

Chapter 1

Comparative Analysis of Educational Policies Research

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ABSTRACT

The chapter discusses the possibility for European education to convergence in the Bologna framework by studying the literature dedicated to educational policies in leading academic journals. Using a content analysis methodology, the qualitative research aims to highlight the key topics and research concerns of academics in European higher education and to correlate their research focuses, which are being promoted and implemented in European universities as effective policy. The results may serve as guidelines for both policy makers and executives in higher education, as well as for broader categories of stakeholders.

EDUCATION IN A NEW EUROPE: A CONVERGENCE PERSPECTIVE

It's twenty years since *Comparative Education Review* has published a special issue on *Education in a changing Europe*. The editorial essay, signed by Erwin Epstein, Elizabeth Sherman Swing, and François Orivel, has the title we partly borrowed: *Education in a*

New Europe. The centripetal tendencies of Western Europe, the second, post-communist, educational revolution of the Eastern Europe, privileging centrifugal moves, are, as stated by the three guest editors, constituents of the European model of the 1990s. Still, the picture had more to offer, even at that time, than this Manichaeism between convergence and divergence. National and ethnic groups,

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migrants and their heirs hinder the ideal of unity in education. In other words, the issue of identity and the intellectual reflection of it are intimately connected with the future of education. Considering this context, the problems raised by the editorial essay and by the special issue as a whole are the frailty of a European dimension in education (that “learning to be European”, as the quoted authors phrase it) and the persistence of national identities.

A legitimate question to ask, two decades after, is whether these problems are still lurking today, from behind the convergent education ideal. It is obvious that the European Community sets moving targets. The 2010 horizon of the Lisbon strategy is recently replaced by New Europe 2020, whose first objective, *smart growth*, retunes the former strategic aim: “an economy based on knowledge and innovation”. Not the strongest in the world, but taking as pillars these two outcomes of the educational system, and of higher education in particular. According to the recent study by Eurydice, *Focus on Higher Education in Europe 2010. The impact of the Bologna process*, the most well-known initiative in educational convergence across Europe was a success story. The next moves to be taken are increased quality and accessibility – enrolling around 40% of the respective age group in universities, as compared to less than one third presently, according to Androulla Vassiliou, Commissioner responsible for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth.

That would, theoretically, put an end to the researches dedicated to the effects of the Bologna process, given that its main targets are attained. Still, critics say that goals may be anytime reported as accomplished, given that they are vague. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* notes, in September 2010, that *As Europe’s Higher Education Systems try*

to work in concert, notes of discord remain. The core concern of the article is that, more than one decade after the process was started, there is still debate on measurement issues (e.g., how to measure mobility?), which are essential to defining and benchmarking goals. This is one of this chapter’s concerns.

Another issue raised by the higher education officials interviewed by *The Chronicle* (as Siegbert Wuttig, responsible of a DAAD – German Academic Exchange Service – department) is that transformations having little to do, in fact, with Bologna are associated with this process. The world of universities is obviously changing, but how much of it can be really traced back to Bologna? This is why a valid system of indicators is needed, to separate random correlations from changes having a causal link with the Bologna provisions. A former education expert in the European commission, David Coyne, takes the criticism even farther, claiming that politicians have a pompieristic approach, with an inflation of communiqués on the success of the process, when, in fact, little real progress has been made. Or, in professor Ulrich Schollwöck’s (2001) words, “the discrepancy between the political rhetoric of excellence and the situation right at the battleline”. He also points to the perception, rather widespread inside the system, that *something is rotten* if so many reforms are needed, in a short interval of time.

A conclusion which may be drawn from here is that, being time-bound, the Bologna process is bound to be successful, at least declaratively. After 2010, the European higher education system should move on to the next level. Still, in *Higher Education Review*, Helmut de Rudder (2010) asks: *Mission accomplished? Which mission?* The vagueness of goals is reframed.

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