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EUREDOCS CONFERENCE CONCLUSION

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The payoffs of Competences for young European Higher Eduction Graduates : Effects on Income and Job Satisfaction, **Adela Garcia-Aracil**

Globalization, International Migration, Comparative Higher Education and Recognition of diplomas, **Elena Dingu-Kyrklund**

Comparing Lifelong Learning : A Reflection on Lifelong Learning at Midlessex university (UK) and Kund University (Sweden), **Abdulai Abukari**

First of all, one may remark that every paper deals with the same theme : the university and its relations with its environment. The first text deals with university and the job-market, the second one with university and migration, and the last one with the university and external forms of education.

Every papers deals with the same conceptual tool : the *human capital theory*.
How is it used ? Basically, one may define the theory within a single sentence : a variation in the level or the intensity of education implies a variation of the marginal productivity of the (future) worker, which implies a variation of his revenue, ie :
Δ Education $\rightarrow \Delta$ Marginal Productivity $\rightarrow \Delta$ Revenue.
This rough equation explicitely suggests there's a causal link between the marginal productivity and personal revenue.

The basic problem of the human capital theory as G.Becker formulated it is that the process of formation in itself was considered as a black box. In other words, G.Becker's theory highlights the inputs and the outputs of education, but not the process in itself. From this point of view, the three papers that were pesented

-   use the human capital theory or are based on its assumptions

-   try to open the black box

-   get to the same result, inso far as they refine the theory.

<u>1 The payoffs for young European Higher Eduction Graduates : Effects on Income and Job Satisfaction</u>

-   The *hypothesis* that underline the assignment theory may be expressed as such : education and competences mismatches are closely related. Educational mismatches imply competences mismatches, which in turn have an effect on income.

-   What are the *findings ?* The quantitative approach A. Garcia-Aracil adopts leads her to the conclusion that the results for mismatches are erratic. In other words, there are no wage premiums for surplus in competences (and conversely, there are no wage penalties for deficits in competences). She then concludes that the comptences have a non systematic behaviour.

-   Therefore and generally speaking, it may be argued that she reviews the assignement theory through the human capital theory (both by differentiating income and job satisfaction and by highlighting some new conclusions).

- From then on, one may regret that she does not criticize the human capital theory's *assumptions*. The theory is considered as neutral and non-ambiguous through the whole paper.

2 Globalization, International Migration, Comparative Higher Education and Recognition of diplomas

- E. Dingu Kyrklund raises the problem of the *transferability* of the human capital theory. The problem might be expressed in these terms : can human capital be transferred from one country to another without losing some of its value ? By raising the case of the evaluations of the Swedish National Agency for Higher Educatiun, she explicitely answers *no.*

- I am very tempted to draw a parallel between Elena's work and my own findings of my Master's Research work, which dealt with the formulation and the implementation of a National Agency policy within three universities of Great-Britain. The main findings were indeed roughly the same : first, the evaluation reports have no impact on the universities (at least, they do not have the impact the evaluators desired), secondly the academics are looking for every possible means to bypass the constraints of the process and use the evaluation for their own purpose.

3 Comparing Lifelong Learning : A Reflection on Lifelong Learning at Midlexes university (UK) and Kund University (Sweden)

- One might express the *framework* of the paper as follows : by implementing lifelong learning courses, the universities are actually trying to define a holistic strategy towards education.

- How could that be ? The human capital may be divided into two main parts : the specific human capital, which deals with the competences one acquires during his formation at school, and the general human capital, which deal with the competences you acquire mostly within (and for) the enterprise. From this point of view, the academics might be seen as people trying to take a hold on the *specific and the general human capital*. They try to internalize every possible form of education (and this explicitely refers to the very slogan of lifelong lernig : 'from cradle to grave').

- Nevertheless, one might expess two main remarks. First of all, one of the asssumptions of the paper is that the definition of lifelong learning is vey divergent. On the contrary, the discussants stressed that the definition of the courses was much more convergent than it seemed a priori. For instance, both courses (in Middlesex as well as in Kund) were designed, formulated and implemented to make money. Secondly, a discussant highlighted the fact that one should not be too much surprised that there were actually no clear and convergent definition of lifelong learning, inso far as it allows every actor to put forward his own interest within it : one might even say that it's this divergence that allows lifelong learning to be implemented.

"The forces for the creation of international relationships between universities", Anne **Corbett**

"Making higher education more European through mobility? Questions on the institutional and individual rationales of mobility" Vassiliki **Papatsiba**

"A comparison between British and French state involvement in trade in Higher Education", Anneliese **Dodds**

"The introduction of two-tier study structures in the course of the Bologna process the HE systems of France, Germany, the Netherlands and England" Johanna **Witte**

This brief summary of the session aims at pointing out **three challenges for future research on the Bologna Process (BP)**.

Whether they focus on policies or on national higher education systems, the four papers develop a multi-level analysis :

- Vassiliki Papatsiba looks at the rationales of the Erasmus programme from the point of view of both the EU institutions and a French Region.

- Anne Corbett's argument is that the success of a European policy depends on the involvement of the academic community as well as the rectors of European universities.

- Anneliese Dodds's paper compares the relationships between the State, the national agency of evaluation and the universities in UK and France.

- Johanna Witte's approach deals with the translation of a European policy (the Bologna Process) by the national authorities in four countries (Germany, UK, France, Netherlands).

However, in each paper, one or two levels remain unexplored, therefore **one challenge of research on the BP is to look simultaneously at the different levels (i.e. European institutions, States, Regional authorities and Universities), and try to analyse their interactions**:

- The next step of research will be to explore to what extent the national responses to the Bologna Process will influence the evolution of the European dynamic.

- Another important topic is to consider the impact of the Bologna Process on the existing relationships between the state, the regional authorities and the universities in every country where the European policy has been implemented. In this perspective, two important questions must be raised. Firstly, will the national authorities involved in the curricula evaluation be strengthened or will the institutional autonomy of universities increase? Secondly, will the partnerships between universities of different countries remain in the EU area or will they be more international ones?

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Another challenge for studies on the implementation of the BP is to investigate more systematically the institutional level. Indeed, most of the studies on the evolution of national higher education systems within Europe show that the institutional autonomy of universities has increased in many northern and western European countries. As a consequence, universities are a relevant level of analysis, especially when the issue of convergence-divergence of HE systems is raised. Three hypotheses have to be tested. One can suppose that European HE will converge through the BP. Another scenario is that the differentiation will increase ; the question is thus whether it will be a national or an institutional differentiation. In this case, one can expect two kinds of differentiation: an horizontal one (i.e. the specialization of some institutions on vocational training and on the other hand, the transformation of others into research universities); or a vertical differentiation, where elite universities initiate partnerships with the highest ranked institutions worldwide, while less prestigious remain in the background.

To answer such questions, it is necessary to investigate how university leadership will take the opportunity of the BP to make choices between research and teaching or between their different disciplines.

The third challenge is related to the study of the European policies on research. Research has been on the agenda of the EU commission for a long time and one may wonder whether the EHEA (European Higher Education Area) and the ERA (European Research Area) will correspond, or will remain separated processes. This is an important issue because the values that drive both processes are quite different : the ERA aims at developing research excellence, while the EHEA rather has mixed targets (improving the European higher education competitiveness on the one hand, enhancing the social or cultural aspects of Europe on the other). Studying the interactions of both processes should be able to reveal which of these conceptions will win in the end…

The session 3 of the conference was quite homogeneous: there were three discourse analyses and a historical "new institutionalist" analysis, which was a bit different, but also interested in discourse and principles.

What it really showed is that there is a real and strong interest for discourse in the Bologna process among young higher education researchers. First, I would like to stress two reasons why this particular approach is really rich and relevant to study an object such as the Bologna process:

- first reason, and this was very explicitly said in Terhi Nokkala's paper, the Bologna documents are full of slogans, but we cannot take these slogans for a given and repeat them in our research (if we did, then it would not be research any more). The deconstruction and analysis of these slogans is therefore a need, if not a condition, for the study of Bologna.

- second reason, the very nature of the Bologna process, as stated and then debated in Konstantinos Tzortzis's paper, is "soft" law. If the Bologna declarations are to be considered "soft" law, we have here a case of a non binding "soft" law process, but big effects… and if we want to explore this tension, the very first materials available are the "soft" law texts themselves.

In this perspective, the four contributions were quite complementary in their way to treat the discourse.

- Magdalini Kolokitha raised the fundamental question "from where do the actors speak?", with her model of the three-level discourse. This model is interesting for it allows seeing how the discourse is not only reappropriated, but also redefined at each level. The three-level discourse model also offers new perspectives to understand the changing position of actors in a European process such as the Bologna process. In fact these levels are levels *of discourse* and the model subtly assumes that actors do not belong to a particular level: actors rather might evolve between the institutional, national and European level, and they might also change their discourse when travelling from one level to the other.

- Terhi Nokkala presented an analysis of the Bologna discourse which was much more autonomous from the actors. In fact her study consists in identifying and discussing the (new?) vision of higher education emerging from the declarations. She proposed this very stimulating interpretation of a shift from a cultural to a market vision of higher education since the beginning of the process. Finally what she did with this interpretation in terms of shift was to draw a bridge between discourse analysis and policy change analysis.

- Taina Saarinen entered the question of discourse even more precisely with a contribution at the cross roads between policy analysis and linguistics. Focusing on a particular –and central- aspect in the Bologna process, namely quality, her paper was certainly the one most interested in semantic and linguistic concerns. She showed how the occurrences and various uses of the word 'quality' finally reveals the evolution of the meaning, not only of quality as a word, but even as notion or a principle.

- Konstantinos Tzorkis treated the question of discourse in a slightly different way. Braving the mainstream of the general comments on the Bologna process, he started from the idea that Bologna discourse and principles are not new, and that what is to be explained is not policy change but continuity. In a very convincing manner, he therefore stressed the continuity between Bologna and previous EC initiatives in the field of higher education, as well as the parallelism between Bologna frame and the Europe of knowledge frame with the Lisbon strategy.

Finally, I would say that the debates were really consistent and raised three main types of issues.

- a first type of issues raised was about theory building / testing and choosing a relevant conceptual framework. Of course each one has to make analytical choices, and one cannot analyse at the same time institutions, organisations, actors and discourse. The whole analysis of the Europeanization of higher education and research is more to be understood as a big puzzle which one single study cannot contain. But an interesting question remains the one of the articulation between the pieces of the puzzles: because words are not completely autonomous; the speakers are in fact actors with objectives and strategies, and in each word can be seen a compromise, or the product of a complex relationship; but speakers themselves are not decontextualised and the institutional environment in which they evolve might also shape their perceptions and strategies.

- a second type of issue raised in the debates was about methodological concerns. How one selects a case when doing a case study (why investigate in *this* university and not in *that* one…?)? How conducting interviews in the very particular field of higher education, where the researchers are at the same *in* (as actors in the institution) and *out* (as social scientists)? Which are are the relevant variables and dimensions to study a higher education institution or national system and its transformations? These were the questions addressed in the debate.

- the third type of issue raised was the deep question of the identification of change. Of course this question is not specific to the study of higher education and research, it is one of the main questions in the social sciences, but this classical question illuminates the debate about the analysis of a *new* European policy process. What is change? Is it a question of nature or a question of degree –and then, where is the threshold between continuity / small change / and radical change? What changes? Practices, discourse, institutions, actors perceptions and strategies…? And what changes first…?

The recomposition of the analytical puzzle and the methodological dialogue are to be continued in the life of the network and in the next Euredocs conference.

The last session was rather homogenious. Three papers were presented:

- Implementation of New Public Management in Norwegian Universities; Nicoline Frølich

- Biology has outgrown its old forms. Can project management accept this challenge?; Séverine Louvel

- Defining Strategic and Excellence Bases for the Development of Portuguese Higher Education Institutions; Maria João Pires da Rosa

All the papers deal with the introduction of New Public Management within higher education and research institutions.

I will stress three main points:

Firstly, it's striking to see how different the definition of New public Management are from one paper to another (management by objectives, project management, quality improvement…)

Secondly, the problem raised by the implementation of New Public Management seems to be closely related to the very specificities of universities. They combine the inherent complexity of public services with the specific complexity of the universities as organizations.

Indeed they can be characterized by an atypical socio-organisational context (which includes individual entities and collective ones) and a special decision process due to:

- The independence of teachers-reaserchers

- The hierarchical ambiguity

- The informal powers and influences

This creates obstacles to the implementation of New Public Management and makes it not easy to find levers of activation to move such heavy and complex establishments as higher education and research institutions.

In each paper, we see that the specificity of universities and research labs is reflected in the organisational resistance to top-down processes.

Thus, we have seen that top-down approaches have limited impact on work organisation and even provoke conflicts between the organisational and professional rules. Participative and join approach seems to be much more adapted.

Thirdly, the third common point in these papers is that they all stress the importance of three factors:

- **The first one is the transformation of values**

The first paper shows that cultural biases underline the formulation and the resistance to New Public Management and that different discourses exist.

In the third paper, the model of self-assessment quality takes into account culture as a criteria of evaluation.

- **The second factor is the transformation of structures**

In the first paper the implementation of Management by Objectives within universities necessitated the merging of the departments at the faculty level.

In the second one, the managerial bend within CEA shows the transformation of institutional rules.

The third one defines structure as an assessment criteria.

- **The third factor is the evolution of individual and collective strategies of actors**

In the first paper, actors' strategies evaluate during the continuous process of implementation of Management by objectives between disciplinary references as well as administrative ones.

In the second paper, we have seen that project management generate different individual and collective logics among the categories.

In the papers, these three factors have been treated separately, but it would be interesting to apprehend them in interdependence.

To conclude, the three papers focus either on one institution or one country and this does not allow the identification of the reasons for differences and similarities I mentioned previously.
Are they to be explained:

- by the national context?

- by the features of studied sector (higher education and research)?

- by the institutions themselves?

- by the disciplines themselves?

We need further comparative work on those different dimensions to be able to conclude.