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Policy travel: *“Bologna going global”*

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1.0 Introduction

In the focus: the “*Bologna club*” vs. the “*outer world*” ...

Until 2005 the Bologna Process became a “success story”; it also became a **policy model** for several non-European countries and regions (however, mainly unintentional)

A new issue was born within the “club”: how should the emerging European Higher Education Area (EHEA) **relate to “outer world”** (“other higher education areas”)?

A decision was taken in Bergen (2005) and London (2007).

However, this issue did not arise out of the blue; its roots can be found in documents from the beginning of the process.

2.0 The vitality of a civilisation ...

“We must strengthen and build upon the intellectual, cultural, social and technical dimensions of our continent.

[...] They are **international recognition and attractive potential of our systems** directly related to their external and internal readabilities.

[...] We call on other Member States of the Union and other European countries to join us in this objective [i.e. the endeavour to create a EHEA] and on all European Universities to **consolidate Europe's standing in the world** through continuously improved and updated education for its citizens.” (Sorbonne Declaration, 1998)

2.1 The vitality of a civilisation ...

“We must in particular look at the objective of **increasing the international competitiveness of the European systems of higher education**. The vitality and efficiency of any civilisation can be measured by the **appeal that its culture has for other countries**. We need to ensure that the European higher education system acquires a world-wide degree of attraction equal to our extraordinary cultural and scientific traditions.” (Bologna Declaration, 1999)

2.1 Possible implications of transnational HE

“Ministers particularly stressed that the quality of higher education and research is and should be an important determinant of Europe’s international attractiveness and competitiveness. [...] They called for increased **collaboration between the European countries concerning the possible implications and perspectives of transnational education.**” (Prague Communiqué, 2001)

“[Ministers] encourage the **co-operation with regions in other parts of the world** by opening Bologna seminars and conferences to representatives of these regions.” (Berlin Communiqué, 2003)

2.2 A strategy for the external dimension

“The EHEA **must be open and should be attractive to other parts of the world.** [...] We reiterate that in international academic cooperation, academic values should prevail.

We see the **EHEA as a partner of HE systems in other regions** of the world, stimulating **balanced student and staff exchange** and cooperation between HEIs. We underline the importance of **intercultural understanding** and respect. We look forward to enhancing the understanding of the Bologna Process in other continents by **sharing our experiences of reform** processes with neighbouring regions. We stress the **need for dialogue** on issues of mutual interest. We see the need to identify partner regions and intensify the exchange of ideas and experiences with those regions. We ask the Follow-up Group to elaborate and agree on a **strategy for the external dimension.**” (Bergen Communiqué, 2005)

3.0 What is the “external dimension”

Different issues can be identified in the “Bologna” discussion between 2005 and 2007; three major groups:

1. “We need to increase **attractiveness** of our HE systems”.
2. **Cooperation** or **competition**? – Competition or cooperation?
3. The Bologna **expansion**: Where are (or should be set) the “**outer borders**” of the EHEA?

Parallel to this, it became clear that there is lots of interests in the Bologna Process in the “outer world”, but the background of these interests was also very diverse.

3.1 Diverse interests in the Bologna Process

Variations of the “Bologna echoes”:

- A. “attractiveness” through the lens of post-colonial dependence (the competition – cooperation dilemma);
- B. Bologna as a challenge to other countries/regions (the competition aspect);
- C. initiative for innovation of one's own system (the “pure attractiveness”);
- D. ignorance – no “echo” (non-attractive but perhaps competitive);
- E. “to keep the pot in a warm place” (attractive, but just in case).

3.1.1 The competition – cooperation dilemma

“It is well known that most of the universities in countries which were former colonies of Europe were patterned on the institutions in the respective colonising country. In Europe these countries are mainly the UK, France, Spain and Portugal. The former colonies, mostly developing countries, are mainly in Africa, Asia, Latin America, the Caribbean and the Pacific. There has always been very close collaboration in teaching and research between universities in Europe and those in the south.”

Now, global *competition* in HE markets raises concerns but there could also be concerns about future *cooperation*: “there is the danger that European universities will now prefer to collaborate with their counterparts in Europe rather than with those in the south. This would have a negative impact on the latter”. (Goolam Mohamedbhai, 2005).

3.1.2 The competition aspect

“Minister Julie Bishop warns that if Australia does not align itself with the changes taking place in 45 European countries under the Bologna Agreement, it will be left out of the tent.” (*The Australian*, 5 April 2006)

Ministers “agreed on the common goal of increasing greater student and academic mobility and transferability of qualifications, and greater integration or exchangeability of education frameworks”. Mobility and exchange “are seen to provide the basis for friendship, mutual respect and understanding, just as education is the key to prosperity, security and peace in the Asia-Pacific region and beyond“. (*Brisbane communiqué*; 3-4 April 2006, signed by 27 Ministers from across the Asia-Pacific region.)

3.1.3 The “pure attractiveness”

“It is needless to say that the HE system in the South is archaic and it is now in a critical situation, and I cannot exclude those countries in the process of development that have already started the implementation of Bologna process (Tunisia, Morocco) since the outcome is not yet evaluated. For some other countries, reform is mere ink on paper.”
[...]

“‘It takes two to tango’ as they say, and North-South cooperation is vital.” (Ahmed Touhami [Syria], 2006)

3.1.4 Non-attractive but perhaps competitive

“The good news is that we still have the finest system of higher education in the world. But we’re at a crossroads. The world is catching up.” (Margaret Spellings, US Secretary of State, 2005)

“For the United States the effects of the Bologna Process are difficult to predict, but a few things are clear. ... Europe will offer an attractive alternative.” (Sedgwick, the WENR editor, 2003)

“Ignorance is always dangerous, but the United States ignorance of the Bologna Process – outside of some educational experts – may be particularly dangerous” (Catharine Stimpson, New York University, 2005).

4.0 A Strategy for the External Dimension

European Higher Education in a Global Setting (2007)

Three **guiding principles**: (a) European heritage and values;
(b) Stakeholder participation; (c) geographical scope.

Five **action lines**:

1. Improving information on EHEA
2. Promoting EHEA: its attractiveness and competitiveness
3. Strengthening cooperation based on partnership
4. Intensifying policy dialogue
5. Furthering recognition of qualifications.

However, **impact** of the strategy has been so far quite **weak**
(see Zgaga, 2011).

5.0 Concluding remarks

The *Bologna Stocktaking Report 2009*: the EHEA countries “promote their own higher education systems internationally and very few promote the EHEA”.

What is (should be) the EHEA:

- a regional area which is based on common academic heritage and values while respecting the diversity and promoting the development of all and each;
- a large area of the free market dominated by the logic of centres and peripheries?

What is (should be) the EHEA:

- an original response to the need for creating regional HE policy spaces (synergy of national HE systems), or
- a tool for the expansion of neoliberal HE policies?