REDRESSING DISADVANTAGE AND ENSURING SOCIAL COHESION: THE ROLE OF DISTANCE EDUCATION AND ELEARNING POLICIES IN THE EUROPEAN UNION 1957-2007

MacKeogh, Kay 2007 Redressing disadvantage and ensuring social cohesion: the role of distance education and elearning policies in the European Union 1957-2007 in Lionarakis, Antonis (ed) Forms of democracy in Education: Open Access and Distance Education. Proceedings of the 4th International Conference in Open and Distance Learning Athens. Hellenic Open University. Vol A pp163-172

ABSTRACT

This paper analyses the development and implementation of the European Union's policies in distance higher education and elearning since the 1957 Treaty of Rome. Distance education emerged in the 1960s and 70s as an instrument at national level to redress disadvantage, and to provide flexible, high-quality and cost-effective access to higher education to adults who were unable, for geographical, employment or personal reasons, to attend on-campus. Analysis of EU policy documents and interviews with key individuals indicates that the support of influential policy entrepreneurs and networks brought distance education to the centre stage in EU education and training policy for a brief period in the early 1990s, culminating in the Maastricht Treaty on European Union (1992), which committed the EU to 'encouraging the development of distance education'. Since then, distance learning has been superceded by elearning, and is linked in EU rhetoric to social cohesion in the context of making Europe the most competitive economy in the world. Yet, despite the great potential of elearning, this paper outlines the challenges to its wider adoption. These include the persistence of the digital divide in Europe; student resistance to elearning approaches; and the problem of achieving cost-effectiveness in elearning. Much remains to be done to ensure the flexibility in terms of time, place, pace, and indeed accessibility, which would enable adult students to participate in lifelong learning on a truly democratic basis.

EU POLICY ON DISTANCE EDUCATION 1957-2005

The European Union was first established when six states, Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands came together to form the European Economic Community and the European Atomic Energy Community under the Treaties of Rome in 1957. Since then, the membership of what is now called the European Union had expanded to 27 states by 2007. The EU is governed by a network of bodies including the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Council of Ministers. While the initial purpose of the EU was decidedly economic in focus, its remit has grown to encompass a wide range of areas including education. The gradual accretion of soft law, which grew up around the EU's activities in education and training through a series of action plans and initiatives, culminated in Articles 126 and 127 in the Maastricht Treaty signed in 1992 and carried forward as Articles 149 and 150 in subsequent treaties. These articles provided the first firm legal basis for Community action in education and training, although the principle of subsidiarity was also written into the Treaty to protect Member State autonomy.

It is the EU's commitment to 'encouraging the development of distance education' in Article 126 (149) of the Maastricht Treaty which is the focus of this paper. The paper

uses Kingdon's (1995) policy streams concept as an analytical framework on which to construct a narrative explaining how distance education came to occupy a place in the core Treaty of the European Union, and how it subsequently declined in prominence as an instrument of EU policy. Kingdon used the policy streams metaphor to explain how some ideas become accepted into the policy stream when they are matched with problems which the political stream decides it is necessary to solve. At certain stages or junctures, often triggered by crises, a policy window opens to admit an idea into either the problem, policy or politics stream. From the early 1960s, the problem stream in Europe turned to the education and training system to solve a range of problems including: retraining of workers from obsolete industries; redressing disadvantage and contributing to social cohesion; contributing to the completion of the internal market; developing a Citizens' Europe; making the process of lifelong learning a reality; stimulating growth, competitiveness and employment; and creating the Information and Knowledge Society. The so called 'Lisbon process' is the most recent example of the EU turning to education and training to meet its objectives; in this case making Europe the most competitive economy in the world by the year 2010 (CEC, 2000).

Distance education evolved as a major player in providing second chance education in the 1970s in Europe. It also pioneered, of necessity, the use of a range of media to deliver education to students who were unable to attend on campus. Distance education entered the mainstream of EU policy-making in the late 1980s when it was seen as the solution to a range of problems besetting the EU at the time. It is generally acknowledged that the importance of distance education for the EU was first recognised in 1987 by the European Parliament when it adopted a resolution on the Open Universities (European Parliament, 1987). However, the idea of distance education had been floating in the policy stream for many years. The 1961 Commission (CEC, 1961) proposals on vocational education included reference to modern teaching methodologies, and the 1971 Guidelines (CEC, 1971) endorsed the potential of correspondence education. In the same year, the Council of Europe proposed a European Inter-University Institute for the Development of Multimedia Distant Study Systems (Seabright and Nickolmann, 1992: 2). The influential 1973 Janne report highlighted the potential of the open university model, and recommended that the Community should set up a specialised body (a European Open University) for the purpose of promoting the mass media and new technology in the context of what was then termed 'permanent education' (CEC, 1973). In 1985 a series of EU action programmes for the first time provided funding for distance education projects (e.g. EUROTECNET, COMETT and DELTA). Following an initiative from the Irish Presidency, the Commission prepared a *Memorandum on Open Distance Learning* in 1991 (CEC, 1991); and in the same year, the clause committing the EU to 'encouraging the development of distance education' was written into Article 126 of the Draft Treaty of European Union, signed in Maastricht in February 1992.

How did distance education come to occupy this central position in the core treaty of the EU? To a certain extent, the explanation for the elevation of distance education to the forefront of EU policy lies in the coalition of three development streams which allowed for the opening of a policy window: the emergence of distance education as a 'respectable' form of higher education in the 1970s; the role of the new information technologies in transforming society and economies; and the increasing concern within the European Union with the completion of the internal market to safeguard

competitiveness, and the need to create a people's Europe of citizens committed to the aims of the Union.

From the 1970s, Member States increasingly adopted distance education as an instrument of economic development designed to extend access to education, particularly to adults disadvantaged by location, occupation, income, disability, or prior academic achievement, in a cost and pedagogically effective way, as well as increasing the skills and qualifications of the adult population. 'The best providers, both public and private, wanted to offer accessible educational opportunities, based on quality materials, leading to reputable qualifications' (Rumble, 2001: 228). This period saw the establishment in Europe, in rapid succession, of open universities, dual mode institutions and consortia of distance education. By 1990, only Greece and Luxembourg lacked some form of publicly funded distance higher education. Table 1 below shows that enrolments in distance education institutions which are members of the European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU) grew from 275,691 in 1987 to 1,154,276 in 2004. (Some on-campus universities also provide extensive distance education programmes although statistics on enrolment are difficult to access.)

Table 1: Enrolments in Distance Education Institutions in Europe 1987-2004

Country	Organisation	1987	1990	1994	1997/98	2004
Austria	Zentrum fur Fernstudien Universitat Linz	NA	NA	2000	2000	5,000
Belgium	STOHO	816	4056	1606	1189	6,000
Denmark	JOU/DAO	750	700	850	8970	NA
Finland	FADE	NA	NA	9500	50,000	80,000
France	Centre National d'enseignement a distance	NA	NA	NA	360000	350.000
France	FIED	26,000	31,200	30,000	38000	20,000
Germany	FernUniversitat	41,000	45,000	53,000	55,450	55,000
Ireland	NDEC/Oscail	290	3,500	2911	3,651	3,000
Italy	Consorzia per l'Universita a Distanza	1,200	2,300	2300	NA	NA
Italy	NETTUNO (Il Network per l'Universita Ovunque)	NA	NA	NA	NA	60,000
Netherlands	Open Universiteit Netherlands	33,542	53,500	60,000	25899	26,000
Norway	Norwegian Association of Distance Education	NA	NA	7000	10000	NA
Portugal	Universidad Aberta	NA	4,500	4500	11137	15,000
Spain	Universidad Nacional Educacion a Distancia	83,121	109,041	127,000	136,444	200,000
Spain	Universidad Aberta Catalunya	NA	NA	NA	NA	25,000
Switzerland	FernStudienSchweiz	NA	NA	195	494	1,276
Sweden	SADE	NA	14,000	2000+	24000	80,000
UK	Open University, UK	88,972	96,931	115065	204000	188,000
UK	Open Learning Foundation	NA	NA	NA	8500	40,000
Totals		275,691	364,728	417,927	939,734	1,154,276

Sources: EADTU Directories, 1987, 1990, 1994, 1998. Personal communication 2004.

In parallel with the burgeoning national initiatives on distance education, a separate stream of developments, based on the introduction of new information technologies in schools and training, came to prominence in EU policy the late 1970s. The extent of technological change between the 1950s and the 1980s was unprecedented. The world economy moved rapidly from an industrial society based on mass production and mechanical systems, to the Information Society based on electronic systems and flexibilisation. Technological developments created profound changes in the nature of work, leading to massive job losses in the traditional sectors, and substantial skills shortages in the new sectors. The years after 1957 were characterised by massive

leaps in technology. By 1969, the ARPANET system, the precursor of the Internet, had been developed. The first email message was sent in 1971, and in 1979, the first proprietary online service was launched (Blackhurst and Edyburn, 2000). The introduction of relatively affordable microcomputers and PCs in the 1980s, combined with the potential to link remote computers together, had at last made the possibility of using technology to both enhance educational practice and to widen access, seem feasible.

In 1978 the EU initiated a separate stream of policy-making on new technologies in education and training. By 1987, 'spectacular development' was recorded in all the Member States 'as regards the introduction of NIT into schools including equipment, training of teachers, and production of educational software' (CEC, 1987).

Between 1985 and 1987, arising from changes in Community policy driven by preparations for the single market, a series of programmes aimed at higher education was introduced which would draw national ODL providers into the European arena. In 1987, the Ewing Report (1987) and a European Parliamentary resolution helped to open the policy window which allowed distance education to enter the EU policy stream over the next five years. The Ewing Report did not make explicit links between the new information technologies and distance education. Rather, the Report stressed the egalitarian aims and objectives of the Open Universities as the guiding principles for adopting action in distance education, the primary objective of which was to:

> provide a second chance or a second path to higher education for adults who do not wish to enter full-time education, or who cannot do so on account of family and/or work commitments. In the process, open universities aim both at self-fulfilment of the individual and more broadly at contributing to economic prosperity and social progress (Ewing Report, 1987: 8)

The resolution highlighted the potential of OUs and distance education to serve the need for adult education and training in Europe, especially among the disadvantaged, as well as their contribution to European integration through teaching languages. Member States were urged to support OUs and other national ODL initiatives, and a key recommendation was a call to investigate the feasibility of establishing a European Open University.

The proposal to initiate a European Open University was not welcomed by the newly founded European Association of Distance Teaching Universities (EADTU) which saw it as a threat to its members. Following a successful lobbying campaign, the European Commission was persuaded to work through EADTU institutions, rather than setting up a new separate institution (Field, 1998; Tait, 1996). In the early 1990s, the Commission produced, with the assistance of representatives of the distance education networks and institutions, a number of reports on distance learning in the European Community culminating in November 1991 with the *Memorandum on Open Distance Learning* (CEC, 1991). The *Memorandum* drew heavily on the report of the IRDAC Committee, which had identified significant skills shortages in Europe, to support its call for Community action in distance education (IRDAC, 1991).

Despite some residual opposition and doubts among some Member States about the cultural and market orientations of distance education, open distance learning (ODL) had become a relatively 'safe option' for the EU to support its policies on lifelong

learning and social cohesion. For a short period after Maastricht it appeared that ODL was top of the Commission's agenda in terms of addressing skills shortages to enable Europe to combat global competition, especially from the US and Japan, as well as contributing to social cohesion and the European dimension. However, by 1993 the high profile of distance education began to wane, as the Commission struggled to come up with an initiative which would constitute an effective programme of 'encouragement' for distance education. The post-Maastricht period encountered a series of new as well as recurring problems, as well as the challenges and opportunities posed by the explosion of the Internet and the WWW. These issues allowed the focus on distance education to slip, as attention was increasingly drawn to the use of the new technologies in education and training. By the end of the 1990s, distance education was seen as synonymous with the use of technology, and not as before, a flexible way of extending access to education to those who were unable to attend full-time or part-time education on campus.

The conclusions of the Lisbon Council meeting in March 2000 have had far-reaching consequences for EU education policy (Hingel, 2001: 14). In addition to the usual challenges of globalisation, competition and demographic change, large numbers of adults in the member states have not completed second level education, and less than 10% of the population were taking part in further education or training (van der Pas, 2002: 2). While the general levels of education in the Community have increased significantly since the 1970s, there is still a residual core of disadvantaged adults who have not completed second level education, especially in Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal. In addition, the lifelong learning agenda requires that even those who have completed higher education will need continuing access to opportunities for updating and upgrading qualifications. The Lisbon conclusions set explicit aims and guidelines which Member States were expected to adopt in their education policies by 2010, including reduction by 50% of 18-24 year olds with lower secondary education who are not in further education. The resolution on 'The Concrete Future Objectives of Education Systems' set three main objectives for education systems which included a commitment to increasing the participation of adults with less than upper secondary education in adult education or training programmes, as well as the number of those aged between 25 and 64 in education and training in general (SCADPLUS, 2006). Yet, the Commission, promotes the use of technologies to meet the demand for lifelong learning, usually with the unproven assertion that these will be more cost-effective, despite the known barriers of the digital divide as discussed below while ignoring the proven potential of distance education (whether using technology or not).

'eLearning' has been adopted as a central pillar for the achievement of the EU Lisbon strategy. However, this policy favourite represents not just a change in terminology, rather it signals a change in policy direction, away from the egalitarian concerns of distance education to redress disadvantage and extend access to higher education, to a more technocratic commitment to compelling the education and training system to adopt the ICTs for the purpose of preparing the citizens of Europe for the Information Society on a lifelong learning basis. Despite rhetorical references to the potential of the ICTs for contributing to social cohesion, the reality is that the Commission's policies are now primarily technologically driven. As Mason points out

> While most of the excitement and rhetoric about virtual education is that it will serve the disadvantaged, the remote, the unemployed, and the lifelong learner, in reality, the early

> adopters are the opposite: employed, urban, well educated, and well off (Mason, 1999: 87).

To sum up, distance education and training in general started from a peripheral position at the inception of the EU in 1957, but moved in and out of the political consciousness until the Maastricht Treaty. It did so because over the years distance education practitioners had worked to improve teaching methodologies and were comfortable with the idea of using a range of media to replace face-to-face instruction. It also did so because it could offer opportunities to extend access on a second chance basis for relatively low cost at a time when unemployment in Europe was increasing and the technological revolution was overtaking society. However, following Maastricht, the distance education policy stream was captured by another stream of policy-making, driven by a fascination with the potential of the ICTs. In the Commission's view, distance education has been mainstreamed although little empirical evidence is available to support this view.

An explanation for the rise and decline of distance education in the policy stream lies, partially, in the complex nature of EU policy-making and the interaction between institutions, groups and individual actors. The development of EU policy on distance education took place within a complex policy network comprising the EU institutions (the Council, the Commission, the European Parliament and the Comitology Committees) with links to a plethora of European ODL and Industry networks, as well as lobby groups and expert groups. Other actors at the national level include Member State Ministries, as well as ODL institutions; while international organisations including the OECD, the World Bank and UNESCO also played a role in promoting policy ideas. By the time of the publication of the ODL *Memorandum*, a critical mass of distance education institutions had been established at national level, and a number of transnational networks had been established, including: the EADTU (European Association of Distance Teaching Universities); SATURN, drawn from members of EADTU as well as industry; two satellite networks: EuroSTEP and EuroPACE; and EDEN the European Distance Education Network, which drew members from the Central and Eastern Europe as well as the EU Member States. There were many contacts and consultations between the Commission and the ODL networks between 1989 and 1991, and there is no doubt that the networks had significant influence on Commission proposals at that time.

The plethora of conflicting networks and interest groups served to dilute the policy-making process, leaving no clear focus on the future development of ODL. Efforts by the Commission to encourage more cooperation between networks proved unsuccessful, largely because these networks were competing in the same field for limited funding; in addition, some of the larger open universities were competing against each other in the European market for students. It would appear that the EADTU successfully acted as an advocacy coalition in its opposition to the proposed European Open University. However, the question is at what cost? The attempt to set up a countervailing network comprising existing institutions almost bankrupted EADTU, and the distance education landscape in Europe was left with no enduring legacy of its time in the European limelight. While the EADTU managed to survive, the three other networks mentioned in the Commission's *Memorandum* went out of existence in the early 1990s.

A number of key policy entrepreneurs in the Commission were crucial in driving forward the ODL agenda between 1985 and 1994; they were joined by a number of officials seconded from the open universities who were fully *au fait* with the distance education field. However, when key officials left the Commission from 1993 on, it is clear that the level of expertise and knowledge of ODL, as well as the commitment to the ODL agenda within Commission diminished. Instead, Commission Officials responded to the technological imperative, as demanded by the new Information Society initiatives, and with some few exceptions, policy amnesia set in, and ODL disappeared from the collective memory.

Analysis of the programmes adopted by the EU in implementing its ODL policies may also help to explain why the original discourse on distance education as an instrument of social cohesion was constantly diverted into a commitment to innovation defined solely in terms of the use of technology. The Commission had started funding distance education projects as early as 1985 with the EUROTECNET programme. The COMETT programme (1986-1994) funded the use and application of multimedia and new technologies in education and training and created an opening for distance education institutions and others wishing to adopt distance education to obtain much needed funding. The programme served to stimulate the formation of partnerships and consortia among existing distance education organisations to take advantage of the prospects of relatively significant amounts of funding for joint projects and activities. Another programme, DELTA (1989-1994) was designed to foster European collaborative research on alternative learning technologies (networks, satellites, IT based training products) as well as to test possibilities for European cooperation (Van den Brande, 1993). Following the Maastricht Treaty, the Commission proposed a new generation of programmes aimed at coordinating and simplifying the programme structure. The Socrates programme, launched in 1995 included a specific action aimed at supporting open distance learning, while large-scale technology-based projects were funded under the research framework programmes. Proposals for a new ODL action for Phase II of Socrates met severe resistance from a number of Member States as well as within the Commission, although this was eventually adopted as the Minerva programme (2000-2006). The Lifelong Learning Progremms (2007-2013) which replaced Socrates no longer supports a dedicated action on distance education or elearning; instead the assumption is that these have been 'mainstreamed' in the education system (see http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/newprog/index_en.html).

It is difficult to demonstrate that the EU's implementation programmes have benefited European distance education in any significant way. Evaluations of action programmes have consistently pointed to the lack of sustainable outputs, despite vast amounts of investment. Yet, the Commission continues to design programmes which favour technology over pedagogy, short-term projects over long-term sustainable solutions; and impose bureaucratic conditions which effectively stifle creativity. In recent years, ODL institutions have largely ceased to participate in these projects. There is a gap between the rhetoric, 'the discourse of crisis' in Field's term (1998), and the reality of implementation programmes which routinely utilise the same limited suite of modest measures (exchanges, seminars, pilot projects) regardless of the objectives and the outcomes.

Nevertheless, case studies of project participation indicate that at the micro level,

some institutions, academics and students benefited from their exposure to the European ODL arena through adoption of new ideas, expertise and openness to innovation. Some ideas generated through projects became commercially successful in the long-term; distance education institutions were enabled to evaluate the effectiveness of different technologies which could later be mainstreamed if they proved successful; while some projects contributed to the development of human capital in the form of skills and expertise (MacKeogh, 2005).

OBSTACLES TO ELEARNING: THE DIGITAL DIVIDE

Despite the Commission's commitment to technological solutions there are significant obstacles to their implementation, in the form of the digital divide, and attitudinal factors. As stated before, one of the primary aims of distance education was to redress disadvantage by extending access to education to students who were unable to attend a campus for geographical, occupational, domestic or personal reasons. Distance education has used a wide range of methods to meet this objective, largely based on the technologies available to students and tutors. Distance education systems can only move at the same pace as their students and teachers.

Access to technology in Europe is unequally distributed, despite the growth in PCs and Internet connections. There is a digital divide between Member States with over two thirds connected in the Nordic countries and the UK, compared with less than one fifth in Greece, Spain and Portugal (MacKeogh, 2005). The latter group of countries are also those with the greatest degree of educational disadvantage. As recently as June 2007, the EU Commissioner Viviane Reding highlighted the fact the Greece continued to rank last of the 27 countries in terms of broadband access (Reding, 2007). Even within countries there are structural divides based on occupation, income, educational attainment and age. All Member States have developed strategies to increase access to technology, however, most of these initiatives have focused on equipping schools with Internet connections or training teachers. There has been very little progress on ensuring that every home has access to a high-speed network. If elearning is to succeed, access to the Internet should not be an optional luxury, but should be seen as part of the package of essential services delivered to every household, such as electricity, water, telephone etc. Even when this ideal situation has been achieved, it will be seen that access to equipment and technology is not the only barrier to technology led solutions in education. The assumption underlying the 'if we build it they will come' approach (The Masie Centre, 2001) fails to recognise the role of learners' attitudes, motivations and individual circumstances as discussed below.

OBSTACLES TO ELEARNING: STUDENT ATTITUDES

It is not clear that the concentration in EU policy on increasing the supply of high technology learning is met by a demand from the general public. A recent study of elearning in the United States has found that the assumption that 'the kids will take to e-learning like ducks to water' to be unfounded. Students 'do want to be connected, but principally to one another; they want to present themselves and their work...elearning is at best a convenience, at worst a distraction' (Zemsky and Massy, 2004: ii). Zemsky and Massy's study also finds that no viable market for elearning products had emerged in US higher education, with the exception of PowerPoint and course management systems such as BlackBoard (Zemsky and Massy, 2004: ii). Nor have the original forecasts that elearning will radically change the way subjects are taught: 'For the most part, faculty who make e-learning a part of their teaching do so

by having the electronics simplify tasks, not by fundamentally changing how the subject is taught.' (Zemsky and Massy, 2004: 52). This discordance between what the policy-makers are trying to promote and what the learners actually want or can achieve is of increasing concern among educationalists (Carey, et al., 2002).

To attain maximum benefit from the potential of elearning, students need unrestricted access to high-speed Internet connections whenever and wherever they wish to study. Few students experience this optimum scenario. A survey of over 750 students in Ireland and the UK distributed between on-campus and distance education groups, and among different disciplines, found that students are not a homogenous mass of users (MacKeogh, 2003). All students had access to PCs and the Internet in their universities and less than 10% relied solely on the university for access. However, this figure masked a range of disparities with regard to the quality and quantity of access. Most students experienced restrictions with regard to the time or place of access to the technology. In addition, the survey revealed that a significant proportion of students lacked the IT skills needed to fully benefit from elearning. Respondents also varied in their levels of confidence in using ITs as well as their value on ICTs in general with, as might be expected, students taking technology courses being far more positively disposed to technology than those taking non-technical subjects. Many students were concerned about the potentially negative impact of technology on pedagogy. While less than one fifth of students could be said to be actively resistant to any form of technology in education, just one in ten would welcome a totally online form of education. The majority of students wanted technology to *enhance*, rather than *replace*, their current form of learning, whether distance education or on-campus.

The key message here is that there is no ‘one size fits all solution’ and what may be appropriate for younger students taking technology courses for work related reasons will not appeal to older students taking humanities subjects for personal interest. Distance educators and policy makers must take into account the reasons why students take distance education programmes: they need the flexibility of studying at their own pace, at a time of their choosing, and in a place of their choosing. Computers, the Internet, print, audio-visual materials are all means to achieving these ends, but they are not the driving force.

ENCOURAGING DISTANCE EDUCATION?

Interviews (MacKeogh, 2005) with Commission officials confirm that the Commission view is that ODL and elearning have been mainstreamed in the general education and training system, although no systematic evidence has been produced to indicate that this is the case, and recent research from the US would dispute these views. The problems which distance education was originally designed to address remain. While the number of ‘second chance’ students is reducing, they are being replaced by increasing numbers of ‘lifelong learners’ who need flexible and accessible opportunities for learning new skills, upgrading qualifications, or generally pursuing personal development goals.

Almost imperceptibly, the Commission has, with the turnover in key officials, experienced a form of policy amnesia about the original egalitarian role of distance education and its contribution to redressing disadvantage and contributing to social cohesion. Despite the rhetoric of lifelong learning, and social cohesion, distance education has almost vanished off the policy agenda. A recent survey suggests that

most universities in Europe are using technology to varying degrees in teaching on-campus students (PLS Ramboll, 2004). However, the use of technology does not automatically extend access to off-campus students. If the course of EU policy in ODL can be seen as a process of mainstreaming it is arguable that this process is only partial. What has been mainstreamed is the use of technology in education; however, it is debatable if the flexibility which distance education offered off-campus students has been mainstreamed in the conventional system. It is ironic that already privileged on-campus students are the beneficiaries of the investment in technology.

The Commission's policy is characterised by a faith in technological solutions, while ignoring the real problems of implementing elearning; inequalities in access, the disputed pedagogical and cost benefits of much of what passes for elearning; as well as resistance not only from students but from academics as well, to what is perceived as a potential threat to the quality of the teaching and learning experience. Distance education has always used technology to *enable* those who were unable to, or did not wish to, attend conventional campus-based education, to learn and acquire qualifications. In doing so it has chosen appropriate and available technologies. Not all adults can afford the financial, domestic and emotional disruption involved in studying full-time on-campus, however, technology is not the solution to the problem if other aspects of flexible provision characteristic of most distance education systems are absent: modularisation, credit accumulation, paced assessment, and above all, use of accessible and affordable media to deliver learning at a time and place convenient to the student.

As discussed above, part of the original mission of ODL (or at least state funded ODL) was to redress unequal access. Through lower fees, open access policies and flexible presentation, adults were offered a 'second chance' to enter higher education. Yet across Europe, access to technology is divided on the basis of income, occupation, class, educational attainment and geographical location. The danger is that by increasing the entry price to education through the requirement to have access to the Internet and a PC, as well as the skills to use the new technology, ODL institutions could lose their 'market' among the disadvantaged while replacing it with a more affluent clientele of lifelong learners, interested in updating skills in the context of the Information Society.

There is, therefore, a tension between policy makers imposing innovation from a top-down perspective and the concerns of potential adopters – institutions, teachers and students. The successful adoption of ICTs in education requires a receptive environment which includes access to the technology, expertise and efficacy, and positive attitudes to learning with technology. It is suggested that much more needs to be done to resolve the most appropriate use of technology in distance education, and also to demonstrate that there is more to innovation than just using technology. The European Union has certainly encouraged experimenting with the use of technology in education, but traditional learners appear to have been the major beneficiaries of this encouragement. It cannot be argued that the EU has sufficiently encouraged the use or expansion of distance education in the Community. Indeed, rather than being mainstreamed in 2004, ODL has actually been submerged in EU policy discourse beneath the rhetorical weight of the Information Society with its constant recourse to technological fixes for social and economic problems.

IMPLICATIONS FOR OTHER REGIONS

The EU as an organisation is somewhat unique on a global scale. It does not have federal powers as the United States has, yet, through a series of treaties and binding agreements, members states have agreed to yield a certain level of sovereignty in areas such as monetary policy, trade and employment, and security. The principle of subsidiarity means that decisions about a wide range of issues such as education remain at member state level, yet there is increasing convergence in member state education systems. This account of EU attempts to develop a distance education policy for its member states illustrates the often futile role played by supranational bodies in persuading their members to implement innovations, where these are not underpinned by legal sanctions. Pressman and Wildavasky's classic study of the failure of implementation of federal policies *Implementation: How great expectations in Washington are dashed in Oakland or why it's amazing that federal programmes work at all* is a good example of how some policies fail, or are diverted into other areas (Pressman and Wildavsky, 1973).

The Asian region has no equivalent to the EU, although various organisations such as APEC, ASEAN, and SEAMEO bring countries together on issues such as trade and educational cooperation on a voluntary, non-binding basis. Nevertheless, various countries have managed to develop extensive distance education systems without the support of transnational organisations. Indeed of the eleven mega universities providing distance education to over 100,000 students identified by John Daniel in 1996, three were in Europea, while five were in Asia: CRTVU, China; IGNOU, India; Universitas Terbuka, Indonesia; National Open University, Korea; and STOU, Thailand (Daniel, 1996). In the past, many Asian countries lagged behind Europe in terms of economic development. Yet recent years have seen rapid progress, with education systems modernising and economies diversifying, no doubt assisted by leaps in technological and political developments. It is perhaps ironic that the stimulus for the Lisbon process in the EU is the perceived challenge from the traditional competitors, the US and Japan, but also the rest of the Pacific rim economies. If there is a lesson to be learned from the experience of the EU's attempts to encourage the development of distance education, it is that technology is a means to an end not a solution in itself.

REFERENCES

(1992) *Treaty on European Union: Maastricht Treaty*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

Blackhurst, A., and Edyburn, E. (2000) A brief history of special education technology. *Special Education Practice*. 2(1): 21-36.

Carey, J.M., Chisholm, I.M., and Irwin, L.H. (2002) The impact of access on perceptions and attitudes towards computers: an international study. *Educational Media International*. 39(3-4): 223-235.

CEC (1961) General principles for the implementation of a common policy on occupational training. *Bulletin of the European Economic Community*. No 12 Annex 1.

CEC (1971) General Guidelines for drawing up a Community action programme on vocational training. Adopted by Council on 26 July 1971. *OJ*. C081(12 August 1971): 5-11.

CEC (1973) *For a community policy in Education, Bulletin of the European Communities supplement 10/73*:

CEC (1986) *European Educational Policy Statements*. Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
CEC (1987) *Progress report for the period 1983 to 1986 on the introduction of NIT into education in the Member States and at Community Level. Developments in the introduction of new information technologies in education. Social Europe Supplement 2/87* Luxembourg: OOPEC.
CEC (1991) *Open distance learning in the European Community, Memorandum on open distance learning in the European Community, Task Force Human Resources, Education, Training, Youth, COM (91) 388 final* Brussels: Commission of European Communities.
CEC (2000) *eEurope: An Information Society for All: Communication on a Commission Initiative for the Special European Council of Lisbon 23-24 March 2000* Brussels: Commission of the European Communities.
CEC (2001) *Final Report from the Commission on the implementation of the Socrates programme 1995-1999 COM(2001)75 Final Brussels 12 February 2001* Brussels: CEC.
Daniel, J. (1996) *Mega universities and knowledge media: technology strategies for higher education*. London: Kogan Page.
European Parliament (1987) *European Parliament Resolution of 10 July 1987 on Open Universities in the European Community Session Doc A2-0069/87 OJ 0133.*:
Ewing Report (1987) *Report drawn up on behalf of the Committee on Youth,Culture, Education, Information and Sport, rapporteur Mrs Winifred Ewing (A2-69/87)* Luxembourg: Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.
Field, J. (1998) *European dimensions: Education, training and the European Union*. London: Jessica Kingsley Publishers.
Hingel, A.J. (2001) Education policies and European governance. Contribution to the Interservice Groups on European Governance http://europa.eu.int/comm/governance/areas/group12/contribution_education_en.pdf 4 February 2004
IRDAC (1991) *Skill shortages in Europe: IRDAC opinion* Brussels: CEC/Industrial Research and Development Advisory Committee of the European Communities.
Kingdon, J. (1995) *Agendas, alternatives and public policies: 2nd Edition*. Boston MA/New York: Little Brown/Longman.
MacKeogh, K. (2003) *Student perceptions of the use of ICTs in European education: Report of a survey*. Dublin: Oscail - Dublin City University (also available online http://www.oscail.ie/picture.htm).
MacKeogh, K. (2005) *Encouraging distance education? An analysis of EU policy on distance education, 1957-2004.* Unpublished PhD Thesis. Maynooth: National University of Ireland, Maynooth.
Mason, R. (1999) *European trends in the virtual delivery of education*. In G.M. Farrell (Ed.), *The development of virtual education: a global perspective*. 77-87. Vancouver: Commonwealth of Learning.
PLS Ramboll (2004) *Studies in the context of the E-Learning Initiative: Virtual models of European Universities; Draft final report to the EU Commission DG Education & Culture*. Aarhus/Brussels: PLS Ramboll Management: DG Education and Culture.
Pressman, J., and Wildavsky, A. (1973) *Implementation: How great expectations in Washington are dashed in Oakland or why it's amazing that federal*

programmes work at all. Berkeley: U of California Press.
Reding, Viviane (2007) Why Greece needs broadband and why it needs it now - a European perspective. Speech to the International Conference 'Exploring Global Dynamics of Broadband Internet' Athens 1 June 2007, http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/07/355 accessed 3 July 2007.
Rumble, G. (2001) Just how relevant is E-education to global educational needs? *Open Learning*. Vol 16 No 3: pp 223-232.
SCADPLUS *Concrete Future Objectives of Education Systems* updated 28 February 2006; available at http://europa.eu/scadplus/leg/en/cha/c11049.htm accessed 3 July 2007.
Seabright, V., and Nickolmann, F., Eds. (1992) *Distance Education in Europe: Studies and recommendations by the Council of Europe*. Amsterdam: SATURN/Council of Europe.
Tait, A. (1996) Open and distance learning policy in the European Union 1985-1995. *Higher Education Policy*. Vol 9(No 3): pp221-238.
The Masie Centre (2001) E-learning: "If we build it, will they come?": Executive summary http://www.masie.com/masie/researchreports/ 20 November 2003
Van den Brande, L. (1993) Research and development on learning telematics in the European Community. *Journal of Computer Assisted Learning*. 9(2): 75-85.
van der Pas, N. (2002) Does the EU need an education and training policy? Keynote paper read to Institute of European Affairs, Dublin 16 April 2002 http://www.iiea.com/keynotes/20020416-vanderpas.html 12 March 2004
Zemsky, R., and Massy, W.F. (2004) *Thwarted innovation: What happened to e-learning and why: A final report for the Weatherstation Project of the Learning Alliance at the University of Pennsylvania in cooperation with the Thompson Corporation* Pennsylvania: The Learning Alliance at the University of Pennsylvania.