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Teaching case: Managing an IT carve out at a multi-national enterprise

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GOVERNMENT AND SELF-GOVERNMENT IN THE INFORMATION SOCIETY

Abstract

Research on the information society and the policies and strategies for its creation has tended to discuss them rationally as the national, and occasionally international or regional, responses to changes in the competitive environment. The predominant notion of the information society in various levels of governance has only rarely been critically examined. The paper provides a Foucauldian analysis of the constitution of the information society as a political and policy imperative at the level of the European Union and the multiple effects it had for its member states. Drawing on ideas on governmentality and regimes of truth, I argue that the European Commission continually shaped the rationality and identity of the information society it heralded, by managing to set itself as the legitimate locus of policy for the information society. In revealing the dominant discursive truths about the European information society, the research discusses how the truth claims about the construction of a particular version of the information society and the legitimate loci of its government shaped the degrees of freedom of the Greek policy makers through a range of disciplining and self-disciplining practices.

Keywords: information society, Foucault, governmentality, policy, European Union, Greece

1 INTRODUCTION

The pervasiveness of information and communication technology (ICT) in all fabrics of the society and economy has dramatically expanded the domains in which it is being discussed. Notions of the knowledge economy and the information society have made their way into political discourse and government action. A wide range of policies concerning ICT have been the subject of academic attention, but the implicit assumption has often been that such institutional interventions arise rationally through the careful consideration of national needs and aspirations. Although this may be true for the technological innovators, there are reasons to question it for the countries which are technological laggards.

The paper discusses the normative and mimetic pressures that result in national initiatives for ICT adoption and innovation. I am arguing that information society policies originating at a regional or supra-national level play a significant role in national decisions to pursue particular types of actions with regards to ICT through processes of discipline and self-discipline. The paper discusses the way in which one such supra-national organisation, the European Union, through its European Commission, has shaped the form of legitimate national government action of one of its members, namely Greece.

The work is conceptually based on the theoretical problematizations of Foucault's later studies on governmentality as the government and self-government of conduct. In particular, the paper will appropriate the concepts of regime of truth and practices and techniques of government to question the construction of the information society at the EU level and the implications for Greek policy makers. In investigating the thought that is embedded in the discourse and the practices of government I attempt to reveal how Greek policy makers willingly assume the interpretation of the information society construed by their European counterparts and constitute themselves as subjects through discipline and self-discipline.

The purpose and contribution of the paper is to present a theoretically informed discussion of the construction of the information society through European policies, and its interplay with national problematizations on how to appropriate ICT. The paper is adding to the discussion of the information society and ICT policy, extending it through its parallel consideration of two levels of government simultaneously.

The paper is structured as follows. In the next section, I will be reviewing the literature on the information society and ICT policy, to highlight the lack of critical accounts as well as the limited efforts to provide a theoretical conceptualisation of the phenomenon. I will then introduce the concept of governmentality, which forms the overarching conceptual bridge of the paper, and explain the dimensions of truth, rationality, techniques and identity formation which will directly inform my analysis. In the following section a narrative of the case as it evolved over the past twenty years will be presented. In the Analysis, I will critically examine the information society policies as they evolved in the period 1994-2006, investigate the role of the European Union in making information society policies, and discuss the types of governable practices that rendered the information society an object to be governed and managed in a way that transgresses national borders.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The discussion about the role of IT in increased interconnectedness of states, polities and economies through the processes of globalization has primarily focused on the ability of multinationals to transcend national borders to create their own conditions of operation (Dunning 2002). However, in a seminal paper, King, Gurbaxani *et al.* (1994) point to the importance of government intervention to facilitate innovation in the production and use of IT.

The way the states have been implicated in intensifying connections through, and in relation to, ICT have received much less attention (Walsham 2000). Early research on the information strategies of advanced nations include Kahin (1997) on the US and Moore (1998) on the UK. The turn of the century has seen the emergence of academic literature on various national strategies for the information society (Cronberg 1997; Silva and Figueroa 2002; Iosifidis and Leandros 2003; Hall and Loefgren 2004; Chen, Gao et al. 2005; Miller 2005; Sadagopan and Weckert 2005). These studies have produced a wealth of information about the different approaches of information society policies followed by states worldwide, but have, been mostly descriptive, and have made little progress to theorise on the ways in which such policies came to be considered as political priorities at specific points in time.

Kubicek and Dutton (1997) do attempt to turn our attention to the political nature of the creation of such information society strategies and policies. They analyse the social construction of the national information infrastructure rhetoric, demonstrating the conscious and fortuitous choices made in its creation, and the impact it had on policies thereafter. Moreover, the role of donor agencies and multinational consultancies in determining national ICT strategies has been highlighted (Madon 2000; Soeftestad and Sein 2002; Ciborra and Navarra 2005). In a more critical vein, Godin (2005) critiqued the role of OECD for turning the knowledge society into an easily digested buzzword taken up and consumed by its member-states.

Despite these efforts to explain how information society policies have been shaped, there is a need to challenge the means-ends rationalistic assumption of the creation of information society policies, and to further explore the role of institutional actors in shaping them. I suggest that a closer inspection can reveal a layered and multifaceted phenomenon which challenges the reasons why national strategies and the resulting institutional interventions have risen in importance globally and more specifically in the European area.

3 THEORY

The research is grounded on Foucault's concept of governmentality, which he developed in his later lectures (2007), when he attempted to veer away from power and discourse as autonomous forces and bring agency back into the discussion. Governmentality reflects the concern with how government takes place, but addresses government in a broader way than the study of the institutions of government or even governance. It instead concentrates on the ways in which individual and collective behaviour becomes the object of government. The "conduct of conduct" (Foucault 1982), i.e. the way agents are constituted as subjects of a government rationale becomes the overarching theme.

Government is closely intertwined with thought and the production of truth. To govern means to govern based on a rationale, or a process of thinking, which in certain points in time assumes the status of truth. Thought congealed in practices of government becomes taken for granted and is rarely challenged (Rose 1999). The production and reproduction of truth determines the options that appear as feasible for individual action, and renders other options unthinkable. What becomes important, then, is to understand the thought, or rationality, of government in order to reveal the way agency is constructed.

Understanding the rationality of government requires the investigation of the material arrangements on which government is embedded. Rather than assuming the existence of invisible power relations enabling the government of agents, a Foucauldian analysis of government focuses on the practices and techniques which provide a material assemblage of heterogeneous elements, which allow the government of behaviour over a distance (Dean 1996; Dean 1999). Techniques of government, such as tools, procedures, vocabularies and technologies, make the government material, and help produce an analysis not merely of ideology, but also of the structures in which it is embedded (Kumar 2005)

Drawing from the above discussion, I will be appropriating the concepts of regimes of practice and regimes of government, techniques of governments and the idea of a field of visibility, i.e. a domain

which is rendered visible through particular practices and techniques of government, which might otherwise remain in obscurity.

The conceptual lens of governmentality allows the researcher to examine with an inherently critical eye the construction of the information society as a political and policy object in need of government attention in the European space, as well as the impacts this has had for the development of national information society policies that shape in various degrees the appropriation of ICT through the society and economy.

4 METHODOLOGY

The research is a historical case study (Mason, McKenney et al. 1997). This method of research allows the phenomenon to be examined in context over a period of time, so that the historical interconnections and patterns can be investigated. Studying the historical evolution of a phenomenon is in line with a Foucauldian tradition of research, as it allows the researcher to examine how social life is construed and thus challenge its current form.

The research draws on two sources with regards to empirical data. Firstly, a wide range of documents of policy was collected and analysed discursively. An analytics of government was pursued, in line with Foucault's later works, according to which questions are asked of who governs, and under which truth claims and techniques (Dean 1999; Rose 1999). The aim was to understand the ways in which the information society was construed as a political and governable object, rhetoric, as well as an imperative for national action.

Secondly, semi structured in-depth interviews were conducted with a wide range of informants from the ICT policy domain in European Commission, as well as Greece. The informants' accounts were critically examined to understand the value assigned to the information society policies and initiatives, as well as to challenge the rationality and techniques through which the information society was constituted as an object to be governed.

Analysing the data consisted of determining patterns, trying out causal chain scenarios, as well as establishing empathy with the protagonists of the story (Mason, McKenney et al. 1997). The researcher's impressions were compiled in an analytical narrative, which highlighted important and recurrent themes, as well as temporal linkages.

The analytical narrative recounted the policies designed and implemented on ICT for almost two decades, from 1985 to 2006, tracking in parallel the history of Greek and European policies in ICT, focusing on the efforts to promote the wider use of ICT, rather than on the research and regulation aspects. For the purposes of the paper, the period from 1994 to 2006 is being considered. A narrative for this period is provided below, to form the background of the analysis.

In the Analysis section below, I address two questions. To begin with, I attempt to understand under which rationality the information society became an object to be governed, through the successive attempts to make it the object of policy at the European and national levels. In doing that, I explore how its identity was constructed and shifted through time. Secondly, I seek to explore how the Greek responses to the information society were shaped under specific regimes of truth and practices.

5 GOVERNING THE INFORMATION SOCIETY – AN EVOLVING REGIME OF TRUTH

Governing the technological artefact has always been within the aspirations of the EU. Even if not always in a visible political position, governing the deployment ICT, usually through research programmes, has been within the scope of the EU. In an insightful analysis of the role of technology in furthering the purposes of European integration, Barry (2001) has argued that the EU has attempted to

enforce homogeneity and inter-nation coordination through the creation of technical standards, while the construction of digital networks has advanced closer integration among member-states and the EU itself. Around the middle of the 1990s, the governing of the technological artifact emerged as a new object, the information society, which was to become the centre of public attention and policy. The information society was to be governed, measured and managed. Rendering the information society an object of government begets further questioning. By which rationality would this new object be governed? Who was to govern it and how?

In 1993, the information society as a rhetorical object was brought into the highlight in the Bangermann report, one of the most influential European policy documents in the domain of ICT, released under the title *Europe and the global information society*. It highlighted the role of ICTs in improving the competitiveness of the European economy, which faced the increasingly technology-based competition from the United States and Japan. The information society was constructed as primarily an economic object, and as such it needed to be managed according to the dominant neo-liberal paradigm. As an economic object, the private sector would be “entrusted” with its creation (European Commission 1994, p.10). Its motor would be private innovation, produced to be marketed, and safeguarded by well-established patent systems. As an extension of the market, it needed to abide to the rules of competition; the national and regional governments needed to make sure of it. The advent of the information society was also understood to increase the urgency for further liberalisation and privatisation; market barriers needed to be lifted to allow an unmanaged European information society to face up to the challenge of global competition. Moreover, individuals were called to take ownership of the changes and take action and risks to respond to them. A distinct regime of truth emerged around the ‘European’ information society: the business in the information society was to be an innovative one and the individual an entrepreneurial one.

The European Commission’s action plan, in 1994 (European Commission 1994), detailed how the information society was to be governed. The private sector was to have “prime responsibility” for the financing and deployment of the information infrastructures, whilst member-states were urged to “promote the information society” to their SMEs. Moreover, timelines were set for the creation of European guidelines and regulatory frameworks on tariffs, intellectual property rights, competition, electronic protection, privacy and standardisation. This and only this was to be the legitimate area of action for the state in the information society.

The continuing policy-making activity, however, points to a desire, or perceived need, to make the information society the object of public policy. The action plan at a first level set a number of instructions for achieving a goal. More than that, however, it presupposed a level of knowledge about the information society and in this way attempted to render it programmable. The European Union’s action plan minimally attempted two things: it made the information society a distinct social arrangement whose nature and aspects are familiar and known, and which can thus be legitimately governed through specific instructions. Furthermore, by making the information society into a global social arrangement surpassing the capabilities of distinct states, it set the corner stone for rendering the European Commission itself as the appropriate locus of policy decisions.

In Greece, the *Greek strategy for the information society: Tool for employment, growth and quality of life* made its appearance in 1995. The product of advisors in the Ministry of Industry, Energy and Technology, it saw the information society as comprising an innovative private sector fuelling the economy with new digital products and services delivered over infrastructures created by the enterprises themselves. The SMEs would be managerial and innovative in order to survive in the particular vision of the economic and market conditions in the information society. The state was to take a light-touch approach, responsible for educating the population and ensuring fair distribution of the benefits.

Despite the heavy state-centric character of the country, and its limited technological base (Thomadakis 1995), the Greek strategy of 1995, which inaugurated the ‘information society’ as a rhetorical object for the first time in Greek policy-making, subscribed to a particular version of truth

about the information society, originating in the EU. It reproduced the discourse on the innovative business and the entrepreneurial individual as the pillars of the information society, even though it was succinctly at odds with the capabilities of the Greek public and private sectors.

The strategy was also drawn at a particularly high level. It set decade-long targets, but specified no actions or timelines to implement them in the short term. No programme of actions was specified, as if a level of knowledge about the discussed social phenomenon could not be achieved to lead to its being rendered programmable. Seeking an explanation for the reason of existence of this strategy, and of more to come, I return to this point when I look at the practices of self-government and discipline later on.

Back at the EU level, in 1999, the European Commission proposed the eEurope initiative as the new EU strategy for the information society. It was created by the newly founded Information Society Directorate General and was endorsed as an integral part of the Lisbon Strategy in 2000. Literature has already discussed the materially different character of this strategy from the previous one, particularly in the way it upheld the social and cultural dimensions, instead of the market and economic rationalities of the information society (Goodwin and Spittle 2002; Chadwick and May 2003; Berleur and Galand 2005)}. What is more pertinent to this analysis is the shift in what was held true for the information society and how it should be governed.

More specifically, the information society no longer revolved around the entrepreneurial individual and the innovative business; it was a different object to be governed. The information society was now fraught with the dangers of digital exclusion of the unconnected, of unemployment for the under-skilled, of consumer exploitation, and of obsolete government processes unresponsive to new demands. For these dangers to be addressed, private entrepreneurship and innovation, although necessary, were no longer considered enough. The information society was now in need of more governing; it was in need of overt government intervention (Berleur and Galand 2005; Liikanen 2005).

Two action plans, in 2000 and 2002, attempted to render the new vision of the information society programmable and governable. The action plans prescribed a list¹ of *e*-priorities, with e-government, e-health and e-inclusion featuring prominently among others. A further list of twenty government processes to be modernised and offered over the Internet by all member-states was established. Interventions like these, most of them of a non-compulsory nature, needed to take place at the national level in set timelines. Data was also to be collected and collated by the European Commission documenting the progress at the national level. A new unit within the Commission was established to undertake this exercise of benchmarking across sectors and countries. Best practices were to be presented and shared in the Commission's numerous fora attended by national policy makers.

The further attempts to govern the information society mark two important changes in the regime of truth. Not only was the information society now to be governed by the state, but the European Commission was to govern the governing of the information society. On the one hand, the state intervention for the creation of the information society became not only the legitimate, but also the recommended way of doing it. Taking a hands-off approach became a hard policy to justify nationally and internationally, as national backwardness was now visible to, and thought to affect, the whole Community.

On the other hand, the constitution of the Commission as a legitimate locus of governing the information society was further strengthened, but now something qualitatively different defined its role. Not only did the Commission legitimately speak of, and act upon, the information society, but it

¹ The list included twenty government transactions, of which twelve targeted businesses and eight targeted citizen, and which were considered primary targets for reaping the benefits of the 'information society'. Four stages of reform were specified: provision of information online, possibility to download forms, possibility to initiate the transaction online, but need to complete the transaction offline, and finally possibility to complete the transaction online. The stage of computerisation was understood to be an important measure of development of the information society

could now govern the governing of the information society by national authorities too. Through discreet, yet effective, disciplining mechanisms, constituted through the action plans and strategies, the Commission attempted to assume the authority to determine the 'correct' national conduct for a phenomenon no longer presented as one of national sovereignty, but re-presented as one of global/European validity. How effective these disciplining mechanisms were and the extent to which they indeed managed to govern national conduct is taken up on in the following section.

In the national context, the *White Bible for Greece's Entry into the Information Society* was created and publicised in 1999. The strategy, which effectively constituted nothing more than a non-binding white paper, documented its authors' vision for the role of ICT in the progress country. The choice of name is quite emotive. It was neither a strategy, nor a policy, not an action plan. It was a bible, a document of conviction, of the dangers of not following a specific path and hopes of a better future in the opposite case. It was about rights and obligations: the rights of citizens in the information age, and the obligations of the state to ensure the future of its citizens and businesses in the new socio-economic arrangement.

As a bible, the value of the White Bible could not be discussed in terms of its merits, neither could it be challenged by counter-arguments but through the positioning of the discussant in a opposing paradigm, or, in a different regime of truth. But the White Bible reiterated the dominant at the time regime of truth about a state-led information society and the role of the state in fostering the transformation. It discussed e-services and e-rights for the new type of citizens turned consumers of public and private electronic services, and the state's role as educator, protector and procurer. Challenging its dogma would have meant openly opposing a version of truth about how to pursue the information society that was made legitimate by important institutional players. It did not happen but much later in the day, when the Bible's 'doctrine' was juxtaposed to the reality of implementation.

In 2003, the drafting of a new information society strategy began in Greece by two academics-turned-policy implementers for the information society, and keen to leave their distinct mark. The draft, which was never finalised, maintained the truth of the information society as shaped by social, instead of market values, but advocated the need for a more horizontal mobilisation of the civil society to compliment the vertical role of the state. An 'improved' vision of the information society is upheld, simultaneously drawing from the dominant regime of truth, and emergent regimes about the power of networks (mainly the Internet) to connect and empower discreet individuals into powerful collectives.

Back in the EU, a new information society initiative, i2010, produced in 2005, stressed the provision of favourable business environments through interventions and policy-making. It employed different discourses of media policy and digital convergence to suggest "proactive" intervention to enable market growth, innovation, and "quality of life", understood as social and digital inclusion. Different discourses, same rationality of government. The emphasis on benchmarking as a technology of government had given its place to the need for harmonization of technical standards and regulatory frameworks to facilitate the emergence of a European information society. The Commission's role of bringing about these changes was considered nearly commonsensical.

In Greece, a new strategy was initiated yet again in 2006, called Digital Strategy. The product of labour of very few policy advisors, it reframed the question of the information society in terms of quality of life and economic productivity. The discourses appropriated were very similar to i2010, but for the first time in the Greek policies on the information society, the Digital Strategy was more than a vague picture of a vision. It broke down the information society as an object into manageable pieces and time-boxed them. The document itself, which was printed in an impressive illustrated publication and circulated widely in the political, policy and business cycles, through its timetabled actions, rendered the information society into a object that was new, yet known and well understood. In a governable fashion, the state knew what the correct response of its functions, businesses and citizens was. The information society was being rendered governable at the national level.

6 THE INFORMATION SOCIETY WITHIN A REGIME OF DISCIPLINING AND SELF-DISCIPLINING PRACTICES

The previous section discussed the constitution of an evolving regime of truth about the information society through the production of a series of European policies and the way it was reproduced in Greek policy-making. I also argued that the Commission attempted to govern not only the information society through its constitution of an object of policy, but also the governing of the information society by the member states. In the following section, I go on to discuss distinct ways in which the Commission was partly successful in its attempts to govern the behaviour of at least one member-country, Greece, through mechanisms which had as a direct impact to govern the behaviour of the national policy-makers of the information society.

6.1 Shaping the degrees of freedom

The role of EU-produced documents as objects that rendered the information society a known, familiar and thus governable social arrangement, through the production of concrete action plans and timelines, was discussed above. Unlike these, however, the Greek information society documents, at least the ones up to 2006, made little effort to re-present the information as a well-known object to be governed, and thus could not effectively function as means of governing other actors' conduct with regards to the information society and its national implementation. Their purpose then needs to be sought elsewhere.

Interviews with Greek policy makers revealed deep contradictions as to the reason of creating these documents. An example of this can be investigated in the case of the creation of the Greek White Bible produced in 1999. A key policy-maker behind the drafting of the White Bible found it "disgraceful" that, before the creation of the White Bible Greece was the only European country not to have an information society strategy, as if it highlighted a shortcoming of policy attention or shrewdness on the part of Greek policy makers in appreciating the magnitude of the impending change. Pointing out that the White Bible was not the first Greek information society strategy, as the 1995 one preceded it by a few years, he dismissed it as inappropriate.

This can be interpreted as a question of legitimacy with regards to dominant truth on what the information society and the role of the state in fostering it should be at this specific point in time. In this respect, the 1995 strategy was not legitimate in 1999 on two counts. Firstly, because it was incompatible with the shifted dominant regime of truth about the particular version of the information society pursued by the Commission at the time. It was out of tune with the prevalent congealed thought about what kind of object the information society was and how it was meant to be governed. Secondly, because not creating a new strategy was incongruent with the expected national policy response to the object of the information society. For the Greek policy makers creating the White Bible in 1999 (and there is evidence that the same hold true for the two subsequent strategies) was thought to demonstrate a rational and purposeful approach towards planning and investing in ICT, which they believed to be congruent with what was expected of them by the Commission. The content of the strategy was less significant than its perceived symbolic value as the outcome and instrument of rational deliberation on managing and constructing an information society.

So, whereas the purpose of the European documents was to render the information society an object that was known well enough to be governed through action lines and deadlines, the purpose of the Greek documents was less to act as a set of instructions, but rather to symbolically demonstrate to be compatible with the expected pattern of behaviour, and the accepted truths about the information society at specific, important in terms of timing, points in time.

The Commission's attempts to govern the information society established a regime of practice where the creation of an information society strategy was the appropriate thing to do. The regime of practice

effectively defined the degrees of freedom of Greek policy-makers, who, working within the context of a country with limited capacity in technology policy, saw their options to be already defined.

What this further means is that the assumed position of the Commission as the legitimate governor of the governing of the information society was not challenged by the Greek policy-makers. They responded to the EU-originating regimes of truth about the information society by upholding the authoritative position of the Commission in speaking of, and initiating action on, the information society.

6.2 Mechanisms of discipline

The Commission employed benchmarking as one of the core methods of achieving compliance with the targets of its version of the information society, by “track[ing] progress towards the agreed targets” on a web space (European Commission 2000) and ensuring that well-performers were congratulated, and laggards made visible to all. Interviews with Greek policy-makers revealed the role that cross-comparison and benchmarking tables played in their decisions to act. As a mechanism of government, the benchmarking exercise has the capacity to re-define an array of disparate countries as a homogenous area of comparison. Re-presenting all European countries in the same space has the potential to create a European technological zone to be governed (Barry 2001).

The effects of the benchmarking exercise in governing the Greek policy makers’ actions have been however mixed. All of the higher-level policy makers interviewed in Greece were acutely aware of the “dire image of the country abroad” owing to its consistent positioning at the bottom of the benchmarking tables. The comparison with other Southern European countries, as well as the new accession countries was thought to be particularly damaging. Their efforts were “geared towards closing the gap”, which would then be rendered visible in the benchmarks. Interviewees in Brussels also extensively utilised the benchmarking tables in our meetings to point out that Greece consistently held the last position and that even their persistent efforts had not managed to reverse the situation.

Despite the prominent position of the benchmarking exercise in the rhetoric of Greek and European high-level officials, and the related discourses on catching up, the visible effects of its governing of practice on all but the higher-level policy-makers were more ambiguous. The practice of benchmarking was often deconstructed and challenged both discursively and in practice. For example, numerous interviewees in Greece brought up the list of twenty proposed government services to be offered over the Internet across Europe and utilised it as a yardstick for measuring the country’s progress towards the ‘information society’. The same informants were however often critical of the local relevance or success of these projects as well as of the way they were “imposed” on them and measured. The constitution of a unifying and comparable European technological space was in practice defied in favour of the uniqueness of national socio-economic conditions. The practise of benchmarking was relegated to a secondary role, which was more symbolic than governing.

7 DISCUSSION

The analysis above provided evidence in support of the argument that the information society was constituted as a political object to be governed by the Commission, which continuously shaped its identity and the claims of truth by which it would be governed. Through practices of discipline and self-discipline the degrees of freedom of Greek policy-makers in ICT were shaped through their interaction with the Commission’s information society policies.

The creation of information society strategies has been usually discussed as the purposeful response to the intensification of information production, processing and dissemination in the whole fabric of the society and economy. Their sudden proliferation at around the turn of the century has rarely been questioned. In an insightful critique, Mosco (2004) addresses this question by analysing the mythical aspects of the discourse on ICT, in order to explain how, repackaged into the information society or

the digital era, the ICTs captured the imagination of *bricoleurs* of governments around the world. His study reveals the consumption side of the discourses that imaginative *bricoleurs* of governments create, furthermore providing evidence for the disciplining and self-disciplining effects of these myths, a concept similar to this discussion of regimes of truth.

The research falls within the critical stream of thinking, in attempting to challenge the dominant perceptions of social reality through “providing alternative readings (Alverson and Deetz 2000, p.17). Providing alternative reading a Foucauldian lens requires more than analysing language to reveal the hidden notions of government. Language is constitutive of government, as government can only take place under a certain description. A regime of intelligibility is what allows government to govern specific parts of social life. As such, language does not only describe acts of government; it also makes them possible. Discursive practices are both part of, and help constitute a regime of practice, i.e. a specific way of making sense of the world. Regimes of practices define what holds true in different points in time and determine what legitimate social action is. The analysis has attempted to show the distinct ways in which language actively determined the government and self-government of people and artefacts. In doing that, it extends existing studies of the European information society (De Miranda and Kristiansen 2000; Goodwin and Spittle 2002; Chadwick and May 2003) which critique the ideology behind the European information society discourse, but make no reference to the impact this discourse for social action.

What the analysis has further revealed is the important and often neglected role of regional, supranational organizations in setting the agenda by filtering global trends and technological concerns for their members. Working alongside trends of globalization, such organizations effectively scan the technological landscape for solutions that match their aims and promote them, thus influencing a zone around them where ambiguity and available options are reduced. The EU helps isolate, in certain ways, member-states from the direct impact of globalization.

Finally, it is important to note that the arguments of this study are derived from an in-depth study of one European country. As such, they are not necessarily generalizable to the rest of the European countries which face a different mix of socio-economic conditions. For example it would be expected that not all countries subscribed to the dominant regime of truth claims and practices produced by the EU. Countries that find it hard to articulate a technological vision of their own may more susceptible to such interventions. It is expected that the influence of regional organizations will be reduced in countries with stronger technological traditions. However, further research would need to examine whether similar findings arising in other cases of financial, technological or policy interplay at different levels of governance, such as international donors and developing countries.

8 CONCLUSION

This paper sought to critically examine the constitution of the information society as an object of political and policy discourse, and challenge the rationalistic assumption that information society strategies respond to clearly defined needs, by revealing the dominant role of supra-national institutions in determining the available options for national governments. The paper critically discussed the constitution of the information society by the European Commission as a discursive political and policy object and examined the role it played in the emergence of national information society strategies.

The discourse analysis of the information society strategies has revealed how the construed identity of the information society and the rationality by which it would be managed shifted through time from more liberal to more state-centric. The regime of truth dominated the conceptions and interpretations of the information society in Greece, where strikingly similar versions of the truth were expressed. The analysis has further showed how seemingly apolitical practices and devices, such as the information society documents, have had highly disciplining effects on the Greek policy-makers' decisions to bring about particular types of responses to the information society. Simultaneously, the

Greek policy-makers willingly subscribed to the regime of practice, reproducing similar truths about the information society and self-governing their behaviour, either because they felt that degrees of freedom were extraneously defined, or in order to pursue instrumentally satisfactory outcomes.

The contribution of the paper lies in its theoretical conceptualisation of the way information society policies seem to have been constructed in a particular social context. The discussion of governmentality appears to have been a fruitful way to theorise the phenomenon and to provide propositions which could further lead to theoretical generalisations.

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