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***Building with LEGO™:
The European Union Modernises
Social Policy***

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puzzle

- EU is taking up the LEGO™ paradigm, later than elsewhere but nonetheless it is occurring.
- That is, there is a process of Europeanisation.
- But what kind of Europeanisation ...?
 - up-loading?
 - internal process, related to policy communities and policy entrepreneurs?
 - new balance of political forces inside the Commission and other institutions?



Structure of argument

- This is a process of Europeanisation, albeit one that does not follow the classic “top-down” definition.
- Question: how are practices promoting the objectives, instruments and settings of the LEGO™ paradigm being taken up in European institutions?
- Available accounts unconvincing:
 - Social learning, as resolution of anomalies and search for what works
 - Pluralist pressure politics
 - Up-loading from one or several member states – best practices or imposition
 - If the focus is only on “ideas,” up-loading seems quite convincing. But “ideas” are not an explanation.
- Need to identify the mechanisms of take-up
- Claim: there are multiple mechanisms.



Presentation in three parts



- I. What is the LEGO™ paradigm?
- II. Despite a late start, LEGO™ is being taken up within the institutions of the EU.
- III. How to account for this? What are the mechanisms?



I. LEGO™ as a paradigm

Reminder: what is a paradigm?

- iii Objectives
- ii Instruments
- i Settings

Change in all three constitutes “paradigm change”

For Hall, 1993, the order is I, II, III – therefore when III changes, so too does the paradigm



The LEGO™ paradigm

Objectives of social policy:

Addressing “new social risks” – child poverty, care gaps, low-income, working poor – and breaking intergenerational transmission.

Ensuring sustainability of existing programmes, such as pensions via redesign but also in the face of demographic ageing.

Fostering social cohesion.

Instruments:

Spending and various incentives to:

- raise levels of human capital
- increase the employment rate
- create greater capacity for flexibility and life-long learning
- support “family projects”
- increase social inclusion



LEGO™ summarised

“Children are our role models. Children are curious, creative and imaginative. ... Lifelong creativity, imagination and learning are stimulated by playful activities that encourage “hands-on and minds-on” creation, fun, togetherness and the sharing of ideas. People who are curious, creative and imaginative, i.e. people who have a childlike urge to explore and learn, are best equipped to thrive in a challenging world and be the builders of our common future.”



Three principles

1 – security depends on learning

2 – orientation to the future

3 – we all benefit from those who play with LEGO™

- investments in human capital – especially in early childhood
- time horizon is the future; the present is preparing the future.
- benefits are more than to individuals; also to society



The LEGO™ paradigm

- Key terms of the paradigm:
Investment, and investing in the future
(rather than spending and protection in the here-and now)
- Key targets:
Children, women, and workers
(rather than “workers and their families”)

Caveats:

- (1) “everything is not new.” It is the re-framing and shift in objectives and instruments, with consequent shifts in policy interventions, that count.**
- (2) everything “old” has not disappeared**
- (3) everything is not “good.”**



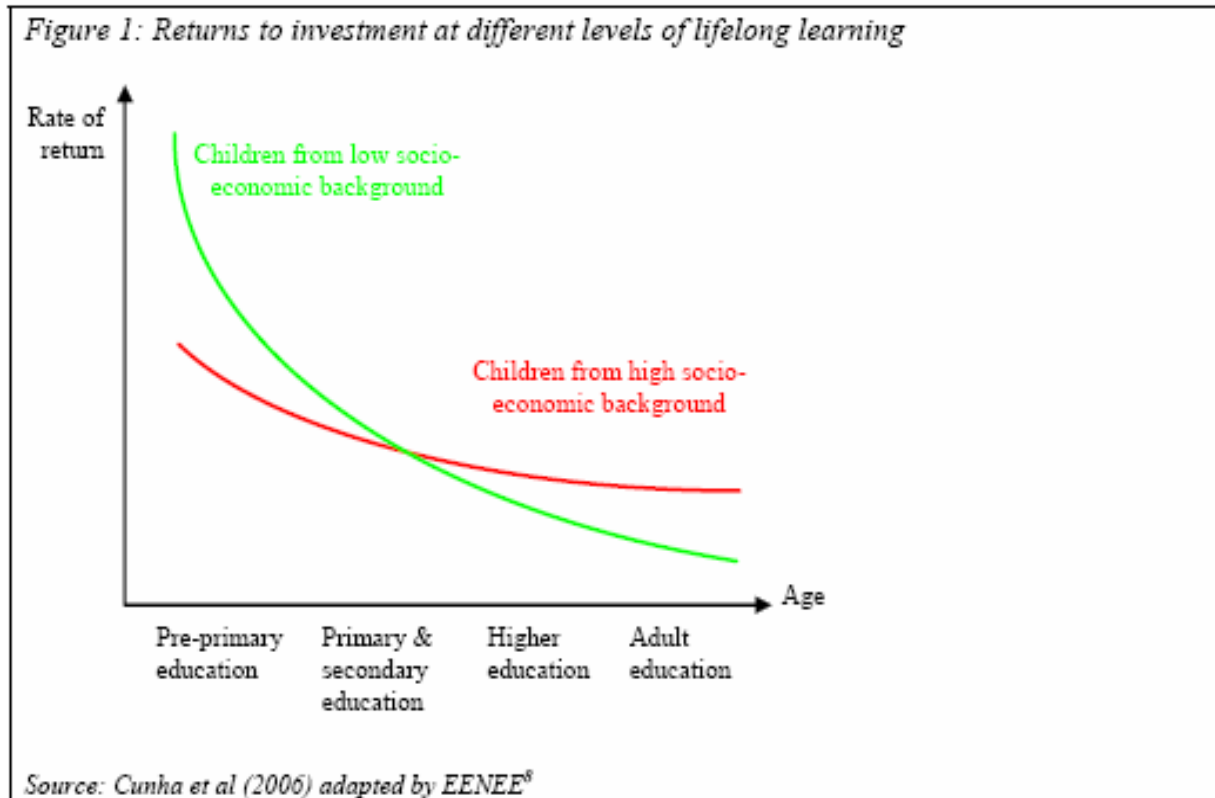
II. Europeanisation – the EU takes up LEGO™

1 – Security depends on learning

- “life-long education” a long-time focus (1993; 1997)
- clearly present in Lisbon 2000, with the instruments being training for activation and flexibility.
- Then principles and instruments begin to change:
 - By the time of Kok Report, instruments to encourage investing in human capital were promoted
 - The mid-term *Integrated Indicators for Growth and Jobs* added “improving investment in human capital”
 - By 2006, “life-long learning is extended significantly back in time: “pre-primary education has the highest rates of return of the whole lifelong learning continuum, especially for the most disadvantaged, and the results of this investment build up over time.”
- Proposal to concentrate spending on life-long learning in early years



Source: *Equity and efficiency in European training systems.*
COM (2006) 481 Final.



2. Orientation to the future

- Major contrast to the logic of principles and instruments of social protection
- Logic of investment and returns:
 - Returns are in the future – invest now for payoffs later.
 - Risks now may mortgage future returns
 - child poverty is a risk
 - human capital is an investment
- Examples: the reconfiguration of social inclusion indicators and their “use” for “children mainstreaming” – Atkinson, et al., Final Report to Luxembourg Presidency, 2005
- BEPA: “Early investments are crucial for all aspects of human capital formation. ... Investing early in youth education and care is much more efficient than repairing later ...” —*Investing in Youth*, October 2005
- ECEC pays off most in the future – for individuals and for society



3. We all benefit from those who play with LEGO™

Investing in ECEC “benefits us all”:

- “... experience shows that Member States having comprehensive policies to reconcile work and family life for both men and women show higher fertility rates as well as higher labour market participation of women.” *Communication on equality between women and men 2005.* COM(2005) 44 Final.



III. How to account for this?

What are the mechanisms?

Mechanisms are “nuts and bolts” of social processes

What’s the puzzle?

- Why now, despite sharing (even innovating) in diagnostic of new social risks, ageing society, etc.
- Can the change in instruments be more important than altered objectives?

Answers available to the puzzle?

- Pressure and pluralism
- Windows of opportunity
- Changes in ideas – social learning, best practices, etc.
- Commission shifts to right and LEGO™ is a right-wing policy.

Why not just call it “up-loading” from Britain?

Because - 1 and 2 significantly advanced by Belgian Presidency in 2001.

Because lots of attention to the Nordics



Suggest three

1. Growth of epistemic communities – policy wonks with a mission

examples: two different communities: investing in children and human capital, composed of economists and sociologists in universities, international organisations, think tanks, etc.

- Increasingly promoting LEGO-type analyses and instruments.
- Result is the naturalisation of new ways of identifying problems, setting objectives and designing instruments.
- Direct access to EU institutions (Presidency, President, Commission) as well as operating in its ambit and in “close” IOs.
- Contributions are: investment, human capital, children/work/family.
- Model is “Nordic,” not New Labour



2. Policy entrepreneurship

- Goal is to advance a research agenda, method and set of techniques.
Example: development of indicators for social inclusion within OMC process – proposal in 2005 report for “children mainstreaming”
- Location is social inclusion OMC
- Less “ambitious” than an epistemic community / less “big picture”
- Process of interaction with the emergence of coalition-building around instruments: one in which experts within policy communities are invited to address policy makers (in writing and at conferences), they seize opportunities for their research agenda, are heard and encouraged to continue, justify their work by appealing to policy makers’ in their own words, thereby magnifying the resonance, and so on.
- Model is “British” but not New Labour, and includes the French CERC and so on.



3. Political consensus-building

- Barroso Commission – selection of liberal President and Commission, over the candidates of France and Germany, more representative of “European social model”
- Centre-right Commission, but still the Commission
 - President forced to “adjust” to the realities of the balance of political forces
 - “Une Europe des projets”
 - Must “go social,” but won’t “go back” ► “stocktaking exercise” looking for new ideas, new models...
 - Can perhaps build a consensus around liberal / Nordic pole because the Bismarkian models are “seen to have” failed and represent a minority model in EU 27. The countries of the CEEC align overwhelmingly with the “southern” and liberal regimes.



sources

- Jane Jenson, “Europeanisation of a child-centred social investment perspective. Is the European Union starting to play with LEGO™?” Prepared for Seminar organised by Belgian Social Security, 8-9 February 2007, Brussels.
<http://www.ose.be/seminar080207/>
- Jane Jenson and Denis Saint-Martin, “Building blocks for a new social architecture: the LEGO™ paradigm of an active society.” *Policy & Politics*, 34: 3, 2006, 429-51.

