

Chapter 6

Implementation of Bologna Reforms: A Comparative Analysis between Participating Countries

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ABSTRACT

This chapter develops a horizontal analysis of the implementation of the reforms adopted by the Bologna Declaration. Each signatory country of the declaration is analyzed according to each of the action lines: quality assurance, degree system, recognition of studies and degrees, mobility of students, researchers and teachers, social dimension, lifelong learning, joint degree programs, employability, student-centered learning system, and the European Research Area. The assessment provides not only some relevant indicators, but it refers also to the main challenges faced by signatory countries and possible measures that might foster convergence achievement within the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

INTRODUCTION

Research conducted in the last years in the field of higher education (Amaral & Magalhães, 2004; Heinze & Knill 2008; Maasen & Stensaker 2011; Neave & Veiga 2013; Voegtli, Knill, & Dobbins, 2011) suggests that a common and convergent higher education policy at European level is one of the most important issues addressed in Europe, due to increasing economic, demographic, social

and cultural pressure. Before 1999, when 29 countries signed the Bologna declaration, a common European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and an integrated higher education policy seemed unthinkable (Heinze & Knill, 2008) and many researchers in the field of education are still discussing its possible advantages or negative effects (Amaral & Magalhães, 2004). However, the commitment to establish three cycles in higher education and to adopt comparable degrees is now

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being implemented in 47 countries and many steps were done in the previous years. We can speak about remarkable domestic changes that vary from country to country (Witte, 2006).

This book chapter builds on earlier work focused on Bologna Process (Coronel Llamas, 2011; Heinze & Knill, 2008; Neave & Veiga 2013; Voegtler, Knill, & Dobbins, 2011; Winkel, 2010) and its main purpose is to present a summary of the stage of implementation of the Bologna Process in the signatory countries.

The analysis follows a *horizontal structure, presenting progresses made by participating countries in each of the Bologna action lines*: the European cooperation in quality assurance, a clear system of comparable degrees, a system of credits, mobility of students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff, the social impact, lifelong learning, employability and the European dimensions in higher education.

Although there are voices that claim that the progress of the Bologna programme at European level was largely formal and predominantly legal (Neave & Veiga, 2013), The Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué set the agenda for the new decade and established clear goals for the main action lines like the National Qualification Frameworks by 2012, a benchmark of 20% by 2020 for student mobility or the public responsibility for lifelong learning partnerships.

In order to increase its relevance and credibility, the analysis relies on various sources of information like stocktaking reports, EURYDICE reports, presentations and speeches from Bologna conferences and academic articles. Therefore the further analysis is based both on the Bologna Stocktaking Reports which have been realized for the Ministerial Conferences from Bergen (2005), London (2007), Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve (2009), Budapest and Vienna (2010) and Bucharest (2012) by a working group appointed by the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) and also on other higher education reports like The European Higher Education Area in 2012 or

academic articles written on this topic and other independent assessment reports developed by various organizations and associations, which represent different voices and groups of interest, such as students, professors etc., on National Reports and other documents.

The main assessment tool deployed in the Bologna Stocktaking Reports in order to offer a “big picture” overview on the progress made on the priority action lines relies on Bologna Scorecard. *Bologna Scorecard* represents an instrument based on objective criteria and benchmarks, which is not an absolute measurement tool, but an instrument which measures the progress made by each country. “The approach is based on similar models, for example the *Lisbon Scorecard* developed by the Centre for European Reform and the *balanced scorecard* approach, which combines qualitative (National Reports) and quantitative (EURYDICE statistical material) measures and can be applied in a range of organisational contexts” (BFUG, 2005, p.13). For each of the action lines there were developed several criteria, each of them being assessed by means of several questions. Each criterion was expanded on the basis of five benchmarks which would serve to measure the extent of progress. These were subsequently colour coded, green for an excellent performance, light green for a very good performance, yellow for good performance, orange for some progress made and red for little progress made yet.

QUALITY ASSURANCE

Based on this methodology, for the first action line, quality assurance (QA), in 2005 there have been established four criteria of evaluation (stage of development of quality assurance system, key elements of the evaluation system, students’ involvement, international participation in the quality assurance process). These criteria have been slightly modified in 2007, 2009 and 2011 from two perspectives: some criteria remain the

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