MAPPING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF POLICY FOR INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

(benchmarking in general)

If I talk about benchmarking I always start by giving this quote:

If we cannot measure it, we cannot (im)prove it.

Since a few years, strategic initiatives such as benchmarking are on the rise, providing policy-makers with valuable information that can help them introduce, change and improve the effectiveness of their policies. The added-value of benchmarking in education is recognized more and more within the European Union, other international organisations and across Member States. But, benchmarking is also a very sensitive exercice, because a lot of arguments in favour of investments in benchmarking have also a counterargument. *(example: benchmarks make things visible, sometimes strengths, sometimes weaknesses).*

(birth of benchmarking)

Why did we decide upon benchmarks in education and training from early years 2000?

➔ First of all, because education and training were more and more considered as important policy fields where efficient and effective policies were needed. *(e.g. greater concern now with student achievement outcomes than before).*

➔ Secondly, because there was a growing awareness of interdepence of policy fields and linking education to other policy areas such as the labour market, social and economic areas and health issues.

➔ Third, countries started being convinced of the fact that they mainly struggle with the same problems in education and can gain time by <u>learning from each other</u> and sharing experiences.

➔ Finally, benchmarks defined at international level remain indicative and in that way are in accordance with the subsidiarity principle. They fit well in a context of <u>open method of coordination,</u> because they are –let's say <u>"non compulsary" goals</u>.

(Objective)

The overarching objective of using benchmarks is to **improve and measure improvement.** Defining certain benchmarks isn't without consequences because it's a way of putting a topic high on the political agenda. Therefore, it is probably an illusion to think that a completely rational and knowledge-oriented method of policy-making is possible.

(Europa)

I can illustrate that by giving you the European example. I will go back in history some ten years. EU education and training policies have gained impetus since the adoption of the Lisbon Strategy in 2000, the EU's overarching programme focusing on growth and jobs. In the detailed work programme on the objectives for education and training systems (called E&T 2010 programme), the European Commission proposed 5 benchmarks applicable to education and training systems in areas which were central to the achievements of the strategic goal set by the Lisbon Strategy of making Europe "the most competitive and dynamic knowledge –based society in the World" by 2010.[1]

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[1] (1<u>) Early school leavers less than 10%,</u> (2) half the level of gender imbalance in maths, sciences and technology, (3) upper secondary completion of 80% in the group of 25-64 old, (4) low-achievers 15 year old in reading maths and sciences halved, (5<u>) participation of adults in LLL at least 15%</u>

In fact, the Lisbon strategy was first called "for growth, jobs and social cohesion". Flanders always regretted the fact that the social cohesion part was more or less dropped. That is also the reason why only 1 of the 5 benchmarks relates to equity and the social dimension of education (early school leavers).

Back in 2000- 2005, countries were quite reluctant about European benchmarks and there were some valid reasons for that:
- education is a national competence
- contexts and definitions differ
- cultural differences in the way of handling the fact that things become visible
- inevitably, by defining common objectives, countries feel very much in a position of competition and "peer pressure"

So, benchmarking is more than simply selecting the right set of numbers and watching them change over time. It includes intensive data collection, monitoring and evaluation.

Where do we stand today?

Well, we are now in the starting phase of the 2 successors of the Lisbon Strategy on the one hand and E&T 2010 on the other. There are two main differences in the way they were established now compared to ten years ago:
- the strategic framework for education and training (ET 2020) was published even before the overall EU 2020 Strategy
- in the EU 2020 Strategy, 2 benchmarks for education are included

Five benchmarks were proposed by the EC, building on the existing ones. 2 of them were taken up in the EU 2020 Strategy (early school

leavers ; tertiary education). It shows the growing importance of education and training which is a good thing. Some benchmarks are still in a consultation phase (e.g. mobility, employability).

The social dimension is clearly defined in strategic objective 3 of the ET 2020: promoting equity, social cohesion and active citizenship. The MS asked the EC to develop cooperation on learners with special needs. A positive point about the current strategy is that it should be more dynamic and responsive to the needs in society. Every 2 years, priorities will be revised.

During the BE PCY we strongly focused on the social dimension of education (including special needs) and also put a lot of stress on the equity issue within the mobility topic. We hope to have contributed to put the topic on the political agenda and smooth the path for further developments in the field of Special Needs Education. I strongly invite you to take a look at the presidency website on www.education2010.be to find out the conclusions of the conference.

Thank you for your attention.