

1. Benchmarking in the Soft Open Method of Coordination

JOSU SIERRA ORRANTIA, PAOLO FEDERIGHI

1.1 The Soft Open Method of Coordination (SMOC)

In the SMOC model worked out and tested in the course of the Prevalet research (Federighi, Abrèu, Nuissl, 2007), the basic stages via which the coordination procedure between regional governments are brought to a conclusion as policy learning and policy transfer are broken down into the following principle phases:

Box 1 – The SMOC model

Policy learning:
<u>Institutional motivation</u> Definitions of the reasons that cause governments to learn from others.
<u>Selection of the pathway for policy learning</u> Definition of the type of relationship – indirect, direct, cooperative – to be established between institutional partners.
<u>Selection and analysis of measures</u> Identification of the subjects to be studied with a view to the possible transfer and analysis of the devices and results achieved in prior experiments.
<u>Evaluation and adaptation of measures</u> Evaluation of the policy measures from the viewpoint of transferring them to the destination country, assessment of their potential impact and their desirability and sustainability, and their possible suitability and partial or total conversion.
Policy transfer:
<u>Creation of institutional conditions for transfer</u> Preparation of conditions favourable to the introduction of innovations by the ‘importer’ institution via the creation of the desire for change in the institution itself, among the stakeholders and in the systems.
<u>The choice of the process for the transfer</u> Choice of the type of process to be adopted: by inspiration, imitation, or adaptation through cooperation between the institutional partners.

<p><u>Decision-making process of the transfer</u></p> <p>Activation of the decision-making process whereby transfer becomes possible, as well as through progressive adaptations.</p>
<p><u>Implementation of transfer</u></p> <p>Introduction of the innovations, standards, as an experimental procedure.</p>
<p><u>Institutionalisation and follow up</u></p> <p>Adoption of the innovation and development of new policy measures and their progressive adaptation.</p>

1.2 Benchmarking in the SMOC

In the SMOC benchmarking can be a useful work method both at the ‘Institutional motivation’ stage and the ‘Evaluation and adaptation of measures’ stage.

Benchmarking is a working method that supports improvements in regional policy, and therefore of the transfer of the measures associated with it, based on a comparison of the results of the effects produced. Benchmarking is no longer merely quantitative, nor can it be restricted to a preliminary startup in the processes of cooperation between regional governments. Benchmarking has both quantitative and qualitative features and is a procedure that initiates rather than establishes a relationship between institutions and continues even when the direct relationship has ended. When two regional governments decide to cooperate, it is because they have already acquired preliminary information regarding the potential partner and believe that they can gain advantages from comparison and collaboration.

At the quantitative level, the comparison that arises from the adoption of the benchmarking method involves the partners in a constant process of comparing concepts, measurement models and outcomes, both at the policy learning stage and, possibly, in the subsequent stages of policy transfer.

Quantitative benchmarking implies a capability and ability to analyse a policy, or, more simply, a measurement of the basis of the results and the effect this has produced.

This type of exercise in Europe is still far from easy.

The difficulties arise from the fact that only in a small number of countries policies and measures are measured, monitored and evaluated according to the effects produced. Approval and, to some degree, financial sustainability would appear to be the guiding criteria. The weakness and limited spread of the cultural effect of

policy based on the evidence of the results produced or which may be expected from the measures adopted makes a specific benchmarking exercise difficult.

The automatic collection of data on the effects of lifelong learning policies and measures is non-existent. This means that it is difficult to set up objectives for quantitative comparison and it would be a mistake to attempt to put something in the place of this cultural and historical missing part in the Regions, which are interested in initiating a coordination and collaboration process. The comparability of usable quantitative data at the conclusion on the assessment of the respective performances may be the result of the process, but not its starting point. If, for example, two regional governments intend to compare the results of their respective policies in the area of the promotion of mobility for reasons of study and work, the veracity of the results and how usable they are is greater if this takes place in the framework of a mobility policy cooperation procedure and a comparison of the areas of applicability, the targets, the concepts, the measures, and the instruments adopted by each for such a purpose.

In our opinion this requirement will only meet with a useful and convincing response if the regional governments also cooperate in the construction of a large database, a tool for collecting information on the individual measures within lifelong learning policies. It was intended that the work of the Prevalet project and the www.mutual-learning.eu website would be a contribution in this direction.

What can, however, be achieved with some benefit is the collection and comparison of the data that do exist, and of the standards relating to the performances of groups of policies (what are known as the Lisbon benchmarks). These procedures will reveal the educative conditions of the population more than the effectiveness of the individual measures adopted. In some cases this includes available data relating to the populations of the different regional territories which are therefore useful in providing a basic general idea of the educative conditions of the populations and the training systems involved. We shall then proceed to provide an example of the use made in the Prevalet research of the Eurostat sources relating to two European benchmarks and to the following Regions: Andalusia (Spain), Vojvodina (Serbia), Tuscany (Italy), Västra Götaland (Sweden), Wales (The United Kingdom), the Basque Country (Spain).

1.3 Data available in Eurostat about Regions Nuts Level 2

a. Definitions

The two benchmarks selected are the following:

Lifelong learning. The percentage of the population aged 25–64 in education or training. Lifelong learning refers to persons aged 25 to 64 who stated that they received education or training in the four weeks preceding the survey (numerator). The denominator consists of the total population of the same age group, excluding those who did not answer to the question 'participation in education and training'.

Early school-leavers. The percentage of the population aged 18–24 with, at most, lower secondary education and not in further education or training.

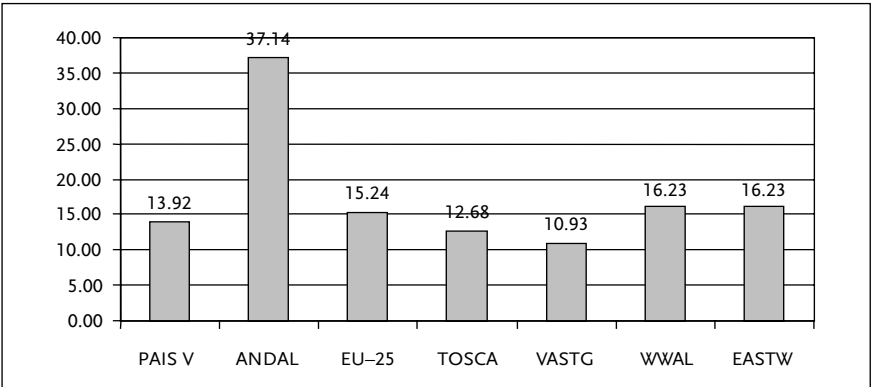
Dropout (Data to be collected with specific surveys).

- Percentage of students 14–16 years old enrolled in ISCED 2 not attending classes, without a justified reason, for one month or more and not having had a transferred file to another district.
- Percentage of students 17–19 years old attending no training or educational activity.

b. Early school-leavers: rate and evolution

The data shown in Box 2 show comparative aspects of the educative conditions of a specific stratum of the population of each of the six Regions concerned. The usefulness of this type of comparison is considerable, although the data represent the outcome of the policies implemented over preceding decades.

Box 2 – Early School-Leavers Rate Total 2005



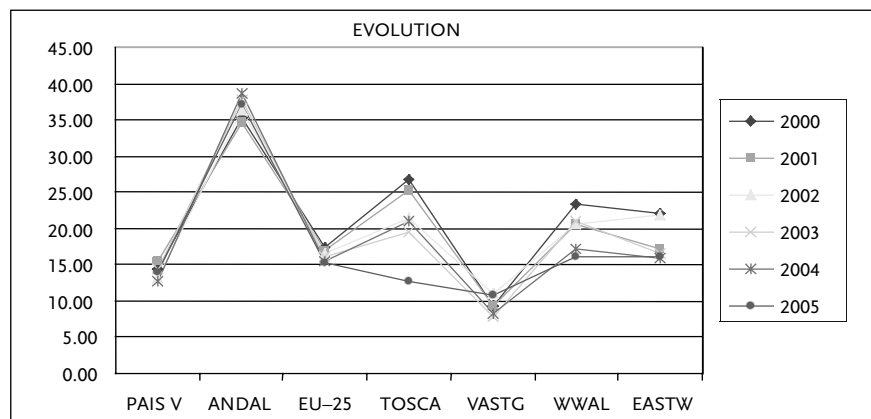
Explanation:

PAIS V: BASQUE COUNTRY (E)
 ANDAL: ANDALUSIA (E)
 EU-25: EUROPEAN UNION, 25 MEMBERS

TOSCA: TOSCANA (I)
 VASTG: VÄSTRA GÖTALAND (S)
 WWAL: WEST WALES (UK)
 EASTW: EAST WALES (UK)

The data shown in Box 3 show elements that can be used to assess the effect of the policies adopted during the course of the period in question. For the purposes of assessing the effects of policies, this type of data is more interesting, even though the results may depend on the aggregation of more political measures and on macroeconomic factors.

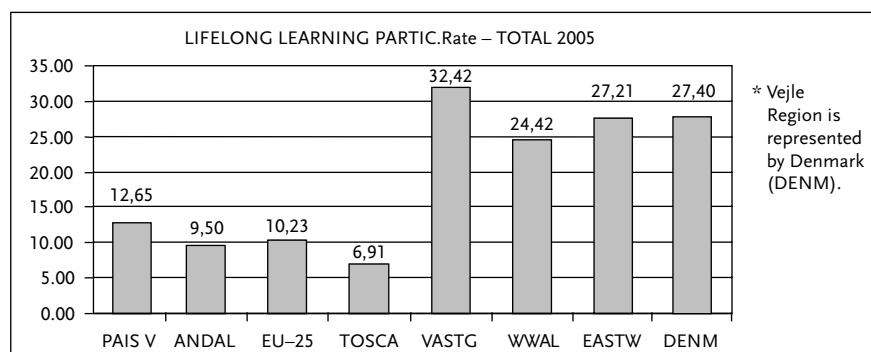
Box 3 – Early School-Leavers Rate Total Evolution



c. Lifelong learning participation: rates and evolution

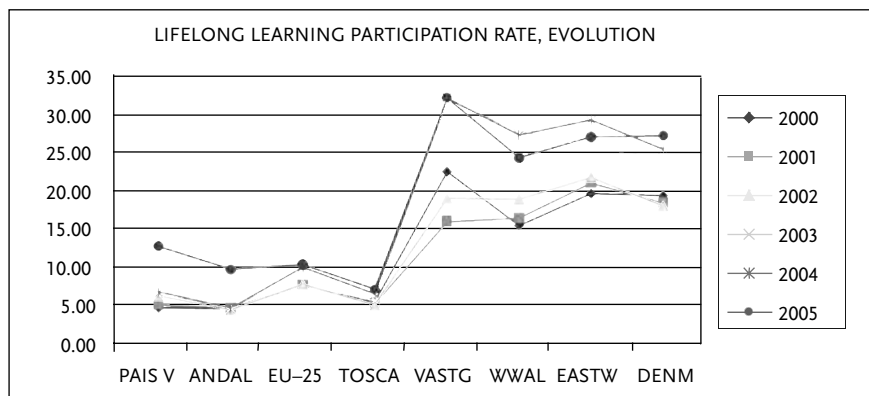
The data shown in Box 4 show comparative aspects of the educative conditions of a specific stratum of the populations of each of the six Regions in question. The usefulness of this type of comparison is considerable, although the data represent the outcome of the policies implemented over preceding decades.

Box 4



The data shown in Box 5 show elements that can be used to assess the effect of the policies adopted during the course of the period in question. For the purposes of assessing the effects of policies this type of data is more interesting, even though the results may depend on the aggregation of more political measures and on macroeconomic factors.

Box 5



Note: *Break in series 2003 VASTG, Wales, Denmark, 2004 Toscana, 2005 Basque, Andalusia due to methodological reasons.

References

- Arrowsmith, J., Sisson, K. and Marginson, P.** (2004), *What can 'benchmarking' offer the open method of co-ordination?*, *Journal of European Public Policy* 11:2 April 2004: 311-328
- European Commission** (2007), *Growing Regions, growing Europe – Fourth report on economic and social cohesion*, Luxembourg, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities
- Federighi, P., Abreu, C., Nuissl, E.** (2007), *Learning among Regional Governments. Quality of Policy Learning and Policy Transfer in Regional Lifelong Learning Policies*, Bonn, W. Bertelsmann Verlag
- Koellreuter, C.** (2002), *Regional Benchmarking and Policymaking*, BAK Basel Economics, adapted and further developed version of the paper entitled "Regional Benchmarking: A tool to improve regional foresight", presented by the author to the European Commission's STRATA-ETAN Expert Group "Mobilising regional foresight potential for an enlarged EU", of which he was a member, on 15 April and 23/24 September 2002 in Brussels

- Owen, J.** (2002), *Benchmarking for the learning and skill sector*, London, Learning and Skills Development Agency
- Page, Edward C.** (2000), *Future Governance and the Literature on Policy Transfer and Lesson Drawing*, ESRC Future Governance Programme Workshop on Policy Transfer, 28 January 2000, Britannia House, London