

Policy Networks, Philanthropy, and Education Governance in Portugal: The Raise of Intermediary Actors

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Abstract: This article focuses on an emerging phenomenon in Portugal: the most visible and frequent presence of new collective actors in public policy processes. Often linked to philanthropic foundations, these actors call themselves to influence the educational agenda, and even the educational practices, and are highly dependent on expert knowledge. They are intermediary actors who perform cognitive and social operations that connect ideas, individuals and technical devices involved in policy processes. The article analyses the emergence of these intermediary actors and their attempts to influence and reshape the governance of education, through new political networks. Based on earlier empirical-based research inspired by network ethnography, and grounded on the political sociology of public action, the article presents a proposal for mapping these emerging intermediary actors, according to a) the spaces of collective action they use/create; b) their targets; c) their autonomy in the production of expert knowledge for policy. And depicts two trends related to their agency: the use of a more cognitive (rather than normative) regulation, more intensive and knowledge-based, converging to a new interactive and intuitive ways of knowledge dissemination; an increasingly intertwined regulation, involving several different social worlds, promoting and establishing new policy networks and the spread of the new philanthropy reasoning.

Keywords: policy networks; education governance; intermediary actors; philanthropy.

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1. Introduction

Since the turn of the century, there is an emerging phenomenon in Portugal: the more visible and frequent presence of new actors who call themselves or are called

to intervene in public policy. Actors who participate in the 'problematization' and 'preconization' (Delvaux, 2009) and even in the public policy implementation. Actors who are invited to participate in public policy 'communicational' or 'coordinative' spaces (Schmidt, 2010). These collective actors present themselves under various names and/or organizational forms: «think tanks» (Lingard, 2016), «mediators» (Jobert & Muller, 1987), «brokers» (Jenkins-Smith & Sabatier, 1993), «transnational policy actors» (Lawn & Lingard, 2002), «boundary persons» (Sultana, 2011), «intermediary organizations» (Cooper & Shewchuk, 2015) or «transnational expert communities» (Kauko *et al.*, 2018).

In this article these actors are gathered, for analytical purposes, around a common feature: they intervene as intermediary actors (Nay & Smith, 2002; Carvalho, 2006) in the social and cognitive dynamics of education policy. The article analyses the emergence and diversity of forms and manifestations of the agency of these collective actors in Portugal, namely those who operate under the philanthropic action of some of the most important Portuguese entrepreneurs. This option is justified given the recent growing importance and visibility of this type of actors in Portugal, and throughout the world, pursuing new cognitive and social operations for the education systems.

Moreover, the rise of these actors will be interpreted as a sign of the ongoing changes in the governance of education, considering them as important «nodes» of new and emerging policy networks.

This analysis will be carry out by conceptualizing policy by the so-called 'public action approach' (Lascombes & Le Galès, 2007; Carvalho, 2015), and anchored in policy networks theoretical framework (e.g. Rhodes, 2006; Thatcher, 2004), specifically in policy networks in education (e.g. Rizvi & Lingard, 2009; Ball, 2012, 2016; Olmedo, 2017). This framework will be presented in more detail in the second section of the article, which clarifies how these collective actors are conceptualized.

The third part of the article presents a proposal for mapping emerging intermediary actors based on empirical studies already carried out in Portugal (Viseu & Carvalho, 2018; Carvalho, Viseu & Gonçalves, 2018, 2019; Viseu & Carvalho, 2020). This outline, presented under the form of a grid of analysis, was made according to the spaces of collective action in use by these actors, the targets to which their agency applies and their autonomy in the production of expert knowledge for policy.

The fourth part of the article is devoted to the identification and analysis of two trends related to the emergence of these actors, namely: a more cognitive (rather than normative) regulation¹; an increasingly intertwined regulation. It will be showed that these trends reveal continuities and changes in education governance in Portugal.

The article closes with a reflexive note about «how far it has been possible to reach», reflecting on the developments and inflexions that seem necessary to deepen our knowledge about the polycentric processes of ordering, coordination and control of education system in Portugal.

¹ By regulation we mean the social process of the production of rules and guidelines for conduct and behaviour by social actors in a particular social context (Maroy & Dupriez, 2000).

2. Studying intermediary actors through public action approach and policy networks

In this section, the theoretical framework that guides the research is presented. It starts by pointing out that, in this research, policy is conceptualized by the so-called 'public action approach', stressing the importance of the intervention of non-state actors in nowadays policy course. Then, it seeks to illustrate how, among these new actors, philanthropic foundations seem particularly interesting empirical objects to study intermediary actors. The section ends by showing how policy networks offer important contributions to better understand the rise of intermediary actors in education governance.

2.1. New policy spaces, new (and old) intermediary actors

The (political sociology of) public action approach applied to public policy analysis compels us to see the policy as a process and a result of public authorities' intervention (concerning their formal mechanisms of normative production and executive intervention) in interaction with a multitude of other actors. Situated at various scales or levels of action (national, local, supranational), all these actors participate: a) in defining the common good of diverse areas of social life (economy, education, health, employment, etc.); b) in determining how such activities should be coordinated. More simply, public action refers to «the activity of public authorities and more broadly all the activity articulated on public space and requiring a reference to a common good» (Laborier & Trom, 2003, p. 9).

The adoption of this perspective of analysis is inseparable from the ongoing changes in the social field of policy practices, as well as the perceptions about what occurs in it. In this respect, and among other factors, changes in the modes of State intervention are known, namely in giving greater prominence and encouragement to other social actors in public policy, resorting to devices related with the «new public management», increasing interventions of inducement nature (while maintaining in use the conventional forms, such as legislation and financing) and giving centrality to quality, effectiveness, performance and usefulness (Maroy, 2012; Ozga, 2008).

In a prudent analysis of those changes, Lascoumes & Le Galès (2007) draw attention to a tension that seems to have become constitutive of public policy and that shapes its current course. On the one hand, the impulse that was given to new forms of participation in policy by social actors (e.g., an increase of policy information and communication dimensions, the use of contracts and other instruments - a priori - of a negotiating and participatory nature). On the other hand, the strengthening of interventions to rationalise collective life: State assumes a central role, through interventions not always normative, but using instead control mechanisms centred on results, such as audits, evaluations, standards and certifications. However, these changes do not depend only on the State action (or its inaction), or even on the criticism of its forms of intervention (for example, the critique to centralization and State dirigisme or the negative perceptions about the State capacity to solve social problems). These changes stem from the intervention of other actors, namely non-state actors.

The emergence and consolidation of various levels of governance - transnational, national and local - and, at the same time, of multiple new actors, perfectly illustrates this point. Starting, for example, from Portuguese politicians' discourses, Alves & Canário (2002) invoked, more than a decade ago, the existence of a new «magistracy of influence», signalling instances and actors (e.g., commissions and «task-forces») which participate, at the same time, in the legitimisation of policy options and the harmonisation of education policy on a supranational scale (Alves & Canário, 2002, p. 663).

Lawn & Lingard (2002) recovered this remark to characterize certain «national political elites», that acts «across borders (...), displays a similar habitus» and pursuit «same policy game» (Lawn & Lingard, 2002, p. 292). Although not physically situated in the «European bureaucracy», this new kind of actors participate actively in an «European educational policy and policy space» and, «in a sense, [are] bearers of an emergent European educational policy» (Lawn & Lingard, 2002, p. 292).

But we can also mention the actors and instances involved in mediation practices at the national level. Also, a decade ago, to characterize the porosity of the relations between knowledge production and policy decision-making arenas in Portugal, Barroso (2006) showed the increasing role of «experts» (such as consultants, advisors and evaluators) in transforming critical discourses into «management instruments», as well as in legitimizing, execution and controlling policy decisions» (Lawn & Lingard, 2002, p. 8).

To understand how these actors participated in the Portuguese education scenario, we approach them as intermediary actors (Nay & Smith, 2002; Carvalho, 2006), that is, actors involved in a set of cognitive and social operations for the construction and stabilization of interactions between ideas, individuals and technical devices. The cognitive dimension considers these actors' self-presentation, the reasons for their intervention and how they imagine education systems are or should be governed. The social dimension regards these actors' activities and their preferred ways of intervention.

2.2. Philanthropic foundations as empirical objects to study intermediary actors

In Portugal, in recent years, one particular category of actors has been seeking to take a more relevant place in the public sphere of education: actors connected to the business world, namely within philanthropic activities of Portuguese entrepreneurs or large corporations. In fact, philanthropic foundations seem to be promising empirical objects to study intermediary actors. Over the past decades, philanthropic foundations increased their public visibility worldwide, seem more relevant in transnational education governance and look more committed to pursuing new cognitive and social operations for the education systems (e.g., see Ball, 2012; Ball & Junemann, 2011; Robertson & Verger, 2012; Reckhow & Snyder, 2014; Hogan, Sellar & Lingard, 2015; Thompson, Savage & Lingard, 2016; Olmedo, 2017).

Evidence of new cognitive operations promoted by philanthropic foundations is their role in the rise and strengthening of a Global Education Industry, appealing for privatization and market orientation in education policy (Verger, Lubienski & Steiner-Khamsi, 2016). «New philanthropy», «philanthropy 3.0» (Ball & Olmedo, 2013)

or «philanthrocapitalism» (McGoey, 2012) are now used to describe this ongoing process of reconfiguration of philanthropic foundations. Although philanthropy is still committed to social projects and innovative solutions, it is now also concerned with «clear and measurable impacts and results» of its investments (Ball & Olmedo, 2013, p. 34; Stone & Moran, 2016).

One of the consequences of philanthropic foundations concerns with the return on their investment was an increase of services addressed to State education providers such as academies programs; curriculum and learning strategies development consulting; teachers training; organizational and management support for schools (Ball & Junemann, 2011). These initiatives help to ensure philanthropic foundations' financial viability, but also to disseminate conceptions about the education systems that underlie their activities. Therefore, the production and dissemination of knowledge became central to philanthropy new cognitive operations, converging with the intensification of dissemination and mobilization of expert knowledge in policy (Levin & Cooper, 2012).

Concerning the social operations, new philanthropy tends to use networking as a form of action. This is particularly evident in the USA, where «new (and old) philanthropists function (...) like a *de facto* advocacy coalition», aiming «to influence governments and influential educational leaders' agendas for change» (Robertson & Verger, 2012, p. 34). New philanthropists assume themselves as connectors and facilitators of innovative projects and financiers, with privileged access to information and expertise (Ball, 2008). As a result, philanthropic foundations create networks, institutionalized or not, with other philanthropic foundations, the State and other non-state actors, including political and administrative elites, experts and academics (e.g., Reckhow & Tompkins-Stange, 2018; Avelar, Nikita & Ball, 2018). A good example of this philanthropy networks is netFWD created in 2012 by the OECD. This global network of foundations is «committed to optimizing the impact of development philanthropy» and to improve their performance through collaboration with «governments and other stakeholders» (netFWD, 2019). For these reasons, policy networks can be an important conceptual tool to study intermediary actors, as it will be developed subsequently.

2.3. Policy networks to study intermediary actors

Understanding public policy based on the analysis of interdependencies between actors implies considering basic questions, such as: which actors make the policy, how they intervene, how their actions are articulated and with what consequences? Policy networks, their analytical tools and developments, constitute a solid basis for confronting these questions and for constructing relevant and pertinent new ones.

Rhodes (2006) offers a comprehensive definition of «policy network» as «sets of formal institutional and informal linkages between governmental and other actors structured around shared if endlessly negotiated beliefs and interests in public policy making and implementation» (Rhodes, 2006, p. 426). According to this approach, the concept of network is not used as an inspiring metaphor, but as an interpretative framework for analysis (Thatcher, 1998). From this point of view, public policy understanding is built around the observation and analysis of interactions between

actors who do not necessarily have the same beliefs and interests, but who share contexts of interdependence.

At a theoretical level, policy networks analysis can be different according to the factors that are perceived as determinants to explain a network genesis and functioning (see, e.g., Thatcher, 1998, 2004; Rhodes, 2006). For some, policy networks are spaces for strategic action, in which resources are obtained and exchanged to achieve the interests of interdependent actors, as well as to define the rules that should govern these exchanges. For others, the interdependence between actors corresponds to structural arrangements that are driven by an integrative system of its own; so, the preferences and capacities for action are conditioned by the rules, norms and routines under which they occur.

The perspective of this article is of a moderate constructivism (Lascoumes & Le Galès, 2007, pp. 111-112): public action is a «system of negotiated order», but all the creative interaction observed in it is made up of «cognitive and normative frameworks» that circumscribe the universe of the possible. Consequently, the patterns of relations between strategic actors structure policy. In parallel, these social spaces are stabilized around the negotiated construction of meanings and interests, so that the networks also structure the strategies of the connected actors. The expression used in another analytical context by Lawn (2006) signals the mutually constitutive character of the actor-network relations: the actors «are constructing and being constructed by their engagement [to the network]» (Lawn, 2006, p. 285).

In part, this is why the use of policy networks is becoming more frequent in education policy studies (e.g., Rizvi & Lingard, 2009; Ball, 2012; Au & Ferrare, 2015). New actors which intervene in policy course, including philanthropic foundations, are conceived as important nodes of these policy networks (Exley, 2014), joining up ideologies, advocacy and business (Olmedo & Grau, 2013, p. 478). Ball & Olmedo (2011) use the concept «network philanthropy» to emphasize these new philanthropists as «‘generative nodes’, aimed at facilitating new connections and linking opportunities» for new projects, sponsors and funders, as well as to provide access to insider information and expert knowledge (Ball & Olmedo, 2011, p. 86).

In sum, public action approach and policy networks seem especially suitable to study intermediary actors. They help us understand the origins of the growing importance of non-state actors’ (namely philanthropic foundations) intervention in contemporary public policy as a consequence of the State reconfiguration process. Besides, these approaches provide solid foundations to analysis these actors’ social intermediation –as they create new spaces of policy, bringing together different social worlds and acting as policy networks and cognitive intermediation– how within these networks, problems are re-conceptualized, solutions advocated and knowledge disseminated. In the following section this conceptual framework will be used to describe and understand these actors’ intermediation operations in education governance.

3. Towards a mapping of intermediary actors: methods and actors’ main features

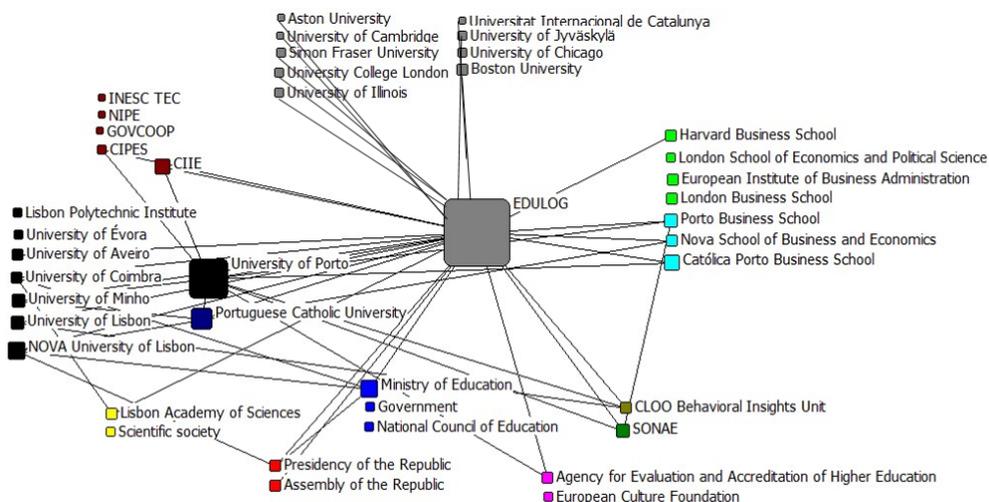
This section presents a provisional mapping of emerging intermediary actors in Portugal, that is, an attempt to describe and analyse the social and cognitive

operations performed by these actors. On the one hand, this means to characterize who they are, where do they operate and with whom (i.e., the spaces of collective action and the social actors which their agency targets or involves - , and how (i.e., strategies, instruments, activities). On the other hand, this means to characterize the frames they use to address educational problems and to advocate solutions through expert knowledge production and dissemination (i.e. how they frame and give shape to other actors' involvement in education processes and policies).

For this, an outline will be presented under the form of a grid of analysis intermediary actors' features. Then, more descriptive details will be provided, regarding three actors: EPIS - Entrepreneurs for Social Inclusion, a collective philanthropy association created in 2006 to prevent school failure; aQeduto, a small-scale online infrastructure, created in 2015 devoted to explaining the results of Portuguese students in PISA to non-experts and the general population; EDULOG, a think tank devoted to education, operating since 2015, that aims to help improve education policies.

These actors were chosen for three reasons. First, precisely for their recent entry in the education scenario in Portugal. Second, considering that they achieved increased visibility in the public sphere, with a regular presence on media, social media and internet, providing updated, profuse and detailed information about themselves. Third, because earlier empirical-based research (Viseu & Carvalho, 2018; Carvalho, Viseu & Gonçalves, 2018, 2019) already showed how they perform as intermediary actors, namely by connecting different social worlds: private and business world, the academy and political and administrative elites, as Figure 1 illustrates.

Figure 1



Source: Viseu & Carvalho (2018).

The results from our previous studies are brought together for comparative reasons: to identify similarities, differences and relationships between and within these

actors. This procedure is a first step to get new inputs which can help us to better understand the networked participation of intermediary actors in education policy.

Previous empirical works have been inspired by network ethnography (e.g. Hogan, 2016; Sperka & Enright, 2017; Allen & Bull, 2018; Saura, 2018; Avelar & Ball, 2019). The fieldwork included two main phases. On the first phase, the empirical research was focused on internet searches and document analysis on the massive online content available about these actors (website documents, flyers, social media posts, press clipping, call for application for research projects, conferences, seminars, etc.). This procedure was carried out to identify actors, events and relevant activities to produce expert knowledge. On the second phase, we interviewed the three organizations managers or executives (EPIS and EDULOG) and experts (aQeduto). Considering the extent of the data available on the Internet, the interviews were planned to fill in the missing information and add new inputs on the data we collected through internet searches. The interviews took place as informal conversations and the questions emerged naturally around the topics (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007).

The data analysis was carried out looking for evidence of the intermediation work performed by these actors, according to two dimensions. The first regards the spaces of collective action and actors to which their agency applies. More precisely, these actors were mapped according to the public they target (public, politicians and policy makers or practitioners) and the different social world they involve in their actions. The second is related with the autonomy in the production of expert knowledge for policy.

Table 1 presents a grid of analysis with a brief presentation of the three actors, synthesizing their main features according to the following analytical dimensions: self-presentation and mission; origins and current status; most relevant activities, governing bodies; expert knowledge production; main targets.

Table 1 - Intermediary actors: main characteristics

	EPIS	aQeduto	EDULOG
Self-presentation	Philanthropic association	Research project	Think tank for education
Mission	Deliver methodological and practical knowledge	Build explanations on PISA results	Deliver knowledge for policy
Origins	2006 President of Republic + Ten entrepreneurs	2015 Ministry of Education + philanthropic foundation	2015 Philanthropic foundation
Current status	Nation-wide operation	New consortium with more partners	New website; new partner; sponsor of a STEM collaborative digital platform.
Most relevant activities	Education programs	Secondary analyses dissemination	Knowledge production and dissemination
Governing bodies	Entrepreneurs and academics	Academics	Academics and decision makers
Production of expert knowledge	Internal	Internal	External
Policy focus	Process	Process	Content
Main target	Practitioners	General public	Politicians and decision makers
Other targets	Politicians and decision makers	Politicians and decision makers	General public

These collective actors present similar characteristics. We will highlight three, as more significant: 1) they are connected to philanthropic entrepreneurship; 2) in a broad sense, they aim to influence the education agenda and education policy; 3) all seem to highly depend on the expert status given to (some) actors or on expert knowledge.

In fact, the three actors were born by the initiative of philanthropic foundations of some of the most important entrepreneurs in Portugal. Nevertheless, it should be noted that these philanthropic foundations are not that old or «historical».

aQeduto was born with the support of Fundação Francisco Manuel dos Santos (FFMS) created in 2009 to «study major national problems and made them know to the society» (FFMS, 2019). FFMS's founder was Alexandre Soares dos Santos (1934-2019), the second richest businessmen in Portugal (in 2017 Forbes estimated his net worth at \$2.7 billion). Until 2013, he was the CEO of an international group based in Portugal called Jeronimo Martins, the 56th world's largest retailer. FFMS annual budget is approximately 10 million EUR, which is used to publish and fund research, meetings, seminars, publications and an online database that provides statistical data on Portugal and Europe. FFMS's website hosts aQeduto, including its reports and studies.

EDULOG was created within the philanthropic activities of Belmiro de Azevedo (1938-2017), also one of Portugal's richest businessmen's (in 2017 Forbes estimated his net worth at \$1.5 billion). In 1974, he became the chair of SONEAE and, in the following four decades, made it one of the largest business groups in Portugal and an important international holding company. In 1991, he created Fundação Belmiro de Azevedo which, until mid-2000, had a discreet public presence, almost exclusively dedicated to student grants. In 2015, he announced his retirement to embrace corporate social responsibility activities in his foundation and created EDULOG, a legacy he wanted to leave for the country (EDULOG, 2017).

EPIS started in 2006 by the initiative of ten founding entrepreneurs who, in the subsequent years, brought together more than a hundred companies from the business sector, turning EPIS into a philanthropic association. These founders represented 35% of the national GDP and 80% of the Portuguese stock market index (PSI-20) (EPIS, 2006). In its initial years, EPIS gathered almost 5 million EUR and in 2018 set aside approximately 7 million EUR for investments.

The second common characteristic concerns these actors' attempts to influence the education agenda and to bring changes to education policy. EDULOG announces this ambition in a very explicit way, exhibiting a focus on the ideas, contents and issues than are (or should be) on the education agenda. Indeed, the first self-titled think tank dedicated exclusively to education in Portugal presents its mission as to deliver objective and relevant research and information to policy makers, in an «attempt to influence education policy to solve the most pressing problems of the education system» (EDULOG, 2017). EDULOG aims to «find solutions, promoting innovation and educational change» for problems that, in its perspective, should be on the education agenda, namely how to adjust what is «taught in schools to what the country needs» (EDULOG, 2017).

aQeduto and EPIS are also committed to bring changes in education policy, although they seem more oriented to policy processes. aQeduto claims the purpose

of building «credible and sustained information» and «explanations» regarding the variation of the results of Portuguese students in PISA, «in simple language, but preserving scientific rigour», for laypeople and policy makers (aQeduto, 2017). For aQeduto's experts, the Portuguese education system needs improvements and it is better steered through evidence-based policies, so that «any proposal or idea may at least be based on information, based on the best there is» (Justino, 2015; Nunes, 2015; Ferreira *et al.*, 2017). EPIS aims to be a «national reference in the development, incubation and internalization of new methodologies to promote school success» (EPIS, 2018). Thus, EPIS looks committed to solve social issues, trying to «lead by example» (Exley, 2014) and showing, namely to public authorities, how things can or should be done.

The third common characteristic of these actors is that they gather and organise experts, namely academics, for their activities and even integrate them on their governing bodies. EDULOG governing bodies include former university deans, senior professors, and researchers of higher education institutions. These academics are presented as «people with high experience and knowledge of educational policies, systems and practices» (EDULOG, 2016), which «lends credibility to EDULOG» (interview with EDULOG's Secretary-General). EPIS's scientific council is composed of twenty senior professors and researchers from higher education institutions, seven of whom were ministers of education in the past. The council is responsible for the design and validation of EPIS' programmes and interventions in schools. aQeduto is presented as a team of academics and researchers from different scientific areas, «bringing together experts in education policy, evaluation, comparability, economic rationality, communication and statistical/data analysis» (aQeduto, 2016).

Besides these common features, Table 1 also shows some divergent characteristics related to these actors' relative autonomy in the production of expert knowledge for policy and their main target audiences.

In aQeduto, expert knowledge is built internally. This small-scale infrastructure comes down to six PISA experts, committed to turn the complex language of «PISA knowledge» simple for its audiences: the general population and policymakers. In EPIS expertise knowledge is also built internally. The scientific board created EPIS's programs in straight closeness with the others governing bodies, composed mainly by entrepreneurs. Together, they established EPIS's vocation to «go to the field», providing expertise services to schools, focusing mediation, capacity building, empowerment and the development of non-cognitive skills, but also presenting to national public authorities «new methodologies to promote school success» and promote social inclusion (interview with EPIS's director). By contrast, EDULOG's expertise knowledge is built mainly externally. For that, EDULOG opens regular calls for research funding in specific topics selected by its advisory board (e.g., «school management and school improvement», «teachers' impact in students' success», «parental engagement in education»). The calls are mainly targeted to higher education institutions or research centres (state and private, national or international) but also to other potential interested parties. Nevertheless, this process doesn't mean that EDULOG leaves knowledge production to chance. On the contrary, it confirms its desire to participate in the construction of the educational agenda, by identifying «knowledge gaps» (interview with EDULOG's Secretary-General), for which more research is needed.

These differences regarding internal and external forms of creating and disseminating knowledge extend, in a certain way, to the diversity of forms and manifestations of these new actors' agency: EPIS has a vocation to intervene in schools with pre-prepared programs; aQeduto intends to translate the complex PISA knowledge into a simple version for the public; EDULOG aims to provide relevant information to inform public and private better decisions. Therefore, there is an important differences regarding their main activities and presumably their core audiences and stakeholders. And despite the fact of all are committed in influencing education system visions and practices, they do not dispute a territory of practices as their zones of influence seem not to overlap.

4. Trends in education governance and intermediary actors

This section discusses the emergence of these intermediary actors as revealing of the continuities and changes in education governance in Portugal. Of these continuities and changes, we would like to highlight four major ones.

1. A longstanding tradition of bureaucratic-professional regulation² (based on a historical tacit alliance between the centralized State and the teachers' unions and school-based professional judgements), and its change, over the past three decades, with the State calling (even if in a mitigated way) for another 'partnership': either the municipalities, through decentralization and deconcentration; either the families through their growing participation on school management or inducing school choice dispositions and practices (Barroso, 2003, 2018)
2. A longstanding tradition of policymaking based on the involvement of actors from the formal political decision arena (government, central administration, parliament) and of actors from formalized spaces of participation (the 'social partners', as such formally recognized by law), and its change with the emergence, in the last two decades, of spaces and informal and ad hoc intervention in the political decision (commissions of specialists, and experts, opinion-makers and, more recently, think-tanks and private foundations) (Barroso, Carvalho, Fontoura & Afonso, 2007).
3. A longstanding tradition of a priori regulation, based on the search for social actors' conformity with laws, procedures, and financial-based injunctions, and its change with the emergence and consolidation, over the past two decades of a posteriori regulation (based on assessments and evaluations) oriented by the value of the results and searching to change ways the actors adjust to their circumstances, perceive the problems of practice, and accept to be responsible for copying or solving it (Barroso, 2003; Carvalho, Costa & Sant'Ovaia, 2020).
4. An ongoing process, increasing over the last twenty years –the Europeanization of education (Grek & Lawn, 2009; Nóvoa, 2010; Lawn & Normand, 2014; Nóvoa, Carvalho & Yanes, 2014)– characterized by centrality of European benchmarks and indicators, quality standards and

² See note 1.

accreditation mechanisms, among other forms of soft power, affecting the heart of Portuguese State bureaucracy and non-state actors involved in the governance of the education sector, as well as education professionals and their working contexts.

Two trends related to the emergence of these actors will be discussed: the use of a more cognitive (rather than normative) regulation, more intensive and knowledge-based, converging to a new interactive and intuitive ways of knowledge dissemination; an increasingly intertwined regulation, involving several different social worlds, promoting and establishing new policy networks and the spread of the «new philanthropy» rationale within these intermediary actors.

4.1. *A more cognitive regulation, and new ways of knowledge dissemination*

The previous section already showed the importance these actors attribute to knowledge production and mobilisation. This phenomenon comes from the cognitive intermediation these actors display, that is, these actors' disposition to frame and address education problems, to re-conceptualize them and to advocate solutions through expert knowledge production and dissemination. Moreover, this phenomenon shows the growing importance of knowledge in education governance, which is, more and more, cognitive regulated, knowledge-based, converging to a new interactive and intuitive ways of knowledge dissemination.

For aQeduto and EDULOG this intermediation cognitive labour aims to illuminate the public and private decisions, and both are committed to offering free digital platforms where the knowledge they produce, or sponsor, is disseminated.

aQeduto's mission is to «provide the public opinion with credible and sustained information on the performance of Portuguese students» (aQeduto, 2017) in PISA. For that, aQeduto develops secondary analysis of PISA results to explain its variations for policymakers and laypeople, which are published in free and open digital platform hosted by FFMS's website. This platform has a considerable degree of interactivity, as users can explore data as they pleased, make comparisons, try a PISA test, or even produce comparative maps of the evolution of Portugal with other countries. As one can read in its presentation, it is: «a digital and interactive format, with a responsive design adapted to new forms of communication, where the rigor of facts is combined with the simplicity of communicating them, all those interested can get to know the Portuguese educational reality» (FFMS, 2019).

For EDULOG the cognitive intermediation is reached by producing a more understandable reading of the available information and research, namely by its «intelligible dissemination» (interview with EDULOG's Secretary-General) in order «to inform political discussions with facts» and to «encourage policy makers and other actors in the education system to make decisions based on rigor and objectivity» (EDULOG, 2017). To this end, EDULOG financed a consortium of universities to create an Observatory for Education which provides free online indicators (and statistical data) about the education system, regarding the performance and quality of schools. The Observatory is a hired university consortium design to «create metrics on the state of education in Portugal, global and detailed, each year» (idem). The results are expected to be available on an

interactive online digital platform that users can explore according to their goals and interests, including the possibility to «make comparisons» of performances between schools (EDULOG, 2017).

For EPIS is all about to 'roll the sleeves up'. Cognitive intermediation occurs through its education programs for school success with the so-called students at risk of school failure. These programs are taking place in three hundred schools, involving seventeen thousand students, and, according to EPIS, are playing an important role in increasing school success at the national level. As stated in the instigate words of the former President of the Republic that driven its creation, EPIS was born as a response to the «conformism that relegates to the State all solutions to the social problems» (EPIS, 2018). By showing the State underachievement in fighting school failure, EPIS offers solutions to collective problems, bringing new instruments, such as consulting, coaching and mentoring which are intensive knowledge based instruments.

In fact, EPIS's interventions are quite knowledge-based. As said before, the EPIS education programs were design by academics from the scientific council and replicated in a model based on a detailed script to be used by end users. Since 2012, EPIS has supported a research centre that promoted an Education Atlas, a set of studies on school failure, which are intended for public authorities, schools, families and «well-informed citizens», but also for EPIS itself precisely to decide which school or territories are more in need of its services. Furthermore, EPIS have a digital platform which is used of internal management affairs, which allows knowing the status of the ongoing projects in real-time.

Thus, data points to different motivations to act as cognitive intermediators: to illuminate the public and policy makers or to do what must be done. Nevertheless, they carry out similar cognitive operations: they select issues to be addressed (e.g., the results of Portuguese students in PISA, school failure) and, by doing so, they participate in the 'problematisation' of public policies, framing the education agenda; they advocate solutions for those problems (Savage, 2016), reshaping the patterns for research, translating complex knowledge or by capacity building at local levels; they use interactive and intuitive ways for sharing and disseminating the knowledge they produce or sponsor.

The importance attributed by these actors to knowledge is deeply connected with the fact that knowledge is currently central in public policy, and it's becoming the governing process itself (Fenwick *et al.*, 2014). As mentioned before, the ongoing changes in the State's modes of intervention call for the use of new coordination and control instruments, such as evaluation, assessments, certifications and best practices. All these instruments demand the production, use and dissemination of more data, information and knowledge, creating the expectation that they would feed better decisions. This phenomenon shows how a certain imaginary of 'rational' public policy feed by 'rational' knowledge of science didn't disappear. And it also explains a greater preference for studies focused on cost/quality ratios or that offer answers about the effects and the results of certain programs and policies (Carvalho, 2019).

So, although the formal mechanisms of normative production are still in use, they are gradually replaced by a more cognitive regulation, where new intermediary actors can better exercise their agency by producing, compiling, collecting and

disseminating knowledge for policy and address specific education problems and formulate evidence-based solutions.

Furthermore, it should be stressed the use of digital platforms by these actors to report performance monitoring about different objects (e.g., performance Portuguese students in PISA; the performance indicators on the education system). These data are offered to relevant actors in policy decision making, allowing data visualization and are based on, if not real-time, at least accurate and updated data. This option is convergent with the new governing education trends, which are growing resorting to «techniques of digital education governance» (Williamson, 2015, p. 16). These devices not only facilitate data collection and analysis. They are «policy instruments» which rebuild the relation between the governing and the governed, performing a «constant audition» about the education system, the schools, or the students (idem).

4.2. An increasingly intertwined regulation, and «new philanthropy» rationale diffusion

Mapping these collective actors allowed us to see the variety of other actors that cross them, integrate them, or take part in their activities. This phenomenon is related with the social intermediation they display, that is, their capacity to bring together different worlds: politicians and policymakers; the academy; the business world. The increasingly intertwined regulation works as a proper breeding ground to create the right conditions for the diffusion of the «new philanthropy» canon within these intermediary actors.

Regarding the politicians and policymakers, apart from their private nature, the three actors have been linked to (former or current) public administration members or State representatives. aQeduto began as an original idea of David Justino, the president (2013-2017) of the National Council of Education (an advisory body of the Ministry of Education) and became a joint venture between a private foundation. Although EPIS was created by ten founding entrepreneurs, they were gathered by the former President of the Republic to create a commitment «for social inclusion, involving public authorities at national and local level, together with civil society organizations» (EPIS, 2018). And, since its beginning, EDULOG advisory board includes two former ministers of education, two former secretaries of education, the former president of the National Council of Education, and consultants for the President of the Republic on educational matters.

The connections with the academia were already mentioned as one of the key features common to these actors. As far as this concern, aQeduto is easily typified once it's governing bodies are exclusively composed by academics or researchers. EDULOG and EPIS are a bit more mixed in their compositions.

In EDULOG, there is an overlap of the social worlds represented in its governing bodies. As mention, EDULOG's advisory board is composed by actors that have or had high-level responsibilities in education administration, but almost of them were academics or teachers of higher education institutions before or during their taking their positions as representatives of the State. Besides, once looking at all the actors and organizations that intersect within EDULOG, it is possible to conclude that

they include the world of academia (national and international), business (including SONAE, the company founded by Belmiro de Azevedo), private foundations and formal political agencies (see Figure 1).

EPIS also present a diverse composition. EPIS governing bodies includes a scientific council, composed by twenty academics, and the administration and executive boards are composed by thirty-one philanthropists and entrepreneurs. Between institutional partners, members, individual donors, supplier, sponsors, public authorities and private organizations, EPIS gathered around two hundred and fifty individual and collective actors.

It also must be noticed these actor's connections to social media. aQeduto is now part of a new consortium with FFMS and a national leading newspaper to keep analysing PISA results and disseminating them over time. EDULOG followed the same path and has a national leading newspaper as a partner to promote a project about media literacy in Portuguese schools. This phenomenon signs the activation of connections to other arenas of political influence, besides the formal ones, as a strategy to influence public opinion and to better perform the mediation of ideas about the education system (Blach-Ørsten & Kristensen, 2016).

In addition, it is relevant to point that EPIS, aQeduto and EDULOG have connections between them. For example, SONAE, the international holding created by EDULOG's founder Belmiro de Azevedo, is a partner of EPIS; FFMS, aQeduto's sponsor, is also an EPIS partner. Moreover, there are also individual actors which, in the present or in the past, are /were connected to two or three of these actors. David Justino, a former Ministry of Education and a higher education professor is one of them: he belongs to EDULOG's advisory board, EPIS scientific council and he created aQeduto.

These data show the potential of these actors to perform social intermediation operations, by the fact that they gather different worlds and create new policy networks. The connections to the academic world provide them the chance to better perform, uphold and sustain their cognitive intermediation, because in these networks problems are framed and solutions are addressed. The connections to political and administrative elites potentially place these actors closely involved in decision making and implementation (see Thatcher, 1998), and more capable of influence education governance, according to their agendas (see 1). As consequence, these actors are becoming important «nodes» of these new policy networks, producing increasingly intertwined education governance.

These social intermediation operations are made, at least, for two proposes. The first is to act as a «bridge», creating interfaces among the academia, business and policy, translating the meanings of these different worlds in order to produce relevant information for policy- making (interview with EDULOG's Secretary-General). The second is to create new opportunities for new sponsors, partners and projects through networking. These processes allow these actors to survive and expand, by creating alliances with different social worlds, but also to connect with other intermediary actors, namely other philanthropic foundations. EPIS seem to a perfect example of this phenomenon and a kind of federation of philanthropic foundations education oriented.

Furthermore, the way social intermediation is built and achieved brought to light some pieces of evidence of «new philanthropy», regarding networking as a form of action, just like it was already mentioned. Effectively, these new philanthropists assume themselves as connectors and facilitators of new projects and financiers, with privileged access to information and expertise (Ball, 2008).

But «new philanthropy» signs are also present in the concerns with the return on investment. The education programs provided by EPIS to schools are a typical feature of «new philanthropy». As its director stated, EPIS's action is embedded on «capacity building» and not on «charitable giving philanthropy». EPIS sell its educational programs to schools, but the public authorities, namely the local authorities, are the ones who buy them. In 2018, approximately 17% of Portuguese municipalities had EPIS programs. Even if these programs «are not made for profit», they represent around 50% of EPIS's incomes (the others 50% are from its donors). In addition to financial concerns, EPIS also show interest to get a social return on investment, as it seeks to be recognized as a «national reference (...) of new methodologies to promote school success» (EPIS, 2018). As EPIS's director said: «we set up a program whose value is recognized. Municipalities seek us, schools seek us. This means that there is a social value that is recognized».

In EDULOG concerns about social return on investment are also evident on seeking to pursuit of its mission - to produce «objective research and information» about the Portuguese educational system for «policy makers and other actors to make better decisions» - and on the «implementation of projects of high reach, profound impact and lasting results» (EDULOG, 2017). This broader intention is materialized, for example, in the processes of monitoring knowledge production for policy. As EDULOG's Secretary-General specified, when knowledge production is outsourced through calls for funding, there are a set of rules that researchers must follow to ensure that EDULOG's mission is fulfilled. Thus, frequent contacts between EDULOG and the research teams are made and there is a major concern that knowledge transfer is the main part of the research outputs.

5. Final remarks and future developments

In this article, we focus on intermediary actors and new governance spaces from several empirical-based research driven through policy networks. The option for studying these actors through political networks occurs in a broader theoretical framework: the public action approach, which relies on two central premises (see Massardier, 2003). One regards to the re-signification given to the notion of 'public' as space of controversy concerning the making and solving of social problems. The other relates to the need for a polycentric analysis of public policy. Our results illustrate, at least at some point, both premises.

Regarding the first, the cognitive intermediation operations of the networkers contribute to a re-signification of policy as they promote new policy-making rules. And to legitimize those new ways of policy-making, they introduce a certain criticism of the State: it is presented as suffering from a lack of knowledge, low awareness and as an almost loser to solve social inclusion/exclusion problems. Then, these intermediary actors intervene in public action in various ways: providing (more)

information, helping public authorities to better understand the available knowledge and to do 'what must be done' in the education system. For that, they involve experts in their activities, which materialize intermediary actors' explicit vocation to produce expert knowledge for education policy and practices. Our analysis identifies various forms of intervention, as well as highlights common characteristics on their agency: they generate different kinds of knowledge and, so, they act as expertise-makers. This is a powerful feature of «experts of today», as they have an «ability to assemble (...) organise and (...) to disseminate educational 'facts'» (Pettersson & Popkewitz, 2019, p. 33).

Regarding the second premise, the scope and intensity of their social intermediation operations confirms the need for a polycentric analysis of policy. Their activities of knowledge production, dissemination and use are bringing together actors from different social worlds. Actors who are connected to, or belong to, certain political administrative elites, academics, important entrepreneurs and philanthropists. Regarding the later it is important to highlight their role in creating, promoting and maintaining new intermediary actors, as well as their adherence to new philanthropy reasoning. That is why, as Lubienski *et al.* (2011) state, it makes sense to talk about new philanthropies as «intermediary organizations», which work in policy networks to gather, produce, and make available evidence to decision makers, according to their agendas. This social operation of gathering helps to spread and consolidated the idea of governing education as a space of intervention of multiple actors and based on expert knowledge.

5.1. *On future developments*

Current trends in public policy are quite promising to help us understand intermediary actors' formation and rising. Furthermore, recent events reinforce this perception: at the end of 2019 - and while we were still writing this article - new intermediary actors come to public sphere, such as Iniciativa Educação [Initiative Education] or Teach for Portugal. The first is a private philanthropic initiative by Alexandre Soares dos Santos (who, until 2013, was the CEO of the corporate business that holds FFMS and, consequently, aQeduto) and his wife, aiming to «promote young people success, supporting exemplar projects with a potential multiplier effect on the education system and society» (Iniciativa Educação, 2020). This initiative is led by a former minister of education, Nuno Crato, who is also a member of the scientific council of EPIS. The second, Teach for Portugal, is a NGO which presents itself as a Teach for All partner, with the mission «to change school success and ensure that all children have access to the same education opportunities, regardless of their socio-economic background» (Teach for Portugal, 2020). What is more important, these two cases are part of a larger population of collective actors performing as intermediary actors in Portugal.

In the light of these developments, three research efforts can be followed. First, one have to deeply observe the conditions in which these intermediary actors were 'born' and how they are expanding, that is to say, one have to take into account a demography of intermediary actors. Thus, in the future, our so far provisional mapping will have to include an analysis of the conditions under which these new formations not only emerge but also survive. Second, the expansion of the number of actors allows us to interrogate the so far absent overlap of their ecologies, that

is, the territories of practices and zones of influence, where they get resources and/or deliver policy-oriented products. Indeed, the expansion of these new actors can activate controversies or even lead to public overt disputes. Third, the explicit connection of these national formations with international actors (such as the connections between «Teach for Portugal» and Teach for All seem to be the case), remind us that one of the common features of these emerging actors is precisely that their agency is associated with the structuring of new policy spaces or new transnational and intra-national policy spaces (Lawn & Lingard 2002; Ball, 2016). So, we need to keep tracking connections and relations of interdependency which are beyond the Portuguese scenario.

6. References

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