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Forming a supranational boundary-spanning policy regime – European intersectoral coordination in education and employment

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ABSTRACT

While European governance of individual policy sectors has received considerable academic scrutiny, less attention has been paid to the development of intersectoral coordination. This paper charts the emergence of a supranational boundary-spanning policy regime (BSPR) in education and employment in Europe. By looking at issues, ideas, interests and institutions, we gain a deeper understanding of the conditions for the emergence and further institutionalisation of European intersectoral coordination in education and employment from the 1990s onwards. The study relies on semi-structured interviews with European policy-makers in education and employment and EU policy documents. We analyse how endogenous and exogenous factors frame (policy) issues that contribute to the emergence and further strengthening of intersectoral coordination, the extent to which *ideas* for European education and employment stress intersectoral policy designs, how *interests* support or hinder intersectoral work, and which *institutions* are developed with an intersectoral reasoning. We find that endogenous forces (rather than exogenous ones) played a significant role in the emergence of a European BSPR in education and employment. Structural aspects and policy instruments (*institutions*), alongside *ideas* and *interests*, then contribute to the institutionalisation of the European BSPR in education and employment.

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1. Introduction

National governmental structures have traditionally been organised to respond to policy problems within a specific policy sector. This approach has limitations when it comes to policy problems that cut across sectors and might also lead to policy failures. Therefore, intersectoral coordination between policy fields has received increasing attention by policy practitioners and scholarship. Government-centred approaches – such as policy coherence (May, Sapotichne, and Workman 2006), holistic government (Wilkinson and Appelbee 1999), joined-up government (Pollitt 2003) – or governance-centred approaches – e.g. horizontal governance (Termeer 2009), policy integration (Candel and Biesbroek 2016) or boundary-spanning policy regimes (Jochim and May 2010) – are concepts that help to understand not only how to create effective policies that cut across sectors but also intersectoral dynamics (Tosun and Lang 2017).

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While these concepts are used to analyse intersectoral national developments, less attention has been paid to supranational and intergovernmental contexts, such as the European Union (EU) and, more specifically, the European Commission (EC). Moreover, academic literature has suffered from the same problem often attributed to governmental structures, i.e. it often focuses either on a single policy initiative or it analyses policy developments within a sector without paying attention to potential intersectoral dynamics. To address this existing research gap, this paper seeks to significantly advance our comprehension of intersectoral policy coordination within the realm of European education and employment. By analysing various dimensions, the objective is to identify the pivotal factors that decisively contribute to the achievement of intersectoral policy coordination. Through this exploration, the paper aspires to offer insights to policy-makers, equipping them with informed guidance on the essential aspects that merit careful consideration in the formulation and execution of effective intersectoral policies. Our analysis is guided by the following question: *how has European intersectoral coordination in education and employment emerged and been institutionalized?* To answer this research question, we apply Jochim and May's 2010 governance-centred concept of 'boundary-spanning policy regime' (BSPR) and adopt their suggested analytical lens of *issues*, *ideas*, *interests*, and *institutions* – the 'i'-framework. Without ignoring relevant previous developments of European integration since the 1950s, we start our analysis in the 1990s, the time when the BSPR has started to emerge following the inclusion of education and employment in EU treaties and trace its evolvement until today.

The following section presents the literature on European education and employment policies and shows how it has privileged a single-sector analysis. Subsequently, we define the concept of BSPR (Jochim and May 2010), initially developed to analyse intersectoral dynamics at the national level. We aim to contribute to the literature by adapting the concept and applying the proposed analytical categories of *issues*, *ideas*, *interests* and *institutions* to supranational boundary-spanning policy dynamics in education and employment. Next, we introduce the research design and methodology comprising a qualitative thematic analysis of 10 semi-structured interviews conducted with EC officials, triangulated with relevant EU policy documents.

Our empirical analysis finds that endogenous factors played a significant role in the emergence of a European BSPR of education and employment. This extends the conceptual framework, which – focussed on national contexts – argues that exogenous factors, more than endogenous ones, tend to frame (policy) *issues* and trigger the emergence of BSPRs. In line with the conceptual framework, we find that the European BSPR of education and employment exhibits intersectoral dynamics where single policy sectors and organisational constraints now coexist with the gradual institutionalisation of intersectoral coordination between the policy fields. Finally, we discuss the implication of these results both with regard to the theoretical innovation to study *supranational* intersectoral coordination and to the specific case of European governance of education and employment.

2. Literature review

On the one hand, some literature on European governance of education has studied the EU's impact by looking at the establishment of the European Education Area (Dale and Robertson 2009; Lawn and Grek 2012; Normand and Derouet 2017) or at specific sub-sectors of educational systems such as the European Higher Education and Research Areas (Beerkens 2008; Kehm, Huisman, and Stensaker 2009; Marques 2023; Zapp, Marques, and Powell 2018) or the European model of skill formation (Graf and Marques 2023; Powell, Bernhard, and Graf 2012). Others have analysed specific EU policy initiatives in education and training and their effects on socioeconomic policies in the EU member states (Milana, Klatt, and Vatrella 2020; Pastore 2015; Vatrella and Milana 2019) or their interplay with the EU's economic goals, e.g. the promotion of dual-training systems (Antunes 2016; Šćepanović and Martín Artiles 2020).

On the other hand, some of the literature on European governance of employment has explored the evolution of the European Employment Strategy since 1997 (Goetschy 1999; Jacobsson 2004).

A range of related scholarly literature exists on soft coordination and new, experimentalist modes of governance in this policy field (Borrás and Jacobsson 2004; De la Porte and Pochet 2012; Heidenreich and Zeitlin 2009; Kahn-Nisser 2015; López-Santana 2006). Scholars, for instance, highlight a shift towards active labour market policies (Bonoli 2010) or entrenched policy positions and member-state interests (Armingeon 2007; Büchs 2008; Zeitlin 2005). Particular attention has been given to the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), which has also been studied regarding the effect on employment as well as education policy (Gornitzka 2006) and of which the European Employment Strategy has been coined a 'flagship' (De la Porte and Pochet 2004, 2012).

Studies spanning education and employment have mainly looked at single policy initiatives such as the ET (Education and Training) 2010 strategy (Marques 2014), ET 2020 (Klatt and Milana 2020), the Erasmus+ programme (Marques et al. 2022; Fumasoli and Rossi 2021) or the Youth Guarantee (Dingeldey, Steinberg, and Assmann 2019). Here, studies on the policy issue of high youth unemployment (e.g. O'Reilly et al. 2015) and policy responses such as a focus on 'employability' (Lahusen, Schulz, and Graziano 2013) have made the link between employment and education policy particularly apparent, as have studies on cross-sectoral policy challenges stemming from the rise of the knowledge-based economy (Jessop, Fairclough, and Wodak 2008; Sum and Jessop 2013). This reflects a more general growing tendency of social policy-oriented studies to consider the nexus between education and employment (for instance, regarding active labour market policies) (e.g. Zeitlin and Vanhercke 2018 on the European Semester; Anderson 2015). However, overall, limited attention has been paid to the development of intersectoral coordination of education and employment and to the role of the EC in this endeavour. Our paper tries to overcome a single-sector approach by aiming to understand the dynamics of European governance of education and employment in the last decades.

3. Theory: supranational boundary-spanning policy regimes

While policy integration and coordination have attracted extensive attention from policy scholars in the last decades (e.g. Candel and Biesbroek 2016; Jochim and May 2010; May and Jochim 2013; Trein, Meyer, and Maggetti 2019), the main developments can be found in the study of national contexts and the challenges faced by national-level policy-makers in attempting to design, implement, and evaluate policies that cut across sectors. With the exception of European integration theories, where notably neofunctionalism has alerted to policy spillovers (see Hooghe and Marks 2019), less attention has been paid to how supranational structures, such as the EU and, among its actors, the EC, have been developing intersectoral coordination within its institutional architecture. This is interesting given the growing influence – a competence creep (Pollack 1994) – of the EU in education and employment. Addressing this research gap, we employ the concept of BSPR (Jochim and May 2010) to grasp how supranational policy integration and coordination has evolved across the sectors of education and employment (see the introduction to the Special Issue, Graf et al. 2023, for a discussion of BSPR as a pertinent theoretical resource to analyse the complexity of European intersectoral policy coordination in education and employment).

BSPR can be defined 'as a governing arrangement that spans multiple subsystems and fosters integrative policies' (Jochim and May 2010, 304). It promotes integrative action across policy fields (sectors or subsystems) by placing pressure on actors that are relevant to a 'messy' policy *issue*. Thus, with Jochim and May (2010), we can argue that *issues* typically represent the starting point for the emergence of a BSPR. Next to accounting for *issues*, Jochim and May (2010) draw on long-standing traditions in political and social science research (Hall 1997; Hay 2004; Lieberman 2002; Palier and Surel 2005; Patay et al. 2022) to distinguish between *ideas*, *interests*, and *institutions* to analyse intersectoral coordination. Through this 'i'-framework, they show that each of these elements can exert pressure to achieve policy cohesion and can be mobilised to achieve coordinated activity, which, in turn, determines the development and strength of a BSPR (see the introduction to the Special Issue, Graf et al. 2023, for an extended discussion). While Jochim and May (2010) already

provide the analytical 'i'-framework, we go a step further by integrating additional insights from public policy analysis, especially in how to treat *issues* (e.g. the role of endogenous forces in supranational contexts) and *ideas* (e.g. differentiation of deep core and policy core ideas) to further enhance our understanding and operationalisation of these concepts, as elaborated below.

As mentioned, Jochim and May (2010) attribute the emergence of BSPR to policy *issues*, especially those that are exogenous to the policy process, that act as both an attention-focusing mechanism and an integrative force. Examples of exogenous forces are disruptions, problems, or crises that can shift the attention to a specific issue that calls for intersectoral responses. Beyond the BSPR concept, the role of external crises for policy processes – as in the case of financial disruptions, pandemics, or mass migration – in influencing European governance is well established in the literature as they shape political purposes and visions of policy directions by generating framing contests (Boin et al. 2009). Crises can foster or hinder policy learning (Kamkhaji and Radaelli 2016; Ladi and Tsarouhas 2020) or serve as an anticipation policy-making mechanism (Rhinard 2019). For instance, scholars argue that the European financial crisis of 2008 has played a role in pushing integration as a solution (Ioannou, Leblond, and Niemann 2015; Jones, Kelemen, and Meunier 2016; Seabrooke and Tsingou 2018). In the case of BSPR, while crises can trigger the emergence of a policy regime, endogenous forces (internal to the policy process) can also play a key role, a phenomenon that is often overlooked in the literature (Boucher 2016; May, Jochim, and Sapotichne 2011).

Endogenous factors in the case of the European Commission's intersectoral coordination could be, for instance, coalition-driven dynamics or transformations of the Commission's cabinet system (Bauer, Kassim, and Connolly 2021). As supranational governance contexts are typically composed of a multiplicity of different actors and characterised by an increased complexity of policy issues, we argue that endogenous forces are paramount when it comes to supranational BSPR emergence. At the EU level, this can, for instance, be observed in the incremental widening and deepening of European integration within member states (Kelemen, Menon, and Slapin 2014) and across supranational and intergovernmental institutions that need to be balanced (Risse 2006). Another example of the role of endogenous forces is how policy initiatives, as found in various text formats (principles, guidelines, summaries, etc.), build up 'small-scale institutional structures' (Lange and Alexiadou 2010) that facilitate and advance EU governance in policy fields.

While policy *issues* are attributed to the emergence of BSPR, Jochim and May (2010) argue that *ideas*, *interests,* and *institutions* play a key role in contributing to the BSPR's development and institutionalisation since they bind the elements of a regime together. *Ideas* involve key players, animate the direction of policy-making, and serve as the organising principle for integrating policy action across sectors (Jochim and May 2010). Beyond the BSPR concept, social science scholarship has explored the role of ideas in policy-making (Béland 2009; Campbell 1998, 2004; Kamkhaji and Radaelli 2021; Schmidt 2008). Studies show that ideas have the capacity to influence policy outcomes via the construction of political coalitions (Béland and Cox 2016) or advocacy coalitions according to their belief systems (Leifeld et al. 2021; Sabatier 1998). They can be understood as paradigms, frames of reference, or belief systems (Hall 1993). Expanding the original BSPR concept, our analysis also acknowledges that ideas can be divided into a *deep core ideas* – fundamental values and a *policy core ideas* – diagnoses and prescriptions relating to a particular area of state intervention (Sabatier 1988). Here, tensions between involved policy sectors could arise: they can apply to deep core ideas, policy core ideas, or both, since ideas are intrinsically connected with a particular policy field.

Next to the question of ideas, consensus or conflict related to *interests* is significant for the institutionalisation of BSPR: interests need to – at least partially – align across sectors for policy coordination (see in this Special Issue, Cino Pagliarello in press). In EU governance, interests have been extensively studied, for instance, in how European collective interests create or hinder opportunities for joint policies (Pollack 1994), or how interests of member states shape EU policies (Moravcsik 1991). A more recent strand of literature focuses on the role of interest groups in shaping European policy (Daviter 2007; Klüver 2012; Saurugger 2008). Another entry point is how interest groups attempt to influence policy-making via venue shopping – targeting multiple venues to

Table 1. Operationalisation of the 'i'-framework according to phases of BSPR.

Phase in BSPR development	Key 'i''(s)
Emergence, starting in 1990s	Issues (exogenous forces external to the policy process and endogenous forces internal to it)
Institutionalisation, after 2000	Ideas (deep core ideas and policy ideas)
	Interests
	Institutions

pursue their goals (Pakull, Marshall, and Bernhagen 2020). However, less attention has been paid to how the realignment of interests can contribute to intersectoral policy coordination and the development of BSPR.

Finally, *institutions* – rules, norms, policy instruments[1] – appear as a potential integrative force across policy sectors. Institutional structures can provide equilibrium and stability for the BSPR, as they have the potential to channel authority, attention, information flows, and relationships that support intersectoral policy coordination (Jochim and May 2010). Moreover, policy instruments that focus on policy coordination, such as the OMC (Tholoniat 2010; Zeitlin 2011), or the European Semester (Alcidi and Gros 2017), are noteworthy examples of how institutional arrangements play a key role in fostering both equilibrium and stability in the policy-making process (see Graf et al. 2023). In the fields of education and employment, the European Qualifications Framework (Bohlinger 2019; Elken 2015), and various policies in European higher education governance (Chou et al. 2017), are examples of policy instruments that strive for intersectoral policy coordination across sectors. Finally, EU institutions play a fundamental role in serving as potential integrative forces across policy sectors, as in the case of the Commission's Directorates-General.

In applying the i-framework to the analysis of a supranational BSPR, we divide our analysis in two phases – emergence and institutionalisation (see Table 1).

In the first part of the analysis, we chart the emergence of the European BSPR in education and employment by looking at the role of *issues*. While Jochim and May (2010) place greater emphasis on exogenous factors, such as crises, we consider both exogenous and endogenous factors to explain the BSPR's emergence. We then study the institutionalisation of the European BSPR of education and employment by analysing to what extent *ideas*, *interests* and *institutions* are binding elements of the BSPR of education and employment. As indicated before, we also consider the interrelation of those categories (*issues*, *ideas*, *interests* and *institutions*) in contributing to support both the emergence and institutionalisation of the European BSPR in education and employment.

5. Methods and data

To study the evolution of a supranational BPSR, we have selected the case of intersectoral policy coordination in education and employment at the EU level, focusing on the EC and the work carried out by the EC's Directorates-General for the sectors of education and employment. The EC appears as a suitable research focus because it is perceived as an agenda-setter and a 'norm entrepreneur' (De la Porte and Pochet 2004) with an orchestrator role (see Abbott et al. 2016) in European-level governance. In addition, considering the increased complexity of policy issues in the supranational context (Martens, Rusconi, and Leuze 2007), the EC's governance architecture lends itself to the study of BSPR. The EC's governance in education and employment was intensively developed since the 1990s. The BSPR concept is particularly relevant here, as the policy discourse arguably started to shift to a more holistic understanding of education and employment as interconnected spheres, illustrated by the emerging discourses around lifelong learning, flexicurity or active labour market policies in Europe (Emmenegger et al. 2012).

We thus look at a most-likely case (Gerring 2012) of BSPR – despite the distinct EU's competence capacity in education (supporting competence) and employment (shared competence) (see Results section) – to test the conceptual framework and gain a deeper understanding of the different categories of the 'i'-framework in a supranational setting. We trace the process of how a European

BSPR of education and employment has evolved and look at *issues*, *ideas*, *interests,* and *institutions* as core analytical dimensions. The analysis focuses on developments from the 1990s onwards, covering the emergence as well as the gradual institutionalisation of the BSPR from the 2000s up to today. However, relevant previous developments are also touched upon to provide a rounder picture of European intersectoral coordination in education and employment.

To this end, our analysis relies on 10 semi-structured expert interviews (Littig 2009) with EU policy-makers, conducted in late 2021 and early 2022.[2] These comprised high and mid-ranked officials from the EC's Directorates-General Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL) and Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC), the Commission's Secretariat-General as well as two former high-ranked Commission officials (see Appendix 1). We executed our interviewee selection based on the seniority of officials working at the European Commission (EC) and their extensive experience in both education and employment in last three decades. This deliberate approach was employed to ensure that the interviews effectively capture the evolutionary path of intersectoral policy coordination between education and employment since the 1990s. Interviews have been anonymised (with numbers according to their chronological order), transcribed, and analysed with MAXQDA. In total, 223 items around the analytical categories of *issues*, *ideas*, *interests* and *institutions* were coded. To triangulate the findings from interviews, we have also analysed around 17 EU documents on education and employment (retrieved from the EU legal database and the EC websites) (See Appendix 2). Here, our scope was to explore key policy ideas and policy initiatives to get a better understanding of interviewees' accounts of specific policies.

In all, through a qualitative content analysis of interviews, supported by relevant policy documents, we chart the emergence and institutionalisation of the European BSPR in education and training. Thus, our findings can inform future studies on supranational cases of BSPR and on applications of the 'i'-framework to intersectoral coordination.

6. Findings: forming a supranational boundary-spanning policy regime of education and employment

Questions related to employment were very much at the centre of early developments of European integration, with a focus on workers, their free movement and recognition of diplomas in a European common – ultimately single – market (Gornitzka 2006; Murphy 2003). Vocational education and training (VET), already included in the Treaty of Rome in 1957 (articles 118 and 128), was considered to play a fundamental role in this regard (Salajan and Roumell 2021). Other education sectors – with their significance for collective identity – have traditionally been considered a stronghold of the nation-state (Rohde-Liebenau 2020) and only later started to appear in the Commission's portfolio.

The Commission's work on education (excluding VET) began in the early 1970s, firstly with a small team in the Directorate-General for Industry and Technology and, a few years later, with a new division for education within the Directorate-General for Research and Science (Pépin 2006). In 1981, questions of unemployment and the training of young people led to the strategic decision to marry education with the VET portfolio under the authority of the Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs. The education portfolio kept expanding, reflected most prominently in expenditure growth in the Erasmus (now Erasmus+) Programme (European Commission 2019a). In 1989, the Delors Commission established a separate structure, the Task Force on Human Resources, Education, Training and Youth. In 1995, this task force was turned into the Directorate-General for Education, Training and Youth (Pépin 2006). While intersectoral coordination between education and employment, mainly via VET, appears as foundational in the EC's policy work, it is only in the 1990s that we witness the emergence of a BSPR. On the one hand, education and employment were now more explicitly included in EU treaties – education in the Maastricht Treaty (1992) and employment in the Amsterdam Treaty (1997) – and on the other hand, the Lisbon Strategy (2000) was adopted as a European political project with a focus on coordination, which we turn to below.

6.1 The emergence of a European BSPR in education and employment – between exogenous and endogenous forces

In this section, we chart the emergence of the European BSPR of education and employment by looking at which *issues* – either related to endogenous or exogenous conditions – acted as attention-focusing mechanisms and integrative forces. In this context, the emergence of BSPR is often attributed to exogenous factors such as crises or disruptions (Jochim and May 2010) external to the policy process. However, as we show, endogenous factors, internal to the policy process, can also play a significant role in shaping intersectoral policy coordination, as is the case for the European BSPR of education and employment.

We find that the emergence of the European BSPR of education and employment can be understood in the context of the EU's larger aim to become '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', formally inscribed in the Lisbon Strategy launched in 2000 (Lisbon European Council 2000).

The ambition to invest in human capital to create a European knowledge-based economy placed emphasis on questions of education and employment and constituted a 'fertile ground' (INT9) for the strengthening of European governance in both sectors (INT1, INT2, INT4, INT5, INT8, INT9). Notwithstanding, the political project followed significant structural changes in the 1990s that paved the ground for the emergence of a European BSPR in education and employment, namely the inclusion of education in the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 (Article 126) and of employment in the 1997 Amsterdam Treaty (Articles 125–130) (INT2, INT3, INT8). Following these Treaties, the EU started to look at education and employment as European policy sectors in their own right (INT2, INT3, INT6, INT7), with the Bologna Process (1999) as one early significant example of a policy in education (INT1) and the European Employment Strategy (1997) as an early policy initiative in the employment sector (INT2). Here, *institutional* arrangements played a significant role in setting up the necessary governance structures to address *issues*, in this case, the creation of the 'knowledge-based economy' (Lisbon European Council 2000).

The Lisbon Strategy created the conditions for the emergence of a BSPR by laying down objectives to be achieved by the two policy sectors and the instrument to monitor their progress (INT1, INT4, INT6). Regarding the explicit objectives to be achieved, adapting skills to the needs of the knowledge economy, and promoting lifelong learning were key for education, whereas increasing the overall employment rate with special attention to female and older workers was key for employment policy (Lisbon European Council 2000). For both sectors, the OMC appeared as a new soft instrument to monitor the progress of member states.

From this point of view, the Lisbon Strategy can be understood as an endogenous *issue* that acted as an attention-focusing mechanism (i.e. European knowledge-based economy) and an integrative force (i.e. implementing soft coordination within the EU) that ultimately framed a set of policy ideas to strengthen intersectoral coordination between education and employment. It is predominantly endogenous, because the establishment of the Lisbon Strategy is intertwined with a desire and an incremental capacity of the European Union to shape education and employment policies (INT1, INT3, INT7).

Rather than triggering the BSPR's emergence per se, the analysis of the interviews has shown that exogenous factors have the capacity to accelerate policy initiatives that entail intersectoral cooperation (INT1, INT3, INT9). Here, exogenous forces include the growth of youth unemployment in the aftermath of the debt crisis of 2008–10, the pressing issues of digitalisation, the move towards a green economy, and the recent COVID-19 pandemic (European Commission 2022). These exogenous factors also fuel the allocation of a substantial amount of funds (INT4, INT7) and push policy-makers to rethink the performance and direction of policies (INT8). Thus, in the case of the European BSPR of education and employment, exogenous forces do not appear, as suggested by the BSPR literature (Jochim

and May 2010; May, Jochim, and Sapotichne 2011) as determinants to explain the emergence of supranational intersectoral coordination. However, they appear as conditions that punctually enhance intersectoral work, showing their importance to the institutionalisation of the European BSPR, which we turn to below.

6.2 Institutionalization of the European BSPR in education and employment – ideas, interests and institutions

According to the BSPR conceptual framework (Jochim and May 2010; May, Jochim, and Sapotichne 2011), *issues* trigger the emergence of BSPR, while *ideas*, *interests,* and *institutions* contribute to its institutionalisation since they have the capacity to bind a regime together. Thus, in this section, we look at the institutionalisation of the European BSPR of education and employment following the Lisbon Strategy developments. We analyse how *ideas*, *interests,* and *institutions* contribute to the BSPR's strength and durability. Here, we bear in mind that exogenous factors also influence the durability of the European BSPR of education and employment because they punctually enhance intersectoral work, as elaborated in the findings on *issues* above.

Ideas animate the direction of policy-making and are paramount in organising and integrating policy action across sectors (Jochim and May 2010). Moving beyond the BSPR framework and as theoretically expected in the broader literature (see Sabatier 1988), our results point to the relevance of differentiating two orders of ideas. First, following Sabatier's 1988 outline of deep core ideas, *ideas* can be deeply embedded within each sector, either by ideological beliefs or by institutionalised ways of doing things. In BSPR, sectors shape problem definitions and policy responses to fit their distinctive way of doing policy-making (Jochim and May 2010). For the European BSPR of education and employment, deep core ideas vary significantly. The main idea for the arguably more education-oriented DG EAC was described in interviews and policy documents as the implementation of policies that contribute to an individual's 'personal fulfilment' and active citizenship (e.g. European Commission 2020a), whereas the arguably more employment-oriented DG EMPL is more oriented towards policies that contribute to 'employability' (e.g. Council of the European Union 2017) and economic development (INT1, INT2, INT3, INT4, INT5, INT6, INT7, INT8, INT9).

While these ideas provide some friction, it is questionable whether the differentiation of sector-specific ideas is still relevant, considering the gradual interdependence of both sectors in the last decade (INT7, INT9). On the one hand, given the long-standing durability of the BSPR, intersectoral policy initiatives analysed recurrently refer to both deep core ideas (Council of Europe 2012; e.g. European Commission 2012d). On the other hand, several interviewed EC policy-makers even argued that both missions appear intrinsically connected (INT3, INT4, INT8). While some interviewees also argued that tensions between the two deep core ideas persist, a likely scenario is that the directorate in charge of the policy initiative prescribes its own vision that might subordinate one logic over the other (INT2, INT5). An example is employability policies that aim to 'make sure that people are immediately employable' (INT1), which diminishes ideas around personal development and enrichment, but does not necessarily disregard them.

The second order of ideas (Sabatier 1988) is concerned with more specific or concrete policy ideas – diagnoses and prescriptions relating to a particular area of state intervention (Sabatier 1988) – for each sector or in our case regarding the coordination between two sectors. Most prominently, mobility has been a keystone idea of European education policy since the 1980s (INT10), reflected in the Erasmus+ Programme as arguably the most famous feature of the EC's portfolio (EC 2019) (INT6). Other ideas can be found in initiatives to promote digital education (INT1), to reduce early school leaving (INT2), or to further early childhood education (INT4), with the latter impacting both children's education and their parents' participation in the job market. More recently, the idea of creating transnational strategic partnerships within educational organisations became more salient as a way to articulate education and employment as in the case of the European Universities Initiative or the Centres for Vocational Excellence

(INT3, INT6, INT10). On the employment side, questions related to flexibility and security (flexicurity) seem to permeate the European employment policy portfolio (INT10), alongside access to the labour market (INT7).

Our analysis shows that instead of opening up rifts between policy sectors, these policy ideas (around mobility, early childhood education, the prevention of early school leaving, and transnational strategic partnerships) and related policy initiatives provide bridges between the education and employment sectors (INT5, INT8).

The most important aspect related to intersectoral policy coordination between education and employment appears connected with the policy idea around skills – upskilling/reskilling –, which has received increasing attention in EU policy-making, especially in the last decade (e.g. European Commission 2012b, 2012c, 2016, 2021; European Union 2014; INT1, INT4, INT5, INT6, INT7). The focus on skills contributed to the intensification and strengthening of intersectoral coordination between education and employment (INT2, INT3, INT8). Related policy initiatives are the EC's skills agendas, most recently, the 2020 'European Skills Agenda' (European Commission 2020b; INT2, INT5, INT7, INT9). Other initiatives that span both the education and employment sectors deal with youth and specifically their access to the labour market (e.g. European Commission 2012a, 2013a, 2013b, 2018). Finally, policy initiatives on the digital transformation and the green economy are also flagged as policy ideas that necessarily entail intersectoral coordination (INT1, INT3). The most recent example brought up in interviews is 'micro-credentials' (certificates for short-term learning experiences), which again embrace both policy sectors via a lifelong learning and employability perspective (INT3, INT5). Thus, despite distinct missions evidenced in the deep core ideas of both sectors that could shape distinctive directions – personal development and active citizenship for education, labour market access for employment – the analysis suggests that policy ideas gradually bridge the missions of both sectors since 'policies get more and more interlinked and interdependent' (INT7).

Interests are another important feature in the institutionalisation of BSPR because they have the capacity for realignment across sectors to support policy coordination (Jochim and May 2010). Here, our analysis shows that administrative leaders (such as Directors and Directors-General of the Commission) as well as political leaders (such as Commissioners) play a critical role in the direction of policies in the EC's context. For example, interviewees argued that personalities within DGs can increase or decrease coordination or a desire to cooperate across sectors because certain 'clusters' ('families' or 'tribes') are formed and might condition the development of intersectoral coordination (INT1, INT2, INT5, INT9, INT10).

Furthermore, each appointment of a new College of Commissioners and an EC President has the potential to trigger a 'turf war' (INT9) on policy portfolios. This can lead to a reshuffling (see also Bauer, Kassim, and Connolly 2021) of competences across Commissioners and directorates, which is based on actors' interests rather than strategic visions for the portfolio (INT1). As the equivalent of national ministers, Commissioners have an interest in furthering their public profile and show that they are developing policy initiatives, which might conflict with the EC College's institutional obligation to work cooperatively (INT8, INT9).

For education and employment, the two portfolios of VET and adult education/lifelong learning were moved from DG EAC to the DG EMPL in 2014, during the Juncker Commission. Interviewees argued that this decision was not neutral (INT1, INT4). Some mentioned underlying political strategies regarding which Commissioner (from which member state and which party) gets a certain post (INT1, INT2, INT4, INT10). Others interpret this move as a way to align the two policy sectors that are particularly close to the labour market (INT3, INT5, INT6). Some interviewees criticised that the reshuffling has split up the education portfolio (INT1, INT2). However, the move is not perceived to have had any major effect on the design and implementation of intersectoral policy initiatives: not only because the EC is seen as 'one and one institution' (INT4) but also because there has always been a substantial degree of staff mobility from one DG to the other that naturally enhances intersectoral work (INT3, INT6, INT8, INT10). Thus, our analysis suggests that political interests exert

a more substantial influence on either supporting or hindering the institutionalisation of the BSPR of education and employment than interests found at the operational level of intersectoral cooperation.

Finally, *institutions* are fundamental to the stability and equilibrium of a BSPR since institutional structures can channel authority, attention, information flows, and relationships that support intersectoral policy coordination (Jochim and May 2010). Here, two interrelated aspects fuel the institutionalisation of the European BSPR of education and employment. The first one concerns institutional rules and norms that establish principles on how to carry out bureaucratic work within the EC, namely the principle of collegiality, the obligation to carry out interservice consultations, and the steering role of the EC Vice Presidents.

The legal principle of collegiality in the EC's decision-making – the principle that Commissioners have collective responsibility for the decisions they adopt – pushes intersectoral coordination or at least increases the exchange across Commission portfolios (INT4, INT9) (European Commission 2019b). Interservice consultations – a duty to request and obtain the formal opinion of other DGs with a legitimate interest in a proposal (European Commission 2019b) – are also flagged in interviews since they ensure that each initial proposal for a policy initiative goes through intersectoral bureaucratic iterations before it is formalised (INT1, INT2, INT5, INT7, INT8). Finally, despite these Commission's working methods, and as already analysed in reference to the clusters formed, there still are perceived silos between DGs that affect intersectoral coordination (INT6, INT8, INT10). This is due to departments developing proposals in isolation and only later seeking advice or opinion of another department (INT6). To break down the 'silo approach', the Juncker Commission created the figure of Vice Presidents in 2014. Today, eight Vice Presidents steer and coordinate the Commission's priorities across sectors (or partly also manage a policy area). They appear as figures to stimulate intersectoral coordination and bring coherence between Commissioners, DGs, and policy areas (INT2, INT4, INT5, INT7, INT8).

The second aspect derived from the interviews concerning the BSPR's institutional structures is rooted in the general set-up of European governance which calls for specific instruments to develop and steer European policies. First, European governance is limited in the case of both sectors – in education, only member states can legislate (with the EU´s supporting competences), while in employment, both member states and the EU can legislate (shared competences). Considering this limited capacity in contrast with EU-exclusive competences (such as single market competition rules or monetary policy for the Eurozone), soft policy instruments to gather and share evidence on member states progress' are paramount. They exist alongside incentive instruments such as the ones dedicated to mobility and strategic partnerships promoted by the Erasmus+ Programme (INT1, INT2, INT10). As mentioned, among the soft policy instruments, the OMC (see e.g. De la Porte and Pochet 2012) and the European Semester (see e.g. Maricut and Puetter 2018) foster mutual learning and intersectoral coordination across countries (INT2, INT3, INT6, INT10). Here, the OMC Working Groups in education (see Gornitzka 2006) are perceived by the interviewees as contributing to the efficiency of EU governance in education (INT1, INT3), but intersectoral work is either punctual (INT10) or restricted to the sector of education without major bridges with the employment sector (INT7). However, overall, the European soft policy instruments support BSPR institutionalisation.

Having presented our empirical findings, we now discuss the interaction of the categories of the 'i'-framework in the emergence and institutionalisation of the European BSPR in education and employment. We also summarise the potential of the BSPR framework to analyse supranational intersectoral arrangements.

7. Discussion

The analysis of the emergence and institutionalisation of the European BSPR in education and employment has facilitated the systematisation of complex European intersectoral coordination across the policy fields. At the same time, the analysis contributed to the advancement of the BSPR framework, especially in the study of supranational intersectoral dynamics.

In our analysis, we found that *issues* – as attention-focusing mechanisms and integrative forces – play a significant role in the emergence of BSPR, also at the European supranational level. While the literature on BSPR (Jochim and May 2010; May, Jochim, and Sapotichne 2011) has placed greater emphasis on *exogenous* forces (disruptions or crises) as key catalysts for the emergence of BSPR, we have found that in our case, *endogenous* factors – building a European knowledge-based economy via the Lisbon Strategy – are essential to the emergence of the European BSPR of education and employment. The significance of endogenous factors to the emergence of (policy) *issues* is connected to the specificities of EU integration: necessary institutional conditions for the BSPR's emergence are created in the context of a generally growing EU-level influence in education and employment. As flagged by interviewees, the Treaties that granted the EU some competence in education (Maastricht 1992) and employment (Amsterdam 1997) are foundational institutional arrangements that paved the way for further European policy initiatives and the development of the BSPR, especially following the Lisbon Strategy in 2000. While crisis might play an important role in pushing European integration, as in the case of the 2008 financial crisis (Ioannou, Leblond, and Niemann 2015; Seabrooke and Tsingou 2018), in the context of the Commission's intersectoral work they mainly either (punctually) strengthen (via funds) or steer the direction of intersectoral coordination. This is not to say that endogenous factors take primacy over exogenous ones but calls for attention to also look at internal and incremental developments (Boucher 2016) in explaining the emergence of BSPR. While endogenous forces explain the emergence of intersectoral coordination in the EC's work in education and employment, one might consider that exogenous ones have played an important role in other EU-level supranational organisations and other policy fields.

The relevance of exogenous factors in the emergence of national BSPR might be due to the path-dependency of state structures and the inertia of some policy sectors (Jochim and May 2010) that can show more resistance towards endogenous ones. In the national context, crises and disruptions appear as external shocks that by demanding intersectoral policy coordination might trigger change within the system. In contrast, in the EU context, we see the interlinked nature of *issues* and *institutions*, in the sense that *issues* are most likely to resonate if there are preceding institutional structures that can support intersectoral policy coordination to react to the specific issue. This aspect deserves closer attention in future research on supranational and national BSPR dynamics.

In what concerns the development of the European BSPR, it was possible to consider the role of *ideas*, *interests,* and *institutions* related to the institutionalisation of the European BSPR of education and employment, as also recently explored in other multisectoral contexts (Patay et al. 2022). *Ideas* have been confirmed as a crucial element since they animate the direction of policymaking. Expanding the original BSPR framework by distinguishing between two types of ideas (Sabatier 1988) has helped to uncover underlying deep core ideas as well as policy ideas for each sector and for intersectoral coordination. For deep-rooted beliefs, it was possible to uncover a distinct mission for each sector, privileging a focus on individual fulfilment and active citizenship (education, DG EAC) or a focus on employability and economic development (employment, DG EMPL). With regard to policy core ideas, despite clear ideas for each policy sector (mobility for education, flexicurity for employment, among others), the question of skilling and up/reskilling appears as the current main idea for integrating policy action across sectors, especially in the last decade. The extent to which these two missions collide or are coherent within intersectoral coordination is up for debate considering that some interviewees claim their complete interconnection while others argue the latter takes precedence in the EU governance. More importantly, the analysis suggests that the fundamental missions, which anchor and feed the core of policies in both cases, tend to coalesce as the intersectoral coordination between education and employment increases. This shows how the institutionalisation of intersectoral coordination can gradually shape fundamental values ingrained in the core policy ideas of each sector.

For the case of *interests*, the results show that shifts in the EC Presidency and the appointment of Commissioners might push but also hinder intersectoral coordination since changes within the policy competences may be due to politics rather than clear strategic policy visions. Here, it was

pertinent to observe the interaction between *ideas* and *interests* in contributing to the institutionalisation of intersectoral coordination in education and employment. While *ideas* give either direction to the governance of each sector/across sectors (personal development/labour market) or determine its substance (which policies to design and implement), *interests* appear as the vehicle that either supports or hinders the implementation of a policy idea. This was visible both through the Commissioners' and the DG's Directors' vision for each policy sector and how to govern them. While the formation of 'clusters' or the obligation of staff mobility might pose challenges to intersectoral coordination, *interests* that are strongly vested in political ambitions and strategic plans for each sector (Commissioners' level) appear to be more disruptive than the operational level of intersectoral cooperation. However, our analysis does not consider the *interests* of business and non-business actors that are external to the work of the EC and might have an influential capacity to legitimise *ideas* that have the potential to trigger the emergence of intersectoral policy coordination. This aspect deserves further attention in future research.

Even more than *ideas* and *interests*, we consider that *institutions* – that channel authority, attention, information flows, and relationships supporting intersectoral policy coordination – play a key role in the European BSPR of education and employment. On the one hand, structural arrangements to carry out work within the EC, such as the principle of collegiality and interservice consultation, establish the rules of the game that stimulate intersectoral coordination. However, as mentioned by some interviewees, this does not necessarily translate into the breakdown of silos, even after the introduction of Vice-Presidents as a way to overcome persisting silos and further enhance intersectoral coordination. On the other hand, policy instruments such as the OMC and the European Semester have contributed significantly to the increase of intersectoral coordination due to the capacity to collect evidence and point out areas in need of intersectoral policy intervention.

8. Outlook

In this paper, we have analysed the emergence and institutionalisation of the European BSPR of education and employment by looking at the role of *issues*, *ideas*, *interests.* and *institutions*, applying for the first time the concept of BSRP to analyse supranational intersectoral coordination dynamics. While the study confirmed the role of *issues* to explain the emergence of BSPR, unlike proposed in the BSPR literature, our results point out a preponderance of endogenous over exogenous factors in this case of supranational governance. This can be explained by the fact that supranational institutions have larger and more complex structures that need internal and incremental developments to operate in a certain policy sector. Moreover, the paper analysed the interplay between *ideas*, *interests*, and *institutions* (but also *issues*) in explaining the institutionalisation of the European BSPR of education and employment.

First and foremost, our analysis highlights the relative importance of *institutions* (structural and policy instruments) in framing conditions to support intersectoral coordination. Such an aspect questions to what extent *issues*, either exogenous or endogenous, can trigger the emergence of BSPR when the institutional structures are only incipient. In this context, further research could explore the relationship between other sectors at the EU level, intersectoral governance in other European organisational settings, or look at how intersectoral coordination takes place in supranational contexts beyond Europe.

Notes

1. For a discussion on how policy instruments can be treated as institutions in national and supranational contexts, see Marques (2021, 2023).
2. List of interviews: INT1_29-Nov-2021; INT2_02-Dec-2021; INT3_15-Dec-2021; INT4_17-Dec-2021; INT5_04-Jan-2022; INT6_10-Jan-2022; INT7_11-Jan-2022; INT8_13-Jan-2022; INT9_17-Jan-2022; INT9_17-Jan-2022; INT10_31-Jan-2022.

Disclosure statement

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Appendix 1– List of interviews conducted and analysed for the European boundary-spanning policy regime of education and employment

INT1 – Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture

INT2 – Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion

INT3 – Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture

INT4 - Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture

INT5 - Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion

INT6 – Commission's General Secretariat

INT7 - Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion

INT8 - Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion

INT9 - Former high-ranked Commission official working at the intersection of education and employment

INT10 – Former high-ranked Commission official working at the intersection of education and employment

Appendix 2– List of documents analysed for the European boundary-spanning policy regime of education and employment

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