003)

In addition to the horizontal learning across member states, countries are encouraged (or even enforced) to compare their policy outcomes with the EU objectives and benchmarks. National action plans are composed in accordance with common objectives and annual national progress reports reviewed by the Commission staff. Although the open method of coordination leaves some degree of freedom to member states to choose their own path, it is hard to imagine that any of the member states can opt out the system entirely. (Novoa and deJong-Lambert 2003, Vanttaja and Rinne 2008) Due to the increasing cooperation between the EU structures and OECD, it becomes complicated to explicitly allocate the effect on national education policies to one of the mentioned actors. Educational policies of the OECD and the EU develop in the same directions and since the mid-1990s, both of them have influenced national education policy-making in Estonia and Finland. (Vanttaja and Rinne 2008) However, Estonia and Finland reacted to the international pressure differently, due to different attitudes towards national policy-making and the time when the two countries joined the EU.

Finland became an EU member in 1995 when European education policy was still in an embryonic phase. Thus Finland could continue in the old manner, meaning that education was regarded as a national business, and policy-learning occurred on non-standardised bases via contacts with neighbouring Nordic countries. (Vanttaja and Rinne 2008)

Finland had a strong position to base national activities in the EU firmly on the Nordic values. Although education was only a minor part of the “Nordic dimension”, the importance of equality and social justice in education was stressed within this framework. (Dahl 2003) To the contrary, the notion of a European dimension in education was seen as too heavily interfering into national policies and too focused on the economic needs of the Single Market. Nordic countries found that education should create democratic citizens as well as fulfil the needs of the industry, whereas the EU emphasised the latter. (Dahl 2003) However, in recent years, the gap between the Nordic and EU education policy values has been becoming less visible. “There is no trade-off between efficiency and equity”, declares the Joint Interim Report. (Council 2006) At the same time, Finnish education strengthens the orientation towards neoliberal values. (Naumanen and Rinne 2008)

Estonia applied for EU membership in the same year that Finland became a member of it. Three years later (1998), the negotiation process started. Estonia adopted annual national action plans, which were reviewed by the Commission in progress reports. Not surprisingly, education issues did not cause problems in implementing aquis. In the same year that Estonia successfully closed membership negotiations (2002), the Barcelona European Council agreed upon the “Work Programme on Education and Training 2010”, which marks the acceleration and deepening of educational policy on the EU level. Thus, when Estonia became a full member in 2004, the Union had already lived two years under the new education-policy paradigm. Estonia learned quickly to report on progress according to the OMC principles

in various policy fields such as employment, pensions, social exclusion and, lastly, education. Hence, for a new member state, the OMC was perceived as the normal way of EU intervention into national policies.

Estonia's standpoint in the EU affairs was quite different from that of Finland. Firstly, there has always been scepticism towards domestic competencies in education-policy-making. The state of affairs in education has been steadily under public criticism, and attempts to transfer policy experiences abroad have been made in education since the beginning of the transition period in the early 1990s. (Ruus 2004) Secondly, Estonia did not have a strong platform on preserving national policy pattern in the EU; instead the willingness to adopt European norms without big discussions was dominant. Such conformism could be explained not by the low self-esteem of policy-makers only, but also by the good fit between Lisbon values and national goals of education. In post-communist Estonian education policy, competitiveness, entrepreneurship and freedom of choice have been more appreciated than social cohesion and equality. (Vanttaja and Rinne 2008) Already in 1997, i.e. five years ahead of the Lisbon strategy, the Estonian government stated the main goal of educational reforms as developing an educational system that will allow Estonia to compete successfully at the European goods and labour market. (VVk 1997) Criticism towards the domestic policy-making capacity and towards the question of whether the EU approach to educational objectives was a good fit created a situation that according to the research literature (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000; Rose 2005) favours policy transfer.

### **Method: applying the policy-learning approach**

Theories of policy-learning have gained remarkable attention in the last decade. Europeanisation has played an important role in this by providing good grounds to verifying relevant theoretical accounts. Much research has pointed to OMC as a policy device intended to rely on the comparative method and on the potential of policy transfers. (Wallace 2001; Novoa and deJong-Lambert 2003; Rodrigues 2003) The first pieces of work on Europeanisation applied the policy transfer approach to the policy areas that belong to the single market. (Radaelli 2000; Risse, Cowles and Caporaso 2001) Later on, when OMC became firmly established, policy-learning accounts were also used to study Europeanisation in soft policy areas including education. (Phillips and Ertl 2003; Novoa 2001) The majority of the studies investigate how Brussels can motivate or oblige policy transfer. Fewer authors stress that the impact of EU institutions is not straightforward but mediated by various factors. The level of how well the EU policy fits with domestic structures and values (Risse, Cowles and Caporaso 2001), "horizontal effects" of Europeanisation understood as the result of increased competition or cooperation between countries (Vink and Graziano 2007) and the legitimacy of the EU in member states (Radaelli 2000) are studied as factors explaining the EU impact on national policies.

I will apply these approaches on mediated policy transfer to the education policy of Estonia, which used to learn from its neighbouring Finland. The aim of the article is to find out whether the role of Finland in drawing lessons has changed since Estonia entered the EU and whether this can be explained by the active interference

of the EU in educational policy. I assume that those EU policy objectives and indicators gain priority in the Estonian policy agenda, where a feasibility to draw a lesson from Finland exists. Thus, another member state, which serves as an arena for policy transfer can play a catalysing role in enhancing the Europeanisation of national policy. In order to prove the hypothesis, I will study several issues in Estonian education subject to policy transfer by asking the following research questions:

1. What are the arguments of actors in looking to reform experiences abroad?
2. What are the policy-learning mechanisms? Do they evolve in the course of time?
3. Are the Finnish experiences that have been transferred related to the EU policy objectives? Do they explain the variance in the success of learning exercises?

In order to carry out the analysis I will adopt the framework by Dolowitz and Marsh (2000), who studied policy-learning by distinguishing arguments, main actors, mechanisms and arenas of the learning process. In soft policy areas, where the EU governs via an open method of coordination, it is not an easy task to define explicit tools of policy transfer. However, some previous studies stress the ability of the EU to frame the policy discourse and in this way affect perceptions and alter the direction of domestic policy debates. (Knill and Lemkuhl 1999, Jepsen and Serrano Pascual 2005, Moreno and Palier 2005, Örnberg 2008) Therefore, studying how policy issues are talked about and which vocabulary is used can be a workable tool to define the presence of Europeanisation in education policy. Interviews with key actors in the field and content analysis of national policy documents will be used for this purpose. Policy documents also allow defining how often an explicit reference to the EU Lisbon strategy or to the “Common objectives in education and training 2010” is made, including use of European benchmarks and indicators. Additionally, typical mechanisms of policy transfer such as the use of foreign experts, study visits, translation of guidelines and manuals will be counted as evidence of the Finnish influence on Estonian education policy.

Given the broad scope of educational policy (Vocational Education and Training, Life-Long Learning, Higher Education), I will focus on primary and secondary education only. Two arguments guided this decision. Firstly, the Finnish influence is more visible in Estonian primary and secondary education, whereas Estonian vocational education used to look mainly to continental Europe, and higher education has more similarities with Anglo-American than Nordic traditions. The second reason lies in the history of EU educational policy. Primary and secondary education was included into the EU policy agenda quite recently and therefore, “adaptation pressures” might be easier to detect. (Risse, Cowles and Caporaso 2001, 8)

Out of the debate-intensive primary and secondary education policy, I selected three issues that have gained significant attention of domestic actors and are related to the “Common objectives in education and training 2010” framework. These issues are curriculum reform, revision of school evaluation and students’ assessment system and improving equal access to education.

The analysis is organised according to the two different periods because paying attention to the time sequences between EU policies and domestic change allows better to determine effects of foreign influence. The pre-accession period of 1995-2003 and the period since 2004, when Estonia became a member of the EU, will be studied by exploring arguments and mechanisms of policy transfer.

### **Analysis: Two periods, different logic**

#### *Pre-accession period – from policy diffusion to contested approaches*

In the early transition period, Estonia received assistance from various democratic countries. Besides the Baltic Sea neighbours, Canada and USA were active in promoting democracy-oriented education. Still, the most massive exchange of expertise occurred with Finland, both at the grass-roots level and amongst policy makers. “There was hardly any school in Estonia that didn’t have a twinning school in Finland. Finns were also very active in creating and developing professional contacts”, the Head of School Headmasters’ Association explains the situation. (Kaasik 2005, 41)

The impact of Finnish experience was strongest in the curriculum reform. Already in 1992, a cooperation agreement was signed between the Estonian Ministry of Education (MER)<sup>1</sup> and the Finnish National Board of Education (FNBE) on assistance in writing the national curriculum. Finnish experts visited Estonia several times, and Estonian experts were invited to train in Finland. “In the beginning we were working as in fog. Finns’ advice gave us confidence that we are working in the right directions in order to compose a democratic curriculum for the independent Estonia.” (Ruus 2008) These words explain the dominating argument of policy transfer. In this period, the curriculum reform was understood in Estonia as a tool of return to the Western world, away from totalitarian Soviet education. (Ruus 2004, 26; Alajõe and Ginter 2008, 40) In the 1980s, Finland played a role of the “window to the West” for Estonia; in the 1990s, this perception was still strong.

The Estonian curriculum was initiated and written by national working groups, but under regular consultations of Finnish experts. It was enacted in 1996 as planned in the government coalition agreement. The adoption of a new curriculum was justified not only by the necessity of democratisation (because this had already largely been done in the previous curriculum of 1989), but also by the willingness to transfer certain principles of the Finnish curriculum, such as increased autonomy of schools via drafting their own curricula and an explicit definition of learning outcomes. (Ruus et al. 2008, 17) Two years after adopting the curriculum, the Estonian Ministry of Education requested a peer review of the curriculum from the FNBE that served as a basis for the further development of the curriculum. (Ruus 2004, 19)

In conjunction with the curriculum reform, another policy-transfer issue rose onto the agenda. Finland had a system of national matriculation exams, and Estonia wanted to implement it, too, in order to measure learning outcomes defined in the

---

<sup>1</sup> On 1 January 2003, the Ministry of Education was renamed the Ministry of Education and Research

national curriculum. Here different stakeholders had different positions: policy-makers were in favour of the exam system, whereas educational practitioners and parents were against it, being afraid of increasing competitiveness in education. Nevertheless, the national examination system was introduced in 1997.

This fact indicates the emergence of a neoliberal orientation in Estonian policy that became apparent at the end of the 1990s when right-wing political parties formed the government. Education-policy thinking started to converge with the Anglo-Saxon neoliberal model. (Loogma 2005) Although England was never mentioned in formal policy documents as a site for policy-learning, one can see the influence of British reform ideas. Issues of efficient resource allocation rose to the forefront; school autonomy, school choice and accountability of schools to the parents were also often debated. All these keywords characterised educational reforms in England in the 1980s and 1990s. (Gorard, Taylor and Fitz 2003) Yet, the neoliberal approach actively advocated by international organisations became a mainstream in policy-making for many countries in the 1990s. Therefore neoliberal features can also be found in Finnish education policy although to a lesser extent than in Estonia (Vantaja and Rinne 2008, 342).

Neoliberalism had its impact also on the curriculum development, which was attacked by different parties. Domestic debates stressed that it does not leave enough choice to the students. Peer reviews by the Finnish Board of Education and OECD criticised the vague description of key competencies that did not allow an efficient measurement of study outcomes. (OECD 2000, FNBE 1999) This criticism led to a new round of the reform. Differently from the Scandinavian policy traditions, the task was outsourced to the special department at Tartu University. Yet, in 2002, the curriculum was enacted by the national government without radical changes compared to the former version. In 2003, a new government was formed, and the Minister of Education, T. Maimets, was a keen advocate of Finnish education. He suggested among other things to adapt the Finnish curriculum as completely as possible. (Alajõe and Ginter 2008, 39) However, emerging educational interest groups opposed this simple solution.

In parallel to this continuous debate on curriculum reform, interest groups raised new issues referring to the existing Finnish good practices. These groups acted mainly under the umbrella of the Educational Forum, an NGO uniting school leaders, educational practitioners and researchers. In 1998, the Educational Forum urged the development of a comprehensive long-term educational strategy and fundamental revision of all main legal acts in the field of education. One of the aims was to streamline the education system in order to facilitate student mobility within the system. The proposition was to abolish the existing division of schools into different tracks (vocational, general) and treat them on the basis of educational levels solely. This idea follows the pattern of the educational legislation reform in Finland, which was implemented in 1999. (Eurydice 2006) In 2001, the Ministry of Education approved the draft document of the educational strategy that created a good premise for adopting the Finnish school system. However, due to the reluctance of the National parliament, the proposed amendment remained in the draft status. "Regrettably the legislation reform is completely stopped", declared one of the leaders of the Educational Forum. (Aarna 2005, 36) The situation with the new educa-

tional strategy was not better – instead of approving a comprehensive strategy, the government continued with twelve separate strategies in the area of education.

Thus, the situation in terms of policy-learning became more complicated at the turn of the millennium. One of the observable trends is the shift from simple policy diffusion to more complex learning. Policy diffusion occurs when countries are geographically close and have vital cooperation. (Walker 1969) Both these factors were present in the Estonian education policy in the mid-1990s. Using Finnish expertise for advice, training and peer-reviewing was a dominant tool of policy transfer then. The adaptability of Finnish experience in the Estonian context was not debated, nor was any strong pressure group in the arena, who could advocate some alternative model. The main motive for policy transfer was gaining confidence in building democratic education although it was not based on systematic comparative studies but rather “on eclectic experience and emotional wishes to achieve the Nordic neighbours’ life standard, or on fears of adopting one’s own decisions.” (Alajõe and Ginter 2008, 40)

Step-by-step lesson drawing attempts became more complex trying to catch various issues and tools. Additionally, educational reforms were put into the broader context of the welfare regime choice, where policy actors did not share a common view. Some actors valued social-democratic education with equal opportunities; some advocated the neoliberal vision allowing to arguably better meet quality in schooling. Using foreign experience to legitimise domestic policy change became an important motive of policy transfer. Instead of inviting foreign experts as in former years, domestic actors composed draft laws themselves by referring to relevant Finnish legal acts.

The success of policy-learning attempts varied. Some attempts failed (implementation of strategic planning, comprehensive legislation reform), some succeeded without revision (national exams), some were altered during the reform process (curriculum). What can explain these differences? The literature on policy-learning suggests that cultural and ideological closeness promotes lesson drawing (Rose 2005), whereas the complexity of the issue could hinder it. (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000) Additionally, the political power of actors advocating foreign experience increases the chances for success. (Marmor et al. 2005, Rose 2005) The current study confirms these arguments. Because the national testing system fit well within the popular doctrine of outcome measurement and school choice, it was implemented fast. The curriculum as a more fundamental issue faced different positions of political actors including reluctance to transfer policy from abroad. An attempt to implement an overwhelming educational strategy as it exists in Finland failed because it was too complex for fast solutions, and it was pushed by the non-governmental experts, who, in that period, were not yet involved in formal policy-making.

#### *The post-accession period – towards increasing self-confidence in policy-making*

In 2004, Estonia became a full member of the EU; at the same time attempts to transfer the best practices from Finland continued. Thus, the situation with policy-learning became increasingly mixed in terms of objectives and influences.

The relevance of the EU common educational objectives for domestic policy was

quite vaguely understood in the beginning. As declared in the first Estonian National Report on progress towards EU indicators and benchmarks, the “fields that are most important for Estonia are given priority also in Europe.” (COM 2005, 5) According to the National Report, the fact that national and EU policy fit so well was the reason not to establish a separate mechanism for the implementation of the objectives as recommended by the Commission (Ibid).

At the same time Finland remained an attractive arena for policy-learning. The primary reason for that were the results of PISA 2003, where Finland performed extremely well. This urged an intensification of study visits to Finland. For example, at an international conference on the Finnish educational “miracle”, held in Helsinki in spring 2005, 10% of the participants were from Estonia. (Aarna 2005) These events opened up a new round in old debates on joining international studies and reforming the national curriculum.

The necessity to join the assessment surveys had already been raised by experts at the end of the 1990s referring explicitly to Finland as a good example of integrating national and international interests. (Ruus 2003, 9) However, “nobody/in the Ministry/did care, did not understand at that time.” (Ruus 2008) Now the situation started to change; Estonia participated in IEA TIMSS 2003 and decided to join OECD PISA 2006. On the one hand, this demonstrates the growing internationalisation of Estonian education policy. On the other hand, some EU indicators in education (share of low achievers, achievement disparity, dispersal of higher order thinking, etc.) were taken from the PISA and IEA studies that increased the policy relevance of international achievement scores.

Two aspects should be highlighted here in order to understand the policy-transfer mechanism. Firstly, Finnish education gained interest amongst Estonian policy-makers because of its great success in the PISA main rating. Secondary ratings such as the very small portion of low achievers and the low disparity in student achievements were pointed out by few academic experts only. (Ruus 2005, Aarna 2005) Hence, the government stressed these aspects of the Finnish system, which fit well with the neoliberal ideology (more freedom to schools, individual development plans for students). This was done despite the fact that Finland itself had decided to return to a more centralised curriculum. This situation is called “mythmaking” in drawing lessons, meaning that the experiences of other nations are only occasionally seriously examined; policy-makers see foreign examples parochially as promising solutions to domestic problems. (Marmor, Freeman and Okma 2005, 334)

Another noteworthy aspect concerns the different approaches of various actors to the way how lessons should be transferred. Some top MER officials wanted to copy the Finnish curriculum fast and without adaptation. Academic pressure groups became worried about such attempts. “If we just take it, it will be disastrous to Estonian education, because we never learn to make a curriculum ourselves”, said one of the leading educational researchers. (Ruus 2005, 86) Analysts warned also that because of the different social context and educational practices, the application of the Finnish curriculum in Estonia would cause a total policy failure. (Ruus 2005, 87)

The controversy between policy-makers and experts has been one of the factors that hindered the quick implementation of the Finnish curriculum. Additionally, a new government coalition was formed as a result of the parliamentary elections in

2005. The revision of the Estonian curriculum was restarted from the very foundation although without remarkable progress. In this stalemate situation, policy-making activities were refocused on less controversial issues such as the provision of free school lunches and workbooks, the reform of the school evaluation policy and the organisation of extracurricular activities. Not surprisingly, Finnish experience guided these policy initiatives as well. For the left-oriented interest groups, the introduction of free school lunches and state subsidy for extracurricular activities were seen as tools to soften the impact of the liberal market economy; advocates of neoliberal thinking referred to these measures as predictors of Finland's success in PISA. Thus, lesson-learning became more selective and bound to the ideological orientation of the actors.

In parallel to Finland, the European influence became more apparent in the national education policy. This can be found for example in the reform of the school evaluation system. The quality discourse and school evaluation issues were top priorities for the EU. When the Ministry of Education and Research started active work towards the implementation of internal evaluation in schools, it explicitly referred to the European experience. (MER 2006) In parallel to implementing the European discourse in quality management, MER used the Finnish expertise in the field. Similarly to Finland, Estonia abolished school inspections, introduced compulsory self-evaluation and developed an integrated system of external and internal evaluation. Finnish experts were invited to training seminars, and relevant Finnish manuals were translated into Estonian.

The increasing role of the EU can also be seen in policies on equal access to education. The introduction of compulsory pre-primary education and the increasing flexibility of the school system can serve as evidence here. None of these issues has been reflected in the first Estonian national report on educational indicators (COM 2005) although they were highlighted in the Commission progress report. (COM 2006) However, just one or two years later, concrete actions were taken.

The pre-primary education reform was prepared in 2006 and will be implemented in 2007-2009. (MER 2006b) In terms of lesson-drawing, it represents a mixed case. Estonia has set a nearly universal enrolment rate (95%) in pre-primary education for 2010. This is in line with the EU benchmark, but significantly exceeds the relevant figure for Finland. (COM 2007, 28) On the other hand, according to the draft law, pre-primary schooling may occur not necessarily in kindergarten, but also in day-care centres or at home. This is the existing practice in Finland. Similarly to the case of the school-evaluation reform, Finnish experts served as consultants in drafting the pre-primary education reform.

The case of improving flexibility of the educational system by the integration of the vocational education training (VET) and general education represents a similar story. After long debates, the former system of VET institutions was reformed in 2006, and a system comparable to the Scandinavian ones was introduced. (Eurydice 2007) The change had two objectives: firstly, to allow vocational training for persons without basic education and secondly, to increase vocational school graduates' competitiveness while applying to the higher education. Both these objectives were highlighted in the Commission progress report as good practices to be found in Scandinavia. (COM 2006)

These two cases confirm Radaelli's thesis that for the implementation of an EU policy, a relevant attractive national practice must exist, which can be "inseminated". (Radaelli 2000)

In 2007, Estonia enacted a new Development Plan for the Primary and Secondary Education, which reflects the growing importance of Brussels. Firstly, the language of the document uses keywords common in the EU progress reports on education and training. As T. Annus, one of the senior civil servants in MER, explained, via the EU documents, policy-makers have gained the confidence that they "can phrase the topic of the access to education in such a way, to look at things in this way" (Annus 2007, 33). Secondly, explicit references to the EU documents are made in the Development plan when analysing the domestic situation in education. Inter alia, the need to increase investments into pre-primary education is described as a priority for the EU. (MER 2006b, 9)

Yet, regardless of this Europeanisation in language, a systemic adjustment to the EU education policy is lacking in the national Development plan. The master document, "Education and training 2010", is not mentioned amongst related strategies. Instead domestic activities in education policy are listed within the "National Action Plan on Economic Growth and Jobs". (MER 2006, 44) Thus, Estonia located its education policy in the area of economy and labour market as it was typical for the pre-Lisbon tradition in the EU.

In sum, the first two years of Estonian membership in the EU are marked by contested and eclectic attempts of policy transfer. Some issues that fit well with the political orientation of the neoliberal government were imported both from Finland and Brussels. References to the EU documents were used to legitimise domestic reform ideas, whereas Finnish expertise was used in the implementation stage. The latter included the taking over of educational arrangements, the invitation of trainers and the translation of manuals.

The very latest developments suggest that Estonian education policy becomes more oriented towards the EU, leaving Finland in a secondary position. Interviews and policy documents support this argument. In earlier years, Estonian Ministers of Education referred to Finland in their speeches, but now they refer to the Lisbon strategy. "There was no Lisbon mentioned four-five years ago but today. I think the Lisbon strategy has become stronger and stronger." (Annus 2007, 39)

In 2008, a joint Development plan for all education areas was finally enacted by the Ministry of Education and Research. (MER 2008) Compared to the Development plan of primary and secondary education implemented two years earlier, it has significantly more references to the EU education policy, including naming the programme "Education and training 2010".

In addition to the issues and keywords, European statistical indicators are used to frame the domestic policy agenda. The problem of early school drop-outs can illustrate this emerging trend. This issue had already been raised in Estonian education policy many years earlier and was repeatedly discussed. However, debates and previous policy reports focused on students' drop-out from grades 6-8, whereas the EU measures the share of 18- to 24-year-olds with lower secondary education who have left the education system. Thus, there was a mismatch between the domestic and the European indicator. In the joint Development plan of 2008, this mismatch

has been abolished by implementing the EU indicator. “Because we are members of the EU we cannot act in a different way. We share common objectives that are not set without us. If there are some indicators that help us to define our position, then we shall use them.” (Annus 2007, 39) Thus, policy-learning has led to the emergence of administrative identity, based on statistical indicators as revealed in some previous studies. (Moreno and Palier 2005)

However, when Estonia looks more closely towards Brussels, Finland is losing its interest in European education policy objectives. Arguably, European benchmarks are regarded as too low and thus not relevant for Finland. (Naumanen and Rinne 2008, 303) Because Estonia also performs quite well in several benchmarks, a similar demotivation mechanism can appear in the future. However, the question remains of whether Estonian policy-making has become as confident as its Finnish counterpart to set the national agenda independently.

## **Summing up**

This analysis was one of the many attempts to discuss the impact of Europeanisation on domestic policy change. The empirical base, a new member state, was non-typical, and so was the chosen policy field, education. One can argue that for both, there is not enough “history” yet to draw reliable conclusions. This can be partly true. However, a first generation of country studies is needed to build the “basic ingredient for improved policy learning.” (Marmor et al. 2005, 344)

I studied the impact of Finland on the Estonian education policy in the last decade involving pre-accession and post-accession periods. My assumption was that the EU membership affects the pattern of lesson-drawing. Another member state which serves as an arena for policy transfer can play a catalysing role in enhancing the Europeanisation of national policy. To test this assumption, I looked at motives and mechanisms used by political actors in different periods applying the theoretical framework by Dolowitz and Marsh (2000) and the latest contributions of several authors on policy-learning within the framework of the OMC. (Knill and Lemkuhl 1999, Jepsen and Serrano Pascual 2005, Moreno and Palier 2005)

The analysis revealed a significant evolution in arguments of lesson-drawing. In the early pre-accession period, the dominant motive shared by all actors in the field was the willingness to gain the confidence that the chosen policy orientation fits with democratic principles. Later, when policy actors formulated their particular political visions, foreign experience was used mainly to legitimise domestic reform ideas. Due to the variance of political preferences, policy transfer became more selective and contested.

The post-accession period, when Estonia became part of the OMC process, is characterised by a progressive increase of the EU influence. In addition to using the EU for legitimising domestic policy change, a feeling of belonging becomes important. To be European appears as a strong argument for using EU policy “language” and statistical indicators to frame national education policy. In parallel to the increase of a European identity amongst Estonian policy-makers, Finland loses its central role in policy-learning. The study suggests that Finland played a catalysing role in the Europeanisation of Estonian education policy only in a limited period. Shortly before

and after Estonia became a member of the EU, Finnish experience was used to legitimise Brussels' vision and to implement relevant policy change in practice.

The low legitimacy of the EU as an obstacle to learning (Radaelli 2000) was not proved by the current analysis. Rather to the contrary, the EU activism helped legitimise domestic decisions, which were pending for a long time.

## Acknowledgements

The study presented here is financed by the Estonian Science Foundation, grant No. 7954. Earlier versions of the paper were discussed at the *Halduskultuur* conference in Tallinn, April 2008 and at the ECPR Joint Session of Workshops in Helsinki, May 2007, in WG "Reforming Education Policy: Internationalisation – Privatisation – Governance." I am grateful to all conference and workshop participants, as well as to two anonymous reviewers for helpful comments and suggestions.

## REFERENCES

- Aarna, Olav. 2005. "Haridusstrateegiline protsess Eestis ja Eesti Haridusfoorum." *Riigikogu Toimetised* 11, 33-40.
- Alajõe, Sulev and Jüri Ginter. 2008. "Educational Reform in a Small Country: The Case of Estonia." In Jaan Mikk, Marika Veisson and Piret Luik (eds). *Reforms and Innovations in Estonian Education*. Baltische Studien zur Erziehungs- und Sozialwissenschaft 16. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 27-42.
- COM. 2008. *Progress Towards the Lisbon Objectives in Education and Training. Staff Working Document. Indicators and benchmarks 2008*. Brussels. SEC (2008) 2293.
- COM. 2007. *Progress Towards the Lisbon Objectives in Education and Training. Staff Working Document of the Commission. Report 2007*. Brussels. SEC (2007) 1284.
- COM. 2006. *Progress Towards the Lisbon Objectives in Education and Training. Staff Working Document of the Commission. Report 2006*. Brussels. SEC (2006) 639.
- COM. 2005. *Implementing the "Education and Training 2010" Work Programme. 2005 Progress Report. Estonia*. Brussels. Retrieved 14 April 2007 at [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/nationalreport\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/nationalreport_en.html).
- Council. 2006. "Modernising Education and Training: A Vital Contribution to Prosperity and Social Cohesion in Europe." 2006 Joint Interim Report of the Council and of the Commission on Progress under the "Education & Training 20102 work programme." *Official Journal of the European Union*

2006/C79/01.

- Dahl, Bettina. 2003. "Tensions between the European and the Nordic Dimension in Education." In David Phillips and Hubert Ertl (eds). *Implementing European Union Education and Training Policy: A Comparative Study of Issues in Four Member States*. Dordrecht: Kluwer, 87-116.
- Dolowitz, David P. and David Marsh. 2000. "Learning from abroad: The Role of Policy Transfer in Contemporary Policy Making." *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration and Institutions* 13 (1), 5-23.
- Eurydice. 2007. *National Summary Sheets on Education Systems in Europe and Ongoing Reforms. Estonia*. February 2007. Eurydice. Retrieved 15 April 2007 at [http://www.eurydice.org/ressources/eurydice/pdf/047DN/047\\_EE\\_EN.pdf](http://www.eurydice.org/ressources/eurydice/pdf/047DN/047_EE_EN.pdf).
- Eurydice. 2006. *National Summary Sheets on Education Systems in Europe and Ongoing Reforms. Finland*. July 2006. Eurydice. Retrieved 15 April 2007 at [http://www.eurydice.org/ressources/eurydice/pdf/047DN/047\\_FI\\_EN.pdf](http://www.eurydice.org/ressources/eurydice/pdf/047DN/047_FI_EN.pdf).
- FNBE. 1999. *Hinnang Eesti õppekavale: Kokkuvõte õppekava üldosa ja ainekavade tugevatest ja nõrkadest külgedest*. Helsinki: Opetushallitus.
- Gorard, Stephen, Chris Taylor and John Fitz. 2003. *Schools, Markets and School Choice*. London, New York: Routledge Falmer.
- Hoskins, Bryony, Ernesto Villalba, Daniel Van Nijlen and Carolyn Barber. 2008. *Measuring Civic Competence in Europe: A Composite Indicator Based on IEA Civic Education Study 1999 for 14- Year- Olds in School*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
- Jepsen, Maria and Amparo Serrano Pascual. 2005. "The European Social Model: An Exercise of Deconstruction." *Journal of European Social Policy* 15 (3), 231-245.
- Kaasik, Martin. 2005. "Mõtteid hariduselu arengust Eestis aastail 1990-2005." *Riigikogu Toimetised* 11, 41-44.
- Knill, Cristopher and Dirk Lehmkuhl. 1999. "How Europe Matters: Different Mechanisms of Europeanisation." *European Integration Online Papers* 3 (7) at <http://www.eiop.or.at/eiop/pdf/1999-007.pdf>.
- Loogma, Krista. 2005. "Haridusmuutused Eestis: Haridussotsioloogiline lähenemine." In Rene Tammist and Hannes Rumm (eds). *Eesti poliitika eile, täna, homme: Reforme seitsmest valdkonnast*. Tallinn: Johannes Mikkelsoni Keskus, 89-114.
- Marmor, Ted, Richard Freeman and Kieke Okma. 2005. "Comparative Perspectives and Policy Learning in the World of Health Care." *Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis* 7 (4), 331-348.
- Martens, Kerstin. 2007. "How to Become an Influential Actor – The 'Comparative Turn' in OECD Education Policy." In Kerstin Martens, Alessandra Rusconi and Kathrin Leuze (eds). *New Arenas of Education Governance: The Impact of International Organizations and Markets on Educational Policy Making*. Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 40-56.
- Moreno, Luis and Bruno Palier. 2005. "The Europeanisation of the Welfare:

- Paradigm Shifts and Social Policy Reforms.” In Peter Taylor-Gooby (ed.) *Ideas and Welfare State Reform in Western Europe*. Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 145-175.
- MER. 2008. *Haridus- ja Teadusministeeriumi valitsemisala arengukava “Tark ja tegus rahvas 2009-2012*. Retrieved 11 December 2008 at <http://www.hm.ee/index.php?044810>
- MER. 2006a. *Õppeasutuse sisehindamine. Soovitusi sisehindamise läbiviimiseks õppeasutustes*. [Guidelines for internal evaluation of schools]. Retrieved 26 October 2006 at <http://www.hm.ee/index.php?popup=download&id=4125>.
- MER. 2006b. *Üldharidussüsteemi arengukava 2007-2013*. Retrieved 14 April 2007 at [http://www.hm.ee/index.php?popup=download&id=5676#\\_Toc153693632](http://www.hm.ee/index.php?popup=download&id=5676#_Toc153693632).
- Naumanen, Päivi and Risto Rinne. 2008. “Euroopa Liidu Hariduspoliitika ja Soome hariduspoliitilised suundumused.” In Larissa Jõgi, Tiina Jääger, Riina Leppanen and Risto Rinne (eds). *Eesti ja Soome Haridus ning Muutused EL-I Hariduspoliitikas 1990-2000*. Tallinn: TLÜ Kirjastus, 274-306.
- Novoa, Antonio. 2001. “The Restructuring of the European Educational Space: Changing Relationships among States, Citizens and Educational Communities.” In Janet Fink, Gail Lewis, John Clarke (eds.) *Rethinking European Welfare: Transformations of European Social Policy*. London: Sage in cooperation with Open University Press, 249-276.
- Novoa, Antonio and William deJong-Lambert. 2003. “Educating Europe: An Analysis of EU Educational Policies.” In David Phillips, Hubert Ertl (eds). *Implementing European Union Education and Training Policy: A Comparative Study of Issues in Four Member States*. Dordrecht: Kluwer, 41-73.
- OECD. 2000. Reviews of National Policies for Education. Estonia.
- Phillips, David and Hubert Ertl (eds). 2003. *Implementing European Union Education and Training Policy: A Comparative Study of Issues in Four Member States*. Dordrecht: Kluwer.
- Programme of the Coalition 2007-2011*. Retrieved 5 April 2007 at <http://www.valitsus.ee/?id=1468>.
- Radaelli, Claudio. 2000. “Policy Transfer in the European Union: Institutional Isomorphism as a Source of Legitimacy.” *Governance: An International Journal of Policy, Administration and Institutions* 13 (1), 25-44.
- Reps, Mailis. 2005. “Haridusreformidest Eestis.” *Riigikogu Toimetised* 11, 29-32.
- Risse, Thomas, Maria Green Cowles and James Caporaso. 2001. “Europeanization and Domestic Change: Introduction.” In Maria Green Cowles, James Caporaso and Thomas Risse. *Transforming Europe: Europeanization and Domestic Change*. Ithaca & London: Cornell University Press, 1-20.
- Rodrigues, Maria João (ed.). 2003. *The New Knowledge Economy in Europe: A Strategy for International Competitiveness and Social Cohesion*. Cheltenham: Edward Elgar.
- Rose, Richard. 2005. *Learning from Comparative Public Policy: A Practical Guide*. London, New York: Routledge.
- Ruus, Viive-Riina. 2008. Interview with V.R. Ruus, professor emeritus of Tallinn University, 24. November 2008.

- Ruus, Viive-Riina. 2005. "Millise õppekavaga jätkab Eesti kool?" *Riigikogu Toimetised* 11, 86-94.
- Ruus, Viive-Riina. 2004. "Eesti õppekavareform 1987-2002". In Airi Liimets and Viive-Riina Ruus (eds). *Õppimine mitmest vaatenurgast. Tallinna Pedagoogikaülikooli Toimetised. A24. Humaniora*, Tallinn: TLÜ Kirjastus, 13-33.
- Ruus, Viive-Riina. 2003. "Õppekava kui ajaloovabrik." *Haridus* 2, 4-9.
- Ruus, Viive-Riina, Imbi Henno, Eve Eisenschnidt, Krista Loogma, Helle Noorväli, Priit Reiska, Sirje Rekkor. 2008. "Reforms, Developments and Trends in Estonian Education during Recent Decades." In Jaan Mikk, Marika Veisson and Piret Luik (eds). *Reforms and Innovations in Estonian Education. Baltische Studien zur Erziehungs- und Sozialwissenschaft* 16. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 11-26.
- Toom, Ellis. 2007. Interview with Tiina Annus. In Ellis Toom. *EL Hariduspoliitilised eesmärgid Eesti üldhariduspoliitika kujundajatenä. Bakalaureusetöö*. Tallinn: TLÜ Riigiteaduste Instituut.
- Vanttaja, Markku and Risto Rinne. 2008. "Soome ja Eesti hariduse võrdlus ning Euroopa Liidu hariduspoliitika mõjud." In Larissa Jõgi, Tiina Jääger, Riina Leppanen and Risto Rinne (eds). *Eesti ja Soome Haridus ning Muutused EL-I Hariduspoliitikas 1990-2000*. Tallinn: TLÜ Kirjastus, 331-345.
- Vink, P. Maarten and Graziano Paolo. 2007. "Challenges of a New Research Agenda." In Paolo Graziano and Maarten P. Vink. *Europeanization. New Research Agendas*. Basingstoke, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 3-22.
- VVK. 1997. "Vabariigi Valitsuse korraldus nr. 464-k." *Valitsuse tegevuse põhieesmärgid 1997-1998*, Retrieved 14 April 2007 at <http://www.valitsus.ee/?id=1119>.
- Walker, Jack L. 1969. "The Diffusion of Innovations among the American States." *American Political Science Review* 63 (3), 880-889.
- Wallace, Helen. 2001. "The Changing Politics of the European Union: An Overview." *Journal of Common Market Studies* 39 (4), 581-594.
- Örnberg, Jenny C. 2008. "The Europeanization of Swedish Alcohol Policy: The Case of ECAS." *Journal of European Social Policy* 18 (4), 380-392.