

PROBLEMS AND POSSIBILITIES OF INTEGRATING ICT IN
EUROPEAN UNION'S HIGHER EDUCATION: PERCEPTIONS OF PEOPLE INSIDE
AND OUTSIDE THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION'S *e*LEARNING PROGRAMMES

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F.S.

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INTRODUCTION

Although I embarked on this quest in earnest in March of 2005, the spark that ignited the fuse of my research interest goes back five years, when I decided to formalize my focus on Europe by writing my Master's thesis on educational technology in the European Union as a part survey of and part speculative paper on the *eLearning Action Plan*. At the end of that paper I wrote that I would continue to closely follow the implementation of *eLearning* initiatives at European level and would produce a future study with my assessments of such developments. Within the first year of my doctoral studies I had already taken several courses in European political and historical studies to explore in more depth the dynamics that go behind policy-making in the European Union. Later on, courses supplemented by extensive readings in globalization studies, international relations and information society equipped me with a whole array of perspectives that could be applied in the holistic understanding of the overall context within which the European apparatus operates.

I took the first concrete steps in defining the direction of my inquiry in December 2002 when I traveled to Berlin to attend the *Online Educa* international conference, a self-proclaimed “key networking venue for strategists and practitioners from all over the world.”¹ I went there with the intent to establish connections with experts in various EU Member States who could provide me with a behind-the-scenes look at the effects of *eLearning* policies and strategies in Europe. Though I can confess that my participation could have been more fruitful, I would still consider the event worth the effort even

¹ Description found on the conference website at http://www.online-educa.com/en/the_conference.htm.

though I ended up interviewing only one of the several persons I met at the conference. In due course, however, that person would prove instrumental in providing me with other contacts. Three years later I can say that my research undertaking has been a slow process, accompanied by small successes and frustrating failures, not unlike the work, I am sure, of many researchers who have set sail on similar journeys before.

I arrived in Germany to conduct interviews with university professors on a hot day in June of 2005 in what must have been one of the hottest summers on record in Europe in recent years. Both my interlocutors and I were challenged to keep from hyperventilating while discussing interesting aspects of e-learning and information society. But the outside temperature was not the only thing that was rising that summer. The political climate was also simmering, particularly at the higher echelons of the European Union and of the Member States, in the wake of the two major back-to-back blows that the proposed treaty for a European constitution had received in France and the Netherlands only three weeks before my trip. European leaders, both from the national governments and from the European institutions in Brussels, were scrambling to make sense of the causes that lead to such a clear rebuttal of the constitution² in two of the founding Member States of the EU. This double rejection was even more worrying as it was coming from two nations that traditionally had been supporting European integration.

In these two countries, the constitutional treaty was seen as a promoter of policies associated with globalization, in particular with liberal economic measures which were perceived as a threat to the social model cherished by the European public. On the other

² On May 29, 2005, French voters rejected the proposed constitutional treaty by a ten percent margin (55%-45%). Three days later, on June 1, 2005 the Dutch delivered an unequivocal **NO** with a result of 62% to 38%. Source: *The Economist*, (June 4, 2005), p. 38-39.

hand, in political circles, the constitutional treaty was seen as a vehicle for deepening the EU's integration and for advancing the reforms needed for a functional post-enlargement union. More relevant for the purpose of this study, the proposed constitutional treaty was considered by political figures in the European institutions as a means for the delivery of the Lisbon Agenda goals. These goals bear a direct connection with the *eLearning* initiatives at EU level (see Chapter I of this text).

I sensed very little worry in the academia, however, about these exercises in European suffrage. In fact, detachment and a measure of amused indifference would describe the atmosphere among the academics I had the chance to meet. The European political panic of that moment was too far-removed from their preoccupation with the technology or e-learning projects and programs in which they were involved. It was not clear then, and it still isn't now, whether these two events had any significant effect on the actual delivery of e-learning practices in the European Union.

Against this general political backdrop, I focus on two related aspects of the *eLearning* dynamics in the EU. Within the primary line of inquiry, this dissertation takes a look behind the scenes of the *eLearning* Programme and other *eLearning*³ actions under other European programmes⁴ by developing a more in-depth understanding of their national agents, the academics at universities in the European Union (in three principal countries – Germany, Portugal and Sweden and six secondary countries – Belgium,

³ Readers will notice during the course of this dissertation that I am using two spellings of the term e-learning. When spelled as *eLearning*, the term is used as a proper name to denote the link to the European political and technical plans in the field of ICT for education. As *e-learning*, the term refers to the general process of ICT integration in education.

⁴ *Programme* (British spelling) is always used here as a pronoun to conform to the European nomenclature when referring to the EUs instruments for implementing specific actions. It is also used as a proper name when used in conjunction with the *eLearning* Programme (when used by itself, capitalized, *Programme* refers to the *eLearning* Programme). Except for these two cases, *program* (US spelling) is used as a pronoun when needed throughout the text.

France, Italy, Netherlands, Spain and United Kingdom), who have participated in or have knowledge of the logistical and administrative burdens of European *eLearning* projects. Through a series of in-depth, open-ended interviews conducted on location, via the telephone or over the web, this study investigates the interactions of academics and researchers with the European funding programmes in *eLearning*. In addition, a number of interviews with members of the European Commission offer an inside look into some of the practices that go into the drafting of the programmes and work to humanize the stern letter of the legal documentation. The personal accounts are used to build a “composite picture” of common themes related to the processes involved in developing and conducting e-learning projects under the *eLearning* Programme and other European programmes. Furthermore, these accounts shed light on the levels of initiative that go into the actual preparation of e-learning projects.

Consequently, this study finds that the principle of subsidiarity (see page 11 of this text), on which the *eLearning* programmes are based, is broken down to the lowest levels of decision-making regarding e-learning projects. It is individual academics or researches who engage in projects with the backing of their respective home institutions. Their involvement puts a human face on the formal national-supranational governmental mechanisms that rule European policy-making.

The study explores the motivations of the academics to pursue European projects and to the factors they take into consideration when they have to make a choice between European and national funding schemes. It thus adds to and expands on the similar findings in isolated national studies regarding the factors that go into academics’ decisions to engage in European *eLearning* projects.

When it comes to the budgetary and logistical nature of the *eLearning* Programme and other *eLearning* initiatives under other European programmes, the academics' views point to the financial insufficiencies and to the limited applicability of these programmes. Finally, this study suggests that some of the best incentives for the academics' participation in *eLearning* projects rest in the professional opportunities and networking possibilities available through the *eLearning* programmes.

Within the secondary line of inquiry, this study investigates the information society discourse in the European Union, in relation to the *eLearning* programmes, based on the academics' conceptualization of the term. This dissertation reveals a mixed picture of the perceptions that the academics have of the information society in their respective countries. The study indicates a convergence of these perceptions with the indicators of a presumed information society in various quantitative studies. This study considers that an integrated European information society, promoted by the European Commission partly through its *eLearning* programmes, is a concept destined to remain a motivational instrument for driving ICT policies throughout Europe.

The text of this dissertation is divided into four chapters. Chapter I sets the framework for the investigation in this dissertation. It does so by combining three topical perspectives. Firstly, it presents a history of the educational policy in the European Union as it emerges from EU official documents. Educational policy at EU level was slow to start and is still somewhat sketchy, given the differences between the European educational systems. This is a problem further complicated by the fact that higher education institutions have administrative autonomy in most of the Member States, and

thus are less compelled to heed edicts coming from Brussels. Current developments in educational policy are presented and future trends are explored.

Secondly, the chapter is dedicated to explaining the difficulty in the conceptual understanding that is generated by a European Information Society, given the European political institutions' promotion of the term at various levels and for numerous purposes. How is it possible to create a unified Information Society in Europe while the continent is still struggling with defining its own identity?

Thirdly, the chapter addresses the background of the e-learning developments in the European Union and how they became part of the European Commission's political, social and educational strategic planning. The official documentation of the current *eLearning* programmes and initiatives are reviewed. The purpose of the study, including the research questions and the motivations driving it, is presented in the last section of the chapter.

Chapter II explains the research methodology and the steps taken in identifying qualified interview subjects.

Chapter III presents the findings of the study, grouped in interpretive stories of the interviews in the first five sections. The next to last section presents an analysis of the separate stories organized by common sub-themes in a "composite picture." The last section further analyzes the composite picture by comparing the findings with official documentation and studies from the European *eLearning* literature.

Chapter IV presents my reflections on the findings and stories, issues recommendations, points to the limitations of the study and suggests future research topics and interests branching out of the conclusions of this study.

CHAPTER I

A European E-Learning Project

1.1 The eLearning Context in Europe

“Tortoise won’t catch US hare,” (Elliott, 2005, p. 29), euphemistically professed the title of a part sarcastic, part worryingly sobering article published last year in *The Guardian Weekly*, tauntingly summing up the feeling across Europe that the bold vision of the European Commission⁵ to see the European Union (EU) ahead of anyone else, particularly the US, in the global economy was fading further and further into the distance. At the dawn of the new millennium, Europe realized that the digital revolution, spearheaded by developments in information and communication technologies (ICT) in the United States and Japan, was about to leave the unifying continent with a serious long-term economic and social handicap in the face of these global competitors. The

⁵ The European Commission could be seen as analogous to the executive branch of a nation-state. The Commission, however, has much more complex responsibilities to fulfill than any single national government. Cini (1996, p. 14) has identified six major functions that have been attributed to the Commission over time: initiator and proposer of legislation; executor or administrator delivering on the mandates from the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament; guardian of the legal framework, assuring compliance with the implementation of community laws at national level; external representative of the member states with powers of negotiations in their behalf; mediator between the member states, European institutions and interest groups; conscience or voice of the union as a whole. Just from the listing of these functions, anyone in the least bit familiar with political systems can see that the Commission, acting as it has a much more complex political life than a national government. The Commission’s actions are the strongest under the Community’s first pillar, in which decisions are applied by virtue of the community laws enacted in the treaties of the Union and in which the Commission retains its most pervasive prerogatives. Economic and monetary union, environmental policies, trade are some of the areas included in the first pillar. The “human” facet of the Commission is divided in two distinctive parts: the College of Commissioners and the administrative Commission. The College is composed of 25 Commissioners, one per member state, 24 of whom are each individually responsible for a policy domain. One of the members of the College serves as the President of the Commission, responsible for the coordination of policy making within the College and for the overall direction of the Commission’s vision. The administrative Commission is the body of civil servants that supports the Commissioners’ work (Bomberg et al., 2003, p. 44). The “technical” aspect of the Commission is its division into Directorates General (DG) each handling a certain policy area. It is the DGs that form the environment for the administrative Commission.

year was 2000 and, at that juncture, the European Commission, recognizing the challenge it was facing, embarked in an ambitious project to transform the EU into the “most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion” by 2010.⁶ The concern was that if no measures were taken, the EU would slip even further behind its competitors in the global economy than it already was. The “Lisbon Agenda,” named after the capital city where the European Council Summit⁷ was held that spring, entered the Commission jargon as a term describing a programming package aimed at achieving that ambitious target. ICTs were placed at the core of the programmes and initiatives included in the Agenda. With five years to go until the 2010 deadline, the Commission’s goal “now looks embarrassing, if not downright ridiculous,” the said *Guardian Weekly* article bluntly asserts. And the “tortoise,” or the EU, does seem to show signs of slowness towards reaching the target. A report from the High Level Group mandated by the Commission and chaired by former Dutch Prime Minister Wim Kok, revealed in November 2004 that the “overall picture is very mixed and much needs to be done in order to prevent Lisbon from becoming a synonym for missed objectives and failed promises.” Jean Pisani-Ferry (2005), director of the Bruegel think tank and professor at

⁶ Presidency Conclusions. (March 23-24, 2000). *Lisbon European Council*, DOC/00/8, p. 3.

http://europa.eu.int/ISPO/docs/services/docs/2000/jan-march/doc_00_8_en.pdf.

⁷The European Council brings together the Heads of State and Government three or four times a year, in meetings that have commonly been called Summits. Similar to the Council of Ministers, The European Council’s proceedings are coordinated by the country holding the presidency at the time of the summit. These are important events in which issues that have remained unresolved in the regular meetings of the other EU bodies, or from previous summits are tackled, sometimes in informal meetings and working lunches. The European Council gives the EU its general political direction, identifies broad objectives and sets the political agenda for further action. For instance, direct elections to the parliament, monetary union, talks on a rapid reaction force, treaty revisions, enlargement rounds, etc., have all been spearheaded by the European Council (Bomberg et al., 2003, p. 56).

the University of Paris-Dauphine, even goes so far as to assert that the EU's growth compared to that of the US has actually weakened since the launch of the Lisbon Agenda.

One of the initiatives, the *eEurope* Action Plan, with its successive iterations outlining goals for 2002 and 2005, encompasses a series of short term plans seeking to integrate digital technologies into every aspect of economic, social and political life of the Union (COM, 1999, 687 final; COM, 2002, 263 final). The prefix “*e*” (even the significance of this seemingly puny symbol was debated at one point, with some believing it stood for *electronic*, others for *Europe*) denotes the envisioned incorporation of ICTs from eGovernment to eBusiness, with everything else in-between being earmarked for the development of an infrastructure able to function seamlessly on the waves of the eRevolution. A section of the *eEurope* Action Plan is dedicated to education, in the form of the *eLearning* Initiative, which stands as a political declaration of objectives aimed at incorporating ICTs in education. This politically motivated initiative was operationalized through the *eLearning* Action Plan and, later, through the *eLearning* Programme. The latter document, in contrast to the former, was endowed with its own budget (see the next section for a presentation of the documents). The Programme and its influence on higher education in selected Member States of the European Union is the main focus of this study. At the same time, the study also takes into consideration *eLearning* components of other programmes, as I will explain later.

The main theme that emerges from the official documents of the European Commission related to *eLearning* is concerned with the relative harmonization of ICT development in the Member States of the EU. Progress in appropriating technologies in education has been uneven in the Member States, with some registering more success

than others. The Scandinavian countries are generally perceived as the most advanced in their development and use of an ICT infrastructure in virtually any sector of their societies. Ireland, the UK and the Netherlands are closely behind them. Some of the larger economies of Central Europe, like Germany, France or Austria have had mixed results, while the countries of Southern Europe are regarded as being the slowest performers in the field. Certainly, the gaps between the Member States are closing, but the speed of the process is slower than the European Commission would like it to be. The Programme does not explicitly mention a “harmonization” of *eLearning* efforts across the EU’s educational systems, as this would be seen by the Member States as an unwelcome interference in their educational policies. All the successive EU Treaties from the inception of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), the precursor of today’s EU, have enshrined the Member States’ jurisdiction over their individual educational systems. This was done to allay any fears on the part of the Member States that a supranational entity would attempt to regulate every social and cultural aspect of the union. If in the realm of economic policies, the Member States were willing to compromise and yield a certain degree of their sovereignty for the common good of the single market, when it came down to the “sacred” cultural and national values, they were far from ready to show the same willingness to give up their control over such matters. Through education, the governments of the Member States consider that the cultural values that confer uniqueness to each country’s national heritage can be preserved and transmitted from generation to generation. It is for this reason, among others, that the Member States refused to agree to a sort of EU-wide regulatory body, as would be the case with many economic and some political elements. What they conceded to, however,

was that they could work together towards the mutual recognition of certain educational credentials, to promote cultural and educational exchanges, to foster linguistic diversity, and to devise various programmes that would build reciprocal respect for one another's culture within the larger European context. Today, the official motto of the European Union, *Unity in Diversity*, speaks volumes to the shared conviction throughout Europe that taking pride in one's national and cultural values is indeed at the core of the European construction and that this manifestation need not be taken as a sign of antagonism towards others.

It is thus scarcely surprising that the European Commission was careful to be very explicit in the *eLearning* documentation that the Programme would only have power of recommendation for the Member States and would be applied in accordance with the *principle of subsidiarity* specified under the Treaty on the European Union (TEU).⁸ The Commission is keen to avoid any move that could be construed by the Member States as an infringement upon national jurisdiction in education. Instead, it is resorting to subtler means to entice the governments to participate in the Programme, part of which are presented in the form of motivational European rhetoric, while another, more practical side, involves financial allocations totaling 44 million euro (€), in order for the Member States to achieve the goals proposed by the Commission. Apart from the lofty goals of creating the most competitive economy in the world or conferring a "European dimension" to education, the Programme contains much more pragmatic targets such as the development of broadband internet infrastructure with affordable access points,

⁸ The TEU or Maastricht Treaty, as it is more commonly known, states under Title II, Article 3b that "In areas which do not fall within its exclusive competence, the Community shall take action, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity, only if and insofar as the objectives of the proposed action cannot be sufficiently achieved by the Member States and can therefore, by reason of the scale or effects of the proposed action, be better achieved by the Community" (OJ C191, 1992, p. 6).

reducing the student-computer ratio, the creation of virtual campuses and inter-university links, training staff and users for technology use, etc. While €44 million may seem like a sizeable amount of money for a programme of this kind, if one considers that it is to be made available to 15 Member States,⁹ it barely seems to be enough to cover the needs of at least some of the Member States. What are the needs of the Member States, however?

As I mentioned earlier, progress across the EU has been uneven, precisely because each national government decides what its priorities are in education, how and when ICTs should be used in education or other sectors, depending on the particular economic necessities and political implications of those priorities. Some countries have advanced faster towards a developed ICT infrastructure because their economic conditions and specific social environments allowed them to take advantage of opportunities in this sector. The sparsely populated Scandinavian countries were especially adept at developing an IT infrastructure due to an underlying need to maintain and expand the social bonds among all of their inhabitants. Moreover, lacking a large manufacturing industrial sector such as France or Germany, for instance, they could gain a strong foothold in the world economy by entering the IT industry. The countries of Southern Europe have been slower in adapting to the new ICT revolution, but progress has been noticeable in recent years. They do, however, trail most other countries of the EU15. With the accession of the Central and Eastern European members in May 2004, the strength or appeal of the budget allocated for *e*Learning becomes even smaller, since these countries are even further behind the original 15 for which the plan was designed.

⁹ The *e*Learning Programme was designed when the European Union was composed of only 15 Member States. On May 1st, 2004, the EU accepted among its ranks 10 countries, mostly from the former Eastern communist block (Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) plus the Mediterranean nations of Cyprus and Malta.

There is no mention in the Commission's document on how the budget allocated will be distributed among the Member States and which countries are to receive more than others. Section 1.5.1 below takes a direct look at what the objectives laid down in the Commission's *eLearning* documents aim to achieve.

1.2 Purpose of Study and Questions

This study approaches the question of state-EU accountability for *eLearning* processes and information society by building on the perspectives of individuals involved in day-to-day academic experiences with policy-making, use and evaluation of ICT in education. It makes a new contribution to the literature on *eLearning* in the EU by specifically focusing on the state-EU responsibility tandem for ICT implementation in education and its extension into the social realm. The questions raised in this study can potentially stimulate a debate beyond the technical and rhetorical facets of *eLearning*'s goal implementation.

If the *eLearning* Programme is endowed only with the power of recommendation, what would influence a member state to even consider the Programme, much less participate in it? What interest(s), if any, would the Member States have in adopting the Commission's recommendations? How would they reconcile them with similar initiatives taken at national level? Would they view the Programme as too ambitious or maybe not ambitious at all? Is €44 million enough of an incentive to persuade national governments to adopt some of the Commission's objectives? How do universities in the EU incorporate ICT in their curricula and to what extent are their decisions to do so motivated by EU initiatives? Do universities have access to European funding on their own or do they channel their requests to the European Commission via their respective

Ministries of Education? These are some of the questions that come to mind after my reading of the Commission's official documents and are given answers that add to the little information there is regarding these matters in the current literature. The "lack of interest" in these subjects may be explained through the fact that *eLearning*, both as a concept and as a programme, is a relatively recent arrival on the European educational scene. As I mentioned earlier, the *eLearning* Programme was launched in 2004 and is scheduled to last until the end of 2006, thus concrete evaluations of its effectiveness or impact are difficult to obtain at this time. The only palpable conclusion that can be construed at this point is that the Commission deemed it worthwhile to launch a programme based on a previous project, the *eLearning* Action Plan, which was deployed between 2002 and 2004.

Apart from the questions I asked above, about the specific *eLearning* Programme, there are others about which I developed a curiosity. I wonder what the European Commission meant by promoting the development of the "Information Society" or a "European knowledge society". This is a concept that is the subject of extensive discussion and debate among academics and policy-makers alike. First of all, how do universities view the concept and why should universities be concerned about the Commission's drive to bring about the Information Society? What does Information Society entail in the opinion of academics and practitioners at universities in the Member States? In what ways do universities contribute to the emergence and propagation of the Information Society? How do the universities' application of *eLearning* initiatives, whether EU or national, concretely shape the notion of Information Society? Is it

influenced by EU, national policies or a combination of both? These are the general concerns regarding the Information Society in Europe that I am addressing in this study.

I think it is appropriate here to outline my own interest in and motivation for conducting this study. A keen interest in European affairs is what I would identify as my primary motivator. For the past ten years I have been following the EU developments in a range of issues such as immigration, political and constitutional reform, common currency, common foreign and security policy, education, etc., from the first post-Cold War enlargement to the latest one in 2004. Apart from being an academic and professional pursuit, this preoccupation with all things European runs deeper in my psyche. I have always considered myself a European and have been fascinated by the emergence of the EU as a unifying force that attempts to confer a common identity to all citizens of Europe. My interest has grown stronger over the past five years, as my native country, Romania, has been negotiating membership in this exclusive club that it is now slated to join in a few months.

An interest in computer technologies at school, play or work, serve as my secondary motivator for pursuing this study. Having been involved in various digital projects over the years, both as a student as well as a professional, I have some idea of how computer systems work and how they change our lives in more or less obvious ways. They have become so ubiquitous in our daily lives that sometimes we may not even be aware of their presence, yet at the same time be totally dependent on their services. It is only after I took a step back to meditate for awhile that I realized we are indeed living a time of great transformations at the behest of the new media technologies, but I am not sure that we know where we are headed or whether we even comprehend

what is unfolding before our eyes. Do we really know whether digital technologies enhance our learning and understanding of the world around us? And if so, how?

Thus, I have put the two interests together. With this study I wanted to go beyond the Commission's rhetoric and find out what the "reality" is, in day-to-day operations across universities in the EU, from people involved in the "European knowledge society" touted by official documents. This is why I think my study will be of interest to students of current affairs in the EU, whether they are curious about educational policy or technological developments. It may also appeal to academics and professionals in the fields of political science, policy studies, social studies and communication studies. Practitioners in the field of educational technology both within Europe as well as outside it may also find it meaningful.

These and other categories of readers would decide to read it due to the growing influence that the EU as a whole represents today. Apart from exalted official rhetoric on the one hand and scoffing media reports on the other, the European Union represents today perhaps the biggest challenge to the economic interests of the United States. This is not to say that these two entities are competing against each other on an international stage devoid of other actors. In fact, emerging markets such as China, India or Brazil pose real challenges to both the EU and the United States, not only in economic terms, but also in political affairs. Nor should one construe that economic competition between the EU and the US leaves no room for cooperation, since the EU is the US's second largest trading partner after Canada.

The EU, however, is not fully aware of its potential as it transforms itself into a sort of transnational political structure, but that is what makes it an intriguing subject to

investigate. Certainly, education and new technologies have their role in this rebirth of Europe. I want this investigation to contribute to the understanding of the on-the-ground dynamics of how this is happening in education.

Therefore, in order to set the stage for the investigation in this study and give relevance to its findings, in the remainder of this chapter I will first take a look at the array of educational policies in the European Union developed by the European institutions in an effort to lend a measure of uniformity to its patchwork of national educational systems. Then I will attempt to give a clear explanation of the influence education and information society exert on each other so that the *eLearning* policies' espousal of the latter term are given a framework of reference. Lastly, I will analyze the official letter of the Commission's *eLearning* initiatives, so that the findings of this study (provided in Chapter III) can be directly contrasted with the legal documentation.

1.3 Education in Europe

1.3.1 The EU's Legal Framework for Education

eLearning is a part of a larger set of educational efforts that have been made at the EU level over the years to create a "European educational space." To understand the educational policy context in which *eLearning* is set to function, it is important to take a look at the framework of EU's approach to education in general. A number of authors have explored the subject of EU policy in education in recent years (Barnard, 1995; Ryba, 1995; Lenzen, 1996; Field, 1998; Moschonas, 1998; Karlsen, 2002), and the story is invariably the same. Member States have conceded very little authority to the European institutions regarding educational jurisdiction, holding on, for various national and strategic interests to their sovereign rights to regulate their national education

systems. Historical considerations have played a major role in perpetuating this state of affairs. Over the past few centuries, Europe has witnessed the emergence of parallel educational systems which promoted the crystallization of distinct national consciousnesses. Events common to contiguous states may be and have been interpreted differently by historians on either side of national borders, leading to different educational materials emphasizing the side of the story that befits each particular interpretation (Field, 2003, p. 190). Iconic figures are often the subject of disputes in cross-border academic debates. Charlemagne, for instance, was claimed by the French as being a Frenchman, while historians in neighboring Germany considered him as one of the leaders of the Germanic nations (Barbero, 2004, p. 103). Linguistic differences are no less a factor in the fragmentation of the European educational space. The Member States' educational institutions function in and are the vehicle for the transmission of the states' official languages, also recognized as official languages of the EU. Lastly, cultural heritages specific to each country, which include ancient and modern traditions, literary values and social specificity of human interactions, exert an influence over the individual educational systems (Lenzen, 1996, p. 23). Yet, at the same time, efforts at European level to instill a sense of Europeanism in contemporary national educational systems have underscored the work of the Commission, and also that of the European Parliament.¹⁰

¹⁰ Initially comprised of named national parliamentarians, since 1978 the European Parliament has been a body composed of directly elected MEPs (Member of the European Parliament). There are currently 732 MEPs serving five year terms, sitting in cross-European party affiliations that essentially have their ideological correspondents, such as Socialists, Christian Democrats, Greens, etc. Though direct suffrage gives the European Parliament (EP) an aura popular representation, its legitimacy is dented by the consistently low turnout in the successive rounds of direct elections held to date in the member states (Wallace, 2000, p. 21; Bomberg et al, 2003, p. 58).

As with the Commission, its legislative powers have grown over the years, perhaps even more dramatically than its "supranational" counterpart's case. The Parliament's involvement in policy-making is channeled

EU policy in education has been defined by virtue of the provisions stipulated in the EU Treaties (from here on referred to only as Treaties in the text), by European Court decisions on education and training, legislative binding rules and the executive non-binding acts of the Community concerning education and training. The subsequent Treaties that culminated with the emergence of the EU as a unitary assembly of nations with common goals and interests have generally been implemented uniformly across the Member States, especially in the economic realm and to a lesser extent in political matters. Social policies, however, which include education, have been less regularized at EU level. The Treaties define mainly a process of economic integration aimed at creating a common market. As a consequence, the nature of the provisions for education that are embodied in the EU treaties up until the Treaty of Maastricht (1992) are predominantly concerned with the economic dimension of education's contribution to the formation of

through a set of procedures. The first one is the *consultation* procedure, through which the Council of Ministers is required to obtain an opinion from the EP on a proposal coming from the Commission, but is not obligated to heed it. Initially the main instrument for legislation setting in the EU, it is now mostly confined to areas that fall under agriculture and justice and home affairs, in other words the realm of national governments. Cooperation is the second mechanism with limited usage in some areas of the EMU. It invokes the right of the EP to request a second reading of proposed amendments sent to the Council, if the former does not agree with the latter's handling of the proposals, for a chance to review the legislation in dispute and suggest further amendments. It is a weak tool in the EPs kit, as the Council reserves the right to overrule any objection coming from the EP. Most of the legislation passed in the EU today is ruled through the co-decision procedure and it is the most powerful device of which the EP can make use. Usually it is employed in a trilateral framework, whereby the Council and the EP have to agree on a Commission proposal, before it becomes valid legislation. If the two bodies cannot agree, they engage in direct negotiations and if they come to no agreement, the proposal is rendered void. Finally, the assent procedure requires the EPs accord, by absolute majority, mostly in matters related to third-country agreements, enlargement or cohesion funds (Wallace, 2001, p. 22; Bomberg et al., 2003, p. 59). In budgetary matters, the EP has no power of decision on how the member states raise revenues for the community's coffers. This drawback is compensated by the fact that the community's annual budget has to bear the signature of the EPs president in order for it to become effective. Furthermore, the EP in matters regarding spending regions, social policy, culture and education it delivers its ultimate stamp of approval. A relevant example is once again warranted, particularly since I mentioned the domain of education. The *eLearning* Programme came into being following a joint decision of the EP and the Council approving the Commission's proposal of the program. It is interesting to mention here that the Parliament voted to increase the overall budget for the program from the €36 million initially proposed by the Commission to €54 million. The Council was only prepared to spend €33 million. By the time the final decision was drafted, the Council and the Parliament had agreed to a total budget of €44 million.

the EU. The main educational objective of the Treaties was to enhance the opportunities for vocational training (Field, 1998, p. 5).

According to Moschonas (1998, p. 12), the notion of vocational training has a double meaning. In one sense, it is directed towards an existing labor market, with the purpose of creating or improving skills in the section of the unemployed or surplus labor, but does not specify whether it is directed towards a specific sector, such as agriculture, coal and steel industry or even the entire economy. In another sense, it is an educational process directed to prospective members of the labor force, the young generation in transition from school to the job market, and its objective is to offer the young people the skills and knowledge they need to cope with the technological innovations in the constantly changing economy. The Treaties, however, do recognize the necessity for the Community and the Member States to foster cooperation among universities and research centers throughout the EU (p. 13).

Despite these provisions, however, the Treaty establishing the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC Treaty) of 1951 and the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community (EEC Treaty) of 1957 bestowed no competence on the EU to develop a comprehensive policy in the field of education.

A preliminary reading of these two Treaties will illustrate the immediate concerns of the Member States regarding the purposes for which support in education was to be provided. Thus, Article 56 of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) Treaty stated that if fundamental changes in market conditions or the introduction of new technological advancements in the coal and steel industry resulted in a significant decrease of the labor force pool, the Community may offer non-repayable aid for the

purpose of financing vocational training for the labor force displaced as a consequence of such changes (ECSC Treaty, 1951). Article 57 of the Treaty establishing the European Economic Community (EEC) instituted the obligation of the Community to issue directives for the mutual recognition of diplomas, certificates or other documentation proving formal qualifications. Article 128 of the same treaty delegated the Community to generate regulations for the implementation of a common vocational training policy aimed at the harmonious development of both the national economies as well as of the common market. Through Article 118, the EEC Treaty promoted the close cooperation between Member States in the social fields, including aspects of vocational training (EEC Treaty, 1958). Neither of the two Treaties granted any powers to the Community to enforce the said stipulations, and thus the matters concerning education remained under the jurisdiction of the educational institutions of each member state.

Thus, the two treaties (EEC and ECSC) did not provide for structural adjustments or changes in the national educational legislation of the Member States and did not set any kind of common approach for the development of European-wide standards. Instead, they merely affirmed the Community's¹¹ willingness to view education as an important factor in the formation of the economic union, emphasizing the economic advantages that would stem from investments in the education sector. The social impact of education in the creation of a common market was disregarded.

The Community's efforts to develop common policies in education did not yield the results that were achieved in other fields of common interest at the EU level. Thus, if in the economic sectors, the EU developed early on policies intended to create a

¹¹ The term *Community* is routinely used in EU parlance to refer to the common legal framework of the European Union. It is also used as a proper name to substitute any of the former or present terms by which the Union is known (i.e., ECSC, EEC, EU).

uniformization of the economic systems and the creation of the common market respectively, the field of education remained for a relatively long time a subject beyond the discussion agenda of the Member States (Barnard, 1995, p. 20).

It was in the mid-1970s that the Ministers of Education of the Member States stressed that cooperation in the field of education was imperative as it did not merely represent a side component of the harmonization in the economic domain (Hingel, 2001). The first meeting of the Council of Ministers of Education took place in 1971. During this meeting, the ministers recognized the need to establish a basis for cooperation in the field. In 1973, education was included for the first time in the European Community's policy area, along with research and social policies. A significant move towards further cooperation was taken in 1976, when the Council Resolution established education as a synchronized process in which responsibility was shared at Community and national levels, delineating specifically which actions should be carried out at each particular level. The Resolution also included among its priorities "increased cooperation in higher education" and "improved recognition of academic diplomas" (Field, 1998, p. 31).

Therefore, the Community developed an action programme based on four main considerations: the creation of better facilities in the Member States for the education and training of nationals, children of nationals of other Member States and of non-member countries; improving the mutual understanding of the national educational systems through the dissemination of information for the Community's citizens as well as through the promotion of closer relations between the educational systems themselves; encouraging study visits and exchanges, instilling a "European dimension" to the experience of the students and teachers taking part in such exchanges; and enhancing the

opportunities for equal access to all forms of education throughout the Community (Ryba, 1995, p. 66).

As Moschonas (1998, p. 35) points out, these objectives looked ambitious and well thought out in 1976 at the time of their drafting, but ten years later the French government identified in a blue paper a lack of progress in the fulfillment of the said objectives and claimed that cooperation in the field had remained at an “embryonic stage.” The blue paper made reference to the fact that the Single European Act of 1986 did not address education and culture, thus having failed in adding a new dimension to the educational process, confining it strictly to the needs and requirements of the common market. The French government’s blue paper proposed a pragmatic approach to cooperation in education and culture, with the active participation of only those Member States that wished to participate, thus bypassing any preliminary debate on the legal constitutional framework of the cooperation. In the end, this exclusivist proposal was avoided through a common decision to introduce cooperation in education at Community level.

Having been drafted and ratified after the coming into force of the Single European Act (1986), but still before the completion of the common market, the Treaty on the European Union (1992) is still concerned with the economic aspect of educational policy, but it radically shifts the Community’s direction towards the formation of a well-rounded pool of professionals and workers, able to cope with the modernization and technologization of the common market. In referring to general education, Article 126 under Title II of the TEU states:

1. The Community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting

and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organization of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity.

2. Community action shall be aimed at:

- developing the European dimension in education, particularly through the teaching and dissemination of the languages of the Member States;
- encouraging mobility of students and teachers, inter alia by encouraging the academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study;
- promoting cooperation between educational establishments;
- developing exchanges of information and experience on issues common to the education systems of the Member States;
- encouraging the development of youth exchanges and of exchanges of socio- educational instructors;
- encouraging the development of distance education. (Treaty on European Union, 1992, <http://europa.eu.int/en/record/mt/title2.html>)

Article 127 under Title II of the TEU, focuses on vocational training:

1. The Community shall implement a vocational training policy which shall support and supplement the action of the Member States, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content and organization of vocational training.

2. Community action shall aim to:

- facilitate adaptation to industrial changes, in particular through vocational training and retraining;
- improve initial and continuing vocational training in order to facilitate vocational integration and reintegration into the labour market;
- facilitate access to vocational training and encourage mobility of instructors and trainees and particularly young people;
- stimulate cooperation on training between educational or training establishments and firms;
- develop exchanges of information and experience on issues common to the training systems of the Member States. (Treaty on European Union, 1992, <http://europa.eu.int/en/record/mt/title2.html>)

The TEU thus widens the scope of the educational sphere, extending Community influence in sectors that were not provided for in the previous Treaties. Despite the marked progress in outlining key elements for the development of a dynamic and integrated European educational sector, the TEU still falls short of providing a direction towards the creation of a common policy. Consequently, the Treaty limits the powers granted to the Community in regulating education across the EU, restricting the space for

action aimed at the harmonization of the national educational policies of the Member States. Thus, the decisional and procedural stages in implementing the objectives contained in the Treaty are left to the Council of Ministers,¹² in which measures relating to education are adopted by qualified majority voting¹³ (Weidenfeld & Wessels, 1997, p.63).

In a 1995 White Paper¹⁴ in the field of education, entitled “*Teaching and learning: towards the learning society*,” the Commission laid down the concrete objectives that the EU had to fulfill in order to become a social and educational model for the rest of the world. These objectives, identified as applicable to the Community level, encouraged the acquisition of new knowledge. They aimed at bringing the school and business sectors closer together, at combating exclusion and at developing proficiency in three European languages. Finally, the paper also underscored the importance of putting investment in training on an equal footing with capital investment (COM, 1995, 590 final, p. 7).

¹² Also known as the Council of Ministers, this is the most powerful legislative body in the European Union. It is somewhat of a misnomer, because this institution should more aptly be viewed as an assembly of councils of ministers. Composed of ministers named by the national governments of the member states in which they hold their portfolios the Council groups its ministers in councils according to the policy domains in which they serve in their own countries: agriculture, finance, education, etc. The General Affairs and External Relations Council (GAERC), the Agriculture and Fisheries Council and the Economic and Financial Affairs Council (ECOFIN) are the oldest and weightiest groupings in the Council of Ministers. Of the three, the GAERC is the most expansive council, dealing both with a wide range of concerns, from the overarching matters related to policy initiative and coordination, foreign affairs and other issues of sensitive nature (e.g., EU enlargement negotiations, multi-annual budget issues, institutional or administrative matters). (Bomberg et al., 2003, p. 50).

¹³ In its current formula, qualified majority voting (QMV) is accompanied by a “double-majority” provision. According to this provision, a decision subjected to QMV in the Council of Ministers can only pass if a 2/3 majority of the ministerial representatives is met and if the countries the ministers represent amount to 62% of the EU’s population (Phinnemore, 2004, p. 124).

¹⁴ According to the online dictionary EUABC.com, a White Paper is “a report from the EU Commission with concrete proposals for law-making in a policy area. A White Paper often contains results of consultations and further states the position of the EU Commission.” *EUABC.com*, http://euabc.com/index.phtml?word_id=963.

The White Paper recognized the fact that there was no longer a clear division between the vocational and general tracks in the field of education, specifying that the acquisition of a broad knowledge base is today as important for those employed in academia and humanistic sciences as it is for those involved in the business sector. Therefore, the paper acknowledged the need for a closer cooperation in the field of education but it falls short of promoting the harmonization of the educational systems of the Member States, reinforcing the applicability of the subsidiarity principle in this domain (COM, 1995, 590 final p. 35).

The Community, through Articles 126 and 127 of the TEU, limits itself to the role of encouraging cooperation among Member States in the development of quality education, by supporting and supplementing their actions while entirely respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the organization of their individual educational systems and delivery of instructional content (Field, 1998, p. 60). It is this state of affairs that prompts Moschonas (1998, p. 81) to indicate that the essential theme of integrated approach in educational cooperation rests with the convergence thesis. The convergence thesis suggests that as the economies of the different nations forming the Community begin to resemble one another in the long term, education systems follow suit in a similar manner. A “hidden harmonization” emerges in the social and cultural field, as the different countries converge toward a set of conventions, habits and practices common to all of them (p. 82).

Such a trend has not occurred, however, prompting specialists to point out that what is seen at Community level today is a sort of “voluntary harmonization,” based on Community financial aid and on a pragmatic step-by-step approach to cooperation. This

practice is commonly found in the Community action programmes in education such as Socrates, Erasmus, Lingua,¹⁵ etc., in the field of general and higher education, and Leonardo da Vinci, Petra and others in vocational training. These programmes are the practical expression of the Community Treaties, and as such represent an inherent extension of the complex characteristics of the EU legal framework fraught with the decisional balance between the Community and the Member States.

Elements of the EU legal framework as presented above would have been intrinsically inclined to tolerate a certain degree of harmonization in the field of education. National interests, however, have not only prevailed, but were ultimately reaffirmed in the texts of the Treaties, regulations, white papers, etc.

As new technological achievements began to make an impact on various sectors of EU life, the need for the use of technologies for learning and teaching became increasingly evident in EU circles. The Treaty on European Union is the first to mention the necessity for the implementation of ICT in education. Thus, Article 126, besides reinforcing the EEC Treaty's need for the mutual recognition of diplomas and academic credentials and for cooperation between the Member States, it entrusted the Community with the task of contributing to the development of quality education by enacting an action plan aimed at developing, among others, the conditions for the application of distance education (OJ C191, 1992, p. 22).

¹⁵ This program is intended for language learning and teaching. Its goal is to enhance the linguistic diversity in Europe and to afford better opportunities for and quality of language learning from school to adult education. Within Lingua, several activities are included in concordance with the eLearning priorities. Thus, it provides for networking of the language resource centers in various areas of education, sharing of distance-learning resources, delivery of information of distance-learning course capabilities for languages less widely used and taught and designing assessment tools for language skills, taking into account the technological perspective of language teaching (COM, 2001, 172 final, p. 8).

In the new era of the information technology, the Community measures were designed to take the cooperation between universities and enterprises related to training for the development and implementation of the new technologies to the EU level so that the Community would be able to improve the supply of training at local, regional and national level and, therefore, to spur further economic progress by strengthening the common market. Consequently, the main objective is to create the appropriate conditions for the common development of training programs and exchange of information to facilitate the incorporation of ICTs in education. This objective is motivated by the continuous change in technological advancements, thus requiring in-service training and cooperation chiefly between higher education institutions and the industry at Community level (Karlsen, 2002, p. 37).

Given the difficulties in finding a common solution to the harmonization of educational policy in the EU, it is appropriate to speculate at this point that due to the relatively novel character of the presence of information technology in education, the European drive to create a uniform environment for the application of such technologies at Community level has not succeeded. The EU is still en route to instituting a common policy for the employment of ICTs in education.

1.3.2 What About Higher Education?

The lack of total harmonization is not in itself unexplainable given the marked differences in the European educational systems. There is continuous debate on whether the educational systems should follow a common recipe. The Commission itself promotes and encourages diversity in the educational systems, making it even harder for

the various interested stakeholders to come to a consensus in the nature of a possible common educational policy.

Despite the fact that harmonization has not materialized as a palpable outcome, remaining a declarative goal enshrined in the Treaties, convergence or approximation of educational national standards seems to have gathered pace over the last several years. The EU is still some distance from what Hingel (2001) referred to as the *European Space of Education*, a concept advanced in the Bologna Declaration, based on common principles of education agreed upon by the Member States. Hingel even advances the notion of a *European Model of Education* as the natural consequence of the presumed application of such principles, losing sight of the whole European debate on such a concept. Nevertheless, Hingel remains in the mainstream thought that cooperation and integration in the field of education is accelerating.

In the realm of higher education, the convergence movement was prompted by the signing of the Bologna Declaration in June 1999 by the European Ministers of Education. In the Declaration, the signatories freely commit themselves to reform their educational systems to create overall convergence at European level for the emergence of the so-called *European Higher Education Area*. The Declaration, however, stresses that it does not seek to impose a path towards the “standardization” or “uniformization” of the higher educational systems of Europe, respecting the fundamental principles of autonomy and diversity of universities. Furthermore, the Declaration echoes a search for “a common European answer to common European problems,” recognizing the challenge the educational systems face, given the growth and diversification of education (higher

education in particular), the shortage of skills in certain areas and the expansion of private and transnational education (CRE, 2000, p. 3).

Towards this end, the Bologna Declaration proposes a series of objectives aimed at establishing a common framework of readable and comparable educational degrees, the introduction of a two-cycle undergraduate and graduate (a three-year bachelor's degree followed by a two-year master's degree) system in all signatory countries, the consolidation of the European Credit Transfer System, the development of a European dimension in quality assurance and the elimination of the remaining obstacles in the free mobility of students and teachers (CRE, 2000, p. 4). The education ministers decided to meet every two years to assess the progress of the Bologna Process in what has become known as the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG).

Interestingly, the Bologna Process, as it has become known, is not limited to the Member States of the EU. The document was signed by 29 countries, all of the EU members at the time, all new Member States that joined in 2004 (except for Cyprus, which signed in 2001), plus Bulgaria, Iceland, Norway, Romania and Switzerland. The number of signatory countries has grown since then to 45, including countries that have no foreseeable prospects of EU membership, such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia (all three since 2005) and Russia.¹⁶

As a side note here, it may thus be rather confusing when one reads that the Bologna Process correlates with the Lisbon agenda's priorities, since the latter applies only to the EU Member States. The Bologna Process was launched, at least in the view of the signatory countries, as a push for creating a competitive European system of higher

¹⁶ Europe's Effort to Standardize Higher Education Now Includes 45 Nations. (June 10, 2005). *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, p. A34.

education, or rather a set of systems that can adequately respond to the demands of the global economy and to the challenges of scientific and technological innovation. In this sense, Bologna's purpose does coincide with the Lisbon agenda, but it is far less clear how the non-EU members, especially those who will never gain membership, can be included in a strategy of forging a "competitive knowledge-based society" strictly limited to the EU. Those countries that will remain outside the Union may never achieve the level of economic sustainability required of them to be members of this society, mainly because they do not benefit from the same solidarity clause and sharing of Community funds as the members of the EU do. This, however, is an issue for another discussion.

My concern here rather deals with the actual operationalization of such a far-reaching process as Bologna. If a system of credit transfers is a conceivable and attainable objective, the institution of a uniform undergraduate-graduate cycle across Europe is a much more difficult, if not impossible, proposition. A credit transfer system, with appropriate funding and administrative support from the participant countries can function as an independent parallel mechanism in the form of a centralized database system to which higher education institutions have access on the basis of mutual agreements with similar participating institutions. It would entail a considerable amount of work, but with the help of computer technology conforming to a clearly-defined set of criteria established through a negotiated understanding, such an arrangement could be feasible. In contrast, a complete overhaul of the degree-granting procedure of the different educational systems in Europe, to transfigure their constituent nature evolved over years of institutional development into a one-size-fits-all degree system is highly problematic.

It is particularly curious that the Education Ministers agreed to implement the Bologna objectives even though in the run-up to the signing of the Declaration, the first in a series of *Trends Reports* that have been published every two years since 1999 by the European University Association, pointed to the complexity of the higher education systems in Europe and to the little preoccupation with transition to a harmonized system across Europe. The diversity of educational structures in Europe is not confined to the differences in the national educational systems, but also within the individual educational systems there is a further fragmentation of academic curricular choices, by virtue of the autonomy that the universities enjoy. Speaking to this diversity, a subtitle of a section in the report suggestively affirmed that there are more educational systems than are countries in Europe. Even though three-year bachelor (or first) degrees do exist in a number of countries, these are specific to some fields, with most other such degrees taking at least four years to completion. If one takes into consideration the split between the official and unofficial completion times, whereby many students in some countries (e.g., France, Germany) take up to 7 years to finish a first degree as opposed to the customary 4 or 5 years, the matter becomes even more complicated.¹⁷

Another issue that touches the core of the social value systems of Europe, is the perception among academics and the public in Europe that the proposed degree system is a borrowed concept from the Anglo-Saxon (UK and US) educational systems, and, by extension, of the economic systems they represent (Van der Wende, 2003, p. 200). There are fears that adopting educational concepts geared for markets driven by liberal economics can undermine the fundamentally public nature of the higher educational

¹⁷ Trends I: Trends in Learning Structures in Higher Education. (1999). *European University Association*. http://www.eua.be/eua/jsp/en/upload/OFFDOC_BP_trend_I.1068715136182.pdf.

systems in Europe and lead to the “McDonaldization of education as part of globalization” (Field, 2003, p. 184). Increasing trends towards the privatization of higher education in the UK may somewhat justify these apprehensions, since other EU countries may feel compelled to adopt elements of the British model in order to reform their educational systems. Moreover, if reform measures entail adopting parts of the US model of a higher education based on, at times exorbitant, tuition fees, the concern in Europe about the threat to the continued public character of higher education is understandable. When it comes to the comparison of degree granting systems between the US and Europe, however, it seems odd that the Europeans would contemplate a bachelor degree of 3 years in duration, when in the US, even with its hugely diverse program offerings at this level, a bachelor degree is normally granted after 4 years of undergraduate studies.¹⁸

It is for some of these reasons that the national ministries have been reluctant to implement reforms aimed at bringing about the objectives of the Bologna Process and that no timeline was set in the Declaration for the achievement of these aims. The education ministers knew that an undertaking of such proportions could not be set in stone with a definitive timeline. The successive *Trends Reports* of the European University Association have noted some progress, but consistently conclude that, although universities and ministries recognize the need to reform, more needs to be done for this process to actually move forward.¹⁹ Changes in educational legislation to accommodate the Bologna Process are considered only a first step, but actual implementation of reforms in higher education requires more commitment at all levels, the reports seem to suggest. It is a complex matter and resistance to such radical changes

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ The *Trends Reports* are available from the European University Association’s website at http://www.eua.be/eua/en/policy_bologna_trends.jsp.

cannot be ruled out. Some countries and universities within some countries look upon the Bologna Process favorably,²⁰ supporting the streamlining of educational systems in Europe with the view of encouraging facilitated transnational mobility and of strengthening the appeal and competitiveness of the European higher education. I will, however, conclude by saying that a total reinventing of the European higher education systems still lies far ahead into the future.

1.3.3 News from the Educational Front in the EU

If competitiveness of higher education is sought in the EU, then Member States and universities do have a lot to worry about if they are to become the promoters of a globally competitive EU. In a recent world ranking of 200 world universities compiled by *The Times Higher Education Supplement*, the top 10 is overwhelmingly the domain of the US. No less than seven American universities (the cream of the crop of American academia like Harvard, MIT, Stanford, etc. form the honor roll) dwarf the symbolic presence of the UK, with two universities, and that of France, with one university. Even extending the range to the first 50 of the 200 universities included, the EU is still weakly represented. The US is, again, the incontestable leader, with 20 spots. The UK is the strongest EU competitor, with eight universities, in comparison to France, with two universities and Germany with only one.²¹ Below top 50, the presence of European universities becomes denser, especially in the bottom half of the rankings. In a parallel ranking of the top 50 European universities in the same publication, the UK again comes

²⁰ Sweden, for example, expects the legislation that it adopted with respect to the Bologna process to come into effect on July 1st, 2007, though notably not with reference to the adoption of the two-cycle degree system. More information is available in the national report of the Swedish Ministry of Education drafted for the BFUG meeting in Bergen, Norway on May 19-20, 2005 at this address: http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/EN/national_impl/00_Nat-rep-05/National_Reports-Sweden_050114.pdf.

²¹ World University Rankings. (October 28, 2005). *The Times Higher Education Supplement*.

out as the clear winner, represented by 19 universities, more than any other country in Europe, broadly speaking, and the EU more specifically.²² Obviously, money has a lot to do with this situation. The top universities in both rankings are well endowed financially, which explains the quality of education they can provide, and hence their recognition as leaders in education. Both these rankings reveal the apparent strength of the Anglo-Saxon approach to higher education that I mentioned in the previous section. The UK universities are much closer in their tuition and revenue generating schemes to the US than the rest of the EU (Soete, 2005, p. 7), even if fundraising from alumni and other entities with vested interests in higher education is still a relatively strange concept to UK would-be donors and recipients.²³ Some universities have relied, not surprisingly, on professionals who have developed their fundraising skills in the American academia. Outside the UK, only Swedish universities have proven adept at raising money from corporations, such as Volvo, but adequate funding is not such a critical concern in Sweden, where government funding for universities is much more abundant than almost anywhere else in Europe. In Germany, such activities are springing up in a few places, but it is an alien concept to German universities' administrators, and talks of instituting tuition fees are immediately opposed by students, academics and the public as a measure that would run counter to the notion of government subsidized education ingrained in the German social welfare model.²⁴

There are two somewhat contradictory lessons that can be drawn from these implications. The first one is that the American, British or Anglo-Saxon model of tertiary education based on fundraising and tuition fees is much more effective in providing a

²² Ibid.

²³ Across Europe, Chasing the Money. (April 30, 2004). *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, p. A39.

²⁴ The brains business: A survey of higher education. (September 10, 2005). *The Economist*, p. 10.

substantial basis for universities to function as research and innovation laboratories for the generation and dissemination of knowledge. More financial capability leads to increased production of research and design, which is what ultimately makes a university competitive and reputable in the global economy. Public spending cannot be relied on as a constant source of financial support, because such revenue is intrinsically tied into the economies within which universities carry out their missions. An economic downturn can spell reduced public spending for social programs and often times education is one of the first victims. The orientation towards private financing and tuition charges allows the universities to take their fate into their own hands and dictate their own future. Those higher education systems that are better equipped to sustain themselves on the principle of market demands, such as those in the US or the UK, fare much better in the quest for advancing academic knowledge than those that suffer the shortages of an overwhelmed public budget subjected to the whims of the economic rollercoaster.

The second, and untold, story that can be inferred from the rankings is that not having a high number of universities towards the top end of the scale is not necessarily a bad thing. The top-ranking universities are elite institutions that attract the brightest minds from all over the world, more often than not competing against one another for highly qualified individuals. The US and the UK definitely win in this compartment, while most other European universities are on the losing end when it comes to attracting intellectual talents. Elite universities, however, are not accessible to everyone, either on financial terms, entry requirements or both. Herein lies the strength of the European higher education system, with all its ills and shortcomings, playing a crucial role in keeping up the socially accepted view of universities as publicly accessible institutions.

Notwithstanding the necessity of modernizing and reforming universities in Europe, their public character is definitely in line with the EU's values of social inclusion that resonates with the public at large. It is uncertain how likely the universities in the continental EU will be to pursue reforms that may alienate a large part of the public and, worse, contradict the fundamental social values at the heart of the Union.

Where does this, however, leave ICT in higher education? How can e-learning take hold on a large scale when many universities struggle to keep their doors open for everyone on sometimes tight budgetary constraints? Evidently, not all EU Member States can afford the type of funding for ICT in education as the Scandinavian countries, for example, can. These are small, largely homogeneous countries with established traditions of distribution of wealth and equitable access to education and public services, based on high income taxation. Not everywhere in Europe can such arrangements exist.

The EU's programmes and actions in ICT for higher education (*eLearning Programme* and other actions within *Socrates*) are not aimed at equipping the universities with technologies, but rather at developing networks of knowledge exchange to promote a better understanding of how technologies can be shared in mutually beneficial partnerships at European level. It is up to the universities to provide the equipment necessary for their participation in trans-European projects. Given the lack of strategic vision in higher education on what e-learning is set to accomplish in the long-run in many parts of the European Union and the various degrees of actual integration of ICT,²⁵ it is difficult to envision a move towards increased public spending on ICTs in universities.

²⁵ Priorities and Award Criteria for the Call for Proposals 2005. (April 19, 2005). *eLearning: Designing Tomorrow's Education*. Decision of the *eLearning* Committee, following the scrutiny of the European Parliament.

Perhaps the only alternative to public spending is indeed to encourage private spending in higher education from the industries which have a stake in the universities' success in appropriation of the ICTs. Here, again, there is a push from the European level, in the Commission's announcement to invest €1 billion in research on ICT over the next five years.²⁶ Though directed at key projects in the commercial and industrial sector in the field of nano- and micro-electronics, broadband technology and mobile communications, these could generate spin-offs that may filter into the higher education sector both as direct financial reinvestments in the knowledge base of the universities formed by its human capital as well as technology infrastructure transfers into the universities on more affordable premises than is currently possible in many corners of the European academia.

As a final note here, I think it is interesting to mention a proposal of the Commission that went largely unnoticed in the EU since its unveiling in the summer of 2005. In an effort to keep up with pressures from the US regarding the building and dissemination of knowledge in science and technology, as well as to curb the outflow of talented researchers from the EU to the US, the Commission published for discussion an informal paper in which it advanced the establishment of a European Institute of Technology (EIT).²⁷ Though the paper carefully skirts the issue of what the purpose of such an institution would be, it leaves the notion open for discussion. Again, we see here the Commission's concern to diffuse any hint at an imposition of supranational authority in a field that is the fiefdom of the Member States. With all its efforts to conceal its

²⁶ IP/05/1034. Commission to invest €1 billion into Research on Information and Communication Technologies. Brussels, August 3, 2005.

²⁷ A European Institute of Technology? Public Consultation on the possible missions, objectives, added-value and structure of an EIT. http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/eit/paper_en.pdf.

preference, the Commission seems to favor a network approach to the nature of the institute. This would mean that the EIT would not replace any individual “world-class” institution in the EU today, but would rather act as a pool of expertise for science and technology, bringing together the brightest scientists and researchers from across the Member States to develop and disseminate knowledge for cross-sectoral application within the union. It is not clear from where the funding for such an entity would come. Whether the idea of an EIT is well received will become clearer when the results of the consultation will be made public in early 2006. Judging from the difficulty of past and current efforts in promoting anything with a “European” flavor in education and taking into account the dynamics of educational policies I discussed in this chapter, I venture to say that the outlook, at least in the short or medium term, for an EIT is not particularly encouraging.

1.4 The Information Society in Europe

1.4.1 Living with the Information Society

In describing the technological impact on the social transformations of his time, McLuhan (1964) defined new media and technology as a “huge collective surgery on the social body”. He further postulated that in “operating on society with a new technology, it is not the incised area that is most affected... It is the entire system that is changed” (p. 70). Forty years later, McLuhan’s words couldn’t ring truer. I am inclined to assert that had he been alive today, he would have felt vindicated in his belief. The transformations we witness today are not unlike the changes through which McLuhan lived, but they seem to be of a higher order in their nature and scale. The electric media of the sixties have been in good part replaced by the digital media or ICT and virtually every aspect of

human behavior or activity is in some way or another dependent on the new computer technologies. The changes are so radical that new terms have been invented to refer to the type of society in which we live: Information or Informational Society, Knowledge-Based Society, etc.

Keeping this study's purpose in mind, I would like to explore in this section the connection between the emergence of the discourse on the information society and its dissemination through the academic circles. As I stated in the beginning of this dissertation I am interested in developing an understanding of the values and functions placed by academics on the notion of information society. Their perspectives on how the concept of information society is operationalized in European higher education through the application of the EU's *eLearning* programmes and, consequently, on how the universities contribute to its propagation in the public domain of specific EU countries form the basis of this inquiry. The choice of academics to gauge the emergence of the information society in their countries can be justified through evidence that academics are, by and large, the segment of the public most interested in explaining information society dynamics. Duff (2000, p. 7) mentions a British study entailing a search in the DIALOG bibliographic database on the term information society in publications in the English language. The results indicated that an overwhelming majority (63.5%) of the 305 references yielded by the search that contained the term information society were written by academic authors. The remainder of the references was shared among authors from the industry sector (14.4%), research institutes (7.7%), government bodies (2.2%), information services (2.2%) and an unknown segment (9.9%). This not only illustrates the academic preoccupation with the concept of information society, but it also points to

a particular gap between academia and governmental institutions regarding this subject, an aspect that will become relevant in many ways to the reader in the course of this study. With these aspects in mind, I shall now proceed to discuss the information society notion and its relation to education.

Talk of the information society is not new and it has been controversial from its very early days, with economists and sociologists assigning it different values and dimensions. Dordick and Wang (1993, p. 37) situate the dawn of the debate on information society in Japan, where in 1963, Tadeo Umesao, a professor at Kyoto University, advanced the concept of information industries which he saw as the environments of “spiritual production” based on higher-order intellectual processes that spur “creative and spiritual growth.” Just before him, Simon Kusnetz, identified services as the tertiary sector of economic production, based on the production and distribution of knowledge, but even a preliminary understanding of the impact of this sector on economic growth was sketchy at best.

In the US, Fritz Machlup’s measurement and aggregation of the different sectors of the economy based on processing information and knowledge led him to the conclusion that the “knowledge industry” accounted for roughly 29% of the gross national product of the United States, based on 1958 US Census Bureau data (Dordick & Wang, 1993, p. 38; Webster, 1995, p. 11). Marc Uri Porat embraced a similar approach to Machlup’s, distinguishing between information workers and those employed in manufacturing or agriculture. He divided the information workers category into producers and sellers of knowledge, gatherers and disseminators of information and operators and support specialists (Webster, 1995, p. 14). Using figures from the US

Census and Bureau of Labor Statistics, Porat offered his own estimations of the percentages of information work and non-information work that each occupation entailed (Dordick & Wang, 1993, p. 44).

While Machlup and Porat focused chiefly on the economic indicators of the information processing sector and included primary and secondary branches of the economy, Daniel Bell paid attention only to those knowledge-producing sectors that had human and social implications like research, higher education and the production of knowledge as intellectual property (p. 38). He fused this typology into the term *postindustrial society* to mark a shift in the economic emphasis from industrial to informational processes (Martin, 1995, p. 2; Webster, 1995, p. 30). Bell predicted that this dependency on knowledge and information processing would determine the concentration of the work force in the professional and technical occupations (white-collar workers replacing blue-collar workers in the overall picture of the society) giving rise to a new dominant elite leading the social and economic development.

Yoneji Masuda also looked at the human extensions of the concentration of production into information processing, but buoyantly extolled the virtues of the information society in contrast to the industrial society. He unhesitatingly replaces the industrial society with the information society contending that the latter is everything that the former isn't, with new patterns of political, economic and social organization (2004, p. 16). Riding on the newfound promise of a socio-economic miracle premised on the potentials of new information processing and technologies, the concept of information society gained increasing visibility through the upbeat, even futuristic by some accounts, works of writers like Alvin Toffler who anticipated the coming of a "third wave" of

technologies and the rise of a new civilization (Kumar, 2004, p. 107) or John Naisbitt who saw computers as “liberators” in the transition process from an industrial to an information society (Martin, 1995, p. 3).

We can deduce from this brief presentation of the major narratives on the constitution and interpretation of information society elaborated by some of the greatest thinkers in social sciences that information society is a complex term. The various nuances that need to be taken into consideration when measuring the elements that enter in the composition of the information society give rise to multiple perspectives on the information society, none of which could be said to prevail over the others. I think Duff’s summation of the information society (2000, p. 171) captures this complexity:

Society is multifaceted; so is information. Information work and the makeup of the gross national product are important to society. Information flows are important to society. Information technology is important to society. It is hard to see, therefore, how an adequate theory of the information society can be one-dimensional. The lodestar of the Information Society Studies should be a *synthetic* information society thesis, one which fuses the manifold elements of informatisation in a balanced way.

I acknowledge the importance of analyzing all facets of the information society before developing an informed judgment about its functions and influences in the social environment. However, in order to keep the relevance of this inquiry in the foreground I will limit the discussion to the educational sector and its convergence with elements of the information society. In this sense, my approach here may seem influenced by Bell’s emphasis on education as a knowledge producer, but I combine below several perspectives that hopefully convey a pluralistic view of the interdependence between education and information society.

To illustrate the role of the educational system in and its impact on social development in the context of new digital technologies, taking my cue from Castells (1996, p. 356), I will contend that the universities are the very first units of innovation that precede any real technological revolution. It is in the labs and testing rooms of universities that pilot projects for the invention of new forms of technologies unfold (e.g., ARPANET, later the Internet, setup in 1969 at UCLA), often times through grants received via various channels from government funds. These innovations regularly end up as patented inventions, later entering the process of mass production for the various purposes for which they were devised, ultimately benefiting the public at large. Castells calls the creative environments that the universities represent “milieux of innovation,” as a telling symbol of their intrinsic vocation for technological progress. In addition, not only are universities centers for innovation, but they are the frontrunners in the promotion of the new technologies, especially ICT, as the students are the ones who are most likely to use communications technologies for academic, research or recreational purposes and thus contribute to the diffusion of ICT outside the walls of their academic institutions (p. 391). It follows, then, that there exists a dual relationship between the educational system and communication technologies, each one feeding off of and supporting the other. The prestige of societies in the international arena is partly dependent upon the quality of technologies developed, tested and implemented by universities.

There is little doubt that the educational system is the primary component of the society through which knowledge is generated. In support of this statement I bring Smith’s assertion that technological change is “more than invention and innovation” and his argument that the manner in which knowledge gets applied is essentially social in

character since it requires the contribution of society to sustain R&D resources such as sophisticated laboratories, teams of highly trained specialists and extensive educational systems (1993, p. 190). It seems, therefore, that at the same time that society is changing under the influence of technological pressure, it is heavily dependent upon the educational system to provide it with the knowledge base that will sustain it in the digital age. This reliance causes changes in the educational system as well, since the latter attempts to address the needs of the society while at the same time being affected by the technological transformations. Therefore, we are witnessing a dual effect of the ICT revolution on society and education.

In this context, the adoption of digital technologies in the academic world has changed the way students learn and how they connect to society. Brown and Duguid (2002) advance the notion that learning at a university entails “enculturation,” which means that students are engaging with communities of academics and researchers to develop their thinking. It also means that the students are “learning to be,” that is, they are learning not only to identify with academic communities, but also through daily interaction with their peers in the community surrounding the university, they learn to be members of one, which represents the social aspect of their learning experience. ICT, the Internet and the World Wide Web not only facilitate their access to remote communities of researchers and scholars in which they may show an interest, but these tools also provide them with the means to disseminate the knowledge they acquire in their academic careers throughout the society (p. 220).

Mitchell (1995) adopts a similar position in noting that digital technologies have become commonplace in university settings and that academics can easily access virtual

communities of researchers via the Internet, engaging in discussions that sometimes may prove, they claim, more rewarding than a discussion with an academic located down the hall. He further states that “being online may soon become a more important mark of community membership than being in residence” (pp. 68-69). Obviously, Mitchell may be venturing too far in laying his claim, but the point remains that students and academics can take advantage of the innumerable opportunities offered by the new computer networks to engage in social and academic relationships that are radically different from the ones that McLuhan may have witnessed forty years ago. Once the individuals acquire an array of technological skills and experiences, they contribute to the diffusion of these skills into the society by becoming its members. It follows then that technological change is not only a revolution in itself, but it also revolutionizes the social interaction of the individuals within the society.

The proliferation of information and communication technologies have enriched the global societal landscape by transforming the way governments, businesses, corporations, armies, individuals in general, etc., communicate and use information. Sure enough, ask what the source of globalization is and chances are that the first answer you get is ICTs, the Internet or the World Wide Web. Any government agency, commercial firm or university today that does not have a web address is out of step with the rest of the world and can pass as a non-existent entity in some respects. It goes without saying that the educational system is both the promoter of ICTs as well as the environment in which skills to use them are imparted, at least in theory if not in practice. After all, it is educated individuals in society that are able to make effective use of technologies for professional, recreational or commercial purposes. These social interactions augmented

and facilitated by computer technologies, particularly through educational settings, give a new meaning to the concept of information society. Having looked at the more general attributes of the education-information society tandem, in order to bring the information society discourse into the regional focus of this study, I will next concentrate on the more specific European context and analyze the traits of a presumed emergence of the European information society.

1.4.2 Towards a European Information Society?

European political elites have little patience with the epistemological theorization and the academic analysis of the term information society. The meaning and significance of information as a defining characteristic of contemporary society pale in comparison to the practical matters that the policy-makers consider when making use of the concept in drafting political and economic programs. The use of information society as a currency to buy electoral acceptance through extolling the potential social benefits from the use of ICTs is one reason why the term has made its way into decision-makers' political vocabulary. Another reason is the concern, undoubtedly justified, about the competition each particular Member State and the EU as a whole has to face globally from countries on the cutting edge of technological innovation, specifically the US, Japan and some of the emerging economies of East Asia.

The debate surrounding the information society led the European Commission to dedicate a whole department of its executive branches to the popular concept, the Directorate General for Information Society and Media (DG INFSO). A look at the DGs website reveals its overall purpose, which is "to ensure that policies are coupled with the deployment of advanced and easily accessible technologies throughout Europe, for

businesses and for the benefit of our society as a whole.’’²⁸ This is indicative of the preoccupation of the European Commission with Europe’s place in the technological transformations and of the attention it gives to the appropriation of technologies in social environments. No doubt, it is an admirable effort, even if the ascribed label is narrowly focused on harnessing the potential of ICTs in the service of the economy and society. We shouldn’t, however, expect the European Commission to engage in philosophical divagations on the essence of information society. That is not what politicians do, since their responsibilities are to find practical solutions to real problems, at least in an ideal world. I am not suggesting here that the Commission members (and other European elites) are not aware of the difficulty with defining the sense of an information society or that they are not genuinely interested in finding the best remedies to Europe’s technological challenges. I am simply stating that as a body appointed by the representatives of the Member States to represent the best interests of the EU as a whole, the Commission’s focus on specific aspects of the information society, regardless of the way it is defined or conceptualized, is an expression of its “technocratic” function, stripped of scholarly sociological explications. It is within this context that information society is seen as the all-encompassing meta-narrative for embedding technologies in social interactions, production, services, government and all other aspects of human activities, without prejudice to the ideological or rhetorical function of the expression.

If, as I mentioned in earlier in this chapter, initially information society was adopted in the Commission’s language as a reflexive response to American leadership in information technologies, over the years the notion has taken on wider and more nuanced

²⁸ Quotation from the website of the Information Society and Media Directorate General (DG INFSO). http://www.europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/information_society/index_en.htm.

connotations. While trying to keep up with the competitive pressures from across the Atlantic and from other parts of the world, the Commission has turned its attention internally to upholding the core values enshrined in constitutions across Europe and in the Maastricht Treaty, pertaining to human rights and social cohesion. As a consequence of these pressures, it has been striving to create a framework in which technologies are used in the service of Europe's citizens.

This shift is visible from the time of the early documents when the emphasis was placed on the exploitation of technologies to boost productivity and growth to the later Commission papers which gradually espoused a larger social theme in connection with new technologies, while at the same time keeping close watch on economic desiderata. A string of such documents in the second half of the 1990s bear titles that are evocative of this course adjustment: *The implications of the information society for the European Union policies – preparing the next steps*; *Living and working in the information society: people first*, *Europe at the forefront of the global information society* (Servaes & Heinderyckx, 2002, p. 95).

This is not to say that the European elites have moved economic considerations to the backburner so that social priorities can be met first. In fact, the *eEurope* Action Plan (introduced in Chapter I) was meant to target a range of sectors that would create the conditions for a competitive European Union. ICTs were envisioned as the scaffolding upon which services and businesses would mature into efficient vehicles for economic growth and job generation. Designations such as e-health, e-business, e-government, e-services bear testimony to the hope placed in information technologies to deliver a Union able to face the global competition on all fronts. Whether the faith placed in technologies

to create a more competitive European Union is justified or not remains a subject of intense discussion, particularly since the two failed referenda in France and Netherlands in the summer of 2005 which cast doubts on the European public's inclination to go along with anything decided on the corridors of Brussels.

In European jargon and decision-making circles the bond to information technologies remains the guarantee for the perpetuation of the information society. European technocrats are working relentlessly to cultivate the comprehensive deployment of technologies via programs that are explicitly tailored towards the alleviation of the dysfunctions in social milieus stemming from differences in rates of penetration and availability of ICTs at various social levels. Employing terms such as *e-inclusion*, *e-accessibility*, *digital inclusion*, *digital cohesion*, European political programs intend to alleviate problems of access for less favored sections of society, such as individuals with disabilities, people with lower levels of education or those residing in remote areas (OJ C292, 2001, p. 7; COM, 2005: 425 final, p. 3). Attention to these matters represents the political expression of Häyrynen-Alesto's observation that "the openness of communication is supposed to guarantee that inclusions will be maximized and exclusions minimized" (2001, p. 210).

New policy actions intended to replace the current *eEurope* plan embrace the same creed in the promise of technologies to bring about the European information society which subsumes all social equity issues, economic development, flexible and sustainable employment, job growth, etc. Grouped under the new communication from the Commission, *i2010 – A European Information Society for growth and employment*, these aims are premised on the emergence of a "Single European Information Space" and

an “Inclusive European Information Society” which have at their basis the new generation of fast communication technologies, like broadband connections, voice over internet protocols (VoIP), Web-TV and so on (COM, 2005: 229 final, p. 5).

Interoperability of communications across borders is seen as the key element for the provision of public services within the Union, ranging from e-health to e-government. But in practice such a grand plan may run into similar difficulties to the other visionary strategy that launched the Lisbon agenda. Dependency on the national governments to absorb these grand European ambitions always results in half-measures and mixed results as the degree of commitment from national level varies widely across the Union. To be sure, convergence between European and national objectives on the employment of information technologies for the social good and economic vibrancy is hardly an issue, as most governments have long acknowledged the need for a strategic incorporation of technologies in the public and economic sectors (Servaes and Heinderyckx, 2002, p. 90). It is the resources and the political willingness of national governments that throw into question the sustainability of a cohesive mechanism for the delivery of those strategies.

In keeping with the political strategies, if we are to take the perception in the EU of the new ICTs and the internet as the two main instruments upon which the information society is postulated, it could be claimed via induction from a Eurobarometer Special Survey conducted by the European Commission’s Public Opinion Analysis sector that the European Union is on the cusp of entering the information society. On average, 87% of the citizens in the EU-25²⁹ considered that computers and information technology will have a positive effect on the Europeans’ way of life over the next 20 years and 78% held

²⁹ EU-25 is an abbreviation commonly used to refer to the current EU composed of 25 Member States.

the same view regarding the Internet.³⁰ For good reason, it may be argued here that these figures are not realistic in assessing the presence of an information society. Nor should it be construed that I endorse such a hypothesis. However, the survey probes the public outlook for the long term and offers a quick glance into the present perception of the potential of ICTs into the future. The survey may indicate that the European public conceives of the new ICTs as beneficial for the future, but it does not suggest a direct link between the ICTs and the conceptualization of an information society at public level, nor does it indicate what social values are contemplated as the beneficiaries of the new ICTs.

That an inclusive European information society based on the two indicators mentioned above (ICT and Internet) is a remote prospect is supported by another study released by Eurostat four months after the Eurobarometer. It shows that despite the pervasiveness and widespread use of ICT and internet in all aspects of society, “the divide is not being bridged” (Demunter, 2005, p.1). While on average 54% of all EU-25 households owned a PC in 2004 and 43% had internet connections at home, there were wide disparities in Europe (including the EU-25; the sample also included candidate states Bulgaria, Romania and Turkey as well as associated countries Iceland and Norway). Within EU-25, Denmark had the highest rate of PC ownership with 79% of the households and Latvia the lowest, at 26% (outside the EU-25, Iceland figured at the highest end with 86% and Turkey at the lowest with 10%). In terms of access to the internet from home, Denmark again topped the EU-25 charts with 69% of the households being connected, while Lithuania was last with 12% (Iceland and Romania were at the extremes of Europe with 81% and 6% respectively). If we consider the penetration of

³⁰ Eurobarometer Special Surveys, EB 63.1, *Social Values, Science & Technology*, June 2005, p. 73, http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/archives/ebs/ebs_225_report_en.pdf.

home broadband connections, which on average hovers at a dismal 15% in EU-25, even the most advanced countries perform poorly. In EU-25, Denmark comes out strongly again with 36% of households benefiting from broadband connections, while Greece comes at the bottom with 1% (outside EU-25, Iceland gets top marks with 45% and Turkey gets the lowest grade with no broadband connections recorded).³¹

I have focused here on public access to ICTs and the internet. Equivalent surveys for rates of PC usage and internet access in the government, business or industrial sectors surely dwarf these numbers. Average use of computers and the internet in enterprises in the EU in 2003 was 93% and 82% respectively (Ottens, 2004, p. 4). A society, however, especially an inclusive one, cannot be conceived of without the active participation of the public at large. So, it is even less tenable that, given these marked contrasts in Europe, an information society can emerge, if again, we are only basing it on the infrastructural aspect and give little consideration to the actual intellectual processes that the public resorts to in using the modern tools of information.

The question arises how can 25+ culturally different societies, with heterogeneous economic and social models, diverse attitudes and mentalities, at different levels of technological sophistication converge into an integrated universally accepted model of an information society? It is not hard to imagine a confluence of standards in infrastructure at European level. As a matter of fact, many technologies already function via internationally regulated standards (e.g., internet protocols), while compatibility issues with various equipment components still persist. In an ideal scenario, these relatively minor issues can be ironed out in the short or medium term and it is plausible that

³¹ The data in this Eurostat survey is not complete as information about Belgium, Malta and Sweden was not available, but it gives some sense of the gaps between countries in Europe.

differences in technological advances can also be gradually remedied as “poorer” Member States, and especially the newer Member States, catch up with their “richer” western counterparts. Some new members are already taking over established members in terms of wealth. Czech Republic is the latest newcomer surpassing Portugal, the poorest of the former EU-15,³² in gross income per capita, with 73% of the EU-25 average for the former and 71% for the latter. Slovenia had already entered the EU ahead of Portugal, and now stands at 81% of the EU-25 average. It is estimated that Slovenia will reach Greece’s level in 2007.³³ Wealth and economic progress apart, the convergence of technological standards is not an indication that this mixture of cultures and nationalities will discern the contours of an information society within their own borders, much less in a Europe growing more diverse over time. Some nationalities may place more emphasis on values not necessarily related to technologies as they may not consider them essential to define their way of life. Yet others may see technologies and digital media as part and parcel of every aspect of life upon which the progress of their nation thrives. Certainly, in economic terms there is no eschewing the thought that a country can consider itself competitive today without the judicious and comprehensive incorporation of ICTs in production processes, services, financial markets, etc. The social implications of technologies touch on more subtle and nuanced reflections about the projection of technologies into people’s everyday lives.

There is little doubt that the digital transformations of our time require individuals to hone their abilities to navigate the oceans of information equipped with the modern

³² An abbreviation used to refer to the EU of 15 Member States before the last wave of enlargement that took place on May 1st, 2004.

³³ Czech Republic leapfrogs Portugal in wealth terms. (January 17, 2006). *EUobserver*. <http://euobserver.com/19/20701>.

communication media. Learning to do so, through informal and, more importantly, through formal instruction figures prominently in the European documentation. Higher education, the focus of this study, is particularly held in high regard for its potential for innovation and research tradition. There is no shortage of European discourse applauding the role of universities in the production of knowledge and its dissemination through information and communication technologies, their promotion of innovation or linking research outcomes with industry and society and to the shaping of the knowledge economy and society (COM, 2003: 58 final, p. 3; European Commission, 2005, p. 21).

We have seen in this section some of the problems with which universities in Europe are confronted in maintaining their edge in the global academic competition. Whether they can contribute to the arrival of the information society in Europe and its component states is one of the focal points of investigation for this study.

1.5 eLearning Policies in the European Union

1.5.1 The Official Rhetoric

Among the first efforts to promote ICT at EU level was the elaboration by the European Commission, at the request of the European Council in Florence in June 1996, of the document *Learning in the Information Society: Action plan for a European Education Initiative* presented in 1996 to the European Parliament and to the European Council. It included proposals directed towards the creation of a technology-based society, with a “European dimension,” a framework within which new technologies would be applied to satisfy the needs of a society increasingly dependent on ICT. It laid down objectives for the immediate term, 1996-1998, but aimed to set the background for the future development of strategies in the field.

As explained in the document, the initiative seeks to reinforce the “impetus of various activities at national and local levels to connect schools to communication networks, train instructors and develop products that meet pedagogical needs.” It had three main objectives:

to accelerate the schools’ entry into the information society by making available to them the appropriate means of access to the world; to promote the implementation of multimedia pedagogical methodologies, to encourage the formation of a body of technology literate users and to create a pool of educational multimedia products and services; and to strengthen the European dimension of education through the use of information technologies while at the same time enhancing cultural and linguistic diversity within the Union (COM, 1996, 471 final, p. 2).

The initiative also stipulated the lines of action to be followed in order to achieve the goals it set forth. Consequently, it proposed that the schools be interconnected via regional and national networks at Community level and it provided for stimulating the introduction of educational multimedia with a European dimension by seeking the collaboration of European software developers, media broadcasters and the education sector. It recognized the need for the appropriate and substantial training of teachers in the endeavor to integrate technology in the curriculum and it sought to inform all parties involved of the educational possibilities the ICT could offer (p. 3).

This initiative was deemed to support similar initiatives developed in several Member States, but this time it made the weight of the Community the driving force in achieving the assimilation of the new technologies in education. It aimed to coordinate the actions at national levels, which often seemed too fragmented, so that the common

interests of the Community would be promoted, while respecting the principle of subsidiarity. The initiative was directed mainly towards the benefit of primary and secondary schools, considered less advanced on the way towards technologization, in contrast to higher education, at which level ICT was more widely used (p. 7).

Because the Heads of State and Government were concerned about the limited progress in bringing the EU closer to the goals stipulated in the body of the initiative, at the European Council Summit, held in Lisbon on March 23, 2000 (the Lisbon Council), they recognized that the EU was facing real challenges resulting from globalization and the new “knowledge-driven economy.” The Lisbon Council set a major goal for the EU “to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-driven economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion” (COM, 2000, 318 final, p. 3).

A precondition necessary for this goal was the decision of the Lisbon Council to accelerate the education and training throughout the EU so that the digital technologies would be absorbed on a larger and more comprising scale than ever before. The Council determined that this would lead to a successful economy, able to set the pace of modernization in a world market growing increasingly interdependent.

As a consequence, the Lisbon Council delegated the European Commission to draw a plan that would observe these goals and would find the best possible avenues to direct the resources of the EU towards creating the conditions for a rapid development and assimilation of ICT in education (p. 3). The European Commission developed the *eEurope* Action Plan, which aims to give Europe the modalities to exploit its strengths and surmount the impediments obstructing the introduction of digital technologies.

Within the *eEurope* Action Plan, the European Commission initiated the *eLearning* Action Plan, which assessed the status of ICT in education and set a calendar for the implementation of the Plan's new recommendations in order to speed up the deployment of ICT in education, to meet the challenges evoked by the Lisbon Summit. The *eLearning* Action Plan covered the period 2001-2004 and proposed means to involve education and training players, as well as the relevant social, political and economic factors with the aim to make lifelong learning the driving force behind a cohesive society in a competitive economy. Furthermore, it sought to remedy the shortage of skills associated with the new digital technologies (COM, 2001, p. 2). It stated that the EU's citizens were among the best educated in the world and that the EU's education systems ranked among the best worldwide (COM, 2000, p. 5). Despite these facts, and contrary to its proven investment capacity, the EU presented significant weaknesses and was "well behind" the United States in the overall application of the new ICT at all levels of activity.

This situation is reflected in several aspects in the Action Plan. The majority of the European countries were faced with a shortfall in hardware and software, which affected not only schools and universities, but also technical training centers and in-company training such as SMEs (Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises). It was estimated that in schools the situation varied greatly with differences ranging from one computer to 400 students to one computer per 25 students (p. 5).

The Action Plan identified a shortage of qualified staff, especially teachers and trainers with ICT skills. No accurate figures were available regarding the number of teachers with real skills in the new technologies, able to include them in their teaching.

The European Commission estimated that over the following five years, one out of every two jobs would depend on the new technologies, and specialists able to make use of them were in scarce supply. It was estimated that the shortage of technology specialists corresponded to 500,000 jobs in Europe in 1998, and, based on those trends, the figure would have reached 1.6 million by 2002 (p. 5).

The European production of educational multimedia software was still very low. It was estimated that in a world market of approximately two billion dollars in 2000, almost 80% of the online resources originated in the United States (p. 5). Europe's marginal contribution to this market was due to the high number of small firms and to the weakness of the links between education systems and the technology industry. An obstacle to the rapid and wide introduction of ICT in education represented the relatively high cost of telecommunications in Europe. In order to overcome the situation, the EU should follow the US example by lowering the costs of Internet connections for education and training centers to expedite the conversion to a knowledge-based society (p. 5).

To address these shortcomings and problems, the *eLearning* Action Plan adopted four main lines of action to bring about the knowledge-based society: equipment, training at all levels, development of good quality multimedia services and content, and development and networking of centers for acquiring knowledge (p. 7).

In the equipment area, the emphasis was placed on multimedia computers in order to facilitate improved access to digital networks in the various academic and training environments. Additionally, high standards would be observed for infrastructure quality regarding the connections to outside networks and Intranets, so that by the end of 2002 all classrooms would be equipped with a fast Internet connection. Furthermore, all schools

would be connected to research networks and support services and educational resources on the Internet as well as online learning platforms for teachers would be available by the end of 2002. Support was given to integrate new learning methods in the curricula, based on ICT, by the end of 2002. The *eLearning* Action Plan proposed that, by the end of 2003, all school-leavers would have the opportunity to become digitally literate. The Plan set as a minimum requirement for optimal technology utilization a ratio of 5 to 15 users per multimedia computer to be reached by 2004 (COM, 2001, p. 3).

As far as training at all levels is concerned, the *eLearning* Action Plan set the new technologies in the context of teaching practices. Thus, the Action Plan sought the creation of innovative educational models in which new technologies would make possible the crystallization of new types of relationships between students and teachers. Consequently, training was to focus on the development of those skills needed in the employment of the ICT. The aim was to provide all teachers with the appropriate training, to adapt training programs accordingly and to encourage teachers to use digital technologies in their lessons by the end of 2002. The training course of action was not in itself to be a terminal one in which skills are imparted to meet the immediate needs of the instructional demands, but would rather be a continuous process aimed at providing skilled teachers for the medium and long-term (p. 4).

Within the third line of action, innovation and development in content areas such as modern languages, science, technology and society, art, and culture and citizenship with the help of ICT were deemed essential. Thus, the *eLearning* Action Plan sought to stimulate the European market for content and services tailored to the needs of the educational and cultural communities as well as to the benefit of all European citizens. A

successful outcome was highly dependent on the involvement of the software industry, the principal supplier of multimedia services and beneficiary of its direct investment in the form of the skilled human capital that arises from the application of technologies in education (COM, 2001, p. 8).

Lastly, the *eLearning* Action Plan aimed to enhance the conditions currently underway, namely the building of virtual teaching and learning environments. The Action Plan would encourage the interconnection of virtual spaces and campuses, the networking of universities, schools and training centers, while respecting cultural and linguistic differences. In addition, this networking was to facilitate the exchange of experience and to stimulate distance teaching and learning (p. 9).

In order for the *eLearning* Action Plan to work, the European Commission stipulated the framework within which the implementation of the plan would unfold. The Action Plan was directed to a network of educational systems with various degrees of compatibility among one another. In order that the deployment of new technologies could be performed in as uniform a manner as possible, two methods of coordination involving shared responsibilities were envisioned: implementation by the Member States and a support framework at Community level.

Since it contained a set of specific objectives and priorities, the *eLearning* Action Plan was tied to a strict calendar, and at the same time it required solid political commitment on the part of the Member States and wide acceptance of all the parties that had a vested interest in the process, for the attainment of a quick implementation (p. 10). Through the benchmarking of education and training policy actions, the European Commission, in conjunction with the Council of Ministers' Committee on Education,

would be able to measure the progress made in the accomplishment of the goals included in the plan, to determine the effectiveness of the actions taken and policies implemented, to weigh the dissemination of best practice and the enhancement of joint reflection.

Consequently, the European Commission undertook the task to present periodical reports on the progress of the implementation process to the Education Council³⁴ (p. 10).

The European Commission also took on the role of supporting the Member States in their implementation of the *eLearning* Action Plan to coordinate and strengthen their efforts by co-financing selected activities. Thus, the Member States were encouraged to utilize a portion of their Structural Funds³⁵ to sustain *eLearning* actions especially in regard to equipment, training for teachers and development of “virtual mobility” – distance courses via the EU’s other educational programmes like *Socrates*³⁶ and *Leonardo da Vinci*³⁷ (p. 17-18).

The European Commission was also to take Community level actions to channel the interests of the parties involved concerning several technical facets of the implementation

³⁴ One of the nine councils of the Council of Ministers.

³⁵ *Structural Funds* represents a redistribution or reallocation of Community funds, instituted after the 1973 enlargement to diffuse disparities between the poorer and richer regions of the Union (Allen, 2000, p. 251).

³⁶ *Socrates* represents Europe’s education program and it involves 30 European countries, including the Member States and other European countries. *Socrates* is now in its second phase of operation, running from January 1, 2000 through December 31, 2006, based on a budget of € 1.8 billion. The main objective of *Socrates* is to create a Europe of knowledge. Additionally, it seeks to offer a better response to the challenges of the changing societies and it promotes language learning and encourages mobility and innovation. *Socrates* advocates equal access to education for all and facilitates the use of ICT in education (COM, 2001, p. 3). *Socrates* consists of several separate actions: *Comenius* (school education), *Erasmus* (higher education), *Grundtvig* (adult education), *Lingua* (learning European languages), *Minerva* (ICT in education), *Observation and Innovation*.

³⁷ *Leonardo da Vinci*, scheduled to run between 2000 and 2006, is a programme directed towards the creation of a vocational training policy at Community level with the support of the Member States. It aims to provide the necessary skills for its participants through on-the-job training and apprenticeship programs and to ensure continuous access to quality lifelong vocational training. The long-term objective is to perfect competitiveness and entrepreneurship. The *Leonardo da Vinci* programme supports the *eLearning* objectives through pilot projects, thematic action projects and joint actions. These entail the expansion of ICT use in vocational training actions and products, accelerating the establishment of transnational open and distance vocational training through the use of digital technologies and designing new concepts in pedagogic methodologies related to ICT (p. 13).

procedure: strengthening the cooperation created within the framework of the European Schoolnet (EUN)³⁸ network by setting up virtual European campuses for cooperation among schools and developing a European network for the exchange of information on digital technologies; establishing observation mechanisms both at national and Community level to determine which scenarios were best suited for the technological needs in the educational systems; creating a training network to provide trainers with expertise in the use of technologies in education; setting up an *eLearning* Internet site which would serve as a forum for the exchange of experience between schools, universities and companies; promoting “employability” by defining qualifications and skills related to the incorporation of ICTs (p. 18).

This cursory examination of the *eLearning* Action Plan reveals the fact that the main concern of the Commission was to support the quicker implementation of ICTs in schools and it was focused mainly on bridging their infrastructure needs. It is important to note here that the Action Plan was not accompanied by any financial support from the Commission. Instead, it was meant to be implemented within the framework of the EU’s *Socrates* programme for education to which the EU had been allocating funds since 1995. Universities, as I have mentioned above, were a lesser concern, due to their already comparatively advanced role in adopting technologies. The Action Plan reserves one line of action for universities, but it is a general statement of support in expanding what had already been happening in higher education, namely the creation of virtual campuses and networking of universities (this is a rather vague term in this particular context, as it

³⁸ According to the EUN website, the “European Schoolnet (EUN) is a unique not-for-profit consortium of 28 ministries of education in Europe created in 1997. EUN provides major European education portals for teaching, learning and collaboration and leads the way in bringing about change in schooling through the use of new technology.” <http://www.europeanschoolnet.org/ww/en/pub/eun/about/euninfo.htm>

could refer both to computer networking as well as to the “human” networking of technologically enthusiastic academics/professionals).

Following the Commission’s evaluation of the Action Plan, the Parliament showed interest in the idea expressed in the Commission’s proposal for the development of a programme with its own budget (Gutierrez-Diaz, personal communication, January 5, 2006) to address “a selected set of targeted strategic actions on high priority areas” (COM, 2002, 751 final, p. 10). In its proposal to the Council of Ministers and the Parliament for an *eLearning* Programme, the Commission identified universities as “key actors in the production and dissemination of knowledge” drawing from the past experiences of traditional and Open Distance Universities involved in transnational collaboration schemes (p. 5). Believing that building on these past experiences new practices in pedagogical development could be infused with the help of ICT, the Commission placed higher education as one of the four priorities of the Programme.

No longer is there an emphasis on infrastructure, but rather on the social dimension of creating networks of practice and dissemination of knowledge through technologies. The first target refers to bridging the digital divide, using ICT to allow socially or geographically disadvantaged groups access to education otherwise not available to them via traditional means. The second priority relates to higher education and is given significant importance in comparison to the *eLearning* Action Plan. It envisions the elaboration of new models of European collaboration and exchange via virtual mobility schemes and virtual campuses between universities. The text of the formal decision on the *eLearning* Programme adopted by the Council of Ministers and the Parliament particularly emphasizes that the EU “should pay close attention to

effective promotion of virtual higher education campuses” as an area of importance (OJ L345, 2003, p. 10). This is a watered down version of the Parliament’s report on designing the *eLearning* Programme, which, in an amendment to the Commission’s proposal on the Programme, stressed the delivery of quality “European” curricula in higher education (PE 312.569, 2003, p. 8). Given its intergovernmental nature, it is safe to assume here that the Council of Ministers was uncomfortable with the reference to European curricula and objected to the inclusion of the term in the final decision convinced that a European curriculum per se is not a uniform, unitary system, but rather a metaphoric container of differing national curricula. A rather vague component of this objective refers to the provision of an “e-learning dimension” to some of the operational tools the institutions use for credit transfers, quality assurance and mutual recognition designs of the Bologna Process (discussed in Chapter II of this text). Consideration to schools is reserved in the third objective, in the form of school twinning via the internet. It aims to bring schools in partnership and developing school networks for sharing of pedagogical practices with the use of ICT, while “fostering language and intercultural dialogue.” Finally, the fourth purpose employs so-called “transversal actions,” meaning the promotion, dissemination and distribution of information related to the *eLearning* objectives across the Member States (COM, 2002, 751 final, p. 11).

The final decision reiterates the use of the principle of subsidiarity in deploying the *eLearning* Programme and it allocates €44 million to be spent for the four objectives over a three-year period, beginning on January 1, 2004 and ending on December 31, 2006. The largest portion of the Programme’s budget goes to the school twinning objective with 45% of the total amount, while higher education benefits from 30% of the

total budget. The rest of the budget is distributed among the other targets, with 10% going to promoting digital literacy, 7.5% for transversal actions and 7.5% for the technical administration and management of the Programme (OJ L345, 2003, p. 12).

1.5.2 Current Issues and Developments

As a part of the *eEurope* Action Plan, the *eLearning* Action Plan dealt with specific objectives for the diffusion of ICT in education at all levels (COM, 2001). Higher education institutions have been particularly targeted as leaders of the ICT development in education, due to their role in the dissemination of knowledge and development of research strategies in digital technologies, both of which have implications for the economic competitiveness of the Member States in the global arena and for the emergence of the information society in Europe.

The *eLearning* Programme reiterates the mechanisms of policy-making that were set forth in the *eLearning* Action Plan regarding the competence of the Member States in the process of ICT development in education. Thus, consistent with other actions and programmes in education throughout the EU, the *eLearning* Programme does not replace programmes that address ICT incorporation in the national educational systems of the Member States, but complements them (Debande, 2004, p. 1).

Research conducted to date in the development of e-learning in Europe, though growing, is rather patchy, and has been generally limited to cursory reviews of software, hardware distribution and internet use, mostly in relation to the training of practitioners and users of ICT in the small and medium enterprise sector (SME). Nevertheless, the 2nd *Interim Report* of Centro Tecnológico do Estoril (2003), considers not only the business sectors' number of computers, internet access and presence, internet use for commerce,

but also the number of students per computer and the number of students per each computer connected to the internet as indicators for e-learning growth in the European Union. Debande (2004), for instance, only refers to the types of internet connections, with 72% broadband and 33% dial-up, in schools across the EU (p. 194) and the use of these internet connections in classrooms as indicators of e-learning presence. These studies, like many others, do not go beyond the numbers to identify the importance of state or European *eLearning* initiatives for the higher education sector.

Other studies have focused on the quality and effectiveness of e-learning in various governmental and non-governmental agencies as well as business organizations. In one of these studies, of 43 e-learning practitioners surveyed in Europe, only 14% rated the *eLearning* initiatives to date as *excellent*, 33% as *good*, while the vast majority, or 51%, rated them as *fair* (Barron, 2003, p. 9). A similar study conducted in 2002, found that out of 433 respondents from EU countries, 61% considered the quality of e-learning in their countries as *fair* (46%) or *poor* (15%), while only 5% considered it *good* and a dismal 1% rated it *excellent* (Massy, 2002, p. 3). Results provided by these studies are mixed and ambiguous and reveal little about the mechanisms through which *eLearning* policies are adopted. These studies reflect even less upon the recommendations coming from EU institutions and are not concerned with the mechanisms of *eLearning* policy adoption at an organizational level. A number of other case-studies focus on *eLearning* developments in terms of distance learning programmes at individual higher education institutions in various locations, of which the most well-known is the Open University in the United Kingdom.

These, however, are all recent attempts to evaluate the logistics of e-learning mostly from an equipment feasibility and implementation perspective. Given the fact that the *eLearning* Programme is at this time in progress (it is scheduled to run between 2004 and 2006), there is a need for research into how the *eLearning* recommendations that were first developed under the *eLearning* Action Plan have been influencing the individual Member States in their efforts to address the use of ICT in higher education.

On a related aspect of *eLearning* in Europe, it is my view that any analysis of the *eLearning* Programme and the developments surrounding it is incomplete without a consideration of the concept of Information Society. The Commission documents dedicated to *eLearning* intrinsically and explicitly link the ICT implementation in education to the emergence of the information society. It is the opinion of the Commission that the *eLearning* Programme is essential for the development of the information society in Europe, as education provides the means through which technologies are tested and particularly higher education contributes to the creation of skilled cohorts of professionals able to function in a competitive economic environment. This aspect ties directly into the abovementioned generic goal outlined at the Lisbon Council in 2000.

Information society is a term that has been used for at least two decades in an attempt to explain the transformations that have been occurring in contemporary post-industrial modern societies. As I have indicated above, the literature on information society is vast, as discourses vary from the technological and economic to the social and political. In EU policy language, however, information society appears to be used as a political slogan to justify the implementation of information technologies in various

fields. Entering the information society, in the Commission's reasoning, is the solution that will enable the EU to keep up with the competitive pressures of the global economy. Thus, the Commission's language about information society has been primarily economically motivated, as reflected in the *White Paper on Growth, Competitiveness and Employment* (1993) drafted under the then European Commission President, Jacques Delors and in the Bangemann Report in which the Commission considered that the information technology developments would be dictated by the needs of the market (Bulletin EU, 1994, p. 16). Following the challenges of the Information Superhighway program drafted by the Clinton Administration, the Commission sought to distance itself from the primarily economic context of the US program. Therefore, the Commission decided to draft a plan that would be uniquely European and would be a more comprehensive program to advance ICT development not only for economic gain but also, equally importantly, as a factor of social cohesion (Ducatel, Webster, & Herman, 2000, p. 4). Hence, the *eEurope* Action Plan was launched in 2000 (see above), a plan meant to take a multifaceted approach at the challenges that the information society posed for the EU and aimed at promoting the integration of information technologies in virtually every sector of life, from commerce and politics to health and education. Yet, as in the case of *eLearning* literature, there is very little research on the actual effects the *eLearning* Programme exerts on the shaping of an information society view at university level or how the Programme is perceived as a promoter of the information society in the EU. It isn't clear what kind of debate there exists in the EU decision-making circles regarding the nature of the information society, beyond the largely technical aspects of incorporating digital technologies in society, except for a vaguely defined goal to bring

about “social cohesion.” Consideration for the meaning of information society for the European public in the Member States does not seem to be a concern for the EU political elites. What they do recognize, as Field (1997, p. 15) points out is that “technology-mediated learning and teaching have an important part to play in turning Europe into a central player in the global information society.”

What the exact role of Europe (EU) as a central player should be in this “global information society” and at what level should the responsibilities that come with such a role be outlined (state vs. European) is less obvious. These are the two aspects of the *eLearning* Programme that I found intriguing and in need of investigation. I have surveyed both the field of *eLearning* and of the information society in the context of the legal documents that promote their implementation in the European society. I will now invite my readers to join me in constructing an analysis of these two processes from the ground up, with the help of the data that I gleaned from the academics who generously gave me some of their time to help me in this quest.

CHAPTER II

Thinking about Research

2.1 The Investigation Mode

“Knowledge is obtained from a multiplicity of views rather than from the determined application of a preferred ideology,” says Feyerabend in *Against Method*. This statement is not a justification for the kind of study I conducted, but rather a guiding principle for it. I eventually realized that the type of manuscript I wanted to produce could not be easily classified under any of the research methodologies common today in social sciences. Trying to understand the complex reality of EU’s *eLearning* developments, often characterized by fragmentation and disconnect between policy areas and actual implementation on the ground, cannot, in my judgment, be defined through rigorous methodology. The juxtaposition of reality and policy desiderata in the European realm lend themselves to a research context explained succinctly, but eloquently by Bryman and Burgess (1994, p. 2): “Indeed, research seldom involves the use of a straightforward set of procedures. Instead, the researcher has to move backwards and forwards between different sequences in the research process.”

The various levels of discourse (formal and informal) and inconsistent dissemination of information about *eLearning* required me to take a flexible approach to the collection of information that I deemed relevant for creating as informative a study as possible. Due to the contemporary, and relatively novel, nature of European *eLearning*, I considered that a historian’s set of methods (that is, analyzing past documentary evidence

and comparing it with the current personal accounts of the study participants) would be the most appropriate avenue to develop an understanding and a report of the various events in *eLearning*. In taking this approach, I sought to understand how people inside and outside the *eLearning* programmes make sense of a set of complex, contemporary developments and render their accounts as accurately as possible in this study, trying to follow to some degree what Barzun and Graff (1992, p. 36) have referred to as the “fashioning of written history.” It is for these reasons that my study draws on elements of social science research, combining various methods of data collection, such as interviews (on-site/in-person, online and over the phone), official document analysis, personal communications, literature reviews and media reports, in an effort to conjure a clearer picture of the *eLearning* programmes’ success or nonsuccess, for that matter, in the EU’s Member States.

Given the convoluted nature of European Union politics, in which decision-making seems to occur within an intricate web of rules and regulations where institutional responsibilities overlap at various levels, I considered it sensible to approach this study by employing a theoretical mix of hermeneutics and policy analysis, without, however, excluding other possible unexpected ways to view and evaluate matters. Interpreting the policy-making mechanism of the Union is a daunting task in itself and numerous works exist that attempt to explain just who is in charge of what domains and why they function that way. My goal was to concentrate on a slice of the EU’s complex political life and its implications for education.

Because this study did not set out to test a theory and verify hypotheses, but sought to formulate rather clear and intelligent assumptions about what is happening in

the *e*Learning realm in the EU, it was intended to be an open exploration endeavor attempting to shed light on some of the less obvious effects of the *e*Learning policies the European Commission has proposed thus far.

With this intent in mind, I deemed that the interview was the most appropriate investigative instrument that I could utilize in collecting information from faculty and administrators involved in various capacities in EU-funded e-learning projects. If I had to be more precise on the typology of the interviews accepted in the mainstream social sciences, I would oscillate with my classification between semi-structured and unstructured interviews: semi-structured, because I was generating questions based on my main research questions; unstructured because those secondary questions, though similar in formulation from one interview to another, were not pre-designed, but they rather emerged seamlessly during the course of the interview sessions. I am more inclined to use the term open discussion, since my interlocutors did not have a pre-determined interview script from which to prepare in advance, but a general idea of my study based on the proposal that I sent each of them prior to the interview. I did not ritually follow a specific order in asking my questions, because, as I anticipated, the participants elaborated on their answers and went into various details that would have not been allowed for in a highly structured and tightly controlled interview. I believe this manner of engaging the interviewees put them at ease and provided them with the best possible scenario to freely share their knowledge on the topics under investigation. In conducting the interviews, I took direction from Rubin and Rubin's theoretical conceptualization of interview methodology:

Interviews develop in several distinct stages. An interviewer guides the discussion through these stages, paying attention to how well the intensity and

emotional and intellectual challenge of the questions matches the depth of the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee... We pay attention to what stage we are in but recognize that the stages are not meant to be followed inflexibly. Rather they serve as a kind of an interpersonal scaffolding, giving the interviewer some guidance about how to deepen the interview relationship and how to ensure that the questioning is appropriate to the level of relationship. (1995, p. 129)

Not all interviews, however, were fluid and exhaustive, sometimes because of the interviewees' time constraints or because of the medium used for the discussion. Clearly, the on-site interviews were by far the most interactive, comprehensive and rich in information not least because the interviewees allocated ample time for discussion when I was on site. The telephone or online audio interviews were similarly rich and fluid, but were generally limited to one hour in duration. My experience with the online text chat interviews was mixed. For the most part, I found that both my interlocutor and I would underestimate the time and the number of sessions needed for an online discussion to cover all the concerns that I would normally be able to address in an average one hour audio conversation. Thus, I found myself compelled to ask my interviewees to agree to subsequent chat sessions in order to cover all questions I had. I also learned that the flow of conversation was much slower than during a personal or phone interview, due to the intervals of time that would elapse between alternate postings typed on either side of the connection (I should emphasize that the language of communication was not an impediment, as all interlocutors were fluent in English).

Ironically, this poses an interesting conundrum related to digital technologies. The uncontested advantage was that these technologies allowed me to conveniently connect with individuals in Europe and have real-time, cost-free conversations from any available terminal connected to the internet. On the downside, in addition to the sensibly

longer sessions, they proved to be unwieldy tools at times, because the lack of visual cues inherent in face-to-face interactions made it more difficult to infer the “mood” of the interviewees and detect nuances that are best punctuated through nonverbal communication. Thus, the text-chat dialog was much more succinct than either the on-site or telephone interviews, typically consisting of shorter answers to my questions, requiring me to probe further with quick questions for elaboration. In contrast, in a face-to-face or telephone situation, the interviewee could “read” the visual or audio cues to interpret my reaction and elaborate on his/her answers without the need for fine-point clarification at every step on my part. Despite the differences peculiar to their nature, all tools proved effective in communicating and extracting the information I needed.

Before I move on to the next section, I should point out that the choice of interviewing methods were in part dictated by the time and financial resources I had available for conducting this study. Initially, I intended to spend several months for research in Europe so that I could gather more information “on the ground.” Unfortunately, professional as well as academic commitments prevented me from traveling to Europe for an extended period of time. I was, thus, constrained to use the limited vacation time I had from my job and my own financial resources to spend two weeks in Germany and Sweden for data collection. Upon my return from Europe, I decided that the only way I could supplement the information collected on location and obtain new data, by employing the interview methodology, was to have online and/or telephone conversations with other potential informants. Over a period of about six more months I interviewed online and over the telephone the rest of the informants included in this dissertation.

2.2 Choosing Locations

For the purpose of this study, I selected three Member States of the EU, namely Germany, Portugal and Sweden. The rationale for choosing these countries is based on their progress in adopting ICTs in education or the society at large. Each member state of the union is at a different stage of implementation of ICT, both in the public and private sector. I selected the three countries based on the various surveys or studies that consistently divide the countries of the EU in what I call the three tiers of ICT development. The first tier belongs to the countries that are most advanced on this path, the second tier comprises the ones that have had mixed success, while the third tier contains the countries which are least advanced in this field. Thus, Sweden belongs to the first tier, Germany to the second, and Portugal to the third. My grouping of these three countries is similar to that of Guerrieri, Jona-Lasinio and Manzocchi (2004, p. 4), who divide the Member States of the EU into three clusters of IT diffusion: fast, medium and slow adopters. In their diagram Sweden is a fast adopter, Germany a medium adopter, while Portugal is a slow adopter of IT.

In all three countries, as in the rest of the EU, the educational system is the responsibility of the government (Brock & Tulasiewicz, 2000, p. 16), through the respective ministries of education. This fact, however, does not signify that the ministries of education in these countries have exactly the same responsibilities in each country or that they regulate education in similar fashion. In fact, the opposite is actually true. Each member state of the union organizes its educational system according to its needs for economic and labor market development, as well as for the promotion of its specific cultural and social values (Kron, 2000; Belard, 2000; Salin & Waterman, 2000). I take

the universities to be the reflection of nation-state interests, since the higher education sector, as part of the educational system, is developed through state policies. I must point out here that in the German educational system the universities are technically the responsibility of the *Länder* (federal states), but the Federal Government is entrusted with drafting the legal framework within which the higher education institutions function as well as with providing financial assistance for training (Kron, 2000, p. 165; Eurydice, 2001). Furthermore, universities are considered, by many writers and specialists, the laboratories of ICT development, the front-runners of the digital revolution (Brown & Duguid, 2002; Castells, 1996; Mitchell, 1995).

This country sample is not meant to be representative for the entire European Union. It is hardly imaginable that one could generalize one's findings in a sample of three countries to a union that contains 22 other countries. Because the *eLearning Action Plan* and the *eLearning Programme* have been developed while the EU had 15 members, the neat division into three tiers was more suitable to that number than to the current EU-25. While the profile of the former EU-15 is changing, the comparative levels of development among the old Member States have remained largely unchanged since the last enlargement. With the inclusion of 10 new members (EU-10), the overall landscape is much more heterogeneous given not only the contrast between the EU-15 and EU-10, but also the differences between the new members. Furthermore, even this clean split between two blocks has to be regarded cautiously. There are signs that the new members are quickly catching up and are experiencing a quantum leap, particularly in the information sector, as transfers of know-how and investments from West to East are leveling the playing field for their benefit. To put it more prosaically, they don't need to

rediscover the wheel. Although these rapid transformations within the union dilute even further the disparities between the Member States, for the sake of clarity and to maintain the focus of this study, I preferred to stand by my choice of the three countries mentioned above. In this manner I sought to get an understanding of the mechanisms through which such a complex organization as the EU mandates a programme like *eLearning* and how the Member States or entities within Member States choose to respond.

Though my intention was to restrict the scope of the study to the three countries mentioned, the chain of contacts (as I will show in the next section) led me, on several occasions, to developments elsewhere in the European Union. I do not intend to confuse my readers about the focus of the study, which is still concerned with the developments in *eLearning* in Germany, Portugal and Sweden, but I think being open to processes in other countries is a useful exercise in gaining an understanding of the complexity of this diverse machinery which is the EU. Contrary to my expectation, the additional findings from other Member States not only enriched the picture provided by the principal three countries investigated, but also reinforced many of the findings in Germany, Portugal and Sweden. Thus, my research trail eventually took me to Belgium, France, Italy, Netherlands, Spain, and the United Kingdom.

Once I identified the countries on which I wanted to concentrate, the choice of locations within those countries was entirely dependent on the affiliation of the individuals with whom I managed to establish contact and who eventually agreed to participate in the study. Since not all universities participate in EU-funded programmes, it made sense to identify potential interviewees who participated in such programmes on behalf of their institutions (see next section on interviewee selection) instead of

attempting to identify those universities that participate in European *eLearning* programmes and then trying to contact interested participants at those institutions. The institutions that make part of this study, including those outside the principal three countries, are shown in the table below.

Table 1. Institutions in the Primary and Secondary Countries

Country	Institution
Belgium	Limburg Catholic Institution for Higher Education http://www.khlim.be/
France	University of Paris 8 http://www.univ-paris8.fr/
Germany	Ludwig-Maximilians University, Munich http://www.uni-muenchen.de/ University of Hamburg http://www.uni-hamburg.de/ University of Hildesheim http://www.uni-hildesheim.de/ University of Kaiserslautern http://www.uni-kaiserslautern.de/ University of Tübingen http://www.uni-tuebingen.de/
Italy	Polytechnic University of Milan http://www.polimi.it/
Netherlands	The Hague University http://www.haagsehogeschool.nl/
Portugal	University of Lisbon http://www.ul.pt/ Catholic University of Portugal http://www.ucp.pt/
Spain	Open University of Catalonia http://www.uoc.es/
Sweden	Swedish Agency for Flexible Learning http://www.cfl.se/ Swedish Net University Agency http://www.netuniversity.se/ Royal Institute of Technology http://www.kth.se/
United Kingdom	UK Open University http://www.open.ac.uk/

As Table 1 indicates, the spread of institutions is not even among the principal countries concerned due directly to the way in which contacts emerged throughout my research. It is interesting to note here that not all of these 16 institutions are traditional campus-based universities. The majority of them, 12, do fall under this category: all 5 in Germany, 2 in Portugal, one in Sweden (for the principal countries) and one each for Belgium, France, Italy and Netherlands. Both the Open University of Catalonia in Spain and the Open University in United Kingdom are distance education universities, but they are different in that the former was established from its inception as an exclusively online (internet-based) institution, while the latter has a longer tradition in distance education based on printed materials and television programming, adding only relatively recently the internet as another avenue for the delivery of distance education courses.

Two of the institutions in Sweden are not universities. The Swedish Agency for Flexible Learning's primary focus is on making distance education for lifelong learning available to the public at large and is thus indirectly involved in providing services for the higher education sector. The Swedish Net University Agency coordinates a partnership of 35 major Swedish universities in which distance education courses (many internet-based) offered by the participating universities are registered in a central database at the Net University from which students can select the courses they want to attend.

Several of the institutions introduce a cultural element inherent to the social milieu in which they are functioning, further fragmenting the sample according to their regional scope. All German universities in the sample are the responsibilities of the federal states in which they are located, but the language of instruction being German makes them national in their appeal to students from all over the country. Similarly, the

Limburg Catholic Institution for Higher Education in Belgium (also a federal government system) is under the jurisdiction of the Flemish government but has appeal only for the Dutch speakers of the Flanders region and of the Flemish community not for students from across Belgium. The French and the German communities of Belgium have their own educational systems, thus making it less likely that French or German speakers will attend a university which conducts its instruction in Dutch. The Open University of Catalonia in Spain is under the jurisdiction of the Catalan Government (Generalitat de Catalunya) and it conducts its courses primarily in Catalan, only relatively recently having moved towards offering courses in Spanish. These elements only testify to the intricacy of the European educational landscape and the difficulty in objectively extrapolating narratives from regional to national or supranational level in Europe. Nonetheless, the interconnectivity of any number of units within the European space does give rise to some common features and patterns that I will reveal shortly.

2.3 Finding Informants

The approach I employed in identifying and selecting participants for the study was through what Holmberg and Hansson referred to as “social navigation,” namely trying to locate the key individuals who have knowledge of, experience in and connections in the field of e-learning in their own countries, as well as elsewhere in Europe and then asking for further contacts from each participant or potential participant. My sources of contacts came initially from three directions: the *Online Educa Berlin* international conference, professors at Teachers College, Columbia University and professors at Georgia College & State University, an institution from which I had obtained my previous university degrees. Through the conference I initiated contact with

the principal administrator of multimedia for education, training and culture within the Directorate General Education and Culture of the European Commission. In addition to becoming one of the interviewees, he also recommended other contacts within the Commission and at universities in Sweden. My professors at Teachers College put me in contact with professors in Germany and Portugal. Professors at Georgia College & State University also afforded me a few leads in Germany and Sweden.

From these initial contacts, some of which participated in this study themselves, I requested further links to other like-minded individuals who either participated directly in or were familiar with EU-funded projects. I decided to approach both people who were directly involved in eLearning programmes as well as individuals who had indirect experiences with such programs because in order to understand the larger context in which these programmes operate, both types of informants were important to my research endeavor. I want to emphasize that my primary target participants were faculty members at universities in the three principal Member States. For the most part, I succeeded in achieving this goal, as the vast majority of my sample is made up of professors with direct or indirect experience in European projects. Many are also experienced in accessing and using funds from national or regional governments in their countries. Other avenues that I attempted in my search for contacts were through e-learning web portals, particularly the *elearningeuropa.info* site, trying to contact contributors to those sites who appeared to have knowledge of the e-learning developments in their countries in particular and Europe in general. My experience as a researcher trying to contact people without being referred by an acquaintance or colleague of the potential interviewee is not a very successful strategy. In almost all my attempts to contact

individuals directly I received no response. The search worked much better if my request came accompanied by a reference from a colleague whom the potential participant knew. In several cases the referee contacted the potential interviewee personally to introduce me and my research to him/her. As I was getting references to potential participants from outside the three main countries, I also used a successful proposal for EU funding under the Comenius³⁹ action line of the Socrates programme, provided to me by one of my subjects from Portugal to select possible interviewees from the participating parties in the EU project.

Through these various channels, I contacted, primarily between March 2005 and January 2006, approximately 70 individuals from Germany, Portugal, Sweden and other countries in Europe. Apart from my initial contact in Berlin, which was a face-to-face meeting after a conference session and one meeting with a visiting professor from Portugal at Teachers College, all the other contacts were initiated via email. Many requests for participation went unanswered. Some initially expressed their willingness to participate, but later other personal or professional priorities prevented them from granting an interview. Others initially signaled their interest in the study, but did not feel knowledgeable or comfortable enough with the topics under discussion to provide an informed response, but suggested other individuals whom they considered to have more

³⁹ Comenius is designed to stimulate and promote the European dimension of school education by encouraging transnational cooperation between schools and enhancing the opportunities for language learning and intercultural awareness. In line with the *eLearning* initiatives, Comenius employs ICT for almost all its actions as a means for administration and internal project organization. Through its transnational cooperation feature, Comenius facilitates the participants' exchange of experience and skills in telecommunications and computer skills. Comenius also plays an important role in ICT training of staff and teachers by "preparing student teachers and teachers to use ICT as a pedagogical tool, as a means of opening the school to the outside world, and assessing the implications of new technologies for classroom management" (COM, 2001, 172 final, p. 4). In addition, it promotes the networking of projects on subjects of common interest to boost European cooperation in different educational areas.

expertise in the field. Eventually, the total number of participants who granted me an interview in some form by the end of my self-imposed deadline was 25.

To give a sense of the professional make up and experience of the individuals included in the sample, the table below presents each participant by name, affiliated institution, current position and experience with EU programmes or funding. To clear any concern regarding the confidentiality of the persons involved, each participant consented to be identified by name.

Table 2. Individuals Interviewed Listed by Country

Country or Region	Name	Institution	Title/Position	Familiarity or Experience with EU funding
Belgium	Katja Bongaerts Valère Awouters	Limburg Catholic Institution for Higher Education	Professors, Teacher Training Faculty	Yes: Participants in the digiFOLIO project under the Comenius programme
France	Sylvianne Toporkoff	University of Paris 8	Professor President, Global Forum	Yes
Germany	Manuela Glaab	Ludwig Maximilians University, München	Professor Head, Research Group Germany, Center for Applied Policy Research	No, but some indirect familiarity
	Burkhard Lehmann	University of Kaiserslautern	Professor Assistant Director, Center for Distance Studies and Continuing Education	Yes

Table 2 (continued)

Country or Region	Name	Institution	Title/Position	Familiarity or Experience with EU funding
Germany	Rolf Schulmeister	University of Hamburg	Professor Director, Interdisciplinary Center for University Didactics	Yes: Participant in the STREPS projects under the EU Framework Programme 6, eSIGN (Essential Sign Language Information on Government Networks, under eContent)
	Erwin Wagner	University of Hildesheim	Professor Director, Center for Distance Learning and Advanced Training	Yes: Former chairman of the European Distance E-learning Network.
	Joachim Wedekind	University of Tübingen	Senior Researcher, Knowledge Media Research Center	Yes
Italy	Matteo Uggeri	Polytechnic University of Milano	European Projects Manager, Centro METID	Yes: Participant in the eLene project and SIG-DLAE “Distance Learning Accreditation in Europe” under the eLearning Programme

Table 2 (continued)

Country or Region	Name	Institution	Title/Position	Familiarity or Experience with EU funding
Netherlands	Gerard de Kruif	The Hague University	Professor	Yes: Participant in the Value Education European Module under Erasmus
Portugal	Roberto Carneiro	Catholic University of Portugal	Professor, School of Human Sciences; Dean, Institute for Distance Learning; Former Minister of Education	Yes: Mediakids, New Skills, Telepeers and Kaleidoscope
	Fernando Costa	University of Lisbon	Professor, Faculty of Psychology and Education Science	Yes: Initiator of and participant on behalf of coordinating institution in the digiFOLIO project under Comenius
Spain	Tony Bates	Open University of Catalonia, Barcelona	Research Professor in e-Learning	Yes
Sweden	Ruth Bourke-Berglund	Swedish Net University Agency, Härnösand	Advisor	Yes, indirectly
	Carl Holmberg	Swedish Agency for Flexible Learning, Hässleholm	Advisor to Director General; Former Head, Department of Behavioral Sciences, Linköping University	Yes: Member of the Executive Board of EDEN

Table 2 (continued)

Country or Region	Name	Institution	Title/Position	Familiarity or Experience with EU funding
Sweden	Christer Johannesson	Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm	Director of Basic Science Education	Yes
	Göran Karlsson	Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm	Senior Lecturer, Department of Mechanics	Yes: Participant in Bistro project under Leonardo da Vinci, TAEM project under Tempus-Tacis programme and SIG-DLAE “Distance Learning Accreditation in Europe” under the eLearning Programme.
	Marianne Solomon	Royal Institute of Technology, Stockholm	Vice-Director, Distant M.Sc.-Sustainable Energy Engineering	Yes: SIG-DLAE “Distance Learning Accreditation in Europe” under the eLearning Programme.
	Per Westman	Swedish Net University Agency Härnösand	Senior Advisor Formerly at Stockholm University	Yes

Table 2 (continued)

Country or Region	Name	Institution	Title/Position	Familiarity or Experience with EU funding
United Kingdom	Andrew Robinson	Open University	Formerly Assistant Director for European and Regional Development; Vice-President, European Institute for eLearning	Yes
European Union	Maruja Gutierrez-Diaz	European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture	Head of Unit, Innovation and Transversal Policies	Yes
	Brian Holmes	European Commission, Directorate-General for Education and Culture	Head of Unit, Comenius/Grundtvig/ eLearning/Lingua Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency	Yes
	Patricia Manson	European Commission, Directorate-General Information Society and Media	Head of Unit, Learning and Cultural Heritage	Yes
	Emilie Normann	European Commission, Directorate-General Information Society and Media	Project Officer for eLearning - eTEN Programme	Yes

Table 2 (continued)

Country or Region	Name	Institution	Title/Position	Familiarity or Experience with EU funding
European Union	André Richier	European Commission, Directorate-General for Enterprise and Industry	Principal Administrator, Technology for Innovation, ITC Industries and E-Business	Yes

I intentionally delayed mentioning the five Commission officials included in the sample and shown in the last five rows of the above table. The intent of approaching the Commission was to balance the stories that would emerge from the interviews in the Member States. I considered that getting the other side of the story about the processes surrounding EU programmes in e-learning was not only fair in terms of giving the European Commission the chance to respond to the concerns expressed by my interviewees in the Member States, but also crucial in getting as complete a picture as possible regarding the e-learning policy dynamics. It also allowed the Commission officials to bring insights that are not available when one reads the formal documentation available publicly on the Commission's website. It also gave them the opportunity to "add life" to the sometimes opaque and formal language found in those official documents. By the same token, the interviews with the Commission officials offered a reflection of the universities' own attitudes towards European programmes.

The interviews were conducted in the following manner:

- **Germany** - on-site in Kaiserslautern, Tübingen, München, Hamburg and Hildesheim (in chronological order);

- **Portugal** - online, using the text-chat features of MSN Messenger and Skype respectively;
- **Sweden** - one interview on-site in Härnösand, one over the telephone and the remaining three online via MSN Messenger's text-chat feature;
- Belgium, Italy and Netherlands - online via MSN Messenger's text-chat feature;
- France - over the telephone;
- Spain and United Kingdom - via Skype's audio conversation feature;
- European Commission - over the telephone.

The on-site interviews were the longest and most detailed, ranging in duration between 60 minutes to 3 hours. The telephone and online audio interviews lasted approximately one hour each. The online text-chat interviews, as I previously mentioned, usually required more than one session per interviewee, each lasting approximately one hour. In trying to maximize the opportunities to gather information that could prove relevant to my study, I decided not to use a limited set of specific questions, which by their very nature could have restricted the interviewees in elaborating on their answers. Instead, I kept my broader research questions in mind and let the subjects reveal the developments, events and insights into eLearning as they observed and understood them.

2.4 Getting the Stories

Naturally, no study can be evaluated without a careful recording of the data that is to be collected (Rubin & Rubin, 1995; Creswell, 1998; Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003). In this sense I used some of the traditional tools of data collection and recording in the social sciences. I recorded the on-site interviews via a mini-cassette recorder. Initially,

some of the telephone interviews were recorded with the same mini-cassette recorder using a microphone connected from the receiver to the recorder. Later, the remaining telephone and audio Skype® interviews were recorded digitally on my personal desktop, using the recording feature of the digital audio editing program Goldwave®. These latter interviews proved to be much clearer in audio quality than the telephone interviews. For the online text-chat sessions, I used either the built-in features of MSN Messenger® to capture the conversation transcript and then create a Word file or I copied the conversation from the Skype® chat window and pasted it into Microsoft Word®. Regardless of the recording method used, all interviews were converted into Word documents.

As I developed the stories, I secured agreement from each respondent that the contents of their respective accounts were accurate renderings of what they had expressed in the interview sessions. At the same time, I obtained written agreement from my interlocutors to use their actual names in the stories produced from the interview transcripts. For feedback and editing purposes, each interviewee was provided with a transcript of the conversation I had with him/her. Following their review of the transcripts, I revised my copies of the conversations to take into account any deletions, additions or comments the interviewees made to their copies of the transcripts. It is from these revised copies that I proceeded to analyze the content, extract the findings and draft the results. These findings are presented in the following sections.

In order to make the account of the findings as fluent as possible, to maintain a consistent account across the findings throughout the next five sections and to avoid repeated explanatory remarks about the logical layout of each section, I shall point out

here that each section is sequentially organized according to the thematic questions that have been asked consistently throughout the interviews. As a reminder, the questions were not pre-scripted and the interviewees were not bound to a limited number of possible answers. Throughout the interviews, however, a certain pattern of questioning emerged, touching on the same aspects, not necessarily in the same order in every single session. In addition, there were variations in the formulation of the questions, but the content, meaning and direction of the questions were consistent during the interviews. In the next chapter I am presenting the themes that emerged via these questions.

CHAPTER III

Solving the Mystery

The stories that follow are organized by three major themes (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p. 38) that guided the research as it unfolded via the interviews: Working with EU-funded Programmes, The eLearning Programme: Its Budget and Impact and Information Society. These themes reflect three levels of discourse that inform the core of my interest in the *eLearning* developments.

Thus, the first theme seeks to reveal the difficulties and general concerns that people involved in European e-learning projects have in finding ways to make the *eLearning* programmes work both for their own individual goals and for the greater common good of using the programmes to lead innovation in education. In this context, the *eLearning* Programme becomes a point of reference, given its specific focus on encouraging the development of sustainable academic projects. How people relate to the Programme and how easy or difficult they think it is to work with it gives important indications about the character of EU-funded programmes.

Because the *eLearning* Programme was endowed with a budget, in contrast with prior Commission initiatives in this field, making some sense of the suitability of this financial support for multinational projects is important to gauge the Programme's effectiveness. Hence, the second theme looks, via the perceptions of the academics interviewed, at the impact that the *eLearning* Programme has had so far in higher education, given the relatively complicated process involved in obtaining funding through the Programme.

Finally, the usage of the concept of Information Society in the Commission's official documentation in connection with the *eLearning* actions at European level gives cause, in my judgment, to concerns about its appropriateness in driving the *eLearning* Programme and other programmes. The term may be too complex and may mean too many different things to different people to make it a strong motivator for participation in *eLearning* projects. Its multiple conceptualizations are, therefore, brought together under the third theme named above.

For a logical organization by the locations I explored, the three themes recur uniformly under each country investigated. The three principal countries are presented individually in the first three sections. The secondary countries are grouped in one comprehensive section, followed by a section comprising the stories in Brussels.

3.1 The Story in Sweden

3.1.1 Working with EU-funded Programmes

The formalities involved in obtaining funding from the EU were defined by the Swedish interviewees as bureaucratic, difficult, complicated and annoying. Swedish universities are relative newcomers to the EU-funded programmes, not least because Sweden became a reluctant member state of the EU only in 1995. But that in itself is not the strongest reason why universities have been cautious about involvement in EU *e-learning* initiatives.

As Professor Holmberg, former Head of the Department of Behavioral Sciences at Linköping University explained it, apart from the procedural burden related to submitting an application for EU grants, Swedish universities, though richer than many universities in other Member States, do not have a lot of "free money" to invest in co-financing

European projects. He stated that another reason for the lack of enthusiasm for European projects in Swedish universities is the “attitude towards international cooperation.” It is not that Swedish academics and researchers are not willing to conduct and cooperate in research projects across borders, but the nature of many European projects are not held in high esteem. Holmberg considered that the perception of Swedish researchers is that European projects do not amount to “research in the deeper meaning, it’s more developmental work,” the kind of research that raises the profile of a researcher and confers him/her a high status in the research community. Per Westman, Senior Advisor at the Swedish Net University Agency in Härnösand, formerly at Stockholm University, similarly opined that “research is valued much higher than education,” thus professors are not keen on seeking funding for e-learning projects from the European Union. Furthermore, he added that the e-learning projects initiated by professors are mostly employed in the improvement of the professors’ own courses, not for large scale undertakings.

Professor Karlsson, from the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm, who has participated in a number of EU projects among which the latest one, SIG-DLAE “Distance Learning Accreditation in Europe,” was funded through the *e*Learning Programme, argued that even though the EU programmes’ budgets may seem very large, “it is very difficult to get money and even then, mostly, the projects are underfinanced.” Karlsson remarked that not only are the projects underfinanced, but the partner organizations have to contribute anywhere from 5% to 50% to the project and in certain cases up to 90% as in eTEN⁴⁰ implementation projects. In addition, much of the

⁴⁰ According to the eTEN website, “eTEN is the European Community Programme designed to help the deployment of telecommunication networks based services (e-services) with a trans-European dimension. It

researchers' time is spent on writing up the proposals, but this is not an entirely unusual factor, as many projects financed by the Swedish research council operate in the same manner. He estimated that the success rate of the applications for most EU programmes is around 15%.

An issue associated with the costs of co-financing an EU-funded project is the extra money that has to be allocated for covering the administrative procedures involved in preparing the actual applications, whether EU-funded or Swedish-funded, by the personnel employed by many universities in Sweden. Per Westman and Ruth Bourke-Berglund, Advisor at the Swedish Net University Agency, pointed out that Swedish universities can deduct between 35% and 40% of the funds for the overhead costs in a project funded from Swedish sources, as opposed to approximately 25% allowed in an EU-funded project. This differential and the sensibly larger amount of paperwork required in an EU project compared to a Swedish project partly explains the institutional apathy for dealing with EU projects, the two interlocutors concluded. But, as Karlsson pointed out, there are mechanisms in place, created by the Swedish government, to provide support and promote familiarity with EU programmes. Such a governmental body, he mentioned, is the International Programme Office for Education and Training (<http://www.programmekontoret.se/>). A quick glance at the office's website indicates that this institution is entrusted with the mission to "inform about and market the Programmes and provide simple and effective administration, evaluate and disseminate results of the various activities," both for national as well as for European programmes.

focuses strongly on public services, particularly in areas where Europe has a competitive advantage." <http://ec.europa.eu/eten>.

When it comes to the level of initiative in taking the decision to participate in EU programmes, in Sweden, it is usually the individual professor or a group of professors with common interests in a certain sphere who take the first steps towards developing a grant proposal. However, an application is normally subjected to the approval of a department head, as Holmberg specified, because, at most universities “you have to co-fund parts of the project and that involves the departmental budget.” The Swedish ministry of education does not influence directly the universities’ decisions on opting for EU programmes, because, in Karlsson’s words, Swedish ministries are “not allowed to take direct operational actions.” In addition, academic autonomy allows universities to determine for themselves what course of action to take to promote their own interests. And, as Holmberg mentioned, the formal stance of the Swedish government is that universities “should be involved in EU-funded projects and there is, of course, an international programmes office (*presented above*) which is aiming, working on these issues. But, in a more practical sense, as a researcher at the university, you see very little of that.”

Westman made a clear distinction among the avenues available to professors who seek to apply for funding. For a project to be developed and deployed within the university, a professor would turn to the special ICT units or boards charged with allocating university funding in such instances. If the project envisioned has national scope, the professor is usually advised to contact the Swedish Net University Agency, after they receive the endorsement of their respective institutions. Those “few” professors who consider EU-funding are normally approaching the International Programme Office to get assistance with the application process.

Bourke-Berglund reinforced the notion that individual researchers who approach the Swedish Net University Agency for project funding need to be “anchored with their home institution” to ensure that the idea behind the project is feasible, actually serves the institution and that institutional checks are in place for carrying out the project. At the same time she reiterated that given the autonomy that Swedish universities enjoy, they are not subject to governmental pressure in deciding what types of funding they can pursue and there are no obvious attempts on part of the government to facilitate access to EU funding. A slightly different approach to the source of initiative was pointed out by Bourke-Berglund, citing the example of the Swedish Net University Agency. The Agency issues “pledges” for new programs. These pledges, in the form of information letters, usually go to heads of universities or colleges who then pass the responsibility of determining the appropriate course of action to someone further down in the hierarchy who has the necessary competence to carry out the work. In this sense, at least in theory, there may be some impetus for initiating participation in a certain program from the highest echelons within the institutions.

Professor Christer Johannesson, Director of Basic Science Education at the Royal Institute of Technology, on the other hand, mentioned that the universities approach the EU directly for funding, but “personal networks” are the driving force behind those efforts.

Most interviewees agreed that academic freedom gives academics the power to choose the type of projects or programs in which they want to get involved. In this sense, it seems that Swedish academics and researchers are much more favorable towards Swedish grants than towards EU funds. They feel that it is much easier to apply for

national grants, not least because they are more familiar with the process involved and “because we have a more simplistic way of working with research money with many of the councils funding research here than the EU has,” Holmberg stated. This does not mean that Swedish government funding is devoid of bureaucratic weaknesses. Karlsson added that, in fact, it is not uncommon for Swedish-funded projects to be underfinanced, just as it happens under the EU-funded programmes, but the difference is that Swedish grants do not come with the requirement of co-financing a project with external funding. So how do universities meet the obligation to co-finance a European project? Karlsson indicated that the participating institution does not simply allocate a certain amount of money from its budget to meet the requirement, but instead utilizes “creative bookkeeping” in the form of incentives to those professors who participate in the project, which are then included in the amount contributed as part of the institution’s share of the co-financing procedure. He believed that those involved in the project are aware from the beginning that “only about half the devoted time will be financed by the EU.”

What would be some of the motivating factors for those who do decide and commit the extra time to participate in the European-funded e-learning projects if teaching brings less academic prestige than scientific or theory-testing research? Karlsson explained that it has partly to do with individuals’ interests in a specific area or with the sense of their calling to enter into collaborative partnerships for the noble “mission to assist other countries” (e.g., academics and institutions in the new Member States). He also considered it an incentive the possibility of rolling results from one project to another for the benefit of the individuals’ future work and for the institutions with which they are affiliated. Professional interest and experience transfers aside,

Marianne Salomon, from the Royal Institute of Technology, argued that there is also a financial interest in taking part in European projects since it brings in additional income.

3.1.2 The eLearning Programme: Its Budget and Impact

The best outcome of the *eLearning* Programme from the Swedish perspective is the collaboration that it spearheaded among academics. “Clusters of universities,” according to Karlsson, are much more common now and Swedish participation has increased as a result of the Programme and other EU e-learning funding opportunities, such as those offered through the Commission’s Directorate General for Information Society and Media. Universities that work in isolation, he said, “have just started to disappear.” Karlsson believed that the Programme’s budget was adequate enough to encourage the development of these “clusters,” which can further organize themselves online by setting up virtual campuses. And this is a welcome development for Sweden, Karlsson added, as Swedish universities were slow until the end of the 1990s to engage in collaborative projects with European partners.

The Programme has contributed to a certain degree to this shift of mentality, though the actual extent is difficult to quantify. Karlsson estimated that only about 40% of the faculty at Swedish universities are aware of *eLearning* initiatives and the possibility of obtaining EU grants in the field, but that this proportion already represents a “critical mass” for further developments to ensue. Salomon was of the opinion that the Swedish academics “are eager to collaborate with European colleagues,” but the financial allocation to the last call of proposals under the *eLearning* Programme was too limited to attract a larger number of professors. Holmberg equally stressed that the entire budget for the *eLearning* Programme is very small to make an impact in a union of 25 nations.

On the other hand, Westman concluded that Sweden is not necessarily dependent on EU funding in general and the *eLearning Programme* in particular. He considered that Sweden could manage without EU funding, but by engaging in EU programmes Sweden could benefit from collaboration with other countries if it is to “keep pace with the rest of Europe” and could also “export some good ideas.” Westman considered that the *eLearning Programme*, and other e-learning initiatives, have had a “lesser effect” in Sweden, in comparison to other small countries such as Estonia or Finland, because Swedish professors believe that Sweden has come far enough to profit from European collaboration, is self-sufficient both financially and logistically, and has a higher education system that is unique in Europe.

In Westman’s opinion, the fact that many of the *eLearning Programme*’s objectives, such as “social inclusion, better technology skills in teacher education and pedagogical innovations,” have long been central themes in the Swedish government’s drive for the use of ICTs in education, makes it more difficult for many academics to see what the immediate added benefits of the Programme would be for the Swedish universities and society. Recounting her participation in a recent conference in Brussels, Bourke-Berglund confessed that she was surprised to learn that many of the ideals pursued by the Commission at the European level in its e-learning efforts are already common practice in Sweden. And again, restrained by a certain reluctance typical of a Euro-skeptical country, she thought that Sweden has “not been so good at going out and showing what we do and maybe helping other countries by showing how we work. So that’s something we have to be better at doing, because a lot of what they (*the*

Commission) talk about is what happens here in Sweden, it's how it works here in Sweden."

3.1.3 Information Society

The Swedish interviewees painted a very bright picture of Sweden as an information society, confident that their country is indeed worthy of that label. Governmental initiative represents the driving engine in the emergence of those elements that can be construed as the building blocks of the information society in Sweden. But nuances in their interpretations of the information society still points to a certain amount of confusion surrounding the deeper meaning of emphasizing the role of information as such in the society as a whole.

For Bourke-Berglund, everyone's access to information, particularly helped today via computers, is a central feature of the information society in Sweden. The government's drive to ensure round-the-clock public access to governmental documents and services, whether online or over the telephone creates the premises for an all-inclusive society in which citizens can stay informed about the policies that affect their lives. This does not mean that even in Sweden, everyone is able to participate in the information society, she added, as "there will always be small pockets of society that don't get touched by that." Nor does it mean, in her view, that information in itself depends solely on modern technologies as "everything is still paper as well," but the focus is disproportionately placed on making better use of computers, broadband and faster communication to deliver the information. She considered that this facilitation of access to information through technologies, however, adds the problem of filtering the information that "we're bombarded with" and making a careful decision of what is useful

and what is not. This is where, Bourke-Berglund argued, schools and universities step in, to educate individuals, particularly early on in their development, in the discriminative and critical use of information. Government investment in technology infrastructure in universities to ensure equal access to education, especially for those in remote areas, is another prominent aspect of the information society in Sweden, Bourke-Berglund stated. She considered that the Net University itself, as a government-sponsored body, is the promoter of inclusiveness by offering a central clearinghouse for distance courses offered via a network of universities throughout Sweden. She added that financial incentives disbursed to universities only after the students complete distance education courses keep the universities interested in maintaining an environment conducive to student satisfaction with the courses offered. Bourke-Berglund thought that this technicality was put in place to more efficiently monitor the expenditures, after the initial euphoria with new technologies saw universities getting a lot of extra money, largely on faith, to develop technology enhanced distance education and e-learning, only with disappointing results. She pointed out, however, that, in Sweden, university access for the traditional 18-22 age-group is not the only priority. Lifelong and adult learners, individuals returning from the workforce to update their knowledge and skills through technology-enhanced university courses (whether via distance education or in the traditional classroom), are categories that are very much included in governmental initiatives. Through these functions, Bourke-Berglund stressed that universities in Sweden intermediate between industry and local community, contributing to raising public awareness about the benefits of technologies for society.

While she qualified Sweden an information society in most of the aspects mentioned here, even though in the Swedish public debate and media alternative terms are often used to express the same notion, Bourke-Berglund was skeptical about the possible emergence of a European Information Society. She named differences in infrastructure between the Member States, in local or government priorities around Europe, in social environments, in ways of working and thinking as only some of the many factors that makes the prospect of an integrated information society in Europe an impossible prospect.

Holmberg was more circumspect in his assessment of the information society in Sweden, considering that it is not evident when “you leave one step (*of social change*) and go into the other.” He admitted, however, that the country is “far ahead towards it anyhow,” especially in comparison to other parts of Europe. For him, the distinction between information society and knowledge society was less clear, but he conceded that the concepts denote a new focus on “the most important aspects of present development.” In his view, this development is marked by a shift in the mode of production of a society in which the emphasis is no longer on the tools of production, but rather on the finite product which in current times takes the shape of information or knowledge. Sweden is producing, marketing and earning money by exploiting innovations ranging from Skype, the popular peer-to-peer online voice system, to mobile phones to pop music. Holmberg considered that these products distinguish themselves from traditional industrial products, like “sweaters,” through their inherent capacity to produce and convey information. Holmberg thought that this prevalence of information is well reflected in the public awareness of the “dramatic changes that the society has gone through,” but he assessed

that the Swedes have not yet given up on traditional jobs “out in the villages,” in the “steel industry” or in the “motor factories.”

Speaking of universities’ role in the information society, Holmberg mentioned the government’s implication in this aspect beginning with the early 1990s. Universities, he considered, are, whether “they want to or not,” part and parcel of the current societal transformations. “They are producers of this type of information we are talking about,” and have the means to “actively promote” knowledge through many of their centers of excellence that act as conduits for the dissemination of research outcomes into the larger society. The idea of a European Information Society, however, depends on the perspective of those who contemplate it, thought Holmberg. The technocrats in the European Commission boast the technical aspects at play in Europe, such as broadband or high speed networks, that confer those European countries that can afford them an infrastructural backbone for the information society. On the praxis level, there are examples that can offer a glimpse of what the European Information Society could look like, such as the European Schoolnet, a pan-European partnership of 26 countries “developing learning for schools, teachers and pupils,”⁴¹ Holmberg concluded.

Westman was unequivocal in agreeing that Sweden is an information society and he associated the concept with a society characterized by information overload which brings with it the need to structure information and the development of information competence. He conceded that ICTs are not paramount to address these needs, but they “do help a lot.” Information society, in his opinion, has direct practical consequences for individuals in that their competitiveness and performance on the changing labor market is linked to their ability to remain “flexible.” Their openness to change translates into

⁴¹ <http://www.europeanschoolnet.org/ww/en/pub/eun/about/euninfo.htm>

harnessing the skills to “structure new knowledge.” The responsibilities of universities in the information society, Westman thought, are primarily tied to the integration of technology-mediated learning in the industrial sector, especially small and medium enterprises, as well as to the provision of ICT teacher training in the primary and secondary schools.

Karlsson was equally positive about the presence of the information society in Sweden, and even placed its beginnings in this country to approximately three years back in time. Its significance is embodied in the infiltration of information in almost all dimensions of the society, from education and healthcare to banking and business to government. Of these, government services have contributed the most in accelerating the advent of the information society in Sweden, Karlsson believed. He considered that being able to contact the “24-hour authorities and getting answers to as many questions as possible any time of day” is an indicator of the deep penetration of information technologies in the public sector. He added that the integration of hospitals in technological networks was done in isolated patches initially, but it has been gathering speed within the past few years. Public awareness of information’s and technology’s roles in society in these respects is very acute in Sweden, Karlsson stated, particularly when information society is set in contrast to issues of inclusion, such as caring for disabled people, the elderly or the poor, as these categories are often still relegated to resorting to traditional service delivery systems. He implied that, to some degree, EU requirements designed to attend to these social categories have had an effect in developing services tailored to their needs.

The universities, Karlsson suggested, “have had quite a low profile” in advocating the rise of the information society in Sweden. In his view, proof of this situation is the slow development of e-learning and distance education in Sweden, which has only gathered pace in recent years following the government’s push for progress in this field, backed with generous funding. By and large, however, for Karlsson, the information society in Sweden has emerged from a fusion of public sector initiatives (some of which were outlined above) and private sector developments (e.g., banking, media, etc.).

Salomon was also confident that Sweden is “very much” an information society and saw its development mostly through the availability of online services. Using online communication for a range of services from filing tax returns to shopping brings the palpability of the information society to the public level. The convenience that comes with these tools of the information society is by no small measure a factor to take into consideration in Sweden, because, as Salomon simply concluded, “it helps when it is cold outside and you do not need to go somewhere to fix everything.”

3.2 The Story in Germany

3.2.1 Working with EU-funded Programmes

When asked about the process of applying for EU funds, there was consensus among the five interviewees in Germany that the logistics involved in preparing the documentation for any EU-funded projects require a lot of resources and efforts to be allocated for this purpose. They described the process as bureaucratic, complex, complicated (compared to other funding schemes), annoying and frustrating. The criteria that need to be met and the documentation that has to be submitted to support an application for a European project is considered the primary factor that deters a

potentially interested participant from taking on a pro-active role in engaging in an EU-funded e-learning project. For any pan-European project in e-learning, whether it unfolds under the eLearning Programme or other funding instruments, such as the 6th Framework Programme⁴² for research (with a total budget of €19 billion, of which €4 billion is earmarked for the Information Society Technologies Programme, including e-learning projects), the participants have to form consortia of at least three partners from three separate Member States. The application process is especially a daunting task for those academics who have no experience in working with EU programmes and who are contemplating participation in such projects.

Part of the problem resides in the lack of tradition, in German universities, of working with European funds in education. Senior researcher Joachim Wedekind explained that it hasn't been common for German universities in the past 10 or 15 years to apply for funding from Brussels, in contrast to the participation of primary to secondary schools, which have been much more active and successful in taking part in EU programmes. German higher education institutions, according to Wedekind, are very weakly represented in European programmes in comparison with United Kingdom or the Netherlands, for instance, and they have only recently begun taking a closer look at the possibilities offered by the European programmes. The recent European funding schemes, Wedekind said, have had limited effects in getting German universities to participate in European projects, but there may be signs that the situation is improving

⁴² The 6th Framework Programme is “the European Community Framework Programme for Research, Technological Development and Demonstration. It is a collection of the actions at EU level to fund and promote research. Based on the Treaty establishing the European Union, the Framework Programme has to serve two main strategic objectives: Strengthening the scientific and technological bases of industry and encourage its international competitiveness while promoting research activities in support of other EU policies. These two objectives are setting the general scene for choosing priorities and instruments. *European Commission*, Research – FP6, http://ec.europa.eu/research/fp6/pdf/fp6-in-brief_en.pdf.

with the establishment of consulting companies such as KoWi (Koordinierungsstelle EG der Wissenschaftsorganisationen - a European liaison office of the German research organizations, <http://www.kowi.de>) which can provide guidance and information on European funding for researchers at, among others, higher education institutions in the 16 federal states. Nevertheless, some universities have been involved in European projects in fields other than education, he added, and have specialized offices that deal precisely with advising on and preparing applications for EU funding. These university offices, Wedekind noted, can now assist researchers or faculty members in putting together proposals for European e-learning projects in various fields. To reinforce Wedekind's statement, Professor Manuela Glaab confirmed that Ludwig Maximillians University in Munich does have such an office. Wedekind qualified his assertion that the situation is improving, but that is happening in the context of the reduction of the overall community budget available for the European Union, which includes funds for education and research.

Since, as all my interviewees pointed out, German professors enjoy a high degree of academic freedom, it is usually at their discretion to make the choice between participating in a European collaborative project or in a research project funded by the German federal government. The initiative to engage in European projects is not influenced by the head of a department or the president of the university. As Professor Burkhard Lehmann put it, "the president is a leader without troops... when the university is looking for funding in the area of e-learning that means that some faculty members do that... Professor X or Professor Y or Professor Z." Lehmann made it very clear that the primary objective of faculty members in applying for EU funding is dictated by the

personal professional and research interests of the individual faculty members. He further elaborated that, in the absence of clear strategies on part of the German universities regarding e-learning developments, it is common for a professor interested in European projects to seek to secure a grant to develop his/her research ideas, as undertaking and conducting research is typically regarded as a much more rewarding activity than teaching. Nevertheless, he cautioned that, often, the outcome of such research projects is inconclusive warranting no further funding. In such situations, Lehmann remarked that the faculty member will apply for another grant, and if funding is not available for e-learning or the educational use of ICTs he/she will seek funding for another research project in another field that he/she finds of interest. It is rather the need to find new sources of funding, he considered, that drives the interest to participate in European projects than fulfilling a certain strategic vision whether coming from European or national level. Professor Erwin Wagner's opinion adds some nuance to Lehman's perspective. Wagner essentially agrees with Lehman's view that individuals are the primary actors, but subtly strikes a balance between the institutions and individuals as the ultimate participants in the pan-European projects: "the institutions very often will be the driving forces, the people will bring in their institute, their department or even their university [...]." He further explained that:

In any case, the professors, the directors of the institutes would have to be involved. Following the rules set by the Commission, the administration or the management, strategic people, partner universities or institutions would have to get involved. That means, in many cases, let's say, the directors or professors would look for any opportunity to, let's say get into some research or development work and to do some collaboration and so on. They would have to, of course, usually they do have to get the agreement from the senior management of the university.

The lack of a strategic purpose, alluded to above, in harnessing the results of even those e-learning projects that show potential in genuinely transforming didactic approaches at German universities, has been emphasized repeatedly throughout the interviews. The participants considered that in order to successfully adopt and adapt technology-enhanced curricula based on the project results, the university administrators would need to have a business strategy or a managerial model that would allow the implementation of technologies in universities in a sustainable manner, so that when money runs out after the 2 or 3 years of funding, the results can be readily incorporated into those models. This essentially translates into considering the research developments akin to marketable assets that could be further continued with revenues generated from the exploitation of successful technology-integrated models by licensing them for use in other higher education institutions. But it is precisely the mix of personal interests and the relatively low profile of the e-learning projects at the European level that prevents the emergence of such models. The small-scale projects do not have the leverage to launch organizational restructuring and incorporation of long-term strategies because of their limited scope, duration and sustainability. While this was a commonly held position among the interviewees, I think Wagner's explanation captured the issue quite clearly and I am citing him here at length:

As far as I have realized this on national as well as on the European level, it's not very often that the senior management people would start the initiative and ask, let's say, the different partners or deans, researchers to get into that. Sometimes this happens, but not very often. The common strategy, in my experience, is the strategy peer-to-peer. This is one of the reasons why it's so hard to incorporate the results into the organizational structures and procedures. I'm not sure it would be very easy if it would be the other way around, but I think it might be somewhat easier. And if there would be some kind of strategic orientation from the senior management of the university, I would expect that they would also think about what's the purpose, what's the goal and how we can do this. 'How can we do the

whole developmental process in a way that our goals can be achieved?’ And so, we do have really some kind of... it’s another reason why it’s so hard, as well.

In a very similar vein, Professor Rolf Schulmeister confirmed that “if you want to have a substantive project, you have to have a real research approach, you have to at least have a developmental approach, you have to develop something new in that area, and then come the content or tools or whatever [...] and then you have to have a very efficient strategy of marketing the whole thing and make it sustainable, etc.”

Another problem, pointed out by the interviewees, that further complicates German participation in European e-learning projects is the express requirement for universities to enter a partnership or consortium with universities from other Member States. Several of the interviewees considered that particularly if an institution is entrusted with the task of coordinating and administrating the consortium of universities participating in the project, the differences of approaches, practices and cultural attitudes to management and technology use represent significant obstacles in the smooth operation of the project. Not surprisingly, the rules that govern European projects are designed to minimize the risks arising from such complexities, but put off many researchers, especially if they do not have a strong interest in participating or if they see no real incentives or benefits (professionally, academically or financially) from their participation. The matter is especially cumbersome for those academics or researchers who consider that the scope of their work primarily benefits and is oriented towards the national or local audience. As Wagner suggested, relatively few professors are connected to the European “pulse” and are “in the know” about the developments and opportunities at European level. It is mainly for these reasons that many researchers and academics prefer to turn to the research organizations and foundations funded by the federal

government or private institutions in obtaining financial support for project proposals. It was unanimously acknowledged by the interviewees that it is far easier to access funds from national sources than attempting to compete for funds from the European Commission.

Schulmeister, who has extensive experience in coordinating and participating in European ICT projects benefiting education and the public sector (currently leading the eSIGN project funded through the Commission's eContent Programme, <http://www.sign-lang.uni-hamburg.de/eSIGN/>), prefers to request federal government funding, because it is usually more substantive, focused on certain practical priorities and it is much easier to obtain. He considered that, when it comes to e-learning, funds from the European Commission are not always put in the service of comprehensive, logical, purposeful and genuine practical research. He thought that funds had been misspent in the past on items or tasks with no real relevance to e-learning practices or no obvious use, such as promotional websites and materials that could otherwise be produced with available free electronic resources (e-mail). He gave the examples of such mini-projects as ULearn (<http://ulearn.itd.ge.cnr.it/info.htm>) or European Tutor (<http://www.odl.net/europeantutorhome>), websites that received EU funding and which he considered mere repositories of information with little or no innovative value. These are superficial projects with no sustainability or real operational purpose and they do not justify the EU funding invested in them, Schulmeister argued. On the other hand, he considered that the European Commission's *Integrated Projects* (IP) that fall under the Framework Programme are at the other extreme, in that a disproportionate amount of money is granted to a single project. When Schulmeister applied for IP funding, there

were more than 60 projects that were contending for €30 million, but in the end two projects shared that entire amount. He pointed out that an integrated project that receives €15 million can potentially have up to 20 partners, making it difficult and costly to manage. Schulmeister estimated that approximately 60% of the budget allocated to such an integrated project would eventually be spent on coordination costs. Instead, he would opt for the so-called STREPs (Specific Targeted Research Projects) programme, as these are smaller projects, with funding amounting between €2-5 million. Schulmeister considered that an amount in this range is “totally sufficient to do a very energetic, a very cohesive project approach and then probably *you have something*.”

There does not seem to be any tension or conflict between the national funding and the European funding schemes. The federal government, through its research organizations does not make its own project funding decisions conditional upon securing EU funding. The federal government is aware of the possibilities of EU funding and encourages applicants for national funding to pursue European financing if additional money is necessary. In Wedekind’s words, “we are encouraged to do that, but that has so many implications if it works or not, so they can’t make their decision only ‘if you get money from Brussels you will get money from us.’ That’s not possible, because otherwise it would be very difficult to get money anyhow.”

Wagner echoed this clear delimitation between national and EU funding, rejecting any idea that there is a competition between the EU programmes and the national programs in attracting successful projects. Both types of funding, he stressed, are released through competitive calls of proposals of which only a certain few are selected, depending on the quality of the project proposal. The national government might allocate

a certain budget for a certain research theme and announce a call for proposals. He specified that if a proposal is not successful in the national funding scheme, the applicants might get a recommendation to seek funding from other sources (foundations, organizations, etc.), including the EU.

There is, as Wagner emphasized, no intent on the part of the federal government, through its ministry of education for instance, to keep a potentially successful project in Germany and prevent it from receiving European funds, particularly if there is an indication in the content of the proposal that some of the objectives involve European participation. He maintained, however, that the federal government does have an interest in seeing German institutions successfully participating in and obtaining funds through European projects. Lehmann pointed out that, though not immediately apparent, the rationale behind this interest is to recapture some of the money that the German government contributes each year to the Community budget. This, he continued, translates into economic interests rather than into a clear and genuine regard towards advancing e-learning research. It is, in essence, a way of recycling funds from the European coffers back into the national treasury and it is of secondary importance what field of inquiry succeeds in attracting those funds, be it e-learning, biotechnology or e-business. Lehmann described it as a “European game” played by those who “believe the philosophy to get money, that’s all.” He opined that it is, in the end, the financial interest of individual researchers and, through them, of their institutions to attract funds by playing the European game, because it is convenient and brings in a certain income, but there is no real attachment or commitment to the ideals envisioned in EU policies. In a further confirmation of the value differential between the EU and federal government

funding in the eyes of German researchers, as well as to stress the inadequacy of a radical transformation in German academia expected through European participation, Lehmann succinctly added that “this money (*European funds*) is not enough for a total development of all these areas (*e-learning, etc.*) and the only idea behind that is just to get some funding or a grant from the European Commission, but it’s not as important as the funding you get from the central government.”

Competition, on the other hand, seems to lie elsewhere, in the hunt to secure funding. As Wagner stated, “all of these people (*academics or researchers*) feel they are poor” and “... there is a competition to get as much money as people can.” Because, as Wagner mentioned, staying informed is crucial to take advantage of the European funding that is on offer, it is usually the same actors who end up contending for money. He considered that a certain “select club” of people “in-the-know” has come to dominate the European scene, continually seeking to attract the available funds.

Wagner thought that researchers need no be sent reminders or announcements every time a programme is proposed, as they know about EU funding once they are exposed to it. He elaborated that since they have become accustomed to working with EU programmes, academics are very knowledgeable of the funding schemes originated by the European Commission. Therefore, he added, they frequently ignore or by-pass information that comes across their desks, distributed via various governmental and non-governmental channels in Germany, such as the ministry of education, European liaison offices, project management institutions such as the *Deutsches Zentrum für Luft- und Raumfahrt* (German Aerospace Center) or university information centers that relay announcements from the European Commission.

3.2.2 The eLearning Programme: Its Budget and Impact

My interlocutors in Germany thought that the *eLearning Programme* is has had limited impact in Germany so far. Its budget, of which only 35% goes to projects in the higher education, is deemed to be insufficient to promote a radical change of strategy in implementing technology-enhanced curricula in Germany. The sum of money allocated is divided between too many projects at the European level so that the successful proposals receive small amounts that are not conducive to embedding results in long-term marketable innovations. In addition, the sheer number of universities in Europe makes it less likely that the rate of participation in a limited number of projects sponsored through the Programme can translate into a massive infusion of practices fostered at European level. Thus, as Lehmann iterated, “the influence is relatively small” in Germany, particularly since a supplementary requirement was added in the EU-funded programmes after the last wave of enlargement to co-opt universities from the new Member States. This requirement is intended to encourage the dissemination and the transfer of best practices in e-learning from the old Member States into the university (and school) curricula of the new Member States.

By the same token, Wedekind implied that the national e-learning programs at university level have not been influenced by the *eLearning Programme* and that the budget allocated to it cannot leave a lasting mark on the further development of e-learning in Germany’s higher education. In contrast, he considered that the schools have benefited from the “training scenarios for teachers” and the networks that were built with the support granted by the *eLearning Programme*. The difference between the two sectors, he thought, lies again in the relative lack of tradition of German universities in

approaching Brussels for funds, given their autonomy and preference for federal government funding.

One obvious result with beneficial implications coming from the *eLearning Programme* (but also other programmes with e-learning components), Wagner argued, was the collaboration between academics on project, networking or scientific community levels where “there is really something happening.” But in the policy transfer domains, in that the *eLearning Programme* could stimulate national e-learning policies, the evident split between EU and national level remains unchanged, considered Wagner. He added that there is no cross-fertilization of policy from the EU level to national or institutional level, hence, EU policy through the *eLearning Programme* has little or no impact in influencing institutional or government policy regarding education. Said Wagner: “I think, for the first five years, and it’s half of the term now (*of the Lisbon Agenda*), the member countries have not been able to really direct their own policies in the higher education arena towards the *eLearning Action Plan*.” He further stated that the total budget allocated to the *eLearning Programme* is inadequate to have a lasting impact on both policy adoption and incorporation of the best practices that arise from some of the projects that do receive funding. Further compounding the shortcomings of the *eLearning Programme* (and other EU programmes), in Wagner’s view, is the uncertainty that sets in towards and after the conclusion of the projects selected when the prospect of discontinued financial support looms large, threatening or effectively dooming the projects’ chances of survival:

It seems to be quite some money (*the eLearning Programme budget*). If you’re looking at the area with 15 Member States, now 25 Member States, it’s not too much money, of course not. So, in a sense, you may say that all the programmes usually have been heavily overbooked in the sense that they’re much more

applications than projects funded at the end. In terms of quality, this is good news... but not always, because many (*academics/researchers*) have interesting project proposals which could not be funded, just due to lack of money. (Wagner)

Such policy dynamics, however, are inherent to the EU mechanism, Schulmeister indicated. He pointed out that the *eLearning* Programme does not have to convince institutions in Germany or other Member States, for that matter, to embrace a certain policy line developed at European level that can be seen as an imposition on the national e-learning scene. He also acknowledged the fact that any EU programme financed from the Community budget must bear the Council of Ministers' approval, which already acts as the voice of the governments of the Member States at EU level.

From the interviewees' responses it is thus evident that the Member States already agree to roll-out the programmes, but it is then up to the universities or schools whether they choose to submit proposals or not. Because schools do not have the same leverage in getting funds from other sources as universities do and are not endowed with the autonomous capacities of the latter, they are much easier to co-opt into the *eLearning* Programme's fold (they also receive a larger proportion of the budget allocated within the Programme – 45% for school *eTwinning*).

My interlocutors also seem to agree that there is no clear understanding of how these projects have contributed to an overall shift in educational practices, whether technology-based courses, academic innovations have delivered on the promises of their initial launch. This is probably because the novelty effect has gradually worn off, ICT becoming, by virtue of its functional role, just another tool that presents both facilitation as well as complexity in its use. People do not become accustomed to radical changes in their personal habits, whether in personal life, at work or at school, overnight, thus

technology has to sink in. By the time this happens, it is no longer an object of fear or marvel, rather ubiquity and familiarity sets in.

3.2.3 Information Society

It can be said from the outset that the picture of the information society in Germany that emerges from the interviewees' perceptions is a mixed one.

Glaab, for instance, explained that, in Germany, information society, as a term, is widespread in the public debate, but as a concept it figures mostly in the debate of the elites. She suggested that assigning labels to society to reflect prevailing trends is not a new phenomenon, and, thus, information society is just one of the many terms that have been used to capture certain aspects that emphasize societal change in modern times. Glaab referred to terms such as *Erlebnisgesellschaft* (approx. transl., "fun society") and *Risikogesellschaft* (risk society) to illustrate the variety of concepts that form the repertoire of the German debate on societal issues.

She viewed information society in terms of access to the means of information delivery and of the personal skills needed to manipulate information or knowledge both within an educational and a societal context. In essence, she argued, there seems to exist a rift, between those who possess the means to participate in the information society and those who don't, which stems from the still relatively high costs of being connected to the internet and from the differences in users' skills for handling technologies. This, however, does not prevent the identification of the various uses of computer technologies which form the basis of the information society, Glaab thought. In consequence, she suggested that there are those who use them for entertainment, others find them useful to take advantage of services offered and there are yet the ones who use them in the "real

sense of information society” to organize activities through the “worldwide exchange of information” and that was what she thought that “affects the way we are thinking.”

Education, she believed, was the vehicle through which information society takes roots. School authorities attempt to familiarize individuals with the tools of information from an early age to shape new generations of informed citizens. There is, however, according to Glaab, a downside to the infiltration of technologies particularly in universities. She pointed out that while e-learning skills are beginning “to change profoundly the way we are teaching and learning in Germany,” ushering in a new understanding of knowledge, they have also changed the value of knowledge in that the ability to discriminate between useful and useless information has to be sharpened among university students. She drew attention to the fact that there is a threat that the availability of free information at the push of a button, the instant gratification that comes with obtaining the information in this manner, reduces the recognition of the need to reflect on the credibility of the sources of information that are accessed. In a very practical sense, the greatest concern Glaab voiced was the increased potential for plagiarism in the students’ academic work as a result of the multitude of information that surrounds them. She thought that deep, thoughtful inquiry becomes superficial as a consequence of the way in which knowledge is handled, but the technology-facilitated access has also heightened the awareness for filtering and sifting information to weigh its relevance.

Wedekind echoed these thoughts, expressly referring to ensuring the opportunity of access to the information technologies as tools that foster social inclusion. Germans, according to him, already live in an information society, due to the fact that “production

of and access to knowledge has already changed dramatically.” According to Wedekind, economic considerations come into play in the emergence of the information society in Germany, and the commercial interests of information technology companies play a heavy role in driving the concept of information society, but ensuring that people are connected and are included in the changing social environment is a crucial matter. He further articulated that that’s where education steps in, to provide the aptitudes that allow one to deal with the informational transformations:

There is an agreement, I think, in politics and also in teaching, that information technology is dominating our society and it is changing professions, it’s changing the kind of work also in research. I think that’s clear. It’s not clear what the implications are on all levels for all people, but of course, that’s discussed in the area of higher education.

Universities, Wedekind thought, are already inevitably part of the process. They are involved in the production and dissemination of knowledge. The digital media, he stated, are already part of everyday life and, inevitably, e-learning and e-teaching are becoming an integral part of university students’ academic preparation. E-learning and e-teaching, Wedekind predicted, will be everyday occurrences in the years to come. The danger, according to Wedekind, resides in not making use of the “real potential” of digital technologies in higher education and he thought that the task of those who direct the process of technologization in education is to ensure that it does not happen superficially as an unconditional tribute to technology.

On the other hand, Wagner’s take was that information society, not unlike *eLearning*, may also be construed as a policy-making tool for the advancement of visions on a grander scale at European level. He suggested that it captures the hope that “focusing on information processing, information business, knowledge business” could

represent a promise for the future, particularly for the sustainability of the current labor markets in Europe. There's an implicit assumption, Wagner thought, that, increasingly, information in itself becomes a product or a service exchanged and sold on the market. It becomes a "core part of business" that allows those European markets to thrive and compete globally if they embrace this functional purpose of information, not as a mere tool for enhancing and supporting the "industrialized production of goods," Wagner thought. Still, he argued that despite its potential to transform market and labor structures, information as business in the new society is an "elitist concept." As he saw it, the number of those who can get the best of both worlds, information and business, does not run into the billions or millions, but it is rather confined to the order of tens or hundreds of thousands. In this context, Wagner continued, Germany, is "on the way to become, to be more and more an information society," with a modern managerial sector and technological infrastructure that allows it to manage information processing efficiently in industry and business, but it still lags behind other parts of Europe in this respect.

Universities in Germany, Wagner considered, still grapple with the meaning of and with their connection with the information society. He pondered that adjusting their philosophies to the tenets of informational change is a slow and deliberately cautious endeavor as "universities still claim to do something else and not just processing information. They still claim to do some research, not just to provide information, but to achieve some kind of inner understanding or dealing with deeply rooted concepts within the history of understanding the world." It is the traditional role of nurturing academic thinking and serving the noble ideals of scientific research, Wagner elaborated, that the

German universities see themselves entrusted with, being “bound to a tradition and a culture they regard as of very high value, as a core value of their existence, and this usually has to do with research and teaching, scholarship, let’s say, the world.” As the exponents of the university environment, he thought that academic professors and researchers in Germany embrace this tradition and are less concerned with technological experimentation and, by extension, with the implications of a term such as information society. This, he implied, leads to a conflict between those academics who oppose the trend and the few ones who see the marketable opportunities of using technologies in academic research. It is for these reasons, Wagner concluded, that “only parts of, sometimes very small parts of universities are really getting involved to do this e-learning.”

For Lehmann, information society is a transitory label that expresses a crisis, the uncertainty of how to make sense of a specific situation at a given moment that marks the changes, in this context, of information use. He considered it an obsolete term as newer and sometimes concurrent concepts are utilized, such as knowledge society, which underscores this uncertainty, and rhetorically asked whether a society can survive solely by producing and selling knowledge. The availability and quantity of information through technology-facilitated access, he continued, does not imply a “revolutionary development” in the life of a society, but rather an “evolutionary process.” According to Lehmann, discriminating between irrelevant and relevant information is the critical point as technology-driven information processing is only useful as long as the human mind can comprehend and apply what is processed. The human brain, he opined, is the result of a slow, gradual evolutionary process that cannot be radically transformed by the digital

technology breakthroughs and people need time to internalize the true effects of information processing through digital technologies.

Things may become faster and they may become more comfortable, but behind that there's one big problem. I think the power lines in our heads do not become faster or bigger, our understanding is not easier... your internal processor is working and behaving the same way. It took millions of years to organize this individual processor, and where is the relation to our power lines on the net?

In a conceptual sense, Lehmann considered that information society is based on multiple axes, of which education is only one component. E-commerce, e-business, administration and policy-making take up a larger part of the information society than e-learning, which was not the primary focus of the entire process of transforming the informational process. He is still not convinced that technologies are necessarily the ultimate solution to stimulating new patterns of teaching and learning and sees the need for a good educational approach or philosophy to integrate it, going beyond the mere early fascination with the potential of technology in education. In this whole context, though Germany is, in many areas, based on technology-driven solutions, in Lehman's view, it cannot be considered an information society, but argued that it is hardly possible to attach that label to any country. Lehmann concluded that there may be many developments and a lot of experimentation with technology in Germany that may warrant this label, but only the future can tell if Germany will come to be considered an information society.

Schulmeister agreed that on a practical level there is a shift from production to services and to a mode of coordination that can be regarded as components of an information society. On a theoretical level, however, he deemed that the knowledge and information components are not to be regarded as equal entities in the information

society. He further stressed that knowledge management in the information society is not made easier by management software, because knowledge is intrinsically a construct of the human understanding and application of concepts, ideas and notions conveyed through information. The increased information storage capacity of digital technologies, he continued, is not akin to the generation of knowledge of which a person is capable. As Schulmeister put it, information becomes knowledge only to the extent that there is meaning in its application to the person processing that information: “When the old master puts his knowledge or his experiences into a database, it’s information. What should make knowledge out of it when a 20 year-old young worker reads it?”

To Schulmeister there seems to be a trend towards the re-monopolization of information into larger units of control, following the initial experimentation with multiple, smaller and independent entities. He explained that the return to mainframe computers in large companies, centralized databases, sophisticated management systems that efficiently distribute tasks and commands to various departments and employees signals the rise of a techno-plutocracy or info-plutocracy concerned with controlling the means of production. “I think it’s a return to not making people powerful to solve problems.” Corporate or industry interests override noble desiderata for a true information society, Schulmeister believed. In his opinion, concepts such as rapid e-learning or micro-learning, consisting of short “on-the-move learning” sessions employing snippets of information delivered via portable technology devices such as personal data assistants (PDAs), which the corporate industries use to train their employees can scarcely be qualified as knowledge-building activities. Furthermore, in Schulmeister’s view, they represent a “perversion of learning.” Communication, he

conceded, is the better part of the information society, because if it is managed properly it enhances the potential for knowledge generation. Still, for Schulmeister, that is not enough to qualify Germany as an information society: “it’s the same society as before.” Technologies have made many activities more comfortable, have speeded life events, but have not caused substantial modifications to the substrata that constitute the building blocks of society.

Schulmeister thought that it is even less conceivable that an information society at European level can take hold. He indicated that a policy-driven information society at EU level was initially seen as the best avenue to counter the American market dominance in the ICT sector. He further explained that the urge to do something about technology, to keep pace in the information business with the American companies, to counter the entry of American technological products in Europe with European-made products took the Commission on a misguided path in attempting to compete with giants such as Apple or Microsoft which yield tremendous marketing and innovative power. Schulmeister gave the example of *The Media Machine*, a multimedia station project (largely an academic undertaking) financed by the European Union that remained at prototype level because this unwieldy tool could not compete, in the end, with such sleek products as Apple’s McIntosh or Microsoft’s Windows. The entrepreneurial vision, production logistics and marketable opportunities for this European product into which the Commission invested millions of euros were simply lacking. This quiet realization that competition with America in the ICT sector is by now a remote goal determined the European Union to turn to the more socially oriented goal of using technologies to create

a “comfortable” Europe for all, to redistribute wealth and experience, to lift up regions that could not progress on their own, Schulmeister concluded.

3.3 The Story in Portugal

3.3.1 Working with EU-funded Programmes

Both interviewees in Portugal have been involved in EU-funded programmes and had gloomy opinions regarding the process of securing EU money for e-learning projects.

Professor Roberto Carneiro, Dean of the Institute for Distance Learning at the Catholic University of Portugal and former Minister of Education, was of the opinion that “the administrative hassle to manage a project, pulling together invoices and accounts from several partners, and streamlining the entire process to meet EU bureaucratic requirements is beyond description.” He qualified his statement by specifying that the success of a funding request is contingent upon the project initiator’s capability to put together a “winning consortium” of participating universities, one of the fundamental requirements in a European project. The winning formula, he explained, is also dependent on the participating institutions’ ability to financially contribute approximately 25-35% of the total costs of the project, which may be a formidable obstacle for institutions “in a cash-crunch period as the one we are experiencing.” Carneiro pointed out that not only do institutions have to contribute, but, in addition, they need to have a “considerable cash-flow” at their disposal, since European funds are not disbursed at the beginning of the project. Rather, they function as a reimbursement system, whereby the participating institutions are compensated only after the expenditures on the project are made and proof thereof is submitted. Carneiro estimated that, in these circumstances, it takes in excess of six months for an institution to receive its share of European funds,

time during which the institution has to be able to incur the expenses associated with the project on its own. He added that, to make matters more complicated, “the last installment only comes in after a final evaluation report that could extend your final payment to one year or later after project completion.”

Professor Fernando Costa, from the University of Lisbon, initiator of the digiFOLIO project under the Comenius Action, also agreed that the process of applying for EU funding is “too bureaucratic,” yet at the same time he did not perceive it as a lengthy undertaking. He recounted that the initial step in taking the project off the ground coincided with a contact seminar in Dublin which he attended in September of 2004 to find interested partners in the project. The proposal was submitted in February of 2005 and a notification of selection by the Commission was issued in July of 2005. Costa, however, placed the co-financing proportion of the institutions participating in EU projects between 40% and 60%.

The interviewees shared similar positions on the extent to which Portuguese universities request funding for and participate in European projects. Costa considered that not too many universities do so and gave the example of his own university as one of the few which actually undertake such initiatives. Carneiro, on the other hand, had a more positive view, admitting that Portuguese universities “do participate, but are normally underrepresented.” He added that Portuguese universities can be found in all European projects mostly in the position of participants in a consortium rather than coordinators or leaders. Carneiro identified several factors that explain this predicament, such as language barriers, lack of networking and lobbying expertise and stated that only

“the most active and ‘open-minded’ Portuguese Universities seek participation in European projects.”

When it comes to the choice of funding that universities pursue, both interlocutors stressed that university autonomy is a concept that is held in high esteem in Portuguese academia. The Ministry of Science and Higher Education, Carneiro pointed out, is actively involved in funding ICT initiatives in higher education, such as virtual campuses, Wi-Fi access, online libraries, and others. It has rolled out a comprehensive program called *Programa Operacional da Sociedade do Conhecimento* (<http://www.posi.pcm.gov.pt/> - Operational Program for the Knowledge Society) which “channels important funds to the development of digital content and to innovative eLearning projects.” Carneiro suggested that government funding is, in principle, easier to obtain than European funding, with the condition that it is limited to Portuguese institutions. He thought that, given the autonomy that the universities enjoy, there is no interference from ministerial level in the universities’ decisions regarding the type of funding that they should seek for e-learning projects.

Costa also underlined the importance of university autonomy in each institution’s preference for various types of funding, but argued that governmental financial resources are limited and universities have to resort to alternative sources of funding. In addition, Costa implied that autonomy may actually impede the ability of universities to cooperate and find common strategies, because they “are competing for the same goals,” seeking to maximize their own prestige. A lack of competence, Costa incisively argued, combined with a lack of vision obstruct the creation of a governmental initiative to create support centers that could assist institutions in getting funding from the European Commission, as

is the case in the “countries of northern Europe.” He added that, in contrast to institutions in other Member States, Portuguese universities do not have the structures dedicated to the purpose of promoting EU funding.

At university level, the initiative to participate in a European project is primarily left in the care of the individual researcher or professor, Carneiro affirmed. The teams that put together an application “are usually based on networks of personal trust and acquaintance.” Costa remarked that the initiative normally comes from faculty members or researchers, but it could also be taken at departmental or university level. Giving his own example of participation in the digiFOLIO project, Costa mentioned that the initiative to engage the university in the project belonged to him, but effective participation came only after the approval of the department.

While senior administration at Portuguese universities is unlikely to get involved directly in steering European actions, there are signs that initiatives coming from higher up in the university administration could indirectly encourage European participation. It has become common, Carneiro explained, for rectors of universities to set strategies and take initiatives in implementing e-learning at universities and this tendency could potentially extend to European initiatives.

3.3.2 The *e*Learning Programme: Its Budget and Impact

Portugal has been largely uninfluenced by the *e*Learning Programme, particularly since few Portuguese universities have participated in projects under the Programme. Carneiro considered that the *e*Learning Programme is a “rather limited contribution to *e*Learning in Europe,” as most of the funding for *e*Learning projects is offered through

the Commission's Directorate General for Information Society and Media under the Framework Programme.

3.3.3 Information Society

In both interviewees' opinions, Portugal cannot yet be considered an information society. The absence of "digital services for citizens" is one of the fundamental components that prevent the emergence of an information society in Portugal, Costa considered. In his assessment, the schools are not making the most of ICTs as they "do not yet prepare the students to be able to explore and to use the information from the internet for curricular use or for other activities." He linked this state of affairs to the lack of training that teachers manifest in employing ICTs for educational use. While admitting that information does not have to rely on modern technologies for its propagation, Costa specified that at general or political level, information society in Portugal is associated with the presence of computers, the internet and cellular phones. Portugal, Costa conceded, is still a work in progress as far as its information society is concerned.

Similarly, Carneiro admitted that Portugal lags behind central and northern Europe in indicators such as access to, usage and diffusion of computers and internet, online services like e-Business or e-Government, but stressed that there is a good momentum building in Portugal. Carneiro thought that the "technological culture" that has emerged in Portugal, exemplified through such communication and digital tools as cellular phones or smart cards, will allow Portugal to "very quickly" close the gap that separates it from the "most advanced European countries in the course of the next years." Two obstacles that need to be surmounted for the development of an information society

in Portugal, in Carneiro's opinion, are the high cost of broadband connections and the low-tech skills of a "large segment" of the general population.

Regarding the role of universities in shaping the information society in Portugal, Carneiro referred to the existence of two interrelated governmental programs, *Plano Tecnológico* and *Ligar Portugal* (Connect Portugal), that rely heavily on universities to "disseminate and generalize the concept of Information Society." In addition, he suggested, universities seem to take on a more prominent position in coordinating lifelong learning and in instilling "a stronger ICT culture in school teachers." A European information society, Carneiro pondered, is driven by the idea of using a *modus operandi* in utilizing ICT that is unique to Europe, different from the American or Japanese approach, embedded in the European social model: "For Europe, ICT is not simply a productivity enhancer, it is also the opportunity to broaden and take further the European values that underlie the notion of a European way of life and values." However, Carneiro pointed to the many "differences and nuances" of the information society concept in Europe. A unitary information society, Carneiro implied, is not a realistic proposition. In his view, the more likely scenario is the emergence of at least four views of the information society in Europe, along the lines of the social models familiar to European political theorists, namely the Nordic, Central European, Anglo-Saxon and Southern European model respectively.

3.4 The Story Elsewhere

The following stories cover an additional six countries, but caution should be taken not to view these stories as representative for those respective countries. They constitute personal interpretations of the interviewees regarding the e-learning landscape

in their own countries. In all but one of the cases they are based on the accounts of one individual per each country. I interviewed individuals from these countries for two reasons: firstly, interviewees in the principal countries referred me to individuals whom they considered to have expertise in the field of eLearning in Europe; and, secondly, I wanted to assess whether developments in the principal countries are comparable in any way with those in other parts of Europe.

3.4.1 Belgium

3.4.1.1 Working with EU-funded Programmes

Professors Katja Bongaerts and Valère Awouters, the two interviewees in Belgium, are affiliated with the Limburg Catholic Institution for Higher Education in Diepenbeek. Their story stands out in that their university caters to the Dutch speaking students of Belgium, and is thus regulated, under the Belgian federal structure, by the Ministry of Education of the Flemish region. They have been participants in the digiFOLIO project under the Comenius action of the Socrates programme.

Even though they have been involved in the project as members of a participating institution (the University of Lisbon was the “penholder”), Bongaerts and Awouters described the process of applying for EU funds as very difficult. Their responsibility in the process was to provide the coordinating institution “with data specific for our institution, but that was already quite time consuming.” This is one of the reasons that deter many institutions from seeking EU grants. They thought, however, that EU funding, despite its tediousness, has a much higher profile than Belgian government funding. If given the choice, the two interlocutors argued, academics or researchers would take the EU path. A combination of factors seems to explain this preference for

EU funds, Bongaerts and Awouters thought: apart from the financial incentive itself, Belgian researchers and Belgians in general are “convinced Europeans” and, thus, having the opportunity to gain European experience that is financed through European channels is a strong motivator to participate in pan-European projects; the small size of the country compels researchers to look outside their borders for international cooperation not only with other European countries, but also with the US, China and Belgium’s former African colonies; Belgian government funding has very little recognition among researchers and academics because it is fairly new and poorly marketed, while the EU has been more effective at advertising its funding opportunities for academic projects. Another source of funding for ICT in Belgium comes from the regional governments, in this case from the Flemish government, which was considered much more accessible than EU funds by the two interviewees.

Given their autonomous status, Bongaerts and Awouters explained, higher education institutions have the liberty to seek the funding they consider as meeting their needs for ICT implementation and most of them draft their own plans or strategies in this respect, which they usually assess for results every five years. As was the case with their own participation, Bongaerts and Awouters attested that the initiative to engage in European programmes belongs to individual academics, but they need to have the approval of the “higher administrative level.” The two interviewees also mentioned that it is up to the individual academics to seek the type of funding they consider appropriate for the project of their interest, be it from regional, federal or European sources.

3.4.1.2 The *e*Learning Programme: Its Budget and Impact

Bongaerts and Awouters unequivocally thought that the budget allocated to the *e*Learning Programme is “certainly not sufficient” to drive a comprehensive change in e-learning practices in higher education: “only when e-learning will be part of the whole society and education we will be able to talk about success, but this will surely take time and, of course, cost money.” They further stated that e-learning at higher institutions in Belgium is “not yet fully implemented” and the Programme has had very little effect in accelerating the process.

3.4.1.3 Information Society

In the two interviewees’ view, one can speak of an information society only “when the government makes efforts to increase ICT use for the whole nation and citizens.” Though they considered that using ICTs for conveying information is not an end in itself, the government is concerned with closing the digital gap between “natives” and “digital immigrants,” the former concept referring to those who have used ICTs in their formal education, while the latter describing a segment of the population aged 30 or older who have not had the same opportunities as the former.

Bongaerts and Awouters were convinced that Belgium can be looked upon as an information society. Government services online, such as tax declarations, electronic voting, community “virtual office windows” for requesting marriage or birth certificates, accessing the commercial registers, VAT (Value Added Tax) registration, etc., distance and e-learning for adult learners and other similar components of the information or knowledge society find their expression in everyday life in Belgium. They estimated that

70-80% of the public in Belgium is aware of these developments related to the concept of information society.

Universities, Bongaerts and Awouters stated, are “working very hard” at defining their role in disseminating the concept of information society at public level, by acting as “knowledge centers for the whole society,” employing e-learning as one of the tools to fulfill this task. They further maintained that “the role of universities is knowledge building, not only for students but for the whole society, in view of lifelong learning.” They were less convinced, however, that a European information society can take roots, given the more pressing priorities that Europe has to pay attention to, such as agriculture, environment, further eastern enlargement and integration, but harnessed through its various programmes, it may be possible at some point to speak of the EU as an information society.

3.4.2 France

3.4.2.1 Working with EU-funded Programmes

Professor Sylviane Toporkoff from the University of Paris 8, president of the Global Forum, expressed her disappointment with the European projects because of the lengthy application process. Her interest in European projects has decreased over the years because “it’s too much work for nothing in the end.” She considered that “most people prefer not to do it, because it takes too long.” The French Ministry of Education, she pointed out, does not offer any incentives to universities interested in EU projects or set strategies to promote European initiatives, thus participation in the EU programmes is solely at the discretion of the individual universities. In what makes for an interesting detail, Toporkoff added that the Ministry of Education itself may get involved in a

European funding scheme in cooperation with similar ministries from other Member States, much like universities do when they partner up in consortia for EU projects.

By the same token, she thought that national funding seems to be inadequate to drive a wide-scale implementation of e-learning and distance education in France. She referred to problems associated with space in French universities that compound the financial aspect and complicate the integration of distance learning in the regular curriculum. E-learning is mostly offered as a complementary method of delivering education to adult, remote or continuing education students. Traditional on-campus students still have limited exposure to genuine e-learning courses. Toporkoff pointed to the *Centre National D'Enseignement a Distance - CNED* (National Center for Distance Education – <http://www.cned.fr/>) as an example of best practice, sponsored through French government funds, which could serve as a model for other French universities in integrating e-learning in their curricula. It is an institute open to anyone willing and able to undergo instruction in French and they can do so from anywhere in the world, but the degree is only granted following exams taken on location at a university in France. Toporkoff herself mentioned that she completed part of her education through the center while being away from France.

3.4.2.2 The eLearning Programme: Its Budget and Impact

Toporkoff agreed that the budget for the eLearning Programme is very small to effect change in e-learning practices in France, but she argued that the limited funding is symptomatic of other e-learning initiatives developed at European level.

This is not to say, however, that she believed the European programmes have not left their mark on the French e-learning scene. On the up side, Toporkoff admitted, in the

sense of disseminating information about e-learning, in “preparing minds about it” and in encouraging people to get involved, the European programmes have yielded positive results. On the down side, regarding the implementation of sustainable and viable solutions for distance and e-learning, the programmes have not been particularly fruitful. Too many projects, Toporkoff thought, are discontinued once the funding from European sources dries up, and only a few survive by other means. “Real distance learning,” as Toporkoff put it, is a long way away from such solid models as CNED in France, the Open University in the United Kingdom or the Open University of Catalonia.

3.4.2.3 Information Society

In Toporkoff’s view, information society is a “vast” concept, but she described it in terms of the fast moving convergence of the various sectors that incorporate ICTs to increase effectiveness, such as e-health, e-government, e-learning, e-business, e-inclusion, etc. She considered that France is gradually moving towards an information society and the impetus seems to come from bottom-up, not as a directed, coordinated approach from the French government. Local and regional governments promoting “city councils on the web,” “direct cyber kindergartens” act as the catalysts for the emergence of the information society in France. Toporkoff’s own involvement in a project for the city of Issy Les Moulineaux earned this municipality a place in the top seven intelligent communities of the world in 2005, in a ranking developed by the Intelligent Community Forum (<http://www.intelligentcommunity.org/>).

It is mostly through the local communities’ initiatives that the French public is becoming increasingly aware of the emergence of an information society, Toporkoff suggested. But this does not imply that the national government is keeping its distance

from stimulating information society developments. Toporkoff gave as examples the national chip ID card that the Ministry of Interior is rolling out or e-government and e-health services sponsored by the government as indicators of an increased involvement of the government to sensitize the public of the benefits of the efficient use of information through technologies.

According to Toporkoff, universities offer a mixed picture related to their role in the making of an information society in France and there is no general strategy that universities follow in taking part in educating the public on information society issues. In her own words, “some universities are doing well, some others don’t care at all, so it depends.” Through their presence on and the many services offered to the public over the internet, the universities have the potential to exert a public influence in an emergent information society in France. A European information society, in Toporkoff’s view, is premised on an inter-sectoral functional approach, much like the early economic and later political integration that characterizes the rise of the European Union itself. Linking hospitals throughout Europe via electronic networks or databases, Toporkoff exemplified, is a necessity in creating easy access to and instant transferability of patient records from one member state to the other. It is much more a drive to identify common, functional approaches to common problems by using ICTs than a conscientious effort to build an elusive European information society, she argued. Toporkoff added, however, that it is through the European Commission’s funding programmes (e.g., Framework Programme) that such functional approaches focused on addressing a certain issue take hold, planting the seeds for continued collaboration that spill over in other domains that may confer a European dimension to the information society.

3.4.3 Italy

3.4.3.1 Working with EU-funded Programmes

Matteo Uggeri, European Projects Manager at Centro METID of the Polytechnic University of Milan imparted from his experience with the eLene-TT project (*eLearning Network for Teacher Training* – <http://www.eLene-TT.net/>) financed through the *eLearning Programme*. While it is common that the senior management of the university is not aware of e-learning projects, in the case of eLene, the initiative to get the university involved, through METID, in an EU funded project belonged to the rector of the university. The story is an interesting one, and atypical of the usual informal network approach or contact seminars we have seen so far and it merits due consideration here.

As Uggeri explained, initially, METID, together with seven other institutions in Europe, was the focus of a study conducted by a company (PLS Ramboll) contracted by the European Commission itself. Ramboll approached the rector of the university to conduct the study on site and the rector, in turn, directed Ramboll to get in touch with Centro METID. At METID, Uggeri and his colleagues prepared a report regarding Ramboll's visit and submitted it to the rector, who, upon reviewing the report suggested that the other institutions included in the Ramboll study be contacted. Uggeri initiated these contacts and invited the respective institutions to join METID in submitting a proposal to a call that had been recently announced by the European Commission, but a lack of familiarity with one another and the limited time available prevented the key individuals from these institutions to develop a solid proposal by the deadline set by the Commission. During two successive meetings, the first one in Milan in November 2003 and the second one in Bremen in February 2004, Uggeri and his counterparts struggled to

find common interests and topics that they could explore and operationalize in a structured project. In the end, they identified four areas in which they could work together: teacher training, standardization in technology and content, mobile solutions and economics of e-learning and at a third meeting in Nancy they took the decision to make the first topic the focus of the project to be submitted under a new call for proposals that had been issued again by the Commission.

While the proposal became a fully-fledged project following its selection for funding by the Commission, the most valuable results of this collaborative effort, in Uggeri's view, were the interpersonal connections generated during the meetings and the morphing of purely professional interests into personal quests for delivering genuine solutions to common problems in an atmosphere of mutual trust among European friends.

Uggeri indicated that another aspect that sets eLene apart is that, in contrast to other projects for which the application process is "always time consuming," the process for eLene was "good," "clear" and "without recommendations." An attempt by the group to request funding through the new *eContentplus* Programme, he said, was later abandoned precisely because of the complicated paperwork and because "we found out (after a long experience in e-learning) that content editing/creating/managing is a very time consuming work and also a very boring duty for the so-called editors, which became frustrated employees."

3.4.3.2 The eLearning Programme: Its Budget and Impact

Uggeri considered that the amount of funding available through the eLearning Programme seems to be appropriate for e-learning initiatives since other sources of funding exist for e-learning projects under other European programmes.

In this context, he maintained that eLene has gotten off to a good start and that, now at the midpoint of its two-year mandate, it has been “quite successful.” As is the norm with other European projects, eLene is subject to the same uncertainty upon the completion of the two-year funding it has received and it may only be continued, although probably not in its current format, if the Commission is satisfied with the results. If the work of the consortium stands up to the Commission’s scrutiny, Uggeri thought, it may be easier for the group to obtain funding for a follow up project as the Commission would be willing to commit funds to the “same trusted people.” The hope expressed by Uggeri, however, was that with good collaborative work, the group may be in a favorable position to continue receiving funding for e-learning projects from the European Commission.

3.4.3.3 Information Society

Italy does not constitute an information society in Uggeri’s opinion. He stated that the gap between the relatively few “medium/high integrated people” who have access to and seek alternative sources of information via the internet (e.g., blogs) and the vast majority who rely on conventional means of mass media like TV or radio is symptomatic of a lack of public awareness about the information society in Italy. Regional disparities between the North and the South of Italy only accentuate this state of affairs.

Uggeri pondered that information society could be construed as “that part of humanity that can access the load of information through electronic devices,” but found that the term “Digital Technology Society” would be better suited to describe the emphasis on technologies in society today. Governmental support for developing the

information society in Italy, he considered, is inadequate, and those who can truly participate in what could be an information society have gained their knowledge of the electronic tools of information through self-learning, rather than through government-directed initiatives. Uggeri also cited the misguided priorities of the government in its drive to fund large infrastructure projects (e.g., high-speed train systems) instead of channeling money to more acute public needs such as hospitals, universities, research and, not least, e-learning.

On the bright side of things, however, universities “play an important role in developing the information society in Italy,” Uggeri thought. He considered that, even though they do not share a common approach to the concept, universities provide students, that “good slice of society,” with the means to take advantage of digital resources to manage and evaluate information.

3.4.4 The Netherlands

3.4.4.1 Working with EU-funded Programmes

Professor Gerard de Kruif, from the Hague University, currently member of the digiFOLIO consortium, has submitted twice in the past successful applications for European projects and described it as a process that is challenging and takes a lot of work, but is nevertheless worthwhile the effort. He has also assisted other “writers” with preparing their applications and noted that although many Dutch universities are interested in taking part in European projects, it is the lack of experience with preparing applications or knowing where in Brussels they have to address their requests for funds that sometimes raises obstacles in their drive to engage in European projects. He pointed

out that agencies specialized in assisting researchers with European proposals, however, exist in the Netherlands.

De Kruif explained that universities in the Netherlands set their own e-learning strategies, but it is usually the individual professors or researchers who take the initiative of getting involved in European projects. Higher level administration personnel, like deans or department chairs, usually have no direct say in the academics' decisions to pursue European projects. According to de Kruif, the difference between staging a successful application for European funding and failing in that endeavor rests with the ability to convince the European Commission that the project is "good and clear," and cost effective, in that quality does not come at a high expense.

De Kruif's impression was that EU funding is easier to obtain than national government funding for two reasons. One reason is the large investments that the government has made in educational ICTs at all levels in the past and its expectation is that it is the private sector's turn to continue financing ICT in education. The other reason is that the government does not subsidize international projects, considering that the significant funds it transfers to Brussels already qualify as contributing to the European programmes conducted by the Commission.

3.4.4.2 The *e*Learning Programme: Its Budget and Impact

De Kruif indirectly implied that the *e*Learning Programme has had very little effect on e-learning initiatives in the Netherlands. He considered that there is a lot of hesitation surrounding the use of e-learning in higher education institutions, particularly among the "baby-boomer" generation of teachers who are taking a cautious stance to using ICTs in their teaching. There is a wait-and-see atmosphere as the results of using

ICTs so far have not convinced professors (and institutions) that there is an urgent need to change the traditional methods of teaching. By no means, de Kruif insisted, can one speak of a backward system of education as technological competences are introduced in institutions at all levels, but “for the moment, e-learning is one step too far,” he concluded.

3.4.4.3 Information Society

De Kruif painted a bleak picture of the information society in the Netherlands. At “propaganda” level, he stated that it may be possible to talk of an information society, but his personal view was that this label currently does not apply to the Netherlands for economic and cultural reasons. He explained that, the Netherlands is trying to catch up with countries like Finland and has invested in ICT programs, primarily in formal education, over the years, but there has been some confusion on how to support those programs with the necessary infrastructure. He considered that universities view ICTs from the practical perspective of applied sciences, not with the aim of diffusing knowledge and information with the aid of technology into the larger public arena. As for a European information society, de Kruif tersely remarked that probably except for “some isolated departments of universities,” at public level, the “European concept is not alive in Holland.”

3.4.5 Spain

3.4.5.1 Working with EU-funded Programmes

Much like the Belgian case explored earlier, the choice of institution in Spain should not be considered representative of the whole country, though some of the

developments occurring there may find their applications in other higher education institutions in Spain. The Open University of Catalonia (UOC) is a case apart in Spain, given the special status of the region of Catalonia under the Spanish federal system, as it is regulated and financed by the government of Catalonia (*Generalitat de Catalunya*). Research Professor in e-Learning, Tony Bates at UOC was referred to me primarily thanks to his experience of e-learning in both Europe and North America, and only secondarily due to his current affiliation with the Catalan university. According to Bates, the UOC conducts most of its programs in Catalan, but has bachelor's level programs in Spanish recognized by the Spanish government. The latter programs, however, are directed primarily to Latin American audiences, so as not to enter in conflict with another open university in Spain, UNED - *Universidad Nacional de Educacion a Distancia* (National University for Distance Education – <http://www.uned.es/>), funded by the federal government and thus mandated to be the primary institution for offering Spanish language distance education programs nationwide.

In reference to his involvement in EU-funded programmes, Bates imparted from his long experience in putting together proposals for European projects, starting with his tenure at the UK Open University, and his illustration of the process deserves quotation in original:

...I left the Open University in Britain at the end of 1989 and at that time my main job was getting European funding for the Open University. I was bringing in about £2 million a year in projects and I got fed up with it, because these were horrendously bureaucratic projects to do. Often in those days, you had to have industrial as well as academic partners. So, you would spend ages building these networks of people and to fit the requirements of the European Union. It took a huge amount of effort, then you had huge amounts of paperwork to do to keep reporting on the funding, and the quality of the research was often very poor because you weren't getting the best researchers involved in research. And so, at that point I left [...] and I came back three years ago, fifteen years later, and found

that nothing had changed. Nothing seemed to have been learned in the meantime about these projects, exactly the same things were going on. And they're still incredibly bureaucratic and they still produce very little in the way of good quality research.

While acknowledging the need for the Commission to monitor the expenses committed to the projects, Bates pointed to the Commission's comparatively reduced concern for tracking the output of the projects in terms of quality and purposeful application. He thought that the assessments performed by external evaluators contracted by the Commission in this sense amount to cursory reports on the activities and operational results of the projects, but they are not further harnessed, deployed or embedded in long-term structural plans for innovation. Bates also deplored the tendency of the Commission to favor large consortia containing too many partners that renders the projects unmanageable. He appreciated the value of the "supranational" character of European projects, but suggested that encouraging "smaller, leaner" projects or even bilateral partnerships between European institutions with mutual research interests would be a more efficient approach to fostering strong European relations and research. Under current practices, an EU-funded project has a running life of approximately 3 years and "just when they're beginning to get somewhere, the funding ends," Bates considered. Instead, he suggested, adopting a model whereby an institution in Germany, for example, enters a 5 to 10-year partnership with an institution in Sweden would be conducive to efficient workflow and profound research, and would build long-term trust among institutions under European auspices.

Bates attributed the lack of genuine research results to the fact that the European projects have a primarily political component aimed at bridging developmental disparities among the regions of the European Union (e.g., northern vs. southern Europe, old

Member States vs. new Member States). In contrast, Bates suggested, work done through the national research councils is a better approach to conducting research, since such endeavors are concerned with and yield high-quality, peer-reviewed, innovative results that can be applied to commercial spin-offs, thus having a much better chance to be diffused in the economy or society as a whole.

Bates further implied that, as in most academic life, the decision to initiate a project under an EU programme belongs to individual academics contacting one another and, at UOC, their proposals are reviewed by a research office (Internet Interdisciplinary Institute – IN3) to ensure that the university is legally able to meet the expenses it has to contribute in being partner of a consortium. “It is up to the individual professors to be involved in the projects, make contacts with other European institutions to participate in European projects,” Bates stated. As far as the nature of UOC’s involvement in European projects, Bates was of the opinion that the university has been actively involved in this domain, but it has been less successful in leading European consortia, being usually relegated to the status of partner within a consortium lead by other, typically large traditional, European universities. He cautioned that this aspect, however, should not be viewed negatively, as the invitation that is being extended to UOC in such cases serves a dual purpose: it recognizes the expertise that the UOC as a fully online distance education institution can bring to the project and it provides a geographical balance in the composition of the European consortia in which UOC participates. Currently, for instance, UOC is a partner institution in the eLENE-TT project coordinated by the University of Nancy 2, France, under the *e*Learning Programme. Bates explained that UOC receives this secondary role in European consortia because it lacks the research

credentials to be considered a lead institution. Though, in his view, the university is beginning to dedicate more attention to research by bringing in research professors, it is still primarily focused on teaching, and thus its faculty (many of whom are young professors without doctoral degrees) have little time to spend on research projects. The reliance on individual professors to drive research initiatives under European projects, Bates commented, points to a lack of strategic vision and institutional resistance in the face of undisputable changes, not only in Spain, but, with a few notable exceptions, Europe as a whole.

3.4.5.2 The *e*Learning Programme: Its Budget and Impact

Apart from having a small budget, the *e*Learning Programme, Bates emphasized, tends to be spent primarily on technology than on pedagogy. He argued that it is much easier to obtain funding for researching technical standards for learning objects, for example, than to explore the pedagogy of utilizing learning objects. More to the point, Bates indicated that “when you take that €44 million and then look at what’s actually being spent in, what I would call, the sharp end of the job, which is research into the actual delivery of teaching and learning, it’s very small indeed.”

Budget issues related to the Programme aside, there are greater concerns about the purpose of e-learning itself that need to be taken into account. There is a great deal of confusion, including in the Commission, Bates deemed, on what the *e*Learning initiatives and e-learning in general are supposed to achieve. One rationale for rolling out *e*Learning is to “produce the kind of graduate that’s going to be adapted to the information-based society” by designing new, flexible ways of teaching, an aspect intimately related to pedagogy through the use of technology, not to the technology per

se, Bates considered. The issue, he continued, gets “fuzzy” when the Europeans link e-learning to product development, particularly in the attempt to compete with the US in developing new e-learning software. Obviously, as Bates pointed out, these are complementary and both desirable aims at EU level, but they require distinctive research approaches which are not always clearly identified in *eLearning* initiatives.

Another problem, in Bates’s view, is the lack of co-ordination between European programs resulting in duplication and lack of focus on e-learning per se. Too often e-learning projects are on the margins of other more technology-focused programs (e.g. grid networking). E-learning itself is important enough to deserve a research program of its own, not as a subsidiary of other programs.

3.4.5.3 Information Society

The shift towards an information society, according to Bates, has not been accompanied by the disappearance of the manufacturing or the agricultural sectors of the society. An emphasis on information-intensive processes has created a market that requires new educational approaches to produce “highly competitive workers,” Bates elaborated. Nonetheless, he added, the presence of manufacturing and agricultural industries has preserved the need for traditional jobs and traditional education as is the case with Spain, which still has a large agricultural sector. In his opinion, only regions around Barcelona and northeastern regions around Bilbao could be considered to be moving towards a genuine information economy, with new industries, such as software development, consultancy companies or knowledge management companies that require “different kinds of skills from the old traditional industries.”

The essence of the information society is “more a question of attitude than knowledge,” Bates argued. Traditional education has always fostered critical thinking, but it is the need to be adaptable and acknowledge shifts in the new economy, the willingness to take risks that confer individuals the assets to take on the changes of the information society. For the moment, Bates considered, the concept is still the domain of elites “that understand what’s needed and are moving in that direction.”

Bates remarked that UOC seems to be riding the wave of change in Spain and seems to be in a good position to drive the concept of information society. He indicated that, unlike traditional universities in Spain, which are facing difficulties in recruiting and retaining new students, UOC’s enrollment is going up, because it is focused on the lifelong learner, already in the workforce, who realizes that the economy is changing and that UOC is focused on developing the “skills needed in an information society.” He added, however, that UOC still has a fairly traditional ‘information transmission’ model and that its main challenge now is to re-design its courses to provide the more learner-centered, active and collaborative learning required in knowledge-based industries. Bates suggested that technology-based teaching and particularly the need for more learner-centered approaches to teaching will become accepted mainly through young people’s adoption and absorption of technology in the rest of their lives, not through political exhortation or interventions.

While the concept of information society has remained largely an abstract notion for the “general person on the high street,” in part because “it hasn’t been explained very well,” Bates predicted that the public’s awareness of the information society will only grow through its interaction with the technologies themselves. The political

establishment or the academic world can help in being receptive to the public's concerns about the societal changes at the behest of information, but, Bates considered, the ultimate driver of the concept to popular acceptance is "this sort of cycle between technology and people using the technologies."

3.4.6 United Kingdom

3.4.6.1 Working with EU-funded Programmes

Professor Andrew Robinson, currently Vice-President of the European Institute for eLearning shared from his experience as former Assistant Director of the Open University UK and as a reviewer of European bids for projects under such programmes as Socrates, Grundtvig,⁴³ Minerva⁴⁴ and others. While more colleges or newer institutions in the UK have been seeking European funding than traditional universities, he believed that there is a general measure of skepticism across the board in the UK regarding EU projects. The "bureaucratically complicated" process of pursuing European funding coupled with the feeling that such funding would not cover the overhead costs of the universities partially explain that reluctance, Robinson explained. In addition, he

⁴³ Grundtvig is aimed at promoting the European dimension in the context of lifelong learning through adult education, in order to provide educational opportunities for people who left school without acquiring essential qualifications and to instill an innovative approach to educational efforts. Nearly 10% of the projects in Grundtvig involve new technologies, covering teaching materials for adult learners and management of adult educational institutions. New technologies are also used for the distribution of best practices related to their use in education, predominantly via information networks. In addition, Grundtvig provides grants for mobility training of adult learners in the field of the new technologies (COM, 2001, 172 final p. 7).

⁴⁴ Minerva, like other components of the Socrates program is aimed at promoting European cooperation, this time in the deployment of ICT at all educational levels and the development of Open Distance Learning, from the primary to adult level of education. The activities comprised in the Minerva module serve the objectives of the eLearning initiatives. Among others, Minerva focuses on the study, analysis and assessment of the ICT use in education, on the organizational and socio-economic characteristics of innovation based on the new technologies, on the pedagogical dimension related to the incorporation of ICT in teaching and learning, the launching of European-wide Internet portals connecting learning communities and development of quality multimedia instructional services (COM, 2001, 172 final, p. 9).

mentioned that concerns over intellectual property rights related to the “final product” of a project conducted among partners in a consortium make British universities wary of large-scale involvement in European projects.

British government funding for e-learning may not be more accessible than European funding, Robinson stated. This may not be due, however, to bureaucratic procedures, but it may rather have to do with the past investments in large scale e-learning projects that have yielded mixed results. One example of such investments, to which Robinson referred, was *Learndirect*, a “non-university set of courses aimed at the general public” blending online with traditional textbook instruction has been a positive experience since its inception in 1999. He also gave the example of the UK eUniversity, an ambitious online higher education project set up in 2000 to the tune of £62 million, which was deemed a failure four years later and ceased operation. Since then, UK universities have been financing their own e-learning projects with funds raised mostly through non-governmental resources.

Robinson explained that The Open University UK, like other universities in Britain, has not employed an “action team approach” to defining strategies and identifying the most efficient ways to take advantage of the EU funding opportunities. The initiative to engage in European projects was “left to individuals, if you like, pioneers and enthusiasts who both understood the EU programmes and had to tackle a bit, which wasn’t easy of course, knew partners in other Member States and had a feel for the market,” Robinson indicated. For this reason, academics have harbored a sense of disillusionment with the institution’s lack of initiative in prioritizing European objectives and with the lack of high-level administration leadership in this respect.

3.4.6.2 The eLearning Programme: Its Budget and Impact

Robinson found the eLearning Programme inadequately financed to accomplish the development of viable virtual campuses. Typical for European programmes, he stated that the eLearning Programme's "bureaucratic hurdles in putting in a bid are quite considerable, the amounts of money are small and, therefore, the breakthrough that people expect is difficult to achieve." On the bright side of things, he considered that the Programme has had a "stimulatory effect" in that it contributed to the emergence of "virtual networks and virtual communities of researchers and enthusiasts across Europe." The experimentation with joint courses among academics from different Member States has given rise to new ways of thinking about teaching and learning, about the delivery of pedagogic concepts, about student support. These are probably more valuable outcomes of the Programme than the actual online structures that have not been fully operationalized, he speculated. On a more social and political level, Robinson thought that the eLearning programmes have contributed their share to the creation of mobile markets with mobile citizens in an "integrating community." More importantly, he explained, students in traditional universities are now more adept at seeking avenues to "carry their access to learning with them," in an expression of promising new ways to shape education with the help of ICTs.

Though, in Robinson's opinion, the UK has not "responded very actively" to the eLearning Programme and other similar European initiatives, preferring to pursue its own agenda, it has nevertheless been innovative in many aspects, such as *Learndirect* (already referred to above), providing access to remote areas and disadvantaged communities and developing e-government services for citizens. Notwithstanding its relatively low profile

on the European *e*Learning scene, British approaches to student support, mentoring and course design have “informed certain practices in other parts of Europe,” Robinson maintained. However, he was cautious to note that the UK has not been a pioneer in all aspects and underscored the need for the UK to avoid complacency in believing that it can manage on its own. He stressed that Britain would do better to cast its traditional reticence of the European market opportunities and should capitalize on the advantages of the “single learning market in Europe,” especially given its potential to provide pan-European services in a market niche (e-learning) in which English is often a *de facto* lingua franca.

3.4.6.3 Information Society

A weak term, in Robinson’s view, information society is a concept that is not well understood, particularly at public level. Instead of placing a uni-dimensional emphasis on information technologies, Robinson considered that the discourse should move towards developing new values and knowledge sharing. The increasing sophistication of ICTs and their association with the concept of information society, poses the risk of creating confusion in the public’s mind, who might come to view them as “tricks or gimmicks, rather than as tools for intelligence or tools for understanding,” Robinson remarked.

For a specific set of reasons that are not unique to the UK, Robinson argued that the country is not an information society in all its aspects. Curiously, contrary to its privileged status as an English-speaking country in the information and communications world, its monolingual and monocultural character is a factor that isolates it from the “ideas and thinking from the non-English language countries.” Moreover, despite its

sophisticated and modern technological infrastructure, Robinson considered that the UK has been “slipping recently” in IT connectivity and usage in e-learning, e-business, e-government, etc., compared to other regions of Europe, like the Scandinavian countries, for instance. In sum, Robinson thought, the UK may be regarded as an information society “at a functional level” in the academic, banking, financial or administrative sectors, but he was less convinced that the “average person” has been able to grasp the concept in meaningful ways.

Universities in the UK, Robinson explained, even though they have not come to this realization, “are at the forefront of stimulating this information society,” acting as creators and transmitters of knowledge and empowering the individual learner, in a process that, at first glance, may be less obvious to the outside observer. But universities are also drivers of new research and thinking, innovation and experimentation, development of new approaches in teaching and learning, not least in the understanding of information society as transformation and improvement of services, Robinson elaborated.

“A bit fuzzy” at European level, the information society represents a “strategic response to the USA and to the global competition,” Robinson stated. He likened it to an “industrial blueprint” premised on four sectors: e-government, e-learning, e-health and e-business (with its branches in e-banking and e-procurement). In his view, the messages coming out of the Commission’s offices in recent years have been clearly avoiding a discourse on technology for the sake of technology and have been marked by a shift in highlighting the notion that any e-services, be it learning, business or government, “must be anchored in the sense of value to citizens.” In referring to the EU programmes that

endorse a European information society, Robinson reasoned that they are “meant to create a unique chemistry” among the diverse identities in Europe. He recommended that one should not try to detect a hidden agenda or a dubious plan, but rather a genuine commitment in European political circles to furthering integration and (re)building Europe on new premises.

3.5 The Story in Brussels

It is only intuitive and fair to give the European Commission its due space here to flesh out the formal, technical provisions of the official documents and see how the perceptions of the so-called European “technocrats” regarding *e*Learning affairs measure up to the patchwork of opinions surveyed thus far. The story in Brussels comes from Commission officials in three Directorates General (DG) as described in Table 2: one from the DG Education and Culture - EAC (directly responsible for the *e*Learning Programme), two from the DG Information Society and Media - INFSO (oversees, among others, the Technology-enhanced Learning action under the 6th Framework Programme), one from the newly created Education, Audiovisual and Culture Executive Agency (EACEA) which operates under the supervision of EAC and INFSO, and one from the DG Enterprise and Industry - ENTR.

3.5.1 Working with EU-funded Programmes

When asked about the procedures and formalities that the applicants for EU-funding need to observe, all interviewees acknowledged that the process is bureaucratic, very demanding, lengthy and complicated. However, there are several reasons that explain this state of affairs.

Mr. Brian Holmes, Head of the Comenius/Grundtvig/*e*Learning/Lingua unit in the EACEA (formerly Principal Administrator for Multimedia, Training and Culture in DG EAC) explained that on the financial side, rigorous auditing regulations have been introduced at the Commission, following serious past allegations of financial mismanagement and nepotism that lead to the resignation in corpore of the Santer⁴⁵ Commission in 1999. The expenditures on European programmes are kept under close scrutiny by the European Parliament. Ms. Emilie Normann, Project Officer for the *e*Learning component of the eTEN Programme in DG INFSO added that the financial screening instruments have been put in place to “safeguard public money.” Similarly, Ms. Marjua Gutierrez-Diaz, Head of the Innovation and Transversal Policies unit in DG EAC, reinforced this obligation to monitor expenses because “we are managing public money, so we have to be accountable.” Both Holmes and Normann underscored that the applicant institutions’ budgetary strengths are ascertained to ensure that they can meet their co-financing obligations in accordance with EU programme requirements. They explained that, in addition to financial regulations, the applicant institutions are measured in terms of management capabilities, verified to confirm their status as legal entities, judged upon their contribution to the European added value element of the project, rated for clarity of purpose, etc. In all, it amounts to an evaluation process that has been devised to ensure that European funding is disbursed to projects that are sustainable and can continue after the usual two-year maximum financing allowed under the *e*Learning Programme. Gutierrez-Diaz further elaborated on this point, specifying that proposals are assessed by external evaluators who can be selected only after all proposals have been received by the closing date of a call for proposals. While normally proposals are drafted

⁴⁵ Jacques Santer, President of the European Commission between 1995-1999.

in English, it is not uncommon that proposals in some of the other EU official languages get submitted, adding to the time needed to select evaluators proficient in those particular languages. Normann outlined the phases that constitute the timeline of an application process: proposals are received generally over a period of three months from the publication of the call for proposals; four to five months afterwards, following an exhaustive evaluation process conducted by external independent experts, applicants are notified of the selection decision; negotiations taking up to three months are initiated with the successful proposals; finally, almost one full year (10-12 months, depending on how soon after the call the proposal was submitted) after the bid is submitted, a successful proposal begins its life as a project. All interviewees identified the willingness of the Commission to streamline and shorten the process, to simplify the procedures but all expressed doubts about the possibilities to do so. Holmes, for example, cited the tightening conditions imposed by the European Parliament and the European Council that would make it difficult to speed up the process significantly: “I don’t believe I’ve seen any reducing of any requirements, they always increase,” he specified. Normann suggested that possibly reducing the negotiation period after a proposal is selected may help in expediting the process, though the other steps would be unlikely to change.

Holmes confirmed the role played by individual professors in developing proposals for European projects, but could not submit them without their institutions’ support. It is the institution that ultimately submits the proposal and commits itself to the contractual obligations inherent to the EU programmes. Ms. Patricia Manson, Head of the Learning and Cultural Heritage unit in DG INFSO, added that project proposals are “driven by the research interest of one individual, but usually because there is a research

expertise or a research focus in that institution in this particular topic or area.” With technology-enhanced learning projects sponsored by DG INFSO under the IST Programme⁴⁶ that can be allocated €6-10 million each, the commitment of an organization as well as its structural and financial viability become self-evident, she added. But money is not an end in itself when it comes to the individuals’ or institutions’ motivations to submit European proposals, Holmes believed. He remarked that “many organizations, or individuals within an organization, apply for Community funding because they want to raise the profile of what they are doing. Sometimes that might even be within their own organizations. The university professor who, with the backing of his department, wins a grant from the European Community is able then to show to his university governors that he is doing something good, because there is a whole quality assurance procedure, there is competition here.”

Holmes pointed out that because the European projects promote research and expertise at European level, any institution that seeks to engage in such projects has to do so as part of a consortium of at least three partner institutions from three different Member States. An example of how this “European dimension” finds its expression in real life is through transfers of e-learning components (e.g., courses, software, knowledge or experience). Thus, he explained, an institution in one member state may have a proven functional solution that it wants to try in collaboration with institutions from other Member States or three institutions working independently on similar projects may want to come together to enhance the possibilities of success at European level. In these circumstances, Holmes declared, these institutions are entitled to approach the

⁴⁶ The IST Programme is part of the Sixth Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development endowed with €4 billion. <http://cordis.europa.eu/ist/telearn/fp6new.htm> (DG INFSO).

Commission for financial support. In contrast, if an individual university in a member state, for instance, has an idea that it wants to develop, but it is only applicable on the national scene, the Commission would decline funding such a project and direct its proponents to seek governmental support. An important *sine qua non* condition of European funding, Holmes stressed, is that the partner institutions involved in a European project disseminate the product(s) of their joint efforts not only amongst them, but into the larger European academic community and public realm. Individual institutions concerned with protecting and capitalizing on the “intellectual capital” generated through their own research initiatives will be “less likely” to take the European path, Holmes concluded.

3.5.2 The *e*Learning Programme: Its Budget and Impact

According to Holmes and Gutierrez-Diaz, the *e*Learning Programme has been well received by the Member States, so well in fact that it has been “oversubscribed” (a term denoting an excess of applications for the available budget), with over 300 proposals submitted for funding in 2004. At a rate of approximately 1 in 15 successful proposals, the projects resulting are rather small in scale. How successful the *e*Learning Programme has been thus far in terms of the implementation of these projects’ results still remains to be seen as a qualitative study of 70 projects contracted by the Commission is due to be released in June of 2006, Gutierrez-Diaz said. Holmes considered that the *e*Learning Programme has received a large number of responses from universities in Italy and Spain. It has attracted fewer responses from countries like France or the UK, which, like the Scandinavian countries, may feel less of a need to apply for European funding.

Gutierrez-Diaz acknowledged that the expectations for the *eLearning* Programme have been higher than the actual results it has yielded so far, but that this is symptomatic of many other programmes at EU level. The most valuable outcome, in her opinion, were the “networks that are created and the level of debate and of exchange of experience that is fostered by the programmes [...] and I think this is the level at which European Commission projects are more effective.” Concrete results are hard to quantify, she believed, particularly at university level, where the autonomy enjoyed by the institutions allows them to channel the projects’ objectives in the direction of their own interests (in contrast to schools, where the direction of the projects, and implicitly the results, can be subjected to some degree of control through the Member States’ ministries of education). Gutierrez-Diaz came to the conclusion that the *eLearning* developments have not yet matured, but hoped that the *eLearning* Programme “has contributed to accelerating the process a bit.”

Holmes admitted that the budget allocated to the *eLearning* Programme is small, but emphasized that the Programme is aimed at “filling gaps in a much bigger picture.” Considering that *eLearning* research projects are also funded far more generously by the DG INFSO through the IST Programme (see above), he remarked, the Commission identified key priorities, other than research, that could be accommodated through the *eLearning* Programme, such as support for universities and developing virtual services for students. In fact, Manson underlined this difference by stating that the initiatives in the DG EAC have a more socio-political and strategic importance, rather than a program of ICT-related research as such. In some respects, as Gutierrez-Diaz mentioned, the *eLearning* Programme was meant as a pilot programme, with a minimal budget, to test

the demand for eLearning in Europe, since reticence regarding the use of ICTs in education still lingered before the *eLearning Programme*'s launch. This concern was echoed in a related matter by Mr. André Richier, Principal Administrator in the DG ENTR, who was involved in the drafting of the *eLearning Action Plan*, suggesting that many officials in the Commission were skeptical about the ICTs revolutionizing prospects in education and, thus, decided to take a cautious stance and "limit the budget allocated."

The relatively low financial ceiling per project under the *eLearning Programme* (Gutierrez-Diaz put the figure at €500,000), while seemingly inadequate for many stakeholders who prefer large-scale projects of the type funded under DG INFSO, illustrate the DG EAC's preoccupation to distribute the funds in as much an equitable manner as possible by supporting smaller short-term projects that can stimulate further exploration by those involved. Said Holmes: "[...] Their (*institutions*) intentions must be long-term. But the project is short-term, we can only give them Community funding as a catalyst, just to get them going. In that respect, we're quite often like venture capitalists and we are there to provide seed capital, the only difference is we don't expect any financial return. What we expect in return is added value for Europe."

As a corollary to the limitations in its purposes and ambitions, Holmes and Richier indicated that the *eLearning Programme* (and the *eLearning Action Plan*) was not designed with the hope of resolving all issues over the course of its four-year term. The overarching intention is to give practitioners and organizations the opportunity to use "immediately results in real situations" to spur change in the educational establishments' modes of operation, Holmes thought. It was not destined to look far into the future, but

rather to attend to the current needs in education and set the stage for, as Richier put it, “greater collaboration, greater coordination, more flexible and relevant instruments, and also to invite Member States and stakeholders to reflect on how to prepare the schools and the universities for the challenges of the future.”

3.5.3 Information Society

The views of the Commission interviewees regarding the concept of information society are as varied and nuanced as those of the academics interviewed in the Member States presented above. They seem, however, to converge along aspects related to social inclusion and cohesion. The origins of the term’s usage in Commission parlance was placed by Holmes and Richier in earlier documents of the Commission as a response to the ICT revolution in the US, but with the recognition that Europe had to tackle technologies by keeping social aspects in mind.

Holmes indicated that earlier attempts at constructing an information society in Europe have been coupled with infrastructure development, but they have now moved towards enabling services, managing organizational change, emphasizing digital literacy and social inclusion. There is a further shift, Holmes argued, in identifying knowledge as the driving force of a society, not merely “easy and free access to information,” hence the increasing use of the term knowledge society. Information or knowledge society in Europe can also be associated with a virtual dimension of the Single Market in which various integrated services such as e-health facilitate mobile access to health records across the Union via smart cards. “It’s only when you look, I think, at examples that something quite esoteric like information society (at the European level) starts to make sense,” Holmes mused.

Gutierrez-Diaz considered that using the concept of information or knowledge society “is very complicated,” given the difficulties in coming to an agreement on a common definition for it. Apart from education, she identified social cohesion, health, care for the elderly and fighting the digital divide as key components of the information society. Referring to surveys conducted by the Commission, Gutierrez-Diaz mentioned that the “real digital divide” is related to age, not economic status or cultural aspects, pointing to the need for more attention to the “social issues of the ICT revolution.”

For Manson, the term(s) implied a “society where the change that we are seeing currently seems to me to become more dramatic and accelerating.” Social interactions driven by new means of communication (e.g., blogs), leading to new forms of community building, the “way in which people acquire, exchange information and then learn” are elements that have “profound implications for people’s skills, for competence building” in the information society.

Information and knowledge has always been part of society, Normann conceded, but the link today with technology makes for a “different information society” that on the theory level facilitates the transformation of public administration, of schools and universities, but in more concrete terms it increases efficiency and it saves money. ICT drives down transaction costs for and increases the pace of interactions with different services, practical aspects that the Commission takes into consideration when actively promoting the information society, she explained.

The social dimension in general, and social inclusion in particular, were seen as the cornerstone of the information society by Richier. He considered that Europe cannot be complacent in “merely duplicating something like an information highway vision.”

Ideals and goals rooted in the European social model(s) need to be at the heart of the information society, but he didn't lose sight of the fact that these noble considerations are often embedded in the practical interests of the European or national politicians who in order to maintain their portfolios have to heed the social concerns of the public opinion. Hence, he concluded, issues concerning the inclusiveness of the information society may sometimes be more an expression of pragmatic political interests than genuine preoccupation with public welfare.

Universities were unanimously upheld as essential in shaping the European information society by my interviewees. "We believe deeply that universities have been the engine of knowledge in Europe," Gutierrez-Diaz stated and added that they "need to be shaken a little bit" to further improve their power of innovation and to prevent them from falling into "some kind of stagnation" that could only be detrimental for economic and cultural development in Europe. Universities can contribute to the information society, Manson professed, but they "face a number of challenges," chiefly in their abilities to devise "new business models" that allow them to compete for excellence, collaborate with other universities and enter into partnerships with industry. Richier also pointed to the same challenges, particularly to the need for universities to "develop their proper economic models" and to "establish partnerships with other players." These matters become more stringent when one considers the chronic lack of adequate funding in European universities. Finally, Normann saw the role of universities as claiming a greater role in providing guidance to the Commission to shape the research programmes that give impetus to the information society movement in Europe. She thought that the universities should assume a pro-active attitude in defining the direction of the research

programmes in conjunction with the Commission and frame their content, focus and character.

3.6 The Composite Picture

Instead of attempting to construct a “general” view of the *e*Learning practices in Europe, I chose to take the essence of these stories and put the pieces of the puzzle together in what I am referring to as a “composite picture.” A generalization of the ideas and findings presented in the stories would not be appropriate given the variety of approaches to e-learning in Europe and taking into account the structural differences among the Member States. Nonetheless, I have detected common themes, some of which converge towards a unanimous view while others diverge in as many directions as the number of people included in the study.

A common thread that runs through EU policy-making is the complexity of its legislative mechanism. While the various layers of EU decision-making seem to be, at times, irreconcilably divergent, they all function for a common purpose, which is, generally speaking, the better integration of the multiple entities that form the European Union. There are different approaches to policy-making, yet more often than not, compromise solutions give the appearance of convergence in many matters of common concern. It is this kind of dynamics that make difficult many attempts to present EU actions in uniformly representative models that can be consistently applied across its Member States.

In choosing to construct a composite picture, I wanted to keep in mind this complexity and to emphasize again the plurality of EU political and social life that makes overgeneralizations all but impossible. With this composite picture, I attempted to

capture a microcosm of European life, unique in its manifestation in our times. The following synthesis is organized by the common sub-themes that emerged from my interpretation of the interviews conducted with the participants.

3.6.1 Bureaucracy

If I were to pick one single subject as the common feature that raises a chorus of discontent about the *e*Learning Programme, and other European programmes, it is the bureaucratic process involved in preparing and delivering a project application, whether successful or not, following a call for proposals. I would argue, in an ironic twist, that this aspect may have already created a unitary European identity of disaffection, an unwanted by-product of the programmes' drive to foster and raise the profile of European cooperation among universities. Dissatisfaction with the procedures has brought European academics and researchers together in a culture of complaint that is not likely to disappear anytime soon. All interviewees, except for one, deplored the complicated, time-consuming or even horrendous, by some accounts, steps involved in putting together a European proposal. Preparing paperwork, providing financial records, identifying interested partners in other Member States and the wait-times between the phases included in the process from application to, in case of success, the actual start of the project are recurrent elements in the stories that underline the sense of frustration with European bureaucratic practices. The significance of this malaise is that it deters many potentially interested parties from embarking on European projects, it may intimidate those who have little patience for dealing with administrative tasks and leads to a chronic skepticism of European *e*Learning initiatives.

There is no need to break down the general disaffection by country. Whether in a country situated in the front or in the back row of the European *e*Learning movement, the interviewees expressed, in various ways, the same disappointment with bureaucracy. The findings in the secondary countries only reinforced those in the principal countries. Moreover, the Commission, through its representatives, made no attempt to deny that the application process is indeed a complicated undertaking, but gave reasonable justifications for maintaining a system of evaluations that is sponsored, ultimately, with Community money coming from taxpayers in the Member States.

To give a sense of what an application for funding entails, I provided in Appendix B the instructions and requirements section of an application form, courtesy of Professor Costa from the University of Lisbon, who agreed to supply it for exemplification. It was part of the successful proposal for the digiFOLIO project. While this form applies to the Comenius action of the Socrates programme, it is typical of the way applications for EU funding in education are structured. This form contains only the first three pages of a 50+ page-long application, not including supporting documentation. My attempts to secure a sample application form for the *e*Learning Programme did not materialize.

3.6.2 Initiative for European Projects

It is the norm in the institutions surveyed here for individuals or a group of professors pursuing a research or professional interest to take the initiative to engage in a European project. Except for isolated cases, the interviewees in both the principal and the secondary countries endorsed the notion of faculty initiative. In Germany, the idea of a top administrator suggesting a course of action for attracting European funding through projects was unanimously dismissed. In Sweden and Portugal, faculty initiative is the

most usual approach to European projects, but occasional involvement of the head of the university, likely amounting to passing down to faculty members a research opportunity arising from an advertisement for programmes received in the president's office, for instance, is not unthinkable. The stories in the secondary countries reinforce the notion of faculty-level initiative where in all cases, except for Italy, individual professors embark on the quest for European funded projects. The implication of the university rector in the Italian case presented above is an exception to the rule, as such high-level awareness of European projects at universities is very inconsistent and is, by and large, symbolic.

However, given the co-financing requirement of the *e*Learning Programme, a faculty member could not engage as an individual entity in a project without the financial and legal backing of his/her home institution. Furthermore, since a European project requires the establishment of a consortium of institutions, the faculty member, in fact, acts as the representative of his/her respective institution when he/she is seeking partners in other Member States. This status of the faculty member as the face of the institution is valid both for the coordinating institution as well as the partner institutions in the consortium formed through personal networking.

Faculty responsibility for European *e*Learning projects is not atypical of the university environment and, in fact, it applies to other educational aspects. A recent survey of e-learning in higher education conducted by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 19 institutions from 11 countries, including EU Member States France, Germany, Spain and the United Kingdom, revealed that the pedagogical details and day-to-day operations of any new programs adopted centrally by

a university are left in the care of the individual academics (OECD, 2005, p. 106). More pertinent to the findings I presented here, a study published in November of 2005 by the Center of Higher Education Policy Study of the University of Twente in the Netherlands concluded that at the Dutch universities surveyed in the study “most initiatives are taken and executed at the level of individual units or academics, often without the institutional centre knowing what is going on” (Vossensteyn et al., 2005, p. 48).

The academic freedom that faculty members enjoy in universities, particularly in Germany and Portugal where this principle is enshrined in those countries’ constitutions⁴⁷, explains the liberty that professors have in judging what projects they wish to pursue. Institutional support only comes into play when the formal application is submitted, committing the university to a contractual obligation for the duration of the project. Ministerial (governmental) interference in the course of actions that individual researchers and their institutions pursue are either non-existent or they are reduced to general statements of encouragement for European collaboration occasionally included in wide strategies for education.

3.6.3 Motivation for European Participation

A combination of stimuli account for the decision of faculty to consider participation in European projects. The financial incentive acts as an important catalyst in the academics’ determination to go for European *e*Learning funds primarily to finance their own research initiatives, but also to help the home institution increase its revenues. We have seen how in some cases in Germany, professors have a continual agenda for attracting EU funds and actively seek to access those funds, often to supplement their

⁴⁷ Article 5 of the German Constitution and Article 43 of the Portuguese Constitution.

own departments' budget and to keep the appointments of their research staff. In Sweden, I noted how the personal supplemental income generated, though indirectly and often through additional time dedicated to research, can keep an academic's interest in requesting EU funding. We would be wrong to conclude, however, that personal financial gain is the primary motivator, since funding attracted by an individual or a group of professors also boosts the reputation of those academics both within the home institution as well as in the academic community. It is hence, to some degree, a matter of personal and professional pride in helping the institution to augment its budget, particularly in cash-strapped universities. This is generally less of a concern in Sweden, where governmental financial support, as I have shown, is significantly higher than anywhere else in Europe. Even there, however, European funds are welcome as an additional source of financing. In Germany the problem is more acute and the interviews revealed the general feeling across academia that money is often in short supply and going for the European funds can alleviate some of the financial deficiencies, especially when it comes to research. The Portuguese case, similar to Germany, underlines the financial limitations of the institutions as a reason for European involvement, even though the co-financing requirement may actually stretch those limits throughout the stages of a project until the European contribution eventually offsets the costs incurred by the institution's participation in European programmes.

Money, however, is not solely responsible for the academics' interest in European programmes. Faculty members in Germany, Portugal and Sweden pointed to the professional accomplishments that arise from research opportunities. The potential long-term establishment of collaboration and the creation of personal connections through the

networks of academics involved in the European projects are equally or more valuable aspects of European participation than the immediate financial gain brought by the programmes.

Lastly, cultural cooperation with or an interest in assisting less developed institutions in other countries, such as the new Member States or non-EU European countries often included in European funding schemes, also serve as a rationale for participation, particularly since it is through European programmes that such interests can be explored.

3.6.4 Preference between National and EU Funding

By and large, the type of funding sought is usually the one coming from national governments or national research organizations. It is definitely the case in the principal countries that faculty members generally favor national funding for their e-learning research initiatives over the European programmes. Bureaucracy has already been mentioned here as the primary obstacle that turns professors away from European funding schemes. But the general impression is that national government funding is much more accessible than European funds. Naturally, national funding is limited to research projects that are national or regional in scope, thus precluding the academics' pursuit of European collaboration. Another reason why academics prefer national funding is that it normally supports much more profound, long-term research initiatives, whereas European programmes, especially the *eLearning* Programme and other *eLearning* actions under other programmes, are seen as developmental work typically involving transfer of expertise, exchange of practices and experience in using technologies and, sometimes, though valuable, simple "do-good" collaborative efforts

that do not add up to innovative, prestigious research. A yet simpler answer as to why professors rely more on national financing programs is the comparatively lower administrative burden in putting together an application, the familiarity that professors have with the government schemes and, quite frankly, the little knowledge they sometimes have about how to pursue European funding opportunities. This last point can be worrying since in countries such as Germany and Sweden, specialized organizations, some of which are governmental, offer information on and assistance with preparing European applications. Portugal still lacks such organized support structures, but there the problem is compounded by the lack of “human capabilities,” such as knowledge of other languages, networking expertise and lobbying skills at individual and institutional level.

Not everywhere does the perception of less demanding access to national funding prevail. As we have seen, in Belgium and the Netherlands, an academic, and thus the institution, is more likely to see national funding as more accessible than EU funding. Even so, there is a difference between the two countries in this respect. In Belgium, national funding is poorly advertised by the government and, therefore, it is less known among academics than the European funding. Granted, the proximity of Brussels as the seat of the European technocracy may well explain the easiness with which European programmes cloud national funding schemes in e-learning (this may also be the case in other fields). In addition, the openness of the Belgian academics towards European matters is another factor that gives European programmes a higher profile than the national alternatives. In contrast, the circumstances in the Netherlands are quite different when it comes to the preference for EU funding. Here, it is not the less complicated

procedures associated with national funding that makes for the difference, but rather the diminishing amount of funding available from the government for educational technology due to large investments in previous years that have failed to yield significant results. This makes European funding for e-learning an attractive, though still competitive, alternative for financing project ideas.

3.6.5 Participation in the eLearning Programme

The stories exposed above point to reluctance towards participation under the eLearning Programme in the principal countries. In Germany, a lack of tradition in working with EU funding and the pursuit of rigorous research ideas through national research councils rather than the pedagogical aspects typically supported through EU programmes explain this reluctance. In Sweden, skepticism about European programmes (in the context of lingering doubts about the benefits of EU membership), substantial governmental financial support and familiarity with national initiatives are the main aspects that account for the hesitation. In Portugal, the logistical and organizational structures of the institutions mentioned in the previous section translate into limited participation in European programmes. If we are to give credence to the stories, the Swedish institutions are increasingly becoming aware of European opportunities, German universities have had a mixed track record of participation, while from Portugal, only a handful of universities venture into European programmes, far less as project coordinators than consortium partners.

However, a quick survey of the 18 projects selected under the *Virtual Campuses* action line of the eLearning Programme (see Appendix C) in 2004 and 2005 reveals a significant involvement of the German universities in European projects. In fact, with

eight universities participating in various projects, Germany is third only to Italy (with 12) and Spain (with 11), in our country sample, dispelling to a certain degree the rather negative views that some of the academics interviewed held of German involvement in the *eLearning Programme*. With five participating institutions, Sweden is further down the line, on par with the Netherlands, but behind the United Kingdom (with 7) and Belgium (with 6), confirming the relatively low interest in European programmes expressed in the stories. Portugal's placement at the end of the group with only two participating institutions seems to illustrate the deficiencies of the Portuguese universities outlined earlier. Nevertheless, if we look at the Comenius action projects, under the Socrates programme, for 2005 (I chose Comenius because several of the interviewees are affiliated with institutions that participated in this programme), Portugal, with seven participants, jumps ahead of Germany (with 6) and Sweden (with 3) in this particular group of countries (see Appendix D). Again, Spain (with 11) and Italy (with 8), joined by the leader UK (with 14) are front runners in the number of participating higher education institutions.

These variations in Portugal's rankings suggest that we may see an ascendant trend in the Portuguese universities' desire to participate in European projects. But another look at the two tables confirms the fact that Portuguese universities usually take a backseat role in the projects. No Portuguese universities appear, in the two tables, in the role of coordinating institutions, as opposed to Sweden and Germany, which are both represented at least once with coordinating roles under each programme. These patterns of participation suggest the following conclusions: a preservation of the reluctant or cautious attitudes in Sweden regarding the EU programmes; a certain degree of restraint

in Germany still persists, though with signs of increased activity on the European stage; a mixed picture for Portugal, which seems to be lagging far behind in certain *eLearning* actions, but it is starting to gradually close the gap that separates it from its European counterparts.

For some of the other countries in this study, the trends to which some interviewees pointed (both Commission officials as well as academics from Germany and the UK) seem to find their confirmation in the figures presented here. Italy and Spain are very active on the European scene, followed closely by Belgium and the Netherlands, both in the *eLearning* Programme and other European programmes, while the UK oscillates between leading and mediocre positions. Certainly, the dynamics exhibited through these two programmes imply that higher education institutions in Member States seek participation in those funding schemes that maximize their potential for recognition and that best meet their interests.

3.6.6 *eLearning* Programme Budget and Impact

Another item that meets wide consensus in the countries investigated is the amount of funding available through the *eLearning* Programme. In the principal countries, except for one isolated instance, the general perception is that the budget remains inadequate and of little significance in the larger context of European *eLearning* development. If the size of the project that is being pursued is taken into consideration, the Programme has sparked very little or no interest in those academics or researchers used to handling large, long-term and deep impact research projects. In Germany, for example, there is concern about the type of projects that such a limited amount can support. Instead, preference is rather given to the programmes administered by the DG

INFSO which manages a much larger budget for *eLearning* projects than DG EAC, thus allowing for larger funding ceilings per project.

3.6.7 *eLearning* Strategies

The *eLearning* Programme does not appear to have had any influence on the strategies followed both at institutional and national levels in the countries investigated. In both the principal as well as the secondary countries, the general consensus is that the universities are establishing their own priorities. It should, therefore, not come as a surprise that the *eLearning* Programme with its political initiative, the *eLearning* Action Plan, have not effected changes in the appropriation of ICT in higher education other than those driven by individual professors and the institutions themselves.

In fact, in Sweden, there is a feeling that ICT practices now being advocated at EU level have been common occurrences in the Swedish educational system for some time. However, a look at a document published by the Swedish Ministry of Education in November 2003, titled *Education and training in Europe: A report on education and training in Sweden and the shared European goals* unveils a set of Swedish goals for education in the context of European concerns with the modernization of the Member States' educational systems. There is no indication in the report that any European goals are directly adopted in the Swedish governmental strategies, but there is a willingness to take into consideration a more active Swedish collaboration with other Member States and it compares Swedish actions with those from other EU countries. Apart from noting the drive to ensure access to ICT for everyone, in the field of ICT-enhanced higher education, the report points to the growth of distance education particularly through the actions of the Swedish Net University Agency (the location for two interviewees in this

study), a governmental body. In all the initiatives mentioned in the report, the government is the principal driver, but the fact that many objectives are weighed in comparison to the rest of the EU suggests a measure of indirect effects of European policies. The stories on the ground in Sweden, together with the level of participation in EU programmes (see previous section) and the content of the report mentioned here indicates a mixed picture of the strategies followed by universities, but the trend appears to be a reliance on national government initiatives rather than European impetus.

Individual professors and institutions are open to collaboration with EU counterparts, but Swedish practices are seen as effective and suited to meet the needs of ICT-enhanced education in Sweden.

In Germany, the interviewees' accounts clearly express the general concern with the absence of visionary thinking of university top administrators about systemic integration of ICT in their institutions. Instead of coherent strategies, generic solutions for ICT implementations are adopted at universities via specialized units, such as a distance education institutes or departments, but even then, they may not get infused as university-wide planning approaches. The individual initiative of the relatively few professors who participate in *eLearning* projects under EU programmes in itself has little impact on developing coherent strategies for e-learning as long as the institutions fail to develop viable models able to integrate project results into long-term marketable products. Indeed, the story in Germany is circumscribed to the legal structure that governs university functioning. Paragraph 1 in Section 13 of the *Hochschulrahmengesetz* (Framework Act for Higher Education) states: "...the opportunities offered by distance study and by information and communication technology shall be exploited. The Federal

Government, the *Länder* and institutions themselves shall encourage such development within the scope of their responsibilities.” The interviews in Germany only illustrate the implications for e-learning of such a broad provision. It gives academics and their institutions tremendous room to maneuver, which explains why European programmes are not among the top priorities for many of them.

Not unlike the German case, the Portuguese perspective shows little infiltration of European *eLearning* practices into higher education strategies. The University Autonomy Law (108/1988) ensures the freedom of universities to set their own strategies in general. As the interviewees maintained, it is becoming a common practice for high administration at universities to draft plans for e-learning. Increasingly, specialized units, such as distance learning institutes, are responsible for carrying out and implementing e-learning, but not necessarily based on ample strategies. For example, the Institute for Distance Learning at the Catholic University of Portugal bases its activity on a set of guiding principles which includes the development, promotion and implementation of online learning. The low-profile of Portuguese universities in European *eLearning* projects, particularly under the *eLearning* Programme is not conducive to raising the level of diffusion of European practices into the Portuguese *eLearning* environment.

The secondary countries' accounts confirm the general tendency of universities in Europe to adopt their own strategies in *eLearning*, with little impact on such decisions from the *eLearning* Programme (and Action Plan). Though some countries are more active than others in European projects, this is not indicative of an uptake of European strategies in those countries that have a higher rate of participation. Financial matters aside, the strategies of universities in these countries vary from a positive view of

European collaboration and opportunities in European-minded countries such as Belgium, Italy or Spain to the willingness for innovation and practice sharing at European level of countries such as the UK.

In short, there is little evidence of transfers of European strategies into national or institutional strategies, there are rather broad goals with reference to the EU context. At institutional level, universities are setting their own strategies, typically through specialized departments or institutes at the universities not through institution-wide coherent formal strategies. The term strategy, in fact, may be somewhat of a misnomer, and the *eLearning* Programme does not seem to have any influence in shaping any such strategies. While it is becoming common to outline strategies for *eLearning* at universities, this should not be taken as an indication of a conscious effort to adopt European strategies. Participation in a European programme does not amount to a cross-fertilization of *eLearning* policies between the European and national level. The concomitant adoption of strategies at both levels is fortunate, but it is more likely that the European programmes are actually being shaped to meet the demands of the universities in the Member States, communicated to the Commission via various formal and informal channels.

3.6.8 Information Society as a Concept

The conceptualization of information society in the minds of the academics interviewed runs through the entire gamut of interpretations possible, but they all see beyond the mere presence and use of information as the central element. What follows here is a brief interpretive synthesis of the various renderings.

The opportunity of access to information is one measure by which the inclusion of all social strata creates the premises for the emergence of the information society. The purpose of information in social interactions, whether for educational use, recreational activities, business dealings, etc., and the need to distinguish between the meaningful and the non-meaningful in appropriating that information marks another feature of the information society. But information per se is not granted unconditional transformative power. Instead, the knowledge that its accumulation and analysis can generate is of higher value than the plain manipulation and transmission of information units in whatever form this may occur. Particularly in education, access to information via digital communication tools raises the stakes of safeguarding genuine scholarship and academic authorship by revealing the urgency to discriminate information in antithetical terms, between the reliable and unreliable, between the trustworthy and patently false, between useful and useless or between relevant and irrelevant. This not only leads to the morphing of information into knowledge, but it also provides a path towards knowledge about information. By one account, information and its ubiquity on the communications networks do not effect a physiological change in the power of the human mind to process it. Behavioral adaptation, however, may follow to navigate and control the amount of information infused through communication technologies.

A structural change in the emphasis on traditional modes of production to creative processes enabled by digital technologies also enters the equation of information society. Shifting the weight from the hard aspects of industrial manufacturing to the soft facets of information processing marks the emergence of a new breed of professionals with skills and knowledge uniquely tailored to the demands of the economy's novel informational

environments. While this change is inevitable, it does not entirely wipe out preceding industrial or agricultural processes. In fact, it appears, by some accounts, that information society is evolving in parallel to the arguably “older” societies based on industrial and agricultural output, which, nonetheless are aided and made more effective, in turn, by the new informational processes. And there is always a certain measure of resistance to changes in the traditional setting, coming from social layers less willing to adapt, to leave a comfort zone or give up habits that conform to one’s established frame of reference. If an academic who feels competent in his/her field of expertise and sees technologies as an unwelcome interference with the modalities of expounding his/her knowledge in that particular field, new technology-enhanced avenues for exploration have little appeal for the academic’s choice of educational tools. In the same vein, an industrial laborer may see his/her employment threatened by the displacement of manufacturing processes by informational or service occupations.

But how do the three principal countries measure up in terms of their “reinventing” as information societies? The stories reveal an unsurprising pattern. They confirm the hierarchy in which they are positioned by various studies and common perceptions. Sweden is overwhelmingly seen as a fully functional information society, but it is perceived as such given the heavy involvement of the government in ensuring a robust infrastructure with affordable access, both in costs and in number of public access points. Online governmental services that encourage and facilitate familiarity with new modalities of interaction with the authorities are at the heart of information society in Sweden. A developed IT sector, particularly in mobile communications, is a second important feature that adds more strength and context to the notion. Last, but not least,

the drive for social inclusion in the informational environment is a major theme in academic, political and social circles and generates ample public debate in the crystallization of the information society. The confidence about the extent to which information technologies have changed Swedish society and the constant attention to socially acceptable appropriation explains the leading role Sweden plays in an emergent discourse of information society in Europe.

The outlook on Germany seems to be contradictory from one account to the other. The general feeling seems to suggest that while Germany cannot yet be qualified an information society, it is moving towards that status. A long tradition of scientific research and the value placed on manufacturing sectors cast doubts in German academia about the appropriateness of applying the label of information society to Germany. It is not that Germany lacks cutting-edge technological infrastructure to bring about the information society, but the managerial or marketing prowess to transpose large IT solutions into socially-oriented services on a more comprehensive scale hinders progress in this area. Like in Sweden, access to information and social inclusion are fundamental features to conceive of an information society in Germany, but the relatively high cost of broadband subscriptions makes access to information problematic for certain sections of the population. The signs of an emergent information society may be detected in the patterns and purposes of usage among the younger generations who avail themselves of the digital communication technologies for organizing social events, interactions, entertainment, shopping, etc., on a regular basis. For others, the notion of information society is just a matter of semantics, ill-suited for a country still trying to make the most of its modern technological potential. It symbolizes a struggle for managing and

controlling the quick transformative processes associated with the penetration of digital technologies at all levels. At the same time, it is an expression of the futility of defining a phase in the life of a society as alternative terms, such as knowledge society (German academics seem to favor this term over information society), concurrently denote the same societal transformations. Germany's strength and weaknesses, it seems, play each other in a difficult transition, if only in the abstract, to an information society.

Portugal is not an information society, the stories tell us. Though the infrastructure is becoming increasingly sophisticated, it is underused for the delivery of public services having, thus, little impact in the propagation of the notion of information society within the public arena. Technological savvy is not the issue, as the Portuguese are intimately familiar with the modern tools of mobile, personal communication, but, until recently, a combination of inertia and lack of interest has prevented governmental initiatives in providing technology training, through educational establishments, on a wide scale. Things, however, have been moving faster lately, due to the realization at high political levels that Portugal lags behind most of its counterparts in the EU, spurring a massive effort to invest in accessible technologies. A suggestion was made that over the next few years Portugal will close the gap and will be in the position to call itself an information society.

The perceptions in the secondary countries dilute even further, yet at the same time enrich, the multi-dimensional picture revealed by the principal countries. What follows is a brief overview for each country as suggested by the stories above:

- Of the six additional countries, only Belgium is looked upon as an information society by its representatives. Governmental involvement in stimulating the

development of online public services and ensuring e-learning opportunities make for this positive assessment.

- France follows Belgium with a less upbeat perspective, but is nevertheless considered on a positive trend towards an information society. A combination of bottom-up initiatives in connecting the public to their communities and municipalities and governmental measures to employ technologies for selective projects of national or public interest gives shape to the concept in France.
- The United Kingdom, initially one of the more successful IT adopters in the EU, is viewed only partially as an information society. A rift appears between those in the academic world or the political circles who are behind the thrust for the information society and the public at large who has shown very little understanding of the concept.
- Similarly, Spain is incompletely worthy of the title of information society. But in this case, it is not the divide between the intelligentsia and the masses that explains the difference. It is rather the regional differences between a few pockets of technological innovation and the vast areas of agricultural production (and to a lesser degree the industrial sector) that lie behind the partial image of the information society in Spain.
- In the Netherlands, the rhetoric may point to the existence of the information society, but the story points to an improper context for its emergence. Little investment in public programs, particularly through education, determines this perspective.

- Finally, there is no indication of a genuine information society taking roots in Italy, because of the injudicious governmental spending on priorities that take away from investments in technologies for education, public use and access to digital communication tools.

Indeed, this patchwork of perspectives shows that the various information society structures are driven by different philosophies and priorities, its materialization being deeply embedded in the web of practical and theoretical values placed on technologies in each particular country.

3.6.9 The Role of Higher Education in the Emergence of Information Society

There is very little consensus on the role that the universities serve in shaping the information society in the Member States. Opinions vary and they show no correlation to the general view of a country related to the information society. Namely, it does not follow from the perception of a country as an information society that the universities have had a clear contribution to the emergence and propagation of the concept. While a generalization is not appropriate here in declaring that a certain thinking dominates, it is safe to say that the academics display a guarded optimism about the potential of the universities to exert influence in disseminating or bringing about the information society. On closer examination, this mood reflects the academics' doubts about the function that information itself performs in society. Knowledge is the preferred term to describe the discovery and innovation processes that guide university life. Universities are not simple transmitters of information, they have a much more elaborate and profound impact on producing knowledge, driving research and innovation, whether in the context of the information society or not.

Even in Sweden, for instance, apparently an information society in the conception of the academics interviewed, the function of universities in driving the notion is limited. Yet, governmental interest in harnessing the university environment to induce acceptance of technologies on a public scale have helped to a certain degree in defining Sweden as an information society. By some accounts, Swedish universities are already an integral component of the information society, in their capacities of knowledge generation and skills formation for the new industries. But other voices tell us that Swedish universities have been less adept at transposing their latent intellectual power (they may have been quite unwilling to do so) into a coherent pursuit to embrace a particular meaning of the information society.

Germany presents the same misgivings, although perhaps with even more reservations, as Sweden. The same acknowledgement of the universities as the core units of knowledge originators in society holds true in Germany, but the long tradition of the universities as the embodiment of higher-order scientific and academic inquiry casts doubts on their inclination to perceive information-producing tools as more than simple complementary facilitating objects in the quest for noble scholarly and research ideals. This translates into a certain degree of detachment from the entire ICT revolution within the walls of the German academia, leaving the information society concept as a subject of peripheral interest or abstract debate.

In Portugal, we find out that the universities play a role in raising the awareness about the information society through the governmental efforts of recent years to deploy long-term extensive plans for implementing technologies in the society at large, by using the universities as the vehicles for this purpose. This situation contradicts the stated

opinion that Portugal fails to amount to an information society, but it indicates the mounting recognition of universities' potential to effect change in Portugal in this respect.

The accounts in the secondary countries only reinforce this sketchy picture of the universities' place in an information society, with the most upbeat assessment coming from Italy. They also recognize the universities as centers of knowledge production and diffusion, but cautiously reflect assigning a clear representation of the university as the driver of the information society. In contrast, while pointing to the shortcomings of universities (e.g., funding issues, incoherent ICT/eLearning strategies, etc.) and their need to become more involved in the general process of technologization, the stories in Brussels give an optimistic appraisal of the universities' function as the engines of the information society in Europe. Again, knowledge formation and diffusion are recognized as the principal assets that make universities a fundamental part of the information society.

3.6.10 Can There Be a European Information Society?

On close inspection of the stories by country, the quick answer to this question is clearly no. Country differences in technology diffusion in the Member States, different sets of priorities at national or even regional and local level in the Member States, poor dissemination at public level of the notion of a European information society and, indeed, the unpopularity with the entire European political project itself in large sections of many Member States greatly hinder the prospect of an information society of European proportions showing on the horizon.

3.7 Making Sense of the Composite Picture

3.7.1 *e*Learning

What can we make of this varied field of opinions and views in relation to the *e*Learning Programme and other *e*Learning actions taken at the European level? How does it compare to the official letter of the programmes? It is not within the ambit of this study to analyze how the projects are effectively operationalized at universities throughout Europe. It is still too early to truly appraise the success of the *e*Learning Programme as many projects are still in effect at the moment. Instead, the study is concerned with the perception in academia of the feasibility of the *e*Learning initiatives developed by the Commission and how the political intentions purveyed through the programmes measure up to the academics' expectations.

That being said, if we concentrate on the *Virtual Campuses* action of the *e*Learning Programme and revisit the envisioned pursuit of a "better integration of the virtual dimension in higher education" (OJ L345, 2003, p. 11) under this action, the themes arising in the composite picture clearly suggest a very limited impact of the Programme on the advancement of *e*Learning practices in the academic environments of the countries surveyed. Again, if we take the Commission's figure of 289 proposals eligible for evaluation following the April 2004 call for proposals⁴⁸ under all three actions sponsored (Digital Literacy, Virtual Campuses, and Transversal Actions), only 33 universities⁴⁹ participated in 8 projects under Virtual Campuses.

⁴⁸ This is the most current figure available. The Commission received a total of 309 proposals under all actions of the *e*Learning Programme.

http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/elearning/results_en.html.

⁴⁹ To put this number into perspective, there are roughly 3,300 higher education institutions in the European Union (4,000 in the whole of Europe). COM, 2003: 58 final, p. 4.

It is a small number indeed, but we do not know how many of the projects involving universities that would have been equally worthy of funding under this action had to be dropped because of the small budget available to the entire Programme, an unfortunate situation highlighted several times throughout the stories, particularly by the German academics.

The small amount of funding for the *e*Learning Programme is a significant factor that explains the modest effects of the Programme in universities across Europe. Dividing that small amount, to begin with, to a number of projects over the course of three years, is likely to defeat the “prospects for long-term sustainability” (p. 11) voiced in Article 3(2)(a) of the Programme. The projects receiving funding from the Commission’s programmes, as many of the interviewees in this study have shown, very rarely turn into long-lasting integrated academic models for the delivery of directed scholarship and fail to produce commercially viable applications that could boost the institutional revenues. It is not only the academics who complain about the scarce sum dedicated to the *e*Learning Programme. Commission officials acknowledge, beyond the formal support for the Programme, that the funding allocated cannot meet the targets envisioned as far as higher education is concerned. They, as the professors, would have preferred a larger budget, but it was ultimately a matter of “negotiations” between the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers that decided the faith of the financial provisions. The Parliament initially suggested a budget of €70 million, reduced to €54 million in the formal proposal and finally settled at €44 million upon the Council’s deliberations (Gutierrez-Diaz, personal communication, 5 January 2006).

But the budgetary aspect of the *e*Learning Programme is only one link in a chain of causes that impinge upon its power to effect changes in academia. We should remember that the *e*Learning Programme, like many other programmes in education, is not a policy directive, but an initiative with power of recommendation. University autonomy and academic freedom take precedence over any routine appropriation of European propositions in higher education. The onus, then, is on universities to gauge the extent to which any involvement in a European programme has any desired consequences.

As we have seen, however, the administrative bodies at the universities are, by most accounts, rarely cognizant of the opportunities available through European programmes. It is then largely through the bottom-up approaches to collaboration through a combination of informal, personal and professional networks of which the academics avail themselves that the institutions are drawn into European projects. The actual institutional involvement in getting the projects off the ground, however, is limited to a rather mechanistic approval process entailing a review of the paperwork by accounting departments to check the financial solvency of the institution and the formal signatures of departmental heads or, possibly, the head of the institution.

This symbolic presence of the higher administration, specifically in European *e*Learning projects, explains the absence of coherent institution-wide approaches in enhancing university participation at European level. By the same token, the still embryonic and fragmentary understanding of ICT's role in learning and teaching among many academics themselves is hardly conducive to a clear appreciation at management

level of the need to deploy structured e-learning strategies within higher education institutions.

Frustration with the bureaucratic obstacles that need to be cleared in securing a grant for a European project cut many academics' "appetite" for contemplating an involvement in *eLearning* on the European stage. Granted, the academics are increasingly assisted in their proposal writing by specialized organizations (e.g., the EU Bureau for Research Framework Programmes of the German Federal Ministry of Education⁵⁰, the German Aerospace Center, KoWi in Germany or the International Programme Office for Education and Training in Sweden) but many are oblivious of their existence, precisely because of a lack of active promotion of European opportunities by senior management at universities. Incidentally, the *eLearning* Programme does not lay down the procedures governing the application process and how the funds are to be disbursed to the institutions. The only broad reference to the rules concerning payouts comes in Article 8(2) of the Programme which states that "annual appropriations shall be authorised by the budgetary authority within the limit of the financial perspective" (p. 12). In practice, funding amounts are decided prior to the issuance of calls for proposals. As I mentioned earlier, Appendix B shows a sample of the financial regulations and institutional criteria that have to be observed by those submitting a European proposal. The academics' accounts in this study express the aversion for a process that both novice as well as veteran applicant professors perceive as too onerous to spark enthusiasm for participation. Additional work in securing the institution's agreement to co-finance the project and in finding partners is often a daunting task for many professors. It is for these reasons that, for the most part, an established circle of academics and professionals, well-

⁵⁰ EU-Büro des BMBF für das Forschungsrahmenprogramms, <http://www.eubuero.de/6rp>.

versed in *eLearning* happenings on the European stage, network and collaborate in putting together European projects. Not surprisingly, as it has been voiced repeatedly in the stories, this translates into a certain “club of universities” that are persistently represented in European projects, typically the larger, traditional institutions with solid research credentials, particularly in the position of consortium coordinators. Such “elitism” is hardly instrumental in driving profound changes in the diffusion of e-learning practices in Europe, since a large number of universities in Europe are left out of successive cycles of expertise sharing.

Before we blame the European Commission for the procedures instituted in allocating the funds, we have to look at the constraints within which this apparatus has to operate. We have to recall that the co-decision procedures in developing policies involve the participation of the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers (Wallace, 2001, p. 22; Bomberg et al., 2003, p. 59) which represent the European public and the European governments respectively. Tight controls are demanded by the latter two bodies in the interest of accounting for public money contributed by the Member States and its citizens. Transparency in managing this money is crucial, hence the Commission’s “exaggeration” of the procedures on the side of safety. The Commission representatives with whom I spoke were keenly aware of the painstaking process of getting funding for *eLearning* projects, but there was little, if anything, that could be done to institute a more lenient accountability regime. It is also clear from their accounts that they perceive universities, not in bad faith however, as not doing enough to present sustainable business-type models in managing projects and their products, an opinion shared, in fact, by many academics. It can be said that this amounts to a vicious cycle in

which blame gets tossed back and forth between academia and the European Commission for the insufficiencies of the *eLearning* Programme.

Two factors that go hand in hand when it comes to the locus of decision-making for designing a project idea, relate to the level of initiative and motivation for participating in European projects. The *eLearning* Programme is vague in identifying the entities responsible for taking the lead in driving the concepts of the Programme and a reading of Article 4(2) would suggest that the Member States are entrusted with this task: “The Member States shall identify appropriate correspondents who shall cooperate closely with the Commission as regards relevant information about e-learning use and practice” (OJ L345, 2003, p. 12). But who are those correspondents in the Member States? As it turns out from our stories here, they are the individual professors to whom I referred earlier. It is they who take the initiative to engage in *eLearning* projects. And their motivations to do so are symptomatic of the deficient strategic orientation manifested, with few exceptions, throughout the higher education institutions across Europe. Relying primarily on professors’ passion or interest to drive European *eLearning* adoption in universities without any substantial involvement from top administrators is hardly an effective strategy to make that European “virtual dimension” a palpable construct. For the sake of clarity, I will say that individuals’ actions benefit the individuals themselves in the way of developing their own networks of professional expertise, learning about practices pursued in other corners of Europe, satisfying a personal or professional mission, but they amount to small “personal victories” that are not integrated in long-term institutional strategies. Because these actions, often at the expense of an individual’s extra time dedicated to the projects, attract additional income

for their home institutions, it only makes sense that the senior management should place a higher priority on European projects than it is now the case.

To be sure, as we have seen, individual governments allocate funds to various extents for ICTs in education, but these are strictly directed to national efforts which vary in intensity and consistency from country to country (Sweden, for example, is more active and committed to technology-enhanced education as a matter of national priority than both Germany and Portugal, though the latter is showing signs of progress). It is unfortunate that despite all the well-intentioned efforts of the Commission, most European eLearning activities have a secondary character, usually happening on the fringes of national programs. I consider this finding strikingly similar to a conclusion in a section of *The Weatherstation Project*, which compares e-learning in the US, Japan and the UK, that “most e-learning takes place within national boundaries and contexts, reinforcing the fact that place remains of paramount importance” and that “little is actually known in one country about the e-learning capacities of other nations unless those products are advertised on the Web in English” (Zemsky and Massy, 2004, p. 54).

What is worrying from a European perspective is that these shortcomings are not unknown to the Commission’s members, but it is painfully unclear how things could be changed for the better in the short term. A series of workshops held in the latter part of 2005 in Brussels, attended by DG EAC officials (two of whom I have interviewed) and representatives of institutions participating in the *Virtual Campuses* action line (none of whom are in my list of interviewees) only reinforce my findings. I will only selectively quote a few of the concerns expressed by the participants: “definitions of the term Virtual Campus (VC) varies significantly across the EU and between institutions,” “many

VCs suffered from a low profile even within the educational institutions which had created them,” “the true value of distance learning was under-appreciated,” “VCs should be created in a more sustainable way,” “need to make VCs commercially viable,” “VCs generally have very little contact and interoperability with each other,” “there should be more pan-European activity to promote VCs” (DG EAC/JP D, 2005, p. 2-3). In other words, these are chronic problems that are typical of many projects, be they under the *eLearning* Programme or other programmes supported by the Commission.

Such problems, however, are not typical only of European *eLearning* projects. National initiatives seem to suffer from the same insufficiencies. In a survey of *eLearning* practices at Dutch institutions, Boezerooy and Gorissen (2004) conclude that *eLearning* is still not structurally embedded in education, that the achievements of various projects “disappear as soon as the projects are brought to an end” and that “policy and strategy are insufficiently clear.” I think these remarks, corroborated with the stories in this study only suggest that, in fact, these are deep-seated problems inherent to national higher education systems which are then inevitably transferred into the European sphere when universities come together under European programmes. It indicates that it is up to the universities to ensure the viability of the projects they develop, whether they function within the national environments or on the European scene.

Apart from the fact that there is very little variance in the type of issues that hamper European *eLearning* actions in all countries included in this study, not all aspects of *eLearning* projects are plagued by disaffection among the parties involved. The stories tell us that the most palpable and beneficial outcomes of the *eLearning* Programme are the contacts it facilitated among academics at European level, the support it gave to the

emergence of both informal and formal networks of professional expertise and, not least, the debates it sparked about the meaning, purpose and defining elements of *eLearning* across Europe. In this respect, the Programme's aim to provide "support for European networks and partnerships that promote and strengthen the pedagogical use of the Internet and ICT for the exchange of good practice" (OJ L345, 2003, p. 11) has come to fruition. This is the only positive point on which both academics and Commission officials come to an agreement, but it is hard to say how much weight this accomplishment will carry into future programmes.

3.7.2 Information Society

The concept of information society presents us with a jigsaw picture of the countries included in this study. If the e-learning dimension displays many common traits among the countries studied here, the information society facet does quite the opposite. What is even more remarkable, the attitudes and mentalities about the information society in the three principal countries justify their placement in the rankings of ICT sophistication and adoption. I have not referred to the positions of the secondary countries in such rankings, but they complement and diversify the picture of the information society in Europe.

What I have observed in the stories collected here is that the conceptualization of the information society that the academics in these countries have in their minds, while defined in various ways, correspond to each country's progress in the attainment of the status of information society. Certainly, there are nuances within each country, but the general feeling among academics within one country gives a sense of the level of confidence with which they can apply the label of information society.

Unsurprisingly, Sweden, the stories suggest, is clearly at the vanguard of this virtual race towards an information society, given its government's extensive support for ICTs and its constant concern for social inclusion, a theme that has been running deeply in the Swedish society even before the advent of modern technologies. Having long been a prosperous welfare state striving for an egalitarian society, Sweden made access to technologies a priority for its citizens. It has thus treated ICTs on the same level with other services that have been offered to its population. My Swedish interviewees unhesitatingly considered their country an information society, though they also thought that alternative concepts, such as knowledge society or knowledge-based economy, convey the idea equally well. They largely credited the governmental initiatives for the emergence of the information society in Sweden, translated into governmental online services that help raise public awareness regarding the ICTs role in their lives. Distance education via ICT-enhanced systems for remote and adult students, heavily promoted through governmental funding, also greatly contribute to the vision of a Swedish information society. Affordable broadband connections for users of all social strata, driven by a competitive ICT industry, complete Sweden's success story.

Germany offers a sketchier picture, partly because of its strong culture of traditional scientific research and its emphasis on sophisticated manufacturing technologies (e.g., automotive industry). I realized from the interviewees' accounts that it is hard to think of Germany as a fully-fledged information society. Despite the pervasiveness of technologies, problems of access still persist. Skepticism about the potential of ICTs in education is quite high, particularly in higher education, where traditional, rigorous and structured research in the natural or social sciences is regarded as

of much higher value than pedagogical concerns about technology's place in education. But the root cause of this skepticism is the doubt expressed by my interviewees about the appropriateness of the term information society in describing social changes in Germany. Whether it represents a control crisis, a distinct phase in the evolution of the society or a concurrent development with traditional industrial processes, their misgivings about information society only highlighted the difficulty of capturing today's transformations in Germany in one comprehensive term. At best, Germany is on its way towards an information society, if such a concept can ever be fully understood.

Portugal still suffers from a very slow start on the path of ICT integration in society. It cannot be said that the term information society applies to Portugal, due to the still poor familiarity of the public with online services, where they exist. This is not to say that the public is less receptive towards digital technologies than in other countries, but in the absence of extensive ICT skills formation through education, a solid culture of technological development is trailing in Portugal. The low initial level of implication from the government has been accelerating in recent years, through a series of governmental plans, such as *POS_Conhecimento* (Operational Program for the Knowledge Society - <http://www.posi.pcm.gov.pt/>), *Ligar Portugal* (Connect Portugal - <http://www.ligarportugal.pt/>), *e-U* (<http://www.e-u.pt/>), *Espaços Internet* (Internet Space - <http://www.espacosinternet.pt/>), etc., particularly after the Lisbon agenda was launched under the Portuguese government's presidency of the European Union in the first half of 2000. Portugal has been covering for the lost ground of previous years, we learn from the stories, but it still faces obstacles in reaching that elusive, subjective status of an information society. Universities are targeted by the government to carry out its plans for

an information society in Portugal, but problems of access to broadband at public level get in the way of speeding up the tangible side of the information society in public consciousness.

The outlooks in the secondary countries compound and at the same time diversify the representation of the information society in Europe. It is easy to see that distinctive priorities, cultural specificity and the discrepancies in economic development make it a difficult task to speak in unison of an information society. It is clear, and expectedly so, that information society conveys different mental actualizations, as disparate from one another as the social environments within which their carriers live and function. Incidentally or coincidentally, the personal narratives in the stories give a “humanized” perspective to the recently released 2005 European Innovation Scoreboard released by none other than the European Commission. Using what is called the *Summary Innovation Index*, which includes many indicators that give a measure of each particular country’s preparedness for the “knowledge society,” the scoreboard ranks countries into four groups: leading, average performance, catching up and losing ground. Appendix E shows a geographic representation and Appendix F shows a graphic representation of the scoreboard. The trends in the two figures are, by and large, aligned with my findings in both the principal and secondary countries. Sweden is incontestably a leading country. Germany is shown as a leading country in the geographic representation, but if we look at the graphic representation we notice that it actually straddles the leading and the average zones (which illustrates the mixed picture I encountered there). Portugal is shown as catching up in the geographic representation, but still towards the bottom in the graphic representation. We can follow the patterns from the stories to match the secondary

countries to the two representations and find out that there is very little discrepancy between the narratives and these two technical representations.

To talk of a European information society may sound downright utopian in these circumstances. Many of my study subjects who were asked about it had no scruples in dismissing the idea, some with outright derision, others with tactful distrust. But I found it somewhat fascinating that it united them into a panel of rationalist thinkers casting doubts over a chimerical construct in a manner so characteristic to Europeans of all nationalities. In fact, in an ironic twist, it created a common European stance against a European illusion.

A shared thread that runs through this kaleidoscope of images on the information society is the place of the university as the cradle of knowledge. This is not an earth-shattering discovery as any academic or scholar already knows. What is remarkable is the fact that in this particular matter, political rhetoric and personal conviction converge with no observable tension. Academics and Commission officials alike, the latter casting aside for a moment their status of public administrators, indirectly confirmed each other in upholding the role of the university in knowledge formation and transmission and, by extension, eventually shaping public opinion on the utilitarian attributes of the information society. All this, however, is easier said than done. In theory it all sounds encouraging, almost idyllic, but universities in Europe have so many constraints and deficiencies that it is hard to see how and why they would be able to give meaning to the information (or knowledge) society. They have much more practical issues and worries to consider: financial woes that impair their power of technological innovation, problems of physical space in old buildings to accommodate growing numbers of students,

reconciling the strain between “technology-enhanced” learning and traditional classroom instruction and delivering coherent strategies for the incorporation of ICTs in the curriculum. These are all concerns that have repeatedly cropped up during the stories, giving a rather discouraging outlook to the realization of the information society in Europe.

CHAPTER IV

So What?

4.1 What I Have Learned

After taking this winding journey through these countries I can safely conclude that the European *eLearning* landscape in higher education is as complicated (if not more so) as almost any other political or economic aspect of the European Union, only that it seems to be somewhat more erratic given the loosely regulated framework. I am referring here to the activities that unfold under the aegis of the Commission's *eLearning* Programme and other programmes with *eLearning* actions.

There is a marked contrast between the technical and orderly recipe for the application of the *eLearning* Programme and the practices on the ground. Recalling the principle of subsidiarity (see Chapter I), I found that the entities to which it pertains in practice are not, as I expected, the governments of the Member States, not even the regional or local governments in those states. The actors that “move” the *eLearning* programmes are the individual professors with the backing of their home institutions. University autonomy and academic freedom break down the components of subsidiarity to the lowest possible units in the policy-making hierarchy, an aspect that is not evident from the interpretation of subsidiarity given in the TEU, where policy actions are envisioned between the Community and the Member States. I do not mean to say that the professors initiate policies, rather that their liberty of action is diluting the concept of subsidiarity to the point where the policies, or in this case recommendations, of the

Commission have little force of persuasion in the face of personal motivations that drive the individual professors to take part in European projects. These motivations are, not necessarily in this order: of financial nature (to test or research an idea for which no other funding is available); to engage in networking with peers from other Member States; for pursuing a professional interest best suited in the European *eLearning* context; to fulfill a quest or mission to assist in the transfer of expertise to less developed regions (e.g., the new Member States); or simply for taking the first step to European collaboration.

Most of the rest of the dynamics ruling European *eLearning* revolve around this first point, meaning that these personal motivations translate into fragile projects that have low prospects to continue beyond the funding allocated through the *eLearning* Programme and the other programmes. It is a rather ineffective way for the EU to drive genuine incorporation of ICTs in the Member States, not least because the latter have their own priorities varying in their breadth from country to country. Thus, given the modest results of these projects, EU initiatives have little influence on the Member States' priorities, notably when the Member State is a leader country, such as Sweden or other Scandinavian countries (e.g., Finland or Denmark, see Appendices E and F).

I also found that there is no overlap between European *eLearning* strategies and their national counterparts. At no juncture is the Member State, through its governmental bodies involved in recommending a route for institutions and their faculty in pursuing European programmes. There is also no governmental constraint placed on applicants in seeking national or European funding, but if the project they are developing includes a European component, the national government will decline funding and direct the applicant to the European programmes. By the same token, the European Commission

will decline a project that is clearly national in scope. I think that this separation, though logical, points to the political games that the two levels (European vs. national) play in protecting their jurisdictions. I am not suggesting a tension, though some might read it as such, but rather a disconnect between the two political realms that does little to encourage an infusion of EU *eLearning* initiatives into national plans. This presents quite a conundrum, as the Member States have already given their support for the *eLearning* Programme through the signatures of the Parliament and the Council, but then are somewhat constrained in imposing a European course of action in universities by the national laws governing the functioning of their own higher education systems (i.e., university autonomy and academic freedom).

The “European dimension” that is the subject of much of the Commission’s discourse is only partly manifesting itself as a consequence of European *eLearning* projects. A “select club” of universities consistently participate in *eLearning* consortia, thus being in the position to really give some substance to the European nature of their collaboration. It involves an elite league of academics and professionals who consistently take part in these activities through the networks mentioned earlier. But considering the largely personal motivations of these actors, it is difficult to see how the spirit of European collaboration can spread beyond the confines of this “circle of friends.” It is not clear whether it extends to other academics in the home institutions, the institutions themselves and, further, into the public arena.

Certainly, I do not disparage here these connections that form among those enthusiastic academics who look across borders for examples and working models for ICT adoption in their home institutions. I think they are among the most promising

aspects of the eLearning efforts in Europe thus far. Professional interests apart, these are fundamental links that have the potential to carry on ideas for future *eLearning* programmes. Simply said, it is probably at this personal level that a European dimension takes shape.

As I expected, the answers on information society revealed a mosaic of interpretations stemming from the personal experiences of the interviewees and their understanding of the complexities such a term produces. To avoid repetition here, I will not recount the stories on the information society for each country as I covered them in detail in the previous two sections. Suffice here to say that most of the academics interviewed see beyond the practical or technical side of the information society and even question the so-called social intentions of the term. Social inclusion and access for everyone sound like noble ideals, but they are not necessarily premised on the use of the concept of information society. Some questioned the propriety of using information at all as a denoting feature of our society and some doubted its effectiveness as a political tool to foster a socially-embedded technological culture. I had interesting discussions with the interviewees on the purpose, meaning, content and context of information and a concise mapping of its ramifications into various aspects of our lives is all but impossible. Cultural, social, political and economic considerations all factor in to render the subject even more ambiguous.

Of course, the main rationale for the Commission's use of the term was a combination of meeting the needs of a society increasingly reliant on modern digital technologies, ensuring the skills necessary for the new "information-intensive" economies and the recognition of the ripple effect that both elements would have for the

social environment. The use of *eLearning* and universities to pass on the notion of information society in the public domain, I think, looks rather naïve in retrospect. In talking with the academics and putting together their diverse frames of reference related to the term, I believe that if the European political elites are expecting the universities to illuminate the public realm on the substance of information society beyond the convenience of its practical applicability the chances are slim that the civil society is going to even begin to understand in any profound manner the meaning of information society. If the intent is to drive purely political and social programs embracing technologies, than the association of the term information society with digitization is likely to develop those “synaptic” connections in the public mind needed to nurture its acquiescence. But if the ambition is to use universities as incubators of those political ideals, it is the wrong path to follow, as people in academia are far more discriminative and critical of ready-made easy labels than the public at large. That academic restraint that dictates an analytical view of concepts and ideas is likely to go against the political urgings of officialdom, be it European or national.

Summing up all these aspects, I would say that the *eLearning* Programme has shown many more weaknesses than strengths. This is not to say that the projects funded through the Programme have not impacted on those individuals, and possibly their institutions, who have participated in the Programme, but it is yet too early to say. As we have seen, the many difficulties the project participants encounter in finalizing a project (if the project is selected and if it turns out to be manageable) often overshadow the enthusiasm for continued involvement in European projects. With little prospects of a simplification of the administrative burden inherent to the programmes and the marginal

property of the *eLearning* programmes or initiatives (there isn't a comprehensive European research programme with substantial funding dedicated to *eLearning*⁵¹) the promise of an ample implementation of ICTs for genuine pedagogy that is transferable across curricula in Europe will not come to pass. It would be easy, however, to make the *eLearning* Programme culpable for its shortcomings and point fingers towards the European "technocracy" for failing to induce sweeping changes in European higher education. After all, the Commission does not have the clout to dictate internal changes in the higher education systems. It is really dependent on the universities and the national governments to institute measures that can quicken the appropriation of ICTs in higher education.

4.2 Why Is This Important?

This study was concerned with policies produced at the highest levels of decision-making in the European Union. It, therefore, makes sense to briefly place the importance of the findings back into the larger political context of the Union and consider the ramifications that they could potentially have on future policy design in the EU. I started this dissertation with a quote that summed up the greatest concern, I believe, of political elites in Europe regarding the European Union's ability to face global competition, particularly in technological innovation. America, it seems, should have little to fear, at least in the short term, that the EU as a whole will catch up with it. And if we are to take the *eLearning* developments to gauge this competition, the EU is indeed in great difficulty. But this is no news to anyone cognizant of the European arena, least of all to the technocrats in charge of the European institutions.

⁵¹ I credit Tony Bates with this useful insight.

Integration of technologies in education was undertaken as an avenue in a challenging plan to create a European competitive economic and political powerhouse on the world stage. In all fairness, no one denies the EU's tremendous weight in the world economy, but lately it seems to have developed a certain amount of unreasonable stage fright. In worrying about emerging markets like China and India, the EU has forgotten what a pole of attraction it represents for the surrounding countries together with which it forms a veritable "Eurosphere" of 109 nations (Leonard, 2005, p. 54). Let me get back to the point. Integration of technologies is only one part of the picture. Another type of integration, however, is at play here, that of the Member States themselves. Though the astute observer may immediately remark that the EU countries are already integrated, in reality integration is a process that has not stopped since the Treaty of Paris establishing the precursor of today's Union, the European Coal and Steel Community, was signed in 1951 (Dinan, 1999, p. 26).

I have to say that the integration of technologies in higher education, whether deliberately or not, contribute to this larger context of European integration. Ideally, in a virtuous circle, the integration of shared technological models in education would lead to better commercial applications diffusing into the economies of Europe, which in turn would enhance the strength of the Single Market with favorable repercussions on the political integration process. The connection is not obscure, but the means of applying it in practice are very much so. It would not be fair for me to claim that the integration of *eLearning* has contributed to the political goal of European integration at macro-structural level. On the other hand, the personal connections among those participating in *eLearning* have given shape to a variety of grassroots European integration. It is a timid

accomplishment if placed in the European political context, but it is one that can potentially follow the neofunctionalist path of spillover⁵² to affect other domains, starting with education in general.

ICT integration through European *eLearning* initiatives has shown few signs of vigor, not least as a consequence of poor funding. A €44 million budget for a 3-year programme which receives in excess of 300 bids for each call for proposals is acutely inadequate to propel a far-reaching adoption of European practices. It is not known how many of the unsuccessful applicants give up bidding for European grants once they get rejected. If *eLearning* is considered of high importance, as the official documents assure us, then it makes sense to allocate a larger portion of the EU budget to the *eLearning* Programme and, if it continues in some form (my guess is that it will not), to its successor programme. It makes little sense that the *eLearning* Programme receives an amount approximately 100 times smaller than that earmarked for the Technology-Enhanced Learning (TeLearn) action under the Information Society Technology (IST) Programme managed by DG INFSO. Some projects within both programmes replicate similar conceptual models with no communication between them, thus leading to an inefficient use of funds. It would be logical to collate all *eLearning* priorities into one substantial research programme⁵³ and fund it at a reasonable level comparable with the IST Programme. I have consistently shown in this dissertation that the individual actors taking part in European *eLearning*, including the Commission representatives, agree that the *eLearning* Programme's funding cannot induce the type of technology-based higher

⁵² "In its most general formulation, 'spillover' refers to a situation in which a given action, related to a specific goal, creates a situation in which the original goal can be assured only by taking further actions, which in turn create a further condition and a need for more action, and so forth." (Lindberg, 1963 as quoted in Bache & George, 2001)

⁵³ I credit Tony Bates for this idea.

education that would contribute to a solid European performance in innovation and its diffusion into the social sphere.

In looking at the relationship between the European Union and the Member States regarding the level of initiative in conducting the *eLearning Programmes* projects, this dissertation reassesses the principle of subsidiarity and brings new insights in its practical operation. It illustrates in an unequivocal manner that “ethos which the principle stamps and promotes by means of such programs, as well as others” (Jover, 2002, p. 19), namely taking advantage of the bottom-up approach that is inherent in the principle, but obscured by rigid legalistic interpretation. The stories in this dissertation vividly demonstrate the applicability of subsidiarity beyond the formal environment of institutional interactions. I have explicitly sought here to make this connection that I have not encountered in the context of *eLearning* processes at European level.

Another important aspect of the European Union – Member State interaction this dissertation uncovers is the rather arbitrary attribution of funds through the *eLearning Programme*. While I understand that the distribution of grants needs to be done in a transparent way via competitive calls for proposals, if the greater European goal is to close the gaps between the higher education systems’ *eLearning* practices, it would be more appropriate to strategically channel funds to those parts of the Union which need them the most. As we have seen, some Swedish academics were confident that Sweden can do very well on its own resources without the money from the *eLearning Programme*. In a Union whose aggregate governmental spending on Research and Development (R&D) is below that of the United States (0.63% of GDP for EU25 as opposed to 0.76% of GDP for the US), re-distributing Community budget funds to countries which cannot

afford to spend a higher percentage of their GDPs on R&D would seem to be a plausible solution. For example, Sweden spends 0.90%, while Spain allocates only 0.38% of its governmental budget to R&D (Dosi et al., 2005, p. 13). This would put the EU, as a whole, in a better position to compete with the US in innovation and technology-based education. Of course, political considerations and objections on using the Community budget (to which some countries contribute more than others) would hamper such a scenario. Nonetheless, the idea is presented here as an option that could be acted upon with political will.

I have also exposed in this dissertation some of the individual perceptions that are part of the mentalities that drive progress within particular Member States. I was going beyond the numbers and the cold statistics of various studies to reach that humanistic vantage point to a technological revolution that has made its way into the lives of peoples across Europe. This dissertation revealed those subjective views processed through experiential prisms. We have seen how the conceptualization of the information society in the principal countries conforms to the indicators of innovation I presented in Appendices E and F. This highlights the marked differences among the Member States in both defining as well as identifying with the concept of information society, an aspect that renders the prospect of an integrated European information society all but intangible.

Finally, through these stories, I hope to have shown without exaggeration the important role that human interactions play in deconstructing the political and technical mechanisms of the European *e*Learning programmes.

4.3 Some Recommendations

Issuing recommendations for a massive and complicated decisional system such as the EU may be a daunting proposition and their applicability, though theoretically logical, may not have a correspondent in practice. As much as I would like to give recommendations that are focused on the microcosm of the individuals that are the soul of *eLearning*, the sheer complexity of the European colossus only lends itself to its macrocosm. Having said that, here are my recommendations that may make the lives of all parties involved in *eLearning* more rewarding:

- Institute a larger budget for a potential future *eLearning* programme with actions that truly harness the wealth of experience that the universities have accumulated over the past few years. This would give those many universities that have not been able to participate in *eLearning* a chance to do so.
- Create an *eLearning* programme similar in scope and funding to the IST Programme, but limit the consortium requirement so that three universities from three different countries is the maximum, instead of the minimum (with a minimum of two universities, however). Also, increase the duration of the projects, so that the participating universities build the level of trust and shared experience to create sustainable models.
- Conduct a concerted EU-national public consultation on the meaning of the information (knowledge) society with the purpose of assessing the understanding of the construct at the civic level. This would give the political elites a better sense of what priorities need to be set in order to make ICTs truly relevant social tools.

4.4 A Word of Caution

This study does not lay a claim to perfection. Its limitations are many, but the insights into the human condition of the *e*Learning developments in Europe are valuable. It is in no way possible to generalize the findings to the entire European Union. Absent from this study are individuals from institutions located in the newer Member States. Taking them into account would not have made the findings any more generalizable, but it would have added a more balanced “composite picture” of the *e*Learning Programmes scope. It would have been interesting to compare the “eastern” to the “western” perspective(s) on participation in *e*Learning programmes.

The study sometimes refers to the *e*Learning Programme and the other programmes, which may make it difficult to follow the focus of its argument. There is a reason for that, namely the complementarity of many of the *e*Learning actions within the Programme with the actions in other European programmes. The connection may be confusing, but it is difficult to refer exclusively to the *e*Learning Programme and remain oblivious of the whole array of similar actions within compartments of other programmes, particularly since e-learning itself as a concept is viewed in various ways, both at European and at national levels.

The interviewee samples for each of the principal countries are not as large as I would have wanted them to be, thus representation issues come into question. I am aware of this shortcoming, but my intent was to get as many possible subjects as I could in the given personal and logistical circumstances. Where possible and available, supporting documentation for these countries was used to contextualize the interviewees’ representation. Furthermore, by looking in the secondary countries I sought to add a

measure of balance and variety that could give the ensuing material a broader base for interpretation.

4.5 A Look Into the Future of European *e*Learning

The *e*Learning Programme is set to come to a conclusion at the end of 2006. A formal complete evaluation by the Commission, as mandated in Article 12(2) of the programme, is due by the end of 2007. It is only after that time that we will probably know the full impact of the programme and whether the Commission will decide to continue it in some form. Judging from the findings of this dissertation, from the information coming out of workshops and conferences in Europe and from a recent discussion paper on a proposal for a new Integrated Lifelong Learning (ILLL) programme I am inclined to believe that the Commission will discontinue the *e*Learning Programme. The ILLL document claims that there is a new shift at both European and national policy levels from the “pursuit of e-learning per se” to a focus on the “benefits that technology has to offer and the pressing needs of the economy and society” (EAC.A4D, 2005, p. 2). A mere passing reference to the *e*Learning Programme’s *transversal actions* (generally speaking, promoting e-learning in Europe) and the suggested mainstreaming of ICT issues into other programmes (Comenius, Erasmus) are hints that the Commission is not particularly pleased with the progress of the *e*Learning Programme.

This new orientation of the Commission brings up questions that I will make the subject of my future research. Has the *e*Learning Programme had any sway in this shift from the pursuit of e-learning in itself to a greater concern with ICT integration in economy and society? If the *e*Learning Programme had, as one of its actions, the

integration of technologies in higher education (and school education) with the purpose of meeting the Lisbon agenda's chief objective (transforming the EU into the most competitive knowledge-based economy) and it will have proven ineffective, what guarantee is there that the re-distribution of ICT actions into other programmes will contribute towards achieving that goal? Should the *eLearning* Programme be reoriented towards promoting e-learning and ICTs both for fostering university technological innovation and social diffusion and provide a larger budgetary allocation to reach those goals?

Research into the human interactions that drive the deliberations in the Council and the Parliament when *eLearning* programmes are adopted would also offer unique insights into the personal individual preferences of the members that form these two governing bodies. To what extent do the individual experiences with education and information technologies of these policy-makers shape the content and context of the programmes? To what extent do these two factors influence the decision of the ministers in the Council on the budgetary provisions for the programmes: their respective governments' spending constraints versus the personal values they place on technology-enhanced education? What about the Members of the European Parliament? Answers to these questions can elucidate the subtle rationales behind the sometimes precarious budgets that get allocated to the programmes.

A follow up study upon the completion of the *eLearning* Programme, to research the impact specifically at those universities that participated in the projects, seen again from the perspectives of the individuals involved, is another quest that I plan to undertake. What were the expectations of these participants at the beginning of the

projects and what has been accomplished at the end? Apart from the opportunities for networking, what other outcomes would determine these individuals to participate again in a similar programme? What would have they done differently in retrospect, had it been in their power, to maximize the effects of the projects to which they dedicated two years of their professional lives? Such a study would confer nuance to its technical counterpart from the Commission.

As for the information society, the continued exploration of its functions and transposition into everyday parlance will remain one of my research endeavors for as long as society remains affected by it in one way or another.

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APPENDIX A

Map of the European Union



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http://europa.eu/abc/european_countries/index_en.htm

Figure 1. Map of the European Union

APPENDIX B

Sample Application for European Programmes



Socrates



Reserved for the Commission

Number

Date of Postmark

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SOCRATES PROGRAMME

Application Form for Full Proposals

COMENIUS 2.1 Action (Training of School Education Staff)

-	-1-2005-1-	-	-
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CLOSING DATE FOR SUBMISSION: 1 MARCH 2005
(as per postmark)

Applications bearing a postmark after this date will not be considered.
 Applications must be sent by post. Applications sent by fax or e-mail will not be accepted.

You must send the following:

- (1) the original application bearing the original signature of the legal representative of the coordinating institution
- (2) 4 copies of this application
- (3) A diskette containing:
 - a copy of this application in MS Word format
 - the project/network summary in DE, EN or FR.

Socrates, Leonardo and Youth Technical Assistance Office
 Rue Colonel Bourg 139 Kolonel Bourgstraat
 B-1140 Brussels

Important instructions and information regarding the application and selection procedure

- Before completing the form, please read the relevant sections in the *SOCRATES Guidelines for Applicants* and the *SOCRATES General Call for Proposals 2005*, which contain additional information on closing dates and specific priorities for that year. Please also read the most recent edition of the *Administrative and Financial Handbook for Applicants for Transnational Cooperation Projects* before completing Section 2 on the budget. All of these documents can be obtained from the Socrates, Leonardo and Youth Technical Assistance Office at the address below. Further information can also be found on the SOCRATES website:
<http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/socrates.html>
- The Commission is required - in accordance with Article 176 of the Financial Regulation applicable to the general budget of the European Communities (Council Regulation No 1605/2002 of 25 June 2002) - to verify the **financial capacity** of beneficiaries. The verification of financial capacity shall not apply to natural persons in receipt of scholarships, public bodies or international organisations referred to in article 43 of financial Regulation. Public body in that sense means, that it is either guaranteed by the state (for example, public authorities are required to cover any losses it may make) or it is legally incapable of bankruptcy or its income is fixed by law (documentation required). **The applying organisation is requested to supply a copy of the following documents:** The profit and loss accounts and the balance sheet for the last financial year for which the accounts have been closed.
- Projects which are awarded grants of 300.000 euros and above will be requested to submit an external audit report produced by an approved auditor, unless the applicant is a public body or a secondary or a higher education establishment,. The external audit report will certify the accounts for the last financial year available and give an assessment of the financial viability of the applicant.
- The Commission is required to proof the legal status of the applying organisation (legally registered statutes, articles of association, official registration certificate or other document of equal legal value, as applicable) – see Annex 4.
- The form must be completed in one of the 20 official languages of the European Union. These are marked with an asterisk (*) in Annex 1. Please note that all participating institutions must confirm in writing their agreement to the application as submitted. It is therefore suggested to use as application language a language which is common to the partnership.
- The application must be typewritten or word-processed using a computer, character size 11 pt minimum.
- The original of the application must bear the original signature of the person legally authorised to sign on behalf of the coordinating institution and the original stamp of this institution, if it has one.
- A diskette containing two MS Word files – a project/network summary in DE, EN or FR and

a copy of the original application – must be provided in the same envelope as the original paper version.

- A copy of the application must be sent by 1 March 2005 to the appropriate National Agency in each of the countries which are participating in the project (in case of Lingua I, II; Grundtvig I, I.1, I.2; Comenius II.1 and Minerva). The copy must be accompanied by a translation of Section 1 Point 2 and Section 4 of the form, if this is requested by the National Agencies concerned. The list of National Agencies appears in the *General Call for Proposals 2005*. It is also available from the above-mentioned website and from the Socrates, Leonardo and Youth Technical Assistance Office at the address below.
- All applications will be acknowledged.
- Applications will be judged against the eligibility and quality criteria set out in the *Guidelines for Applicants* and the *General Call for Proposals 2005*.
- Applicants will be notified about the outcome of the selection in writing in late July 2005. A copy of the notification letter will be sent to the National Agencies concerned.
- In accordance with standard Commission practice, the information provided in your application may be used for the purposes of evaluating the SOCRATES programme. The relevant data protection regulations will be respected.

Any questions relating to this proposal should be addressed to the

Socrates, Leonardo & Youth Technical Assistance Office

Rue Colonel Bourg 139 Kolonel Bourgstraat

B-1140 Brussels

Telephone: + 32 2 233 0111

Fax: + 32 2 233 0150

e-mail: info@socleoyouth.be

APPENDIX C

Participation in the eLearning Programme

The table below presents the number of instances in which the countries covered in the study have participated in the *Virtual Campuses* action line of the eLearning Programme in 2004 and 2005. While the number of participating institutions was higher, both in aggregate as well as by country, only higher education establishments are included in the table. The funding for the 18 projects under this action line ranged between €300,000-1,000,000 per project in 2004 and €200,000-640,000 per project in 2005 (rounded figures). Each project was funded for a period of 24 months. The data were collected from the European Commission's website available at:

http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/elearning/projects/index_en.html.

Table 3. Coordinating and Participating Countries in the eLearning Programme

Country	2004 (10 projects)		2005 (8 projects)		Aggregated Country Total
	Coordinator	Partner	Coordinator	Partner	
Belgium	0	5	0	1	6
France	2	0	0	1	3
Germany	0	4	1	3	8
Italy	1	7	1	3	12
Netherlands	0	2	0	3	5
Portugal	0	0	0	2	2
Spain	1	5	0	5	11
Sweden	0	2	1	2	5
UK	0	4	0	3	7
Yearly Total	4	29	3	23	59

APPENDIX D

Participation in the Socrates Programme, Comenius Action 2.1

The table below presents the number of instances in which the countries covered in the study have participated in the Comenius action of the Socrates Programme in 2005. While the number of participating institutions was higher, both in aggregate as well as by country, only higher education establishments are included in the table. The grants awarded to the 46 projects under this action ranged between €68,000-359,000 (rounded figures). Of the 46 projects, 40 were funded for a period of 36 months and 6 for a period of 24 months. The data were collected from the European Commission's website available at:

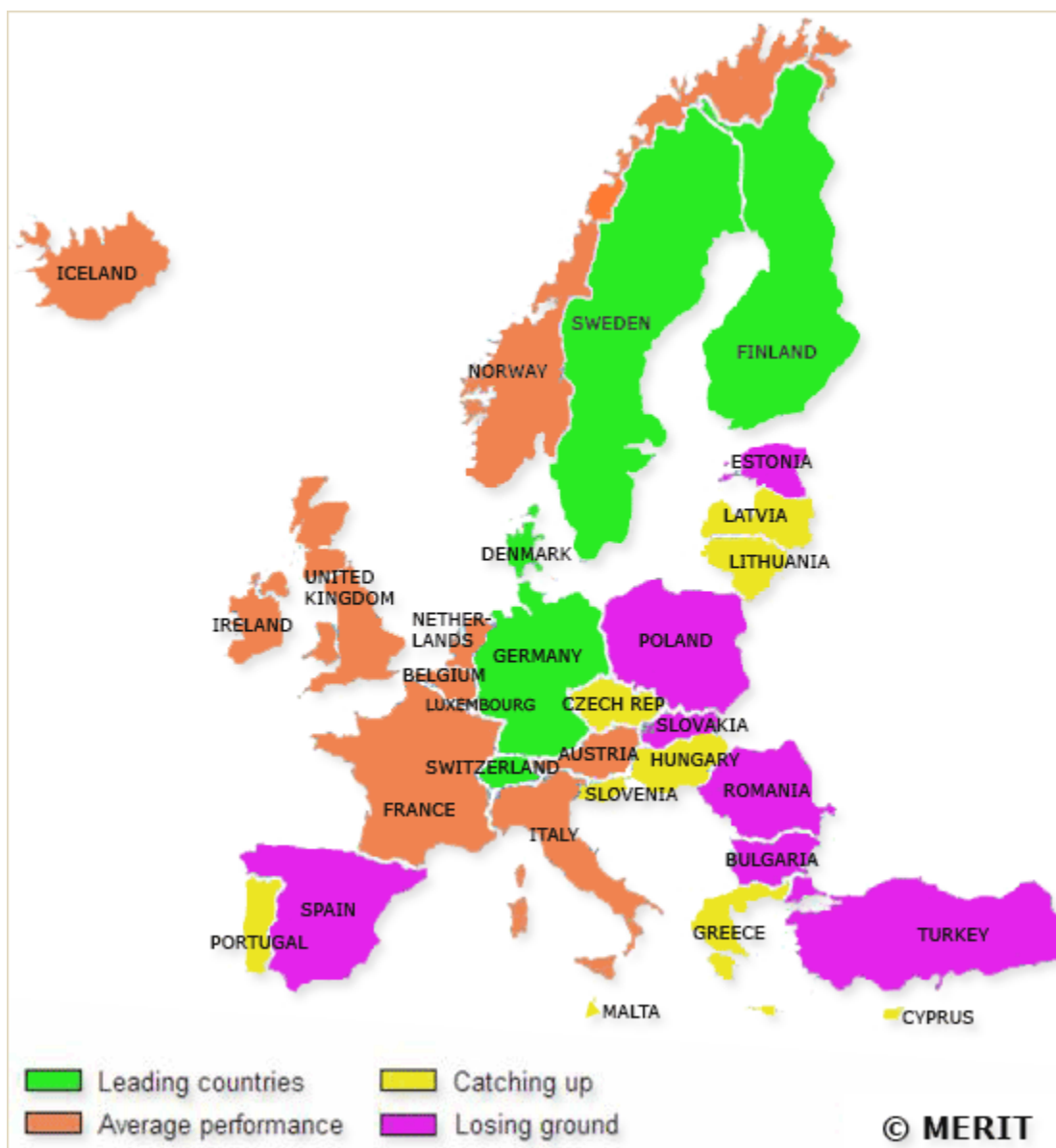
http://europa.eu.int/comm/education/programmes/socrates/comenius/compendia/training05_en.pdf

Table 4. Coordinating and Participating Countries in the Comenius Action

Country	2005		Aggregated Country Total
	Coordinator	Partner	
Belgium	2	5	7
France	2	2	4
Germany	2	4	6
Italy	1	7	8
Netherlands	0	6	6
Portugal	0	7	7
Spain	3	8	11
Sweden	1	2	3
UK	2	12	14
Yearly Total	13	53	69

APPENDIX E

Innovation Leaders and Followers in Europe – Map



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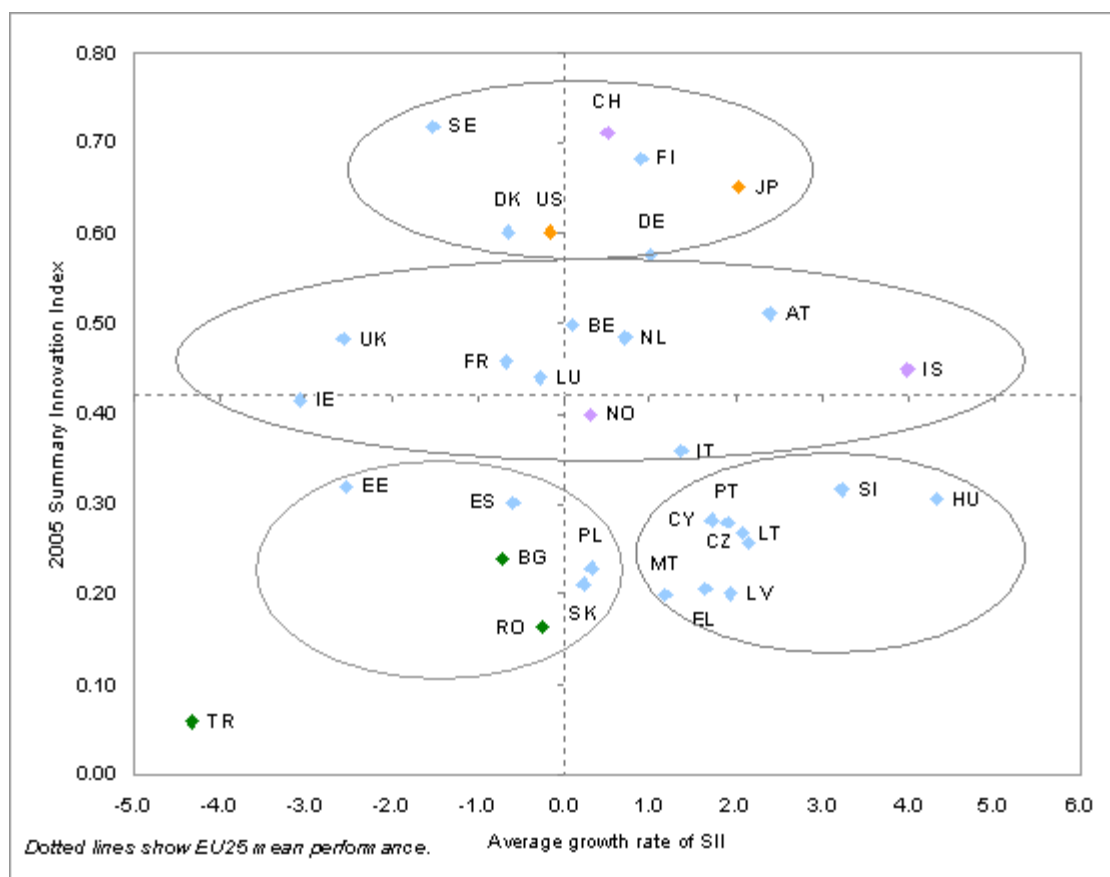
http://trendchart.cordis.lu/scoreboards/scoreboard2005/summary_innovation_index.cfm

Figure 2. Map of Innovation Leaders and Followers in Europe

APPENDIX F

Innovation Leaders and Followers in Europe – Chart

Top circle: *Leading countries*
 Middle circle: *Average performers*
 Bottom right circle: *Catching up*
 Bottom left circle: *Losing ground*



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http://trendchart.cordis.lu/scoreboards/scoreboard2005/summary_innovation_index.cfm

Figure 3. Chart of Innovation Leaders and Followers in Europe

APPENDIX G

Sample Questions from Interviews with Academics

In general terms, regarding the process of applying for EU funding. How would you describe the process? Was it difficult? Was it time- and resource-consuming? Is it worth the effort?

So, in this paper it does say that universities in Sweden have been reluctant to participate in international funded projects. Is that one of the reasons that you would think that this was so because of the complicated process or is it something else that holds them back from participating?

Now, you mentioned that universities in Sweden are very rich, which obviously means that they are funded from the government, which is also that is well-known, documented. Is there any participation or involvement from the government to stimulate participation in EU-funded projects or is it up to the universities? Maybe more simply put: does the government encourage universities to participate in EU projects?

It [*eLearning Programme*] comes with a budget of €44 million for a period of four years and I'd like to ask you: do you think that's an appropriate amount of money for a union of, now 25 countries? It was originally for 15 countries, but now it's 25. Does that sound like an appropriate sum of money for promoting e-learning in such a large spectrum of countries now?

If a professor or even individuals could choose between European funding and national funding or länder funding, which one do you think they would go for?

When we talk about influence from the European Commission, aside from the, let's say political games, does it help, would it help if those political games were supported by substantial funding? Would the national governments or the länder [*federal state in Germany*], the universities be more inclined to accept the influence of the Commission as something beneficial, not necessarily as something that is imposing some policy decisions?

This eases me into the information society section that I'm also investigating, and this is a more, should I say, philosophical endeavor. But it's triggered by the same emphasis in the documents of the European Commission, and the *eLearning Programme*, again addresses this, of creating an information society and making sure that everyone is included, but there is little consideration given to what, actually, the information society means. It has evolved, really, from the *eLearning Action Plan* to the *eLearning Programme* and there's been some effort into sort of indirectly defining the information society, but it's still somewhat elusive and it's still slippery. Now, I want to ask you, in your opinion, what do you think the information society entails? What is it? What do you think it is?

Would you say that there is an awareness of the presence of the information society in Sweden? Do you think that the public at large identifies with this concept of information society?

And now, if I may can put this in a different context and return to education, how do you see the universities playing a role in the information society? Are they well equipped to disseminate this awareness of information society in the public at large? Where do universities stand in that respect? Are they contributing to the development of an information society and to what extent and how much?

There is the concept of European Information Society in EU official documentation. How do you conceptualize this term? Is this something that could only exist as an ideal or is there a convergence towards such a notion in Europe, given the differences between the member states?

APPENDIX H

Sample Questions from Interviews with Commission Members

The first question is... one aspect of the *e*Learning Programme in particular is that it is based on the principle of subsidiarity and the Member States are encouraged to participate, and the program itself has power of recommendation. In that respect, in your opinion, how would you rate the interest of the Member States for the *e*Learning Programme to date?

So, I'll start by asking a couple of questions about the *e*Learning Programme, and it doesn't have to refer only to the *e*Learning Programme, but, in general, about the funding that goes with e-learning initiatives and programs the EU. How would you rate the success of the funding schemes so far on the member states? Do you think the member states have approached the Commission sufficiently to get funding for projects in e-learning or is it something still that it's being worked on?

And do you think that the *e*Learning Programme, or the e-learning initiatives have helped them in shaping up, or focus their objectives in their national programs? Have the European Commission programs helped them in their efforts to develop their own programs at national level?

You mentioned earlier the distinction between the Action Plan and the Programme, and you've said that one aspect of the Programme is that it's concerned with funding... and that's one question I have in my proposal... the Programme comes with funding of €44 million for the three years it is supposed to run and my question, when I read the Programme was if that would be enough of an incentive to persuade national governments to collaborate or adopt some of the Commission's recommendations and objectives. How do you feel about that? What do you think about that?

Would you say that some countries have been more active in pursuing these projects and funding from the EU or there's no evidence sustaining that?

Yes, that's right. And this brings me to the process of applying for proposals and I've learned different things from different universities, but almost every person I talked to at the universities said that the process is too difficult and too lengthy and too bureaucratic. What do you think about that?

Why is information society defined only by new technologies? It's all of a sudden the recognition of an information society as something that has developed so quickly, but, in fact, historically it hasn't. It's been in the coming for a long time. But it's being used in the documents of the European Commission as a new term, information society, we are now coming to live in a knowledge-based economy or knowledge-driven society or information society.

And my last question is what role do you think the universities in Europe would or do have in disseminating this awareness of information society, so what role, overall, do you think they have?