

The IIEP in 2023: 60 Years and a New Departure

Remarks at a seminar on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the International Institute for Educational Planning (IIEP)

Paris, December 3, 2013

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The instructions for this seminar say that we are supposed to talk about the Institute's past, present, and future – but with all due respect and with apologies for my insubordination, I am not particularly interested in the past (that we can't change anyway), and I don't know enough about the Institute's present to say anything useful – so I would like to ask your indulgence for engaging, for the few minutes I have, in a little fantasy about the future of the IIEP.

My fantasy deals with the 60th anniversary of the IIEP in 2023, and it's a pretty big celebration. You may be surprised to hear that the 60th anniversary is not being celebrated in Paris, but in Sao Paulo/Brazil, at the new main office of the Institute. The celebration is presided over by both the Institute's director, who is a woman from India and a senior scholar of educational governance, and the chair of what used to be the Governing Board and is now the Executive Council of the IIEP Foundation; he is the former Rector of Beijing University.

But don't let me get ahead of myself and let me explain what happened as we moved from 2013 to 2023. The main development was the growing realization that the intergovernmental model on which the IIEP had traditionally been structured had become increasingly obsolete, and that there was an urgent need to think of alternative models for the Institute's future. It had become increasingly clear that these alternatives would have to take into account some of the major changes both in the governance of educational institutions and systems around the world and in the role of state and non-state actors in the international system.

In the course of these deliberations, it had also become abundantly clear what some of us had always argued, namely, that the intergovernmental model had never really been a particularly good fit for an institution like the IIEP which has as its central mission research, training, and knowledge transfer. From its beginnings and throughout the Institute's history, all the debates about the special status of the Institute – about its autonomy, the role and the rights of the Governing Board, the recruitment of its director, its distributed funding model etc. – had demonstrated how uneasy the fit between the logic of an intergovernmental organization and the actual mission of the Institute had been all along.

It was thus only logical that, in 2017, the status of the Institute changed rather profoundly. Its relationship to UNESCO was terminated amicably and replaced by a cooperative memorandum of understanding; its legal status became that of a non-profit international scientific society licensed in Brazil and established (as the licensing

documents specified) “for the purpose of research and training in educational planning, policy and governance”. The financial responsibility for the Institute was turned over to the IIEP Foundation that was established under Brazilian law and funded under long-term agreements by a consortium of international donors; this consortium includes the Qatar National Research Fund, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation in the US and several major Brazilian, South African, and Singaporean foundations; in addition, several national governments – including those of China, Malaysia, Germany, Norway and Sweden have contributed major capital funding to an international endowment, the interest of which flows into the funding of the Institute’s activities. The French government has sold the former headquarters of the Institute in the 16th arrondissement of Paris to a major investment corporation for a very good price, and contributed the proceeds from the sale to the new endowment. The IIEP Foundation now is the employer of the Institute’s personnel, all of whom have term contracts which are individually negotiated. The Institute’s Governing Board has been transformed into the Executive Council of the IIEP Foundation which approves the Institute’s work plans and budgets as well as all professional appointments, including that of the Director. The members of the Executive Council are appointed by the Secretary General of the United Nations upon the recommendation of the major contributors to the Institute’s finances and the governments of the states where the Institute has offices; these offices are now located, besides the main office in Sao Paulo, in Beijing, Dakar, and Qatar. The former IIEP office in Buenos Aires has been incorporated into the new network; each of the IIEP’s regional offices has a degree-granting cooperative agreement with a local university for granting a master’s degree in educational planning and governance.

The idea for this new structure of the IIEP owes a good deal to some of the recommendations made in 2013 by the Oxford Martin Commission for Future Generations¹, especially the Commission’s proposal of “Creative Coalitions” of governmental as well non-governmental, national as well as international actors. The legal and financial arrangements for the IIEP’s new structure have been informed by the successful example of the IEA, the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, which as an international scientific society is licensed in Belgium and as a foundation registered in the Netherlands². The Institute in its entirety has a close working agreement with UNDP which supports the Institute’s field operations.

¹ Now for the Long Term: The Report of the Oxford Martin Commission for Future Generations, October 2013

² The International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) is a non-profit international scientific society licensed in Belgium for the purpose of pedagogical research worldwide. Under Belgian law (see the state newspaper of 21 September 1967), the IEA society holds tax-exempt status on all contributions, subscriptions, and grants which serve as working capital. The IEA Secretariat is registered as a foundation in the Chamber of Commerce, The Hague, Netherlands (No. 41158871, 9 December 1994) in the name Stichting I.E.A. Secretariaat Nederland (Foundation IEA Secretariat Netherlands). The foundation holds tax-exempt status. The site of the foundation is Amsterdam, Netherlands. It holds all financial rights and obligations of the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement and employs IEA personnel. The Foundation IEA Secretariat Netherlands is audited annually by the international auditing firm of Ernst & Young, The Hague, Netherlands.

Let me get back to the events of 2023. Listening to a discussion of the Executive Council on the occasion of the 60th anniversary, one gets the impression that both the relocation and the restructuring of the IIEP seems to have invigorated the work of the Institute, and has contributed to a creative broadening of the Institute's agenda. The issue of governance in educational institutions and systems is now playing an even more central role in the IIEP's research and training agenda; some particularly interesting contributions are being made to understanding and assisting the increasingly important educational activities by non-state actors such as enterprises, urban communities, voluntary associations, and other non-governmental organizations.

My fantasy ends with listening to the keynote address at the conclusion of the festivities to celebrate the 60th anniversary. The address is transmitted to Sao Paulo by live stream video and is given by the President of the United States of America, The Honorable Hillary Rodham Clinton, now nearing the end of her second term in office. In her speech, President Clinton acknowledges the important work the IIEP is doing for the advancement of education around the world, and announces a recently concluded cooperation agreement between the new IIEP and Stanford University in the state of California.