

## CHECK AGAINST DELIVERY

Europe in the world – Higher Education Developments across the World

The Bologna Process – A Model for Higher Education Worldwide?

As a dyed-in-the-wool optimist, and not to get too carried away, I decided to start out on a pessimistic and critical note and to work my way towards a positive and optimistic ending. We will take stock of some of the lessons learned in Europe and see what we have to offer to other regions of our planet.

Is the Bologna Process a model for higher education worldwide. Answer: Yes -- But! Why this answer?

A good cause has been partly abused, misused and wrongly used, but that does not make it an **unworthy** cause! And I consider this a **fundamental statement about Bologna and the EHEA**. All its aberrations are aptly abstracted in the following conversation between a grandmother and her student granddaughter:

Granny asking: “Why are you studying, what would you like to achieve, to get out of it at the end?” The answer: “180 credit points and a slot in a master’s program” This answer epitomizes what the Bologna Process was not meant to be: a streamlined study model to rush through university and to have the parchment and a job as soon as possible.

Now don’t be afraid, I won’t give you a rundown of everything that has gone off-center with the implementation, especially as by now we know how to right many of the wrongs. But defending the role of the Bologna Process as model for other regions of the world – I strongly believe it can play this role – you have to put a finger on the weak points of the system also. And the nice thing for other regions taking a leaf out of the Bologna book is that they can more easily avoid the mistakes already made.

It is a noteworthy fact that at the start when Bologna was conceived in 1998/99, it was the European founders that looked elsewhere for viable instruments as models for a more homogeneous European Higher Education

Area. Bologna was not invented out of the blue. A fitting example is the decision in favor of the 2-tier bachelor/master study architecture, which then was prevalent in 3 out of 4 higher education institutions worldwide. So, interestingly, the roles of **model-provider and model-follower were actually reversed**.

Before 2004 there were only scant references to the necessity of **“focusing on the understanding of Bologna degrees in the rest of the world”**, but no follow-up action really. From then onwards the so-called external dimension has been an omnipresent ingredient on the Bologna menu up to now. The largest single higher education reform process in Europe, and probably also globally, did not go unnoticed outside the European continent. Small surprise given the fact that from 2003 the Bologna land area was soon to run from the Atlantic Ocean to the Pacific, and from the Arctic Ocean to the Mediterranean Sea.

A discussion of the impact of Bologna on the rest of the world cannot do without at least mentioning the **“EHEA in a global setting strategy”** of 2007, which was designed to **improve information, to promote European higher education in order to increase its worldwide attractiveness and competitiveness, to strengthen cooperation based on partnership and to intensify policy dialog**. We all know that this strategy and the ensuing Bologna Policy Fora in 2009, 2010, and 2012 have not been very successful. In other words, verbal manifestations and commitments have been short on realization. This is a pity because following up on the strategy and the BPF would have been a perfect show case for offering Bologna as a model. One of the well-known reasons is that the diverging and often non-compatible (yet legitimate) interests of individual countries make a joint effort impossible. This issue has been amply discussed on many occasions, e.g., at the DAAD conference on the external dimension of the Bologna Process in Dresden last October.

### **The Big Issues**

Back to the original question: Is the Bologna Process a model for higher education worldwide?

**Yes**, The Bologna Process can definitely serve as a model. **But** the offer comes with many a caveat in connection with the cases where we had to retrace our steps and put Bologna back on its tracks.

The areas of tension which we have experienced in building a European higher education area will in all probability also be felt in any of the regions where a similar cooperation and convergence model is employed

The idea of Bologna is a noteworthy one, it is a good cause. Yet it can only be successfully delivered with due **consideration of the political, cultural, and of course, educational diversity and specificity** of the countries involved.

In the same way that it is true for Bologna and the EHEA that real success should **not be measured in terms of final implementation but in the continuous effort to uphold the innovative momentum**, this should also be the yardstick for using Bologna as a successful role model elsewhere. It is a special **feature of the BP that it will always remain a PROCESS**, capable of adapting to changing reality. (David Crosier, Teodora Parveva 2013, The BP: its impact in Europe and beyond, UNESCO International Institute for Educational Planning.)

The most daunting and overarching challenge we are “exporting” along with the Bologna instruments and policies lies in the fact that **“The fundamental value of the BP is the synergy of its combined elements”** (Paul Gaston of Kent State University). In other words, the European higher education area will not unfold its full potential until all the instruments and policies are in place in all the participating countries. **This means that it must not be used as an a la carte menu but as a full-course meal!** What sense does it make if a student gets all the financial and organizational support necessary to spend a study-stay abroad, if the home institution refuses to recognize the newly acquired academic skills & competences? Or if a teacher is offered a visiting professorship at a prestigious university abroad and runs into mobility obstacles such as non-portability of insurance and pension rights/payments?

And then we have the seemingly antagonistic and conflicting pairs of **homogeneity versus diversity, mobility versus brain drain, competition versus cooperation, leadership versus autonomy.**

They are conflicting at first sight only. They constitute necessary and inherent accompaniments to such a complex undertaking. We want to keep our rich **diversity** of cultures, languages, customs without interfering with the **converging** process in HE. This must be possible!

And we want to offer **mobility** options to all students, teachers, and staff who are willing and able to embark on study-, research-, or teaching related stays at a partner institution. After all, many of the present and future challenges we are facing (let me just mention migration, environmental degradation, un- and underemployment, climate change, dwindling natural resources, etc.) are entirely or partly border-transcending phenomena. And we will need the best and the brightest with international and intercultural experience to meet those challenges. Mobility is for me one of the cornerstones of a functioning higher education area and I am sorry I can't spare you my mantra in this connection: **"Internationality is an intellectual concept acquired through personal experience"**.

If **brain drain** is involved then there are many possibilities to make sure that the academic expertise is returned to the country of origin. And if we succeed in building a global higher education area then we will also turn brain loss into brain gain through **brain circulation**.

**Collaboration and competition** are two concepts which have come to reinforce each other in that HEIs can grow in quality and attractiveness by cooperating with other HEIs or non-academic partners. At the same time they will be competitors in attracting students and research contracts. They will become more visible and will appear on the radar screens of potential partners. Co-opetition is the buzzword which was coined to describe this situation.

**Leadership versus Autonomy** reflects the paradox of public responsibility for higher education on the one hand, and university autonomy on the other. But we have seen that the solution lies in partnership, exemplarily mirrored in the performance agreements between, e.g. the Austrian ministry of science, research and Economy and the universities, agreements, which are negotiated between equal partners.

**Limiting the bachelor to 3 years**, which may make sense in some fields, but not in others, rather than allowing the originally intended flexibility of 3-4 years (180-240 credits), has perverted one of the main goals – namely promoting mobility – into curbing the movement of students abroad. Being narrow-minded and pussilanimous we often stuck to the beaten track of curricular structures, stuffing the old and often antiquated long 4-6 year diploma curricula corset-like into the short 3-4 year bachelor curricula. It took some time and learning to grasp the opportunities to create bachelor and master curricula from scratch with new innovative contents which answer to the changing needs of students and society at large. Plenty examples are given in the HRK-publication *“Kreative Vielfalt”* (Creativity in Diversity, how German Universities make use of the BP, Bonn 2010).

Bologna is to be understood as a **set of recommendations** which every country must wholeheartedly commit itself to, but whether it uses strict legal regulations or just soft recommendations is a decision it takes for itself. The erstwhile top-down approach typical of the first Bologna decade has given way to partnership-type relations between students, HEIs and governments/ministries. This is extremely important now in the second BP decade where political ownership is firmly established (albeit with some backslipping in some countries) but full adoption by HEI and students is still lacking. I would specifically recommend practicing **“student-centeredness”** i.e. including students in the governance of the university. We have seen that students contribute essentially towards democratisation, and more efficient communication procedures all of which facilitate innovation in higher education. And this effect is even boosted and exacerbated by tapping the experience of international students and students with study-stays abroad.

Don't force Bologna on top of well-functioning aspects of national HE systems but adapt either one to the other. The important thing is that structures and contents become compatible, comparable and that they follow a converging course.

### **More Do's and Don'ts**

One of the missed opportunities lies in the fact that the great **flexibility and availability of options which Bologna offers** has not been properly exploited.

A good example is again the **bachelor study structure**. A bachelors' degree gives you the option of sounding out the labor market as to which professional careers are open to you, and to re-enter academia any time later on. And if you do, you may choose a HEI at home or abroad, programs in your native language, English or another tongue. You might want to go into a related/interdisciplinary field, etc. In actual fact many students frantically rushed into a master program right away because the value of the bachelor degree was not really known by them, the HEI, and the employers. It takes time and appropriate, tailor-made curricula to build up trust and to overcome this impasse.

Another shortcoming to be avoided in using the BP as a role model: **lack of, or scanty, biased and incorrect information**. Many myths and misconceptions about Bologna could have been avoided if information management had been more professional and if it had been given more importance in the first place. Seminars, discussions and other fact-finding meetings with the major stakeholders at all levels are absolutely essential, and national working groups – Bologna follow-up groups with all interests represented go a long way in avoiding information gaps.

This leads directly to another crucial point: The all-inclusive character of the BP regarding implementation and the actors involved: the **it-does-not-work-until-all-instruments-and-policies-are-in-place** postulate, and the **all-stakeholders-must-be-on-board** approach are most warmly recommended to those interested in learning from Bologna. This multi-party philosophy is represented in the European BFUG and should be reflected also in the national BFUGs. It does not only guarantee acceptance and ownership of the process but also helps to combine top-down and bottom-up decision-making, both of which are necessary ingredients.

Coming to an end I would like to reiterate my encouragement for other regions of the world to use Bologna in light of the recommendations and warnings given above and considering the following additional aspects (being fully positive now):

1. Implementing the social dimension agenda will empower many gifted young people to enter higher education and will help harness talents otherwise lost.
2. BP is a PROCESS, not only capable of adapting to changing reality, but also capable of adapting to the reality of a country's specific higher education needs.
3. Keep in mind that part of the success is due to the fact that there is no central authority or governance. Management of the Process functions through the Bologna Follow-up Group and the Secretariat. The latter is provided by the volunteer member which organizes the next ministerial conference.
4. There is no central budget, all costs are borne by the countries and institutions which organize events (not the least of which are EC funds).
5. Joint degrees (ERASMUS MUNDUS and others) are a pillar of inter-university cooperation worldwide; they need to be further promoted and propagated.

And last but not least: If you succeed in making the process INCLUSIVE; OPEN; DEMOCRATIC; CONSENSUAL; PARTICIPATORY; TRANSPARENT and EGALITARIAN, then you might be ahead of Europe and we will be able to learn from you. And if you happen to err along the way you may take solace in a famous saying by James Joyce, who by the way is honored in today's worldwide Bloomsday celebrations: "Mistakes are the portals of discovery".

Thank you for your patience!

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