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Terhi Nokkala

(Department of Administrative Science, University of Tampere, Finland)

“Discursive construction of the role of the universities
as national and international institutions in the European Higher Education Area”

Discussant : Vassiliki **Papatsiba**

Terhi Nokkala
HEG, Higher Education Group
University of Tampere
terhi.nokkala@uta.fi

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Discursive Construction of the European Higher Education Area

–window to the functions of the university in society

Introduction

This paper is related to my ongoing PhD study on the discursive construction of internationalisation of higher education in Finland and the Netherlands. Through study of discourses I seek to shed light into the way in which universities are being construed as international institutions, to the way discourses are facilitating institutionalisation of internationalisation in universities and to the conceptual renegotiation of the role of universities and higher education as social institutions. Taking advantage of the theoretical ideas of my own research, I want to suggest with this paper that looking at the way in which the universities are discursively presented in the Bologna Process documents, offers us a window to the possible institutional change of universities and higher education within the Bologna Process. The aim of this paper is therefore to a) look at the change in the societal context of higher education contributing to the Bologna Process, b) argue that theoretical considerations drawn from institutional theory and critical discourse analysis may contribute to an understanding of the Bologna Process and c) demonstrate through an example analysis the way in which the abovementioned theoretical framework can be used.

Background

Bologna Process is possibly the most discussed process in European higher education, influencing the structures of higher education throughout the whole Europe. It started as an international, governmental level process between the ministers responsible for higher education, but has gradually integrated also the higher education institutions and students, as well as their respective organisations into the structures of the Bologna Process. Even though the process initially started outside the framework of the European Union, the European Commission has gradually gained more and more prominent position within the process, not the least because of integration of the Bologna Process to the so called Lisbon Agenda, the aim of the European Union to become “the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world, capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion” and the recent EU enlargement so that currently even 25 of altogether 40 signatories of the Bologna Process are members of the European Union.

Despite the governmental origins of the Bologna Process, the universities and other higher education institutions, both as institutionally embedded organisations and as wider scale, durable social institutions with assigned task in the functioning of the society, are at the core of the Bologna Process and its desired outcome, the European Higher Education Area. In his famous anecdote, Kerr (1987) has argued that there are only 85 institutions in the Western world which have stayed essentially the same for the past 500 years, including the Catholic church, the parliaments of the Isle of Man, Great Britain and Iceland some Swiss cantons, the Bank of Siena and approximately 70 universities. Universities are embedded in a larger field of various other social institutions or institutional concepts, such as the “nation-state”, “labour market” or “global higher education market” and are known to evolve together with the transformation of the society in general (Kwiek 2003). If Bologna Process is to be considered the widest and most profound change of the European higher education, we may rightfully ask whether the change is taking place only on the level of degree structures or quality assurance and recognition mechanisms, or whether it also touches upon the conceptualisation of university as a social institution.

The wider societal change influencing also the process and foundations of intellectual study and academic work, provision and environment of higher education is naturally that of globalisation and

the phenomena related to it. The concept of globalisation is used to refer to a process of disembedding of previously national institutions such as higher education, and is related to a restructuring of the power, functions and authority of nation-states, forcing them to share their power with various international institutions, thereby leading to restructuring of international activities in territorially different frameworks and by direct networking of global actors globalisation also. (Held et al. 1999, 3-10; Held & McGrew 2000, 37; Scott 2000, 1-2; Dicken 2000, 253) Nation-states are both the agents of globalisation pushing for it by supporting free trade and increased cross-border flows and thus reducing their own definitions as nation-states as well as preventers of the possible unwanted consequences such as the growing inequality inside and between nations. (Carnoy 2001, 26.) The critics of globalisation argue that in the globalised world the nation-states have limited or no control over policies regulating higher education. The private sector offers higher education programmes in countries where there is no free higher education, the shape and size of the higher education system are determined by partnerships between business and institutions, and quality assurance is determined and monitored by third party agents. (Moja & Cloete 2001, 244-245). On the other hand it has been argued that as a process continuously constructed by the nation-states themselves, globalisation does not in itself diminish the power of the nation-states in the field of higher education but changes their role in the provision and steering of higher education leading them to fulfil their role and use their steering capacity indirectly via e.g. international organisations and regulations thus forcing them to play accordingly to the general logics of globalisation. Nation-states can no longer opt out of the big game. Nevertheless, they remain as key definers of basic conditions of democratic society, law, governance and politics and thus that of higher education as well. (Marginson 1999, 25-26.) This is the niche in which the Bologna Process is operating. Globalisation, and ensuing competition, is undoubtedly one of the changes, possibly even the most important one, behind the Bologna Process. Bologna Process, like internationalisation of higher education in general, may be seen as “a systemic, sustained effort at making higher education more responsive to the requirements and challenges related to the globalisation of societies, economy and labour markets”. (Källemark & van der Wende, 1997.)

The disappearance of the state monopoly in knowledge production challenges the national policy makers and providers of higher education. (Castells 2000, Carnoy 2001, Moja & Cloete 2001, Välimaa 2001). A good example of the spreading of the provision of higher education across borders is the phenomenon of the “transnational education” (Machados dos Santos, 2000) or “borderless higher education “ (DEETYA, 2000) which together with increasing student mobility are contributing to increasing competition and the rapid growth of global higher education market,

enhanced by the financial scarcity in higher education, which has led to deregulation of higher education institutions and related aspirations of HEI's turning into entrepreneurial organisations (Clark 1998) looking for additional funding streams from the market e.g. by attracting foreign students paying tuition fees or competing for research funding. Competition for the fee-paying students and "the best brains" is detectable from organisational to national to international level and has resulted in various survival strategies. On the organisational level various partnerships and consortia have been established to increase competitiveness of the partners (Beerkens 2004), on the national level marketing strategies have been designed (Luijten-Lub et al 2004).

The social shift into what is commonly called knowledge-based societies has led to emphasis on knowledge and therefore education, research and innovation as the building blocks of the national competitiveness, which has created tensions and competition for instance between the largest economies in the world. The response of the European Union has been the introduction of the Lisbon objectives, aiming to make EU the most competitive knowledge economy in the world by 2010. In this agenda, education is at a central stage. The Bologna process and the resulting establishment of the European Higher Education Area can also be seen as an attempt to increase the competitiveness and attractiveness of the European higher education especially vis-à-vis the United States (van der Wende 2001, Huisman & van der Wende 2004).

Changing legitimization of HE

The trend related to the increasing competitive focus of higher education and higher education organisations has been suggested to change the underlining "legitimizing idea" or "rationale" of higher education from a social institution into industry (Gumport 2000). The view of higher education as a social institution views higher education as "devoted to the wide array of social functions" (Gumport 2000, 74) such as the development of individual learning and fulfilment, development of human capital, sustaining cultural continuity, and generator of new knowledge (Gumport 2000, Bowen 1980, 55-59). The role of higher education as a social institution has been closely related to the national project of the nation state, acting as an ideological apparatus recreating the dominant ideology of the state and as a mechanism for selection of dominant elites (Castells 1991, 206-208). It has also been considered as a human right (United Nations 1948, 1966), and a public good, thereby making it a public responsibility (Nyborg, 2003).

However, a new orthodoxy of education policy can be argued to have emerged throughout the globe (Carter & O'Neill 1995, cited in Ball 1998) including 1) improving national economics by tightening the connection between schooling, employment, productivity and trade 2) enhancing student outcomes in employment-related skills and competencies 3) attaining more direct control over curriculum content and assessment 4) reducing the cost to government of education and 5) increasing community input to education by more involvement in school decision making and pressure of market choice. Higher education policy discourse can be said to be influenced by ideas as theories such as neoliberalism, new institutional economics based on devolution of authority, incentives and self-management, performativity, which is a steering mechanism based on target setting and accountability, public choice theory and finally the new managerialism inserting the ideas and techniques of business management into higher education. (Ball 1998.) States may be said to have two ideal types of policy responses to the challenges of globalisation, either by creating market flexibility through reduction of social overheads and trade, privatisation and competitive individualism or striving to shape the direction of their national economy through investing in key economic sectors and in the development of human capital. (Brown and Lauder 1996, cited in Ball 1998, 3). Bologna Process seems to fit the latter description in the way that it clearly is an attempt to guide the direction of the European Higher education to achieve desired outcomes, that is, more competitiveness and attractiveness of the European higher education and the whole continent. In his critical account of the European Higher Education and Research Areas, Kwiek (2003) has argued that the whole Bologna Process is based on the underlying assumptions of Europe and the World having entered a new era of knowledge-based and market-driven economies competing against each other, rendering "production, transmission, dissemination and use of new knowledge" the condition of the growth and survival of the knowledge-based societies, and this underlining the aims, practices and conceptualisations of the Bologna Process and the kind of higher education it aims to build.

The paradigm shift of higher education as well as other public services warrants change in the legitimisation of higher education from institution to an industry. The new view on higher education views higher education organisations part of the economy, as industrial production units producing goods and services to the competitive markets for the benefit of the organisations themselves as well as the nation states and tax payers financing their operations. On the other hand, it is equally possible to argue that if institutions are to be understood in terms of a collection of norms, rules and cognitive scripts (see below), the shift in the perceived functions and rationales of higher education

is not that between an institution and an industry, but rather just a change in the nature of those rules from being founded primarily in to cultural and intellectual to economic or market-oriented rules and scripts. However, it is easy to argue that universities are increasingly talked and thought in terms of “a production metaphor” (Gumport 2000, 70) or by using market terminology (Fairclough, 1995). Clark (1998) has searched for the characteristics of “entrepreneurial universities”, Slaughter and Leslie (1997) analysed “academic capitalism” and Shumar (1997) the “commodification of higher education”. Such firmly established concepts as the ‘learning society’ or the ‘knowledge-based economy’ also “serve and symbolise the increasing colonisation of education policy by economic policy imperatives”. (Ball 1998, 3) These examples may be taken as indications that even the academia has started to address itself in terms of market terminology, in other words that there is a change in the discourse of higher education. Drawing from the ideas of Ball (1998) and Kwiek (2003) I want to argue that a similar conceptual shift can be found also in the central documents of the Bologna Process.

Theoretical framework

A theoretical understanding of the institutional change may be based on the institutional theory and critical discourse analysis. Institutions are commonly defined as written or unwritten rules and conventions that are structuring and constraining social action by either facilitating or curbing our actions and ideas. Social institutions have been defined in a great variety of ways by different users and schools of thought, ranging from mere conventions (Douglas 1986) to equating them with organisations (Kerr 1987). The following definition by Scott (2001, 48) aspires to combine the different views and sketches a manifold picture of institutions and the mechanisms through which they influence the behaviour of individual and collective actors.

“Institutions are social structures that have attained a high degree of resilience. Institutions are composed of cultural-cognitive, normative and regulative elements that, together with associated activities and resources, provide stability and meaning to social life. Institutions are transmitted by various types of carriers, including symbolic systems, relational systems, routines and artefacts. Institutions operate at multiple levels of jurisdiction, from the world system to localized interpersonal relationships. Institutions by definition connote stability but are subject to change process, both incremental and discontinuous.”

He elaborates this definition by stating that institutions are multifaceted, durable social structures, which are made of symbolic systems, social activities and material resources, which he later specifies as the four types of carriers. (Scott 2001, 49, 77-83). Symbolic systems consist of rules and laws, values or cognitive categories, relational systems consists of roles and systems of roles, routines are patterned action reflecting the tacit knowledge of actors and artefacts reflect the importance of material aspects of institutions. In an institution such as higher education or university, all of these different types of features and carriers come together thereby providing several useful perspective into study of university and higher education as social institutions (Gumport 2000, Kerr 1987, Meyer 1977) with certain organisational, cultural and value-based features, which shape, facilitate and curb individual, and collective action. They include constitutive rules which e.g. constitute the whole possibility of scientific research and higher education as we know them. They are embedded in a larger field of various other social institutions or institutional concepts, such as the “nation-state”, “labour market” or “global higher education market” and also contain and consist of sub-institutions such as academic disciplines with their theories, methodologies and cultures (Becher 1989), academic freedom (Clark 1983, 92-94), values related to science (Merton 1973), procedures defining inspection of doctoral theses and structures such as various types of governing boards as well as organisational sagas of specific higher education organisations (Clark 1972). Some of these sub-institutions are more general and recognised everywhere (e.g. values of science), some are institutions in their own context (e.g. governing boards in some universities) (Jepperson 1991, 146).

Meyer and Rowan (1977) argue that many formal organisation structures come about as a result of rationalised institutionalised rules, which they, following Berger and Luckmann (1966), define as classifications built into the society as reciprocated typifications or interpretations, function as myths which organisations incorporate thereby gaining legitimacy, resources, stability and enhanced survival prospects. Academic values and traditions may be seen as these kinds of institutions, and in my own ongoing PhD study (Nokkala 2004), I wish to argue that internationalisation in its various forms has become such a legitimating feature for higher education as well. Institutions may then become to matter more for the organisations than the technical demands of production for which the organisations were originally designed for, eventually decreasing efficiency of the organisational work. Conversely, promoting efficiency of production as the sole purpose and disregarding the effect of institutions may lead to a loss of legitimacy of the organisation. It is fairly easy to use this notion to draw a parallel from this to the current day discussion on the functions of the universities vis-à-vis the society by arguing that the universities being immersed in the institutionalised rules

and traditions of the academia are no longer up-to-date with the tasks endowed for them by the modern societies, or alternatively, that the eagerness to get universities adapted to the changing institutional surroundings of the universities with the strong market orientation have clouded the original task of the university as the site of intellectual pursuit.

Although institutions are seen as relatively stable social structures, they still may undergo changes. Functional, political and social pressures may lead to deinstitutionalisation of institutionalised structures and practises and various forces internal or external to institutions may cause them to change. All the three pillars of institutions may be engaged in the institutional change: introduction of new regulative frameworks such as laws and change in the normative systems such as values may contribute to a change. Also linguistic frames may be instrumental in change. (Scott 2001, 182-190). New features need to be legitimised by appearing as parts of the natural order of things, being based either on nature or reason. This also means that as certain institutional facts or conceptualisations of the world are legitimised, competing options are delegitimised. The institutional facts succeeding in that are not necessarily the most efficient ones but those most successful at imposing collective meaning and function on physical reality. They also have to have authority and evoke trust stemming e.g. from power or other authoritative meaning. (Adler 1997)

Scott (2001, 181) poses a question: "If the nature of actors and their modes of acting are constituted and constrained by institutions, how can these actors change the very institutions in which they are embedded?" One possible answer is provided by the central idea of social constructionist critical discourse analysis, the idea being that every moment of language use is a social action shaped by and shaping the wider social structures, practises and institutions. Discourses may be defined as a particular way of talking about and understanding the world or an aspect of the world. It emphasises that our ways of speaking about something does not neutrally reflect our world, identities and social relations, but instead play an active role in creating and changing them. Emergence of certain discourses as "institutional facts" or dominant conceptualisations of the world, therefore, point towards certain course of action as the only "rational", "logical" or "legitimate" option.

Bologna Process is essentially a political communication and negotiation process, where texts are used to communicate the aims and procedures of the process leading to the establishment of the European Higher Education Area. From the discourse analytical perspective it may be argued that the discourse of the Bologna Process is as essential to the outcome of the process as the other types

of social actions taking place in the course of the process, as the discursive conceptualisations are part of the “rule-making” of any social institution. We may therefore argue that the Bologna Process does not only change the institution of higher education and university through the explicit changes of the degree structures, or introduction of quality assurance and recognition mechanisms, which also are “organisational forms” of these institutions. Instead, the discourses of the Bologna Process also crystallise the renegotiation of the legitimate functions and role of the university as a social institution. The Bologna Process documents create a conceptual understanding of universities as producers of knowledge and skilled labour force needed by Europe to survive in the global competition, making a break with the more traditional notions of the university along the lines suggested by Gumpert (2000) and Kwiek (2003). The discourse of the Bologna Process may significantly contribute to the consolidation of the more practical and organisational changes introduced in the higher education systems and institutions.

The discourse of Bologna Process

The four key documents of the Bologna process include the Sorbonne Declaration signed by the ministers of education of Britain, France, Germany and Italy in the 800th anniversary of the Sorbonne University in 1998, the actual Bologna Declaration of 1999 which, when signed by the 31 European ministers of education, gave name for the whole process, and the communiqués of Prague (2001) and Berlin (2003) ministerial follow-up meetings which have somewhat concretised the initially vague concept of the Bologna process and the establishing of the European Higher Education Area striven for in the process.

The elements I wish to concentrate on are the conceptualisations constructed in the Bologna Process documents a) for the Europe of Knowledge as the concept used to argument for the process, b) for the European Higher Education Area as the aimed outcome of the process and c) for the role of higher education in general, and the universities and other higher education organisations more specifically.

The European Process and the Europe of Knowledge

The contextualisation of the Bologna Process in the first two documents, the Sorbonne Declaration (SD) and Bologna Declaration (BD) is anchored to the vague but imagination provoking concept “European Process” which has “*moved some extremely important steps ahead*” (SD) and “*become an increasingly concrete and relevant reality for the Union and its citizens*” (BD). The European Process is not explicitly explained, but is implicitly defined in terms of the economic integration and development of the European Union and contrasted with the “Europe of Knowledge” which is more explicitly defined as a cultural and intellectual project.

*“The European Process has very recently moved some extremely important steps ahead. Relevant as they are, they should not make one forget that **Europe is not only that of the Euro, of the banks and the economy: it must be a Europe of Knowledge as well.** We must strengthen and build upon the intellectual, cultural, social and technical dimensions of our continent.”*
(SD)

*“we are witnessing a growing awareness in large parts of the political and academic world and in public opinion of the need to **establish a more complete and far reaching Europe**, in particular building upon and strengthening its intellectual, cultural, social and scientific and technological dimensions (BD)”*.

The choice of fact sentence as a way of presenting the European Process (*has moved ahead, has become important*) contributes to understanding the process as something factual and unquestionable. This applies throughout the Bologna Process documents.

The Europe of Knowledge is also presented as being

*“**widely recognised as an irreplaceable factor for social and human growth and as an indispensable component** to consolidate and enrich the European citizenship, capable of giving its citizens the **necessary competencies** to face the challenges of the new millennium, together with **an awareness of shared values and belonging to a common social and cultural space**”*
(BD).

This makes the Europe of Knowledge a very strong legitimating discourse for the Bologna Process, as social and human growth and European citizenship with its shared values are positively charged concepts and the passive form (*is widely recognised*) strengthens its presentation and a universal truth.

An interesting shift is then taking place in the Prague Communiqué (PC) and Berlin Communiqué (BC). In the Prague Communiqué neither of the concepts is mentioned, but instead “*the future Europe*” and more implicitly the future, are used to serve the same purpose as an argument for the

Bologna Process. However, the nature of the argument has clearly shifted from culture, shared values and intellectual pursuit to more economic and innovation oriented context.

*In the future Europe, **built upon a knowledge-based society and economy**, life-long learning strategies are necessary to face the challenges of competitiveness and the use of new technologies and to improve social cohesion, equal opportunities and the quality of life. (PC)*

*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**. (PC)*

In the Berlin Communiqué the Europe of Knowledge makes a reappearance consolidating the economic and competitive connotation already introduced in the Prague Communiqué with the “future”.

Ministers agree that efforts shall be undertaken in order to secure closer links between the HE and research systems in their respective countries. The emerging European Higher Education Area will benefit from synergies with European Research Area, thus strengthening the basis of Europe of Knowledge. The aim is to preserve Europe's cultural richness and linguistic diversity, based on its heritage of diversified traditions, and to foster its potential of innovation and social and economic development through enhanced cooperation among European Higher Education Institutions. (BC)

The use of logical connectors (*EHEA **will** benefit, **thus** strengthening, foster development **through** cooperation*) build strong causal links between the elements indicating that the outcomes of the processes are inevitable, which again strengthens the argument.

Similar strengthening effect is achieved here, as well as throughout the documents, with the authority of the ministers and them being “*conscious of the need*”, “*agreeing*”, “*confirming*”, “*calling*” etc.

***Conscious of the need** to promote closer links between the EHEA and ERA in a Europe of Knowledge, and of the importance of research as an integral part of higher education across Europe, Ministers consider it necessary...” (BC)*

The European Higher Education Area

The conceptualisation of the European Higher Education Area has remained fairly constant in all of the documents, even though the name “European Higher Education Area” and the respective acronym EHEA was only consolidated in the Prague Communiqué of 2001.

In the Sorbonne declaration there seems to be two main ways of framing the European Higher Education Area, which may be called instrumental and cultural framing. The cultural framing is more literary in style and refers to Europe’s cultural diversity, citizenship and personal growth. In its literary eloquent style it is fairly vague and noncommittal, drawing rather from pleasant images than concrete benefits.

*We owe our students and our society at large a higher education system in which they are given **the best opportunities to seek and find their own area of excellence** (SD)*

*An open European area for higher learning **carries a wealth of perspectives**, of course **respecting our diversities** but requires on the one hand continuous efforts to remove barriers and to develop framework for teaching and learning, which would enhance mobility and an ever closer cooperation. (SD)*

*The anniversary of Paris offers us a **solemn opportunity to engage in the endeavour** to create a European area of higher education, where **national identities and common interests can interact and strengthen each other for the benefit of Europe, of its students and more generally of its citizens.** (SD)*

*We call on other member States of the Union and other European countries to join us in this objective and on all European Universities to consolidate **Europe’s standing in the world** through continuously **improved and updated education for its citizens.** (SD)*

The instrumental framing is on the one hand drawing from the notions of attractiveness and competitiveness, and on the other hand more down-to-earth in its style and more concrete in its content, drawing from rationality and practicality rather than eloquent images. In the Sorbonne Declaration, the instrumental framing appears less frequently than the cultural framing.

*The **international recognition and attractive potential** of our systems are directly linked to their **external and internal readabilities.** (SD)*

*Much of the **originality and flexibility of the systems**... (SD)*

Both framings may also appear in a single sentence: *An **open (i)** European area for higher learning carries a **wealth of perspectives (c)**. (SD)*

In the Bologna Declaration and the Prague Communiqué the cultural framing is markedly less and the instrumental framing more pronounced than in the previous document. Especially in the Prague Communiqué the way in which the Bologna Process slowly starts to get concrete shape is apparent, therefore making it less necessary to rely on elevated images. There is also a clear trend which indicates that increasing of competitiveness and attractiveness of the European higher education and higher education institutions becomes more and more pronounced in the Bologna Discourse, whereas in the Sorbonne Declaration they are less pronounced.

*...developing of European Higher Education Area as a **key way to promote citizens mobility and employability and the continent's overall development.** (i, BD)*

*The **achievement of greater compatibility and comparability** of the systems of HE nevertheless requires continual momentum in order to be fully accomplished (i, BD)*

*We need to support it through **promoting concrete measures to achieve tangible forward steps** (i, BD)*

*We must in particular look at the objective of **increasing the international competitiveness of the European system of Higher Education** (i, BD)*

*The **vitality (c) and efficiency (i) of any civilisation can be measured by the appeal that its culture has for other countries** (c, BD)*

*We need to assure that the European higher education system acquires a **world-wide degree of attraction (i) equal to our extraordinary cultural and scientific traditions** (c, BD).*

*Ministers are affirmed that **efforts to promote mobility must be continued (i)** to enable students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff to **benefit from the richness of the European Higher Education Area including its democratic values, diversity of cultures and languages and the diversity of the higher education systems** (c,PC)*

***Taking advantage of recognition tools so that citizens can effectively use their qualifications, competencies and skills (i) throughout European Higher education Area** (PC)*

*Together with **mutually recognised quality assurance systems** such arrangements will facilitate **students' access to the European labour market** and enhance the compatibility, attractiveness and competitiveness of European Higher Education (i, PC)*

*The institutions have demonstrated the importance they attach to the creation of a **compatible and efficient, yet diversified and adaptable European Higher Education Area** (p, PC)*

In the Berlin Communiqué there is further consolidation of the practical nature of the European Higher education Area consisting of tangible structures such as the two-tier degree structure, the quality assurance system and the recognition tools, as well as an increasing emphasis on the attractiveness and competitiveness. .

In terms of development of the discourse, most interesting is the aforementioned connection between the European Higher Education Area, European Research Area and the Europe of Knowledge. It is interesting to hypothesise that research, even though often assumed to be an inseparable part of the concept of “higher education” does not seem to be inherently comprised in the European Higher Education Area, but rather something which requires to be explicitly mentioned as worthwhile.

*Ministers agree that efforts shall be undertaken in order to secure closer links between the HE and research systems in their respective countries. The emerging European Higher Education Area **will benefit from synergies** with European Research Area, **thus strengthening the basis of Europe of Knowledge**. The aim is to preserve Europe’s cultural richness and linguistic diversity, based on its heritage of diversified traditions, and to **foster its potential of innovation and social and economic development** through enhanced cooperation among European Higher Education Institutions. (BC)*

*European Higher education Area and European Research Area – **two pillars of the knowledge-based-society** (BC)*

Conscious of the need to promote closer links between the EHEA and ERA in a Europe of Knowledge, and of the importance of research as an integral part of higher education across Europe, Ministers consider it necessary...” (BC)

Instead of the cultural framings above, it can be debated whether another framing has emerged instead of it, namely that of social aspects and social equality, which seem to have emerged as a counterbalance to the emphasis on competitiveness and the instrumental framing. Similarly to the cultural framing, it is fairly vague in terms of the content (with notable exceptions) and instead rather relies of elaborate images.

*Ministers also reaffirmed the need, recalled by students, **to take account of the social dimension in the Bologna process.** (PC)*

*Ministers reaffirm **the importance of the social dimension of the Bologna Process**. The need to increase competitiveness must be balanced with **the objective of improving the social characteristics of the European Higher Education Area, aiming at strengthening social cohesion and reducing social and gender inequalities both at national and at European level.***

In that context, Ministers reaffirm their position that higher education is a public good and a public responsibility. (BC)

*Ministers stress **the need for appropriate studying and living conditions** for the students, so that they can successfully complete their studies within an appropriate period of time without obstacles related to their social and economic background. They also stress the need for more comparable data on the social and economic situation of students. (BC)*

The tasks and roles of universities and higher education

A similar dichotomy between the traditional, cultural feature and the more instrumental feature may be found in the conceptualisation of the task of the universities and/or other higher education institutions. The first two documents, especially the Sorbonne Declaration, feature the traditional, cultural influence of the universities. However, they also seem to contrast “the glorious past” with a somewhat “dire present” and aiming for “a bright future”, indicating that the old means and tasks no longer serve their purpose. This is also evident in the way in which the *change, restructuring, moving ahead, enhancing* and other such expressions are used throughout the documents to make a break with the past.

*We must strengthen and build upon the intellectual, cultural, social and technical dimensions of our continent. **These have to a large extent been shaped by its universities, which continue to play a pivotal role for their development.** (past, SD)*

*Universities were born in Europe, some three-quarters of a millenium ago. Our four countries boast some of the oldest, who are celebrating important anniversaries around now, as the University of Paris is doing today. In those times, students and academics would freely circulate and rapidly disseminate knowledge throughout the continent. **Nowadays, too many of our students still graduate without having had the benefit of a study period outside of national boundaries.** (present, SD)*

*The Sorbonne declaration of 25th of May 1998, which was underpinned by these considerations, stressed the Universities' central role in developing European cultural dimensions. **It emphasised the creation of the European area of higher education as a key way to promote citizens' mobility and employability and the Continent's overall development.** (future, BD)*

The latter two documents seem to feature more strongly what may be called a conditional role of the universities: existence of universities and/or other higher education institutions does not automatically guarantee the emergence of all good things in the society, but only do that conditionally: if the universities/other higher education institutions act in a certain way, that is,

implement the structural arrangements of the Bologna Process, then good things will ensue. This may be because of the context of the documents being the ministerial meetings, but may also be an indication of the nature of the Bologna Process as primarily a national policy process. However, it does seem to indicate a shift from the independent to the instrumental role of the universities.

As the Bologna Declaration sets out, Ministers asserted that building the European Higher Education Area is a condition for enhancing the attractiveness and competitiveness of higher education institutions in Europe. (PC)

Ministers strongly encouraged universities and other higher education institutions to take full advantage of existing national legislation and European tools aimed at facilitating academic and professional recognition of course units, degrees and other awards, so that citizens can effectively use their qualifications, competencies and skills throughout the European Higher Education Area. (PC)

In order to further strengthen the important European dimensions of higher education and graduate employability, Ministers called upon the higher education sector to increase the development of modules, courses and curricula at all levels with "European" content, orientation or organisation. (PC)

Ministers stressed that the involvement of universities and other higher education institutions and of students as competent, active and constructive partners in the establishment and shaping of a European Higher Education Area is needed and welcomed. The institutions have demonstrated the importance they attach to the creation of a compatible and efficient, yet diversified and adaptable European Higher Education Area. (PC)

Ministers expressed their appreciation of the contributions toward developing study programmes combining academic quality with relevance to lasting employability and called for a continued proactive role of higher education institutions. (PC)

They appreciate the co-operation and commitment of all partners - Higher Education Institutions, students and other stakeholders - to this effect. (BC)

They also stress that consistent with the principle of institutional autonomy, the primary responsibility for quality assurance in higher education lies with each institution itself and this provides the basis for real accountability of the academic system within the national quality framework. (BC)

Ministers underline the importance of consolidating the progress made, and of improving understanding and acceptance of the new qualifications through reinforcing dialogue within institutions and between institutions and employers. (BC)

They appeal to institutions and employers to make full use of the Diploma Supplement, so as to take advantage of the improved transparency and flexibility of the higher education degree systems, for fostering employability and facilitating academic recognition for further studies. (BC)

*Ministers welcome the commitment of Higher Education Institutions and students to the Bologna Process and recognise that it is **ultimately the active participation of all partners in the Process that will ensure its long-term success.** (BC)*

***Aware of the contribution strong institutions can make to economic and societal development, Ministers accept that institutions need to be empowered to take decisions on their internal organisation and administration.**(BC)*

*Ministers will make the necessary effort to make European Higher Education Institutions an even more attractive and efficient partner. Therefore **Ministers ask Higher Education Institutions to increase the role and relevance of research to technological, social and cultural evolution and to the needs of society.** (BC)*

*Ministers understand that **there are obstacles inhibiting the achievement of these goals and these cannot be resolved by Higher Education Institutions alone.** (BC)*

Finally it may be noted that there is a clear evolution from the Sorbonne Declaration to the Berlin Communiqué in using the term “university”. In the first two documents, only the word university is used, in Prague Communiqué the phrase “universities and other higher education institutions” is used consistently, whereas in the Berlin Communiqué only “higher education institutions” are used. This may be because of several reasons, for instance also the non-university higher education sector is integrated into the Bologna Process. The use of universities seems logical in the Sorbonne Declaration as it was signed in the context of the 800th anniversary of the Sorbonne University. On the other hand, the shift of the concept may further contribute to the erosion of the “uniqueness” of the university by equating it unequivocally with non-university higher education sector organisations, and therefore also to be bound by the rationales and operating logics as any other organisation. This of course is a rather bold interpretation but not necessarily completely arbitrary.

Conclusions

It may be summarised that there seems to be a change in the discourse of the Bologna Process. Firstly, there has been a shift in the way in which the Europe of Knowledge as the background and legitimisation of the Bologna Process has been conceptualised, from cultural and intellectual to economic and innovation-oriented framing. Secondly, the actual intended outcome of the Bologna Process, the European Higher Education Area, seems to be framed somewhat differently with the shift from primarily cultural to primarily practical and competitive framing, with a social and equality-centred framing emerging gradually. Thirdly, the conceptualisation of the role of the

universities seems to have shifted from more autonomous and automatically beneficial to something more instrumental and conditional. Universities are expected and encouraged to adopt and implement the proposed Bologna Process measures in order to contribute to the creation of the Europe of Knowledge. However, it is worthwhile to remember that like texts, also the interpretations made on them, and discourses as analytical categories projected on the texts, are contextual, and discursive in themselves, construing and constructing a certain kind of social reality. This interpretation, drawing its inspiration from the ideas of Ball (1998), Kwiek (2003) and the globalisation discussion presented in the beginning, is only one possible amongst many, and also other interpretations can be made.

However, these observations are consistent with Kwiek (2003) who has argued that the vocabularies of the European Higher education Area and the European Research Area have converged during the past few years and that this is linked to a wider renegotiation of what higher education, teaching and research, functions and financing and the roles of the students and staff are supposed to be about. On the other hand, it may as well be argued that the discursive change within the Bologna a Process documents within the time span of barely six years is insignificant, and more significant would be to discuss the conceptualisations of university and higher education as social institutions on a wider time span. The elements discussed in the context of the globalisation, such as the restructuring of the relationship between the nation-states and the higher education institutions, the increasing competitiveness between the knowledge-based economies, and the aim of the states to take control and respond to the globalisation for instance thought investing in higher education and emphasising its responsiveness to the perceived change, are certainly elements echoed by the Bologna discourse.

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