

**CONVERGENCE, COOPERATION, COORDINATION:  
HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE AND THE BOLOGNA PROCESS**

by

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## Abstract

Twenty-nine national ministers of education from across Europe signed the Bologna Declaration in 1999 to establish a European Higher Education Area by 2010. This initiated the Bologna process, which had broad objectives in the realm of higher education: to increase mobility and improve the comparability and competitiveness of European universities. Since 1999, the process has encompassed forty-six signatory states along with various NGOs and supranational bodies, including the European Commission.

Through a historical and descriptive analysis using multiple theoretical frameworks (neo-institutionalism and IR integration theories), this paper examines the driving forces behind the extensive university reform, asking which actors have been the dominant agenda-setters during the initial phases of the Bologna process. European higher education has been a multi-actor and multi-level policy field characterized by a politico-normative body of literature, and so the discourse – especially pertaining to the effects of globalization – is examined to determine how the dominant agenda-setters have legitimized their policy agendas.

Universities in Europe, traditionally path dependent institutions, were setting their own policy agendas during the 1980s and 1990s, and the result was an uncoordinated institutional convergence towards a perceived ‘world model’ of structure and governance. With the signing of the Bologna Declaration in 1999 (and its predecessor the Sorbonne Declaration in 1998), national ministries of education became the dominant agenda-setters for higher education, pursuing intergovernmental national cooperation legitimized through a discourse of international collaboration to mitigate the risks of the competitive global environment. Between 1999 and 2001, the European Commission regarded the reform process as an aspect of European integration and seized the opportunity to be the dominant agenda-setter, legitimizing this through a discourse of lifelong learning as part of the Lisbon Agenda. Utilizing aspects of the new open method of coordination, the Commission’s agenda focused on endogenous horizontal coordination, so that the national systems of higher education would be more attractive in the competitive external environment. After 2001, the methods of European-level steering continued as part of the process, but new actors and stakeholders began to cloud the policy field and diffused the dominant agenda-setting capacity of any single level or actor.

# Table of Contents

<b>Abstract</b> .....	ii
<b>Table of Contents</b> .....	iii
<b>Abbreviations</b> .....	iv
<b>Acknowledgements</b> .....	v
<b>Introduction</b> .....	1
<b>Chapter One: Thesis and Methodology</b> .....	4
Thesis.....	5
Methodology.....	6
Theoretical Frameworks.....	9
<b>Chapter Two: Structures and Pressures</b>	
State of the Literature.....	12
Exogenous Pressures: Globalization, Internationalization, Marketization.....	14
Endogenous Pressures: University Governance.....	20
<b>Chapter Three: Institutional Convergence</b>	
The University as an Institution.....	23
Isomorphisms and the Effects of Globalization.....	29
<b>Chapter Four: National Cooperation</b>	
The Bologna Process.....	35
Intergovernmental Bargaining to set a National Cooperation Agenda.....	37
Institutional Reception of the Bologna Process.....	41
The ‘Competition State’ and Supranational Organizations.....	44
<b>Chapter Five: European Coordination</b>	
EU Involvement in Higher Education before Bologna.....	47
EU Opportunities in Bologna.....	48
Agenda-Setting: Lisbon and Lifelong Learning.....	51
Agenda-Setting: Lisbon and the OMC.....	52
<b>Chapter Six: Conclusions</b>	
A Crowded Field of Actors.....	57
Bologna Then and Now.....	59
<b>Bibliography</b>	
EU Documents.....	62
References.....	63

## Abbreviations

ACE	American Council on Education
AUCC	Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada
Bfug	Bologna follow-up group
CAUT	Canadian Association of University Teachers
CHEA	Council for Higher Education Accreditation
EC	European Community
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
EI	Education International
EU	European Union
EUA	European University Association
EURASHE	European Association of Institutions in Higher Education
ESIB	National Unions of Students in the EU
ENQA	European Network for Quality Assurance
GATS	General Agreement on Trade in Services
HEI	higher education institution
IR	International Relations
LRC	Lisbon Recognition Convention
MLG	multi-level governance
NGO	non-governmental organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
OMC	open method of coordination
RAE	Research Assessment Enterprises
UNESCO-CEPES	United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization - European Centre for higher education
UNICE	Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe
WTO	World Trade Organization

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For Dad. Because we never walk alone.

## Introduction

“Education has varied infinitely in time and place.... Today, it tries to make of the individual an autonomous personality. In Athens, they sought to form cultivated souls, informed, subtle, full of measure and harmony, capable of enjoying beauty and the joys of pure speculation; in Rome, they wanted above all for children to become men of action, devoted to military glory, indifferent to letters and the arts. In the Middle Ages, education was above all Christian; in the Renaissance it assumes a more lay and literary character; today’s science tends to assume the place in education formerly occupied by the arts.” (Durkheim 1956: 64)

It seems a rather obvious truism that education is a reflection of its time and place, but it is not always clearly so without the benefit of hindsight. Writing during fin de siècle Europe, Émile Durkheim observed that one of the overarching purposes of modern education was the making of individuals of ‘autonomous personality’ – in a sense, the creation of subjects. This modernist subjectivity applied to persons, but could apply also to universities, to national systems of education, to the very nation-states themselves, so that modernist education has also been nationalist education. Arguably, universities have always been international institutions predisposed to cosmopolitanism and trans-nationalism. However, many scholars (Enders 2004; Neave 1998; Teichler 2004; Wittrock 1993) have observed that the contemporary university is much more the product of modern nation-states than medieval European civilization; in an era when societies were dominated by the nation-state, higher education policies have rather reflected the perspectives and interests of those nation-states. National systems of higher education were inward-looking or ‘closed’ in two ways: they answered to government education policies, and their primary purpose was the development of national citizens, elites, and administrators. From the late twentieth century, there has been a transformation within

institutions of higher education as they became more outward-looking and 'open'. As societies have become increasingly global and international, so too have universities; they are affected by, but also have influence over, these processes. Not all universities have been especially international in their outlook, but all of them have been 'subjected' to the same processes of globalization, as both objects and agents (Scott 1998: 122).

Responding to the challenges of globalization, there has been a world-wide policy trend towards the internationalization and marketization of higher education institutions (HEIs). In Europe, a growing sense of the dysfunctionality of European universities has led educational policy-makers at the institutional, national and European levels to consider radical reform. A significant and recent reform has been the Bologna process, in which twenty-nine (now forty-six) European countries agreed to harmonize their national systems of higher education. This process has sparked vigorous debate amongst policy-makers, university administrators, students, scholars, and members of the business community over the adequacy and meaning of higher education as well as the driving forces behind university reform. As a Europeanist and university student, I have been following the developments and discourse of the reform process with considerable interest. It has led me to question the place of the university in society, and the driving forces behind its reform in Europe. I have been curious about the tensions exhibited in the discourse and the points of conflict and complementarity in the different policy agendas. This tension has prompted me to ask: which institutions or actors have had the most agency through the initial phases of the Bologna process? Are the dominant policy agenda-setters institutional, national or international? In a multi-actor and multi-level higher education sector, how have these policy-drivers legitimized their agendas? The

answers to these questions will likely be as complex as the issues themselves, and perhaps just as controversial. Yet despite the often normative aspects of the discourse, it is clear that universities *are* changing, and the debate is a reflection of the ubiquitous concern regarding these trends and processes.



## Chapter One: Thesis and Methodology

There are many trends that are shaping the development of higher education,<sup>1</sup> but in a European context, globalization has come to dominate the discourse. It has resulted in two policy trends in the higher education sector: internationalization and ‘marketization’, which can be generally correlated to the collaborative and competitive responses to the challenges of globalization. Internationalization puts greater emphasis on trans-nationalizing core activities (i.e. teaching, learning, research), while marketization focuses on the economic role of higher education within competitive national economies. These can be complementary or conflicting processes that alter administrative structures, imprint on higher education governance and profoundly affect policy-making.

The three levels of policy process in the higher education sector (institutional, national, and supranational/international) could be deemed ‘policy drivers’ instead of policy-making processes, because their implementation ultimately takes place at an institutional level. For much of the twentieth century, national governments had the mandate to either steer or control HEIs as part of national systems of education. Despite being strongly framed by these national systems, many universities across Europe began responding to (or in some cases, attempting to ignore) the policy trends of marketization and internationalization without receiving a strong policy direction from their national ministries. This changed in 1999 with the signing of the Bologna Declaration – a critical juncture in university reform – in which national education ministers responded to the pressures of globalization with an ostensibly intergovernmental agreement that would establish a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by the year 2010. In one sense,

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<sup>1</sup> Among them democratization, polarization of inequalities, and marginalization and fragmentation along ethnic, tribal or religious lines (Sadlak 1998; UNESCO 1995).

Bologna simply crystallized the reform process by making the changes to university structure and governance more systematic and transparent. However, it also begged the question of which actors and which policy-driver levels were dominating the reform agenda.

### **Thesis**

In order to mitigate the competitive pressures of globalization, actors at each policy level (institutional, national, European) sought opportunity and legitimacy to be the dominant agenda-setter within the complex multi-level and multi-actor field of higher education. Until the late 1990s, institutions were the dominant agenda-setters, and while they did not legitimize their agenda through a clear discourse, they had the tendency to adopt similar policy agendas resulting in structural isomorphism. This uncoordinated *convergence* gave way to national (intergovernmental) *cooperation* with the Bologna process. National ministers of education (the national-level policy-driver) seized the opportunity to be the agenda-setters through the Sorbonne and Bologna Declarations. They legitimized this through a discourse of internal (i.e. European) collaboration to mitigate the risks of the competitive external (i.e. global) environment. Even amongst the national-level policy drivers, there were dominant actors (France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom) setting the agenda that other national education ministries would follow. Shortly after the signing of the Bologna Declaration, between 1999 and 2001, European-level actors regarded the reform process as an aspect of European integration. The European Commission (as a supranational/international-level policy driver) seized the opportunity to be the dominant agenda-setter, legitimizing this through a discourse of lifelong

learning as part of the Lisbon Agenda. Utilizing the new open method of coordination (OMC), the Commission's agenda focused on endogenous horizontal *coordination*, to make the national systems of higher education more attractive in the competitive external environment. Although somewhat outside the scope of this paper, the years 2001 to 2003 offer an additional frame for understanding the agenda-setting and policy-legitimization functions of the then-dominant actors. The methods of European-level steering continued as part of the process, but new actors and stakeholders began to cloud the policy-driver field and diffused the dominant agenda-setting capacity of any single level or actor.

### **Methodology**

Although policy processes, directions and outputs have differed considerably, the reforming effects of the different policy paths seem ostensibly the same: universities across Europe have been growing more similar in both administrative and curricular structure (if not course content). However, the enormous amount of literature available on internationalization of higher education and the Bologna process can often bewilder attempts at finding any single dominant causal variables for this university reform, or determining the distinct force or weight of particular processes or actors. University reform is clearly a very multifaceted phenomenon, and the Bologna process the uneven result of a mosaic of forces at work, some competing and some complementary. In light of this complexity, binary distinctions are problematic: the university can be a subject and an object; national systems of education can act as an agent of change as well as the structure that is changed; processes and pressures can be exogenous at the same time as being endogenous; and political actors both respond to and implement policy agendas.

Much of the recent research on higher education has concentrated on policy outcomes and effects, often to the neglect of the input side of policy formation (Enders 2004: 379).<sup>2</sup> Due to the relative paucity of empirical data on the effects of Bologna (and because of the large amount of suspicion that seems to surround it), public policy agendas offer research opportunities. Rather than avoiding the strongly politicized aspects of the discourse, one can acknowledge and – to some degree – even incorporate these aspects by considering them a part of policy input. An examination of the discourse can actually enlighten us as to which are the dominant actors in policy legitimization and agenda-setting on the input side of the Bologna policy process.<sup>3</sup>

In classic policy implementation analysis, the policy process is broken down into discrete chronological phases (agenda setting, policy formulation, legitimization, implementation, and evaluation). However, the Bologna process defies the classical policy process configuration for three major reasons. First, its goals have been ambiguous, multiple and sometimes partly contradictory, making it difficult to correlate policy aims with policy outcomes. Second, the phases of the policy process have not been discrete (for example, the formulation phase is often blurred into the implementation phase because Bologna policies are implemented at different times and in different ways in different national contexts). Third, the process is increasingly multi-actor and multi-level, so what is considered a (national-level) policy implementation from a European

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<sup>2</sup> A notable exception has been Anne Corbett (2005; 2003), whose research on EU education policy has examined the policy input side from within the historical institutionalist framework of policy entrepreneurship.

<sup>3</sup> ‘Agenda-setting theory’ is more commonly used in studies of mass media, to examine the ‘salience-transfer’ ability of media on public opinion (cf. McCombs and Shaw 1972). Instead, I use it in the context of political science, inasmuch as political actors seek out the capacity to set (and legitimize) a policy agenda within the limitations of a multi-actor and multi-level setting. Agenda-setting in the context of mass media tests theory by examining effects, and how they correlate with aims. As I am not theory testing, I am less interested in policy outcomes *per se*, except where policy outcomes and effects can actually elucidate the agendas of the dominant actors.

viewpoint is often considered policy formulation from a national perspective (Witte 2004: 419-21). Even though these phases are blurred in practice, they are still useful as configurative markers for understanding the Bologna process in its early stages. Agenda-setting and policy legitimization provide a relational field between the strongly normative-political discourse pertaining to the effects of globalization in higher education, and the patterns of governance that affect universities. To assess agenda-setting capacity, I have assumed four inter-related phenomena. First, no single actor or policy-driver level is alone in setting the policy agenda. Second, there can be dominant agenda-setters that gain prominence at different times. Third, even with a dominant agenda-setter, policy implementation must occur at the institutional level, so agenda-setters tend to seek legitimacy for their agenda with the other actors/levels (often 'in public' given the widespread impact of these reforms), and that they do this (at least partially) through a public (and often normative) discourse. Finally, this policy legitimization (the normative discourse) can aid us in identifying the dominant agenda-setter, be it an actor or level of policy-driver.

In short, this is a descriptive historical analysis of the period leading up to the Bologna process, and the first few years of its reforms. It is analytical in that it analyzes the policy process, focusing on the input side (agenda-setting and policy legitimization) rather than policy outputs or effects. It is descriptive in that it does not test theory, instead using multiple theories as 'handrails' to better understand and explain the relative influence of actors at different policy levels. Finally, it is historical in that it explains change over time, primarily from the late 1990s until 2001, but also looking deeper into the past and forward into the present where necessary. Furthermore, it takes an implicitly

historiographical approach to sources, treating the discourse on higher education as texts that can be read to comprehend the agendas and legitimizations of the actors involved.<sup>4</sup>

### **Theoretical Frameworks**

As a ‘moving target’, the Bologna process does not lend itself well to theory-testing. With new actors, shifting agendas, ambiguous goals, varied implementation, and an accelerated timeline, Bologna is a very dynamic process that cannot be easily explained within a single theoretical framework. Just as the dominant agenda-setters have shifted between the different levels of policy-drivers, with no actor being an exclusive agenda-setter, so too does this inflect the use of different theoretical frameworks, some of which have better explanatory power at different phases of the process. In this sense, theories are used as handrails to highlight the dominant structures within which particular actors can set policy agendas. Other actors might be diminished within that theoretical structure, but they are certainly not absent.

For European policy processes, there are three levels of decision-making: super-systemic, systemic, and sub-systemic. The systemic level of policy refers to the underlying structure of institutions and institutional change, often entailing inter-institutional negotiation or emulation. The super-systemic level usually results in the history-making decisions and policies that change the wider environment of Europe, involving some form of either intergovernmental bargaining or supranational steering. The sub-systemic level refers to policy shaping within a given sector, usually after the major agenda items have been set (Peterson and Bomberg 1999; see also Rosamund 2003). In a very general way, the higher education reform agenda has jumped between

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<sup>4</sup> I do not make a clear distinction between primary and secondary documents because some analysts also have administrative roles in policy-making bodies (Pavel Zgaga for example). In essence, all documents can be considered primary because they are commenting first-hand on the Bologna process, even if some authors are ‘on the outside looking in’.

these levels of decision-making, having moved from an institutional issue (systemic) to an integration issue (super-systemic) and then finally to a sectoral issue inside the larger framework of European governance (sub-systemic). As it moves between these levels, different theoretical handrails become more useful for understanding and explaining the policy process.

The systemic level can be conceived as the base structure that undergirds the other levels, in that policy implementation always takes place at the institutional level even when agenda-setting might take place at another level. In other words, whatever the form of governance that appears dominant at any given time, universities will continue to exist and cohere as institutions. Neo-institutionalism is useful for understanding the emergence of institutional forms and arrangements, and changes in organizational structure over time. In chapter three, historical institutionalism (Pierson 2004; 1998) is used to demonstrate how path dependence and structural ‘stickiness’ resulted in three different models of European university (with other hybridized forms of these three). Sociological institutionalism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983)<sup>5</sup> then explains how the different institutional models began to converge on a single ‘world’ model during the 1980s and 1990s, a reflection of the uncoordinated *convergence* of HEIs as the dominant agenda-setters. The signing of the Sorbonne and Bologna Declarations in the late 1990s made higher education an integration issue, so without discarding neo-institutionalism, International Relations (IR) theories of integration become more useful. In chapter four, liberal intergovernmentalism (Moravcsik 1998) helps to explain these ‘history-making’ agreements and the dominance of a *national cooperation* agenda. Shortly after, the

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<sup>5</sup> Hall and Taylor (1996) differentiate between three subspecies of the new institutionalism (rational choice, historical, and sociological). DiMaggio and Powell (1983) explain changes to organizational structure by way of ‘culture’ rather than ‘calculus’, so this could be thought of as the latter form.

Commission seized the opportunity to be the dominant agenda-setter and shift the policy-level driver from national to European. In chapter five, ‘transaction-based integration theory’ (Stone Sweet and Sandholtz 1998; 1997), a middle-range neo-functional theory not incompatible with liberal intergovernmentalism, aids in the understanding of *European coordination*. Although the subsequent phases after 2001 are outside the scope of this paper, chapter six touches on multi-level governance (MLG) to characterize a policy field that has gotten even more complex, with no single actor or policy-level driver able to dominate.



## Chapter Two: Structures and Pressures

### State of the Literature

Despite the ever-burgeoning volume of literature on the effects of globalization of higher education, university governance, and the Bologna process, there are still research streams that require further analysis, among them (cf. Bidwell 2006: 41-45): global expansion (a cognitive approach to nation-building); the institutionalization of different national systems (a comparative approach<sup>6</sup>); the realization of class interests through ‘massification’ (a ‘neo-Marxist’ approach); the behavioural effects of institutional forms on various actors (a sociological approach); as well as control of educational organizations (a governance approach). At the intersection of the globalization and governance of higher education, Eric Beerens (2003: 142) has identified two further directions for research: the changing relationship between the state and universities because of globalization in other sectors; and the ways that supranational and trans-national institutions are gaining authority over higher education as a result of increased international flows (of students, graduates, academics, financial resources, etc.) and if this transfer of authority has been undermining national authority. This paper lies within this nexus, between the effects of globalization on higher education and the changing patterns of university governance.

As the Bologna policy process develops, process-tracing (George and Bennett 2005: 205-32) is likely to yield causal explanations for its policy outcomes and the effects of its policy implementation. Conducting research along this nexus, however, is currently problematic for two reasons: the size and speed of the Bologna process makes it difficult

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<sup>6</sup> Burton Clark’s research program (Clark 1983) compared national systems of education, although his focus has shifted ‘downward’ to the institutional level in subsequent years (Clark 2004; 1998), perhaps as a reflection of increased university autonomy.

to isolate variables; and the strongly normative-political aspects inherent to the field have tended to overshadow empirical analysis.<sup>7</sup> With each increase in the number of Bologna adherents, new dimensions and elements are added to the process, though the focus still tends to be on harmonization across the original (and predominantly EU) signatory nations, ignoring the more recent and ‘peripheral’ non-EU countries.<sup>8</sup> Furthermore, the Bologna process has only been underway for a decade, and despite systematic assessments,<sup>9</sup> the effects ‘on the ground’ at the institutional level remain somewhat opaque, it being “a widely known fact that so far the Bologna Process has been primarily political in nature and that the capacity of universities to absorb any of the envisioned reforms remains yet to be tested” (Tomusk 2006: 9). The second problem has been that the line between empirical observation and political discourse has grown indistinct; “for the rapidly growing body of *Bologna literature* [...] the borders between the genres are increasingly blurred” (*Ibid.*: 8, emphasis in the original). One can bemoan the corruption of intellectual analysis as it gives way to political propaganda, or try to connect analysis to discourse by relating the effects of globalization to patterns of governance. Scholars

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<sup>7</sup> These research difficulties might actually be related because the scope of change does not seem to sensibly correlate with the proposed timeline, making it a ready space for politicking. The Bologna process is not so much a program of strong policy effects as it is a wish-list in its early phases of implementation, or as Johanna Witte (2004: 421) has put it, “[...] a classical example of ‘implementation as evolution’ [...] or, ‘implementation as interpretation’ [...] as well as ‘implementation as vehicle for the pursuit of particular interests’.”

<sup>8</sup> Voldemar Tomusk draws particular attention to the Russian Federation which joined the process in 2003, and its “1,300 chronically under-funded and mismanaged universities enrolling close to six million students” (Tomusk 2006: 9).

<sup>9</sup> Every two years since 1999, the European University Association (EUA) commissions a ‘Trends Report’ that charts the overall progress of Bologna. This report is compiled from data received as part of a questionnaire submitted to signatory nations (sent to both the Ministry of Education as well as the Rector’s Conference in order to get the perspective of both the government and the HEIs). Voluntarily-submitted national reports are another source of information, but seeing as the same countries that tend to fill out their Trends Questionnaires most completely also submit the most detailed national reports, the question remains as to whether there is enough information on all the countries (Haug and Tauch 2001: 13). More recently, this has been supplemented by other documents compiled by NGOs: ESIB’s *Bologna With Student Eyes* and Eurydice’s *Focus on the Structure of Higher Education in Europe* (London Communiqué 2007: 2).

can avoid being caught up in the normative undercurrent of the debate by realizing that globalization has both positive and negative effects, and that patterns of university governance reflect not unreasonable responses to these effects.

### **Exogenous Pressures: Globalization, Internationalization, Marketization<sup>10</sup>**

Anthony Giddens has defined globalization as the “[i]ncreasing interdependence between individuals, nations and regions. [It] does *not* just mean economic interdependence [but also] involves accelerated and universal communication, and concerns also political and cultural dimensions” (Giddens 2007: xii, emphasis in the original). Yet in geopolitical terms, territorial control becomes less important than control and access to markets, which in turn is linked to education by the capacity to build new technology, maximize human resources, and to generate and use new knowledge (Sadlak 1998: 100). Because its effects have been most visible in the world of business and commerce – and higher education is not immune to these forces despite attempts to shelter it – globalization is currently more often associated with competitive education markets and commercial knowledge-transfer rather than crumbling national borders or even quaint ideas like a global village.<sup>11</sup> While its economic aspects are important to higher education, a distinction should be made between the globalization of higher education and the

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<sup>10</sup> It is somewhat problematic to think of globalization as being a strictly exogenous or endogenous pressure in this way. What appears an exogenous pressure can simultaneously be an endogenous discourse. Furthermore, exogenous to what exactly? Global actors are also national actors, as well as regional actors; their agendas change according to the ideas and interests at stake, and even those are seldom delimited along clear boundaries. However, treating globalization and its effects as an exogenous pressure (understanding full well that it is a multifaceted and complex phenomenon) allows one to make of it a configurative marker and then better understand its effects.

<sup>11</sup> These more overtly cultural effects of globalization were becoming apparent on the research side of higher education as early as the 1970s: global communications systems like the joint academic network in the UK (JANET) were in place by then, as was the perceptible growth of English as the global lingua franca for academia.

globalization of other social arrangements. It has been perceived as commodification, managerialism, decline of the welfare state, and the collapse of democracy, but this perception confuses globalization with the *effects* of globalization (Beerkens 2003: 146). Two of the more substantial effects (or responses) within the realm of higher education have been internationalization and marketization.

Whereas globalization seems to undermine nationalist discourses, internationalization could be deemed a logical extension of nationalism, reflecting a world order dominated by nation-states and strategic relationships, mutual collaboration and cooperation. In this sense, they have been regarded as opposites. However, Ulrich Teichler has observed that globalization and internationalization are not so much opposites as gradations along a continuum, and that these phenomena could even have a dialectical relationship – border crossing activities lead to a crumbling of borders but this same pressure also leads to national border construction (Teichler 2004). In the context of higher education, internationalization can be seen as a response to globalization; “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” (Kälvemark and van der Wende 1997: 19). Thus the pressures of globalization can have positive effects on the long-term developmental trends of higher education policy.

Teichler (1999) has perceived that the internationalization of higher education has become more horizontal, systematic and integrative. It has become more horizontal in that the once vertical – and even neo-colonial – dimension of past inter-institutional cooperation has flattened out to promote more equal relationships and dispersed mobility

(although there is the persistent perception that the universities of Northern Europe are of higher quality). New management systems, increased infrastructure, and the opening or expanding of international offices has shifted internationalization from a case-by-case activity towards more systematic policies nearer the core of institutional administration (although there remains substantial variance between institutions in this regard). And finally, an increasing emphasis on the international dimension of regular teaching, learning and research has resulted in internationalization being more integrated into the very meaning and purpose of higher education. Teichler contends that the majority of scholars share the view that as far as the internationalization of higher education is concerned, there are more opportunities than dangers (Teichler 2004: 6), yet he also cautions that “[...] it should make us suspicious that the most powerful actors, and the most likely winners, praise internationalisation of higher education almost unconditionally, and push aside the anxieties of the less powerful actors” (Teichler 1999: 9).

Globalization has received a great deal of criticism in the perception that it results in the marketization of social policy sectors. Equivocating globalization and marketization depicts a set of supra-national trends and policies that restructure nation-states, deregulate legal and financial controls, and open markets or quasi-markets (including higher education) to increased competition, efficiency and managerialism (Enders 2004: 367).<sup>12</sup> The rhetoric notwithstanding, economics has indeed been more pervasive in higher education as it becomes a burgeoning global industry. In 1999, trade in higher education services across the Organization for Economic Cooperation and

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<sup>12</sup> It should be noted that marketization can easily occur in a national setting too; the decentralized American higher education system is a good example of this.

Development (OECD) countries amounted to US \$30 million – fully 3 per cent of total services trade – and has been growing steadily since (Uvalić-Trumbić 2003: 128). As such, it has entered the realm of World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations and its multilateral agreement covering service industries, the General Agreement on Trade in Services (GATS). Under GATS, cross-border trade of educational services is classified into four categories: 1) cross-border supply (distance-learning); 2) consumption abroad (exchange students); 3) commercial presence (of foreign providers established in a country); and 4) presence of natural persons (instructors traveling to another country to deliver a service).<sup>13</sup> The GATS framework obligates WTO members to respect the general principles that apply to all services except those supplied ‘in the exercise of government authority’, which has generally been accepted as primary and secondary, but not necessarily higher education (Centre for Higher Education Research and Development 2002: 12-3). The United States has been at the forefront of promoting GATS negotiations for higher education services, especially as the U.S.A. is currently the largest ‘exporter’ of education, and half a million foreign students contribute US \$13 billion annually to the American economy. Other major players are the U.K., Canada, New Zealand, and Australia, the last being particularly aggressive in marketing its HEIs.<sup>14</sup> There are even some new competitors in higher education: China, Malaysia,

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<sup>13</sup> Official statistics on trade in higher education services do not cover the full value of this international ‘industry’. For example, OECD and WTO statistics have focused on mobility programs, and do not include fees paid from cross-border supply, commercial presence, presence of individuals, nor services conducted by for-profit educational institutions or training facilities. Therefore, the amount of money involved in the transnational trade of education is likely to be significantly higher than statistics show (Centre for Higher Education Research and Development 2002).

<sup>14</sup> Australia has been accused of seeing its international student population and the exporting of its educational services as ‘cash cows’. For Australia, education is its third largest service export (compared to fifth for the USA), and seventh largest overall export industry (cf. Reus 2006). The term ‘Americanization’ of education has often been used interchangeably with marketization, although this is a misnomer as it is clearly a policy response readily adopted by other nations.

Singapore and South Korea have all recently announced that they want to become educational hubs, exporting services rather than importing them. By 2020, the number of international students could reach seven million worldwide, with the majority of demand for education services predicted to come from India and China (Reus 2006). So in very real terms, there is a competitive interest in supplying these educational services, even from supposedly public education providers. Frank Furedi, a sociology professor at the University of Kent, lamented that “[u]nfortunately, global competition is likely to encourage the ‘pile ‘em high, sell ‘em cheap’ orientation towards the peddling of university degrees...It is a pity that the focus of the globalization of higher education is not the exchange of ideas but the objective of turning education institutions into service providers” (Furedi 2005: A3).

From a more theoretical economic standpoint, the marketization response to globalization has had its advocates too. Conceiving of education as a quasi-market rather than a public good has been encouraged by theories of post-fordist ‘knowledge societies’ in which innovation and knowledge are now primary resources, requiring supply-side investment and offering comparative economic advantage. Rather than miss out on this perceived zero-sum game, governments and HEIs are more inclined to commercialize at least part of the knowledge transaction (like tuition fees to cover the cost of generating knowledge, patents and intellectual property rights, etc.). This phenomenon need not be especially globalized (it can take place in a strictly national context too), but the threat of international competition makes the debate over knowledge transactions more heated. However, knowledge transactions go beyond strictly economic thinking and should be considered within institutional settings and structures. These settings and structures

involve deliberate political choices strongly affected by historical contingencies and institutional arrangements, as they are not the product of straightforward economic efficiency (Rowan 2006: 19-21).

Whether the justification of marketization has been for tangible material benefit or as part of an inevitable ‘reality’ of globalization, these policy responses have been altering the institutional reality of higher education. Marketization ensures greater provider pluralism as HEIs are no longer a monopoly of the government in many states, yet universities also have a more central (and embedded) role in society because of their perceived function for the knowledge economy. As a result of this role, there have been calls for greater accountability that has resulted in a narrower control of practice. Thus, HEIs have become more ‘tightly coupled’ organizations, the coupling being between the technical core (i.e. research, teaching and learning) and the formal organizational and administrative structures of schooling (Meyer and Rowan 2006: 2-3).

In the 1990s, the effects of globalization referred to the totality of substantial change that was taking place in the inner life of universities as a result of trans-national collaborative relationships that were blurring borders and diminishing the power and agency of national systems of education. More recently, the border-blurring aspect has been ignored in favour of a perceived ‘turbo-capitalism’ inherent to global forces, a shift that coincided with concerns over competition and the marketization of higher education. This shift in meaning has its analytical dangers because the rhetoric about globalization can mask the enormous complexity of new governance modes. There is a tendency to ascribe explanatory power within a structurally diffuse context to specific forces (e.g. ‘Americanization’) or sometimes even specific institutions (e.g. the World Bank),



contributing to a sense of conspiracy (Enders 2004: 378). Yet, globalization does not have to be a deliberate and top-down coercive force threatening cultural diversity and encouraging insatiable commercialism, nor does it have to be a distinctly Western movement imposing itself on the world. It can work to the advantage of social and economic development, or perhaps emphasize the impact of global environmental changes. That caveat aside, globalization is often situated as an impersonal and inevitable force in order to justify certain policy directions, like internationalization and marketization. Globalization is not just a phenomenon, it is also an ideology, and one of its less obvious effects has been the intensification of debate over the most desirable structures for governing education systems and institutions.

### **Endogenous Pressures: University Governance**

Governance has been somewhat overused in the social sciences over the last two decades, so that its full meaning remains unclear.<sup>15</sup> This ambiguity is not necessarily evidence of sloppy thinking on behalf of researchers, but rather due to the present societal situation that seems to have destabilized past relationships and categories (Fried 2006: 79).

Simply put, governance refers to “the range of actions and institutions that supply order” (Rosamund 2003: 119). Governance could be further interpreted in the ‘Foucauldian’ sense of different (and not just overtly coercive) modes of coordinating individual actions; the basic forms of social order and how they are maintained.<sup>16</sup> Another definition refers to a new mode of governing that is distinct from the top-down, hierarchical control model and is

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<sup>15</sup> Indeed, many European languages do not have an exact equivalent for the English word, making the notion complex and difficult to understand (Kohler 2006: 17).

<sup>16</sup> “[T]he finality of government resides in the things it manages and in the pursuit of the perfection and intensification of the processes it directs; and the instrument of government, instead of being laws, now come to be a range of multiple tactics” (Foucault 2003: 237).

characterized by state and non-state actors operating in mixed policy networks. These interpretations are not necessarily mutually exclusive: they can overlap and reinforce one another so that norms and values can affect modes of governance, which underlie the patterns and arrangements of governing, which establish and institutionalize norms and values.

The emergence of multi-level and multi-actor contexts has demanded more nuanced interpretations of governance for other policy fields, yet these theoretical developments are still in the process of being applied to higher education. For example, the very term ‘university governance’ has had different connotations in the ‘Anglo-sphere’ than in continental Western Europe.<sup>17</sup> In the Anglo-sphere it has referred to administrative structures and implied more university autonomy, whereas in Western Europe it usually meant state control or direction of HEIs through central ministries of education. The global rise of the ‘new managerialism’ has been shifting the meaning of university governance towards the ‘Anglo’ conception, not only by altering the forms of public administration (i.e. treating students as ‘clients’, external evaluation mechanisms, demand-oriented budget planning, etc.), but also by shifting ‘state control’ from direct supervision by education ministries to that of increasingly self-regulating HEIs (Neave 1998: 53-4). Yet this is oversimplifying the possible meanings of university governance by confusing management with leadership, or administration with policy. In the context of higher education, governance has three interrelated characteristics: first, it means regulation, steering and control; second, it is a set of practices and institutional devices in which actors organize and manage their interdependencies; and third, akin to the

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<sup>17</sup> The ‘Anglo-sphere’ generally refers to developed nations strongly influenced as former British colonies and having English as an official language (i.e. UK, USA, Canada, Australia, South Africa, etc.), while in this context, Western Europe refers to the developed nations of continental Western Europe (i.e. France, Germany, Italy, etc.).

Foucauldian sense above, it is the way in which these structures promote or enhance the legitimacy of the education system. “In other words, governance is seeking the answers to the fundamental question: who is in charge, how are the rules applied, and what are the sources of legitimacy for executive decision-making by different actors?” (Fried 2006: 85; see also 82-85). Agenda-setting and policy-legitimization are concerned with the first and last of these questions, investigating leadership and policy inputs respectively. Therefore the focus of this paper is less on governance within the university (management), and more on the relationship between the university and outside political bodies (both national and supranational).

## Chapter Three: Institutional Convergence

### The University as an Institution<sup>18</sup>

Institutions can be formal organizations, informal networks, as well as “sets of relationships that persist, although in an inherently conflictual and tension filled way” (Skocpol 1995: 105). Universities are among the oldest and most persistent organizations in Europe; of the sixty-six European institutions that have survived without interruption from the Reformation until the present, sixty-two of them are universities (Rüegg 2006: 41).<sup>19</sup> As institutions go, the European university could be characterized as especially inertial and structurally ‘sticky’ in the face of change. Fundamental changes to universities tended to reflect wider changes in society, such as the advent of nation-states: “universities form part and parcel of the very same process which manifests itself in the emergence of an industrial economic order and the nation-state as the most typical and most important form of political organisation” (Wittrock 1993: 305). Changing or reversing an institutional path is possible, but often requires overcoming strong institutional barriers that oppose reform. The strong path dependence of European universities has resulted in self-reinforcing positive feedback processes that defy functionalist explanations and draw our attention to historically remote events or processes in order to explain institutional arrangements. Where they came from speaks to

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<sup>18</sup> When I speak of the university in this context, some elements are deliberately de-emphasized. For example, I do not address the issue of different types of HEIs which underlie the diversity and complexity of higher education in Europe. I am treating the tertiary education sector as being relatively coherent, and focus on its ‘lead’ institutions (traditional universities that are in the main, publicly-funded). For fully privatized higher education, Levy (2006) has argued that rather than isomorphic convergence, there is limited evidence that suggests they are experiencing increased diversity of size, funding sources, governance, curricular scope and content, mission statements, etc. Levy contends that the logic of neo-institutionalism is not faulty in regard to private institutions, but rather there is a lack of empirical evidence in the private education sector to confirm either convergence or divergence.

<sup>19</sup> The other four were the Catholic Church, the Protestant church, and the parliaments of Iceland and the Isle of Man.

where they are now, in terms of university structure, in terms of the relationship between HEIs and the governing structures in society, even in terms of the most prevalent perspective that various actors take in the current discourse on higher education reform.

The very oldest university in Europe was likely the University of Bologna, which was celebrating its 911<sup>th</sup> anniversary with the signing of the Bologna Declaration in 1999. This ‘Mediterranean’ model of university persisted in predominantly Catholic countries, with France having the most coherent contemporary version. The model was heavily influenced by a Jesuit educational tradition that accentuated mobility and meritocracy, and was staunchly opposed to any commodification of the university: “Jesuitism meant the hegemony of ministries without markets” (W. Clark 2006: 437). After the suppression of the Jesuit order and then the French Revolution, the religious influence subsided to make way for new ideological foundations: *laïcité* (secularity), mass education and especially nationalism. Although the revolutionaries lacked the resources to realize mass education even at the primary level, the major higher education academies founded during the early 1800s embodied the values of nationalism, meritocracy and *le service public*.<sup>20</sup> The collapse of the Napoleonic Empire led to the restoration of traditional universities across Europe, yet the French influence, though short-lived, was still pivotal for the modernizing nationalist tradition (*Ibid.*: 440). Though in many ways it epitomizes the Mediterranean model, a distinctive characteristic of the French higher education system is ‘*les Grandes Écoles*’, an upper tier that prepares the administrative elite to manage the country. Despite this apparent elitism, the principle of service to society

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<sup>20</sup> *Le service public*, its origin in Enlightenment-era notions of teaching practical knowledge in service of the public good, filtered into French higher education with a shift of emphasis onto the relationship between university and society being one that is connected and mutually supportive; that higher education should be considered a public good and a responsibility of the state.

persists; “[t]he link between school and society is provided by the meritocratic principle: the allocation of social positions is provided by personal achievement, initially grounded in school achievement” (Hörner 2007: 265).

The University of Berlin is widely considered the progenitor for the modern research university in Germany and abroad. As Minister for Culture and Education, Wilhelm von Humboldt convinced the King of Prussia to found this university in 1810, based on the ideas of Friedrich Schleiermacher rather than the new French reforms.<sup>21</sup> This new type of research-intensive higher education institution was to be an ‘ivory tower’ separated from society at large and not contaminated by pressures from the outside world (i.e. buffered from society); “[i]n Humboldt’s eyes, the state had only two tasks to perform as far as the universities were concerned, namely protecting their freedom and appointing academics” (Rüegg 2006: 47). In the latter half of the nineteenth century, the Humboldt model assumed gigantic proportions, influencing many parts of the world. These reforms led to the bureaucratization of academic life in Germany, with an unintended consequence<sup>22</sup> being the ease with which Friedrich Althoff, from within the Prussian Ministry of Culture from 1882 to 1907, could micromanage German academia for the purpose of industrialization during the Second Reich (W. Clark 2006: 451). Although the Althoff system embraced industry over culture, German universities became as nationalistic as the French in their training of civil servants. This could be perceived as a kind of ‘equivallity’ of agendas; despite different causal paths in their

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<sup>21</sup> Although the research university has been strongly associated with Humboldt, the somewhat mythical link was formed once his writings on the subject had been published well after his death; “a tradition invented around 1900 for reasons specific to the situation of the German university at that time” (Ash 2006: 247). In spite of this, ‘Humboldt model’ is used here because its meaning is well understood.

<sup>22</sup> See Pierson (2004:14-5) for a brief discussion of unintended consequences and their relevance to the path dependency of institutional arrangements.

history, both the Mediterranean and Humboldt models could be bent to the will of the nation-state when required.

Oxford and Cambridge were among the first medieval European universities, yet during the modern era, the ‘Anglo-Saxon model’ could be likened to English politics in being somewhat juxtaposed to continental practices and philosophies. Meritocracy had comparatively little importance, and professors had a diminished role at ‘Oxbridge’ because of a complex hierarchy that also comprised readers, dons, and tutors. One early result was that Oxbridge professors were more commercial than their continental counterparts, many being forced to seek sources of income outside the university. Content-wise, the focus continued to be the liberal arts – and especially the Classics – well into the modern era, so that English higher education inculcated mental discipline more than scientific training or public service. At the same time that Napoleon and Humboldt were modernizing education on the continent, Edward Copleston, Professor of Poetry at Oxford from 1802 until 1812, argued for a ‘proper education’ that would produce gentlemen rather than mere civil servants, scientists, or businessmen (*Ibid.*: 453-9). This remarkably resilient tradition was criticized for its social exclusion as well as being out of touch with the technical demands of the modern (and now post-modern) world.

These three university models (‘mixed Mediterranean’, ‘Humboldt’ and ‘Anglo-Saxon’) form the core to which other national systems of higher education would either emulate or hybridize.<sup>23</sup> Scandinavian universities tended to be a hybrid form, incorporating elements of the Anglo-Saxon and Humboldt tradition. With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, universities in the Newly Independent States (and

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<sup>23</sup> Perhaps not coincidentally, Germany, France, Italy and the UK initiated the Bologna process.

Russia for that matter) initially took Humboldt as their model. The impact of the rapid and widespread privatization (marketization) of this sector (along with other sectors in post-Soviet republics) resulted in many universities wanting – at least in principle – to emulate the American model.<sup>24</sup> This so-called American model has been a point of strident debate, one that has echoed into the Bologna discourse; “among the fears heard... was the possibility that Europe might just import a foreign, ‘Anglo-Saxon’ (and mainly American) model” (Haug and Kirstein 1999: 9). In fact, the American model – if you could even call it that – was itself a hybrid of Humboldt and Anglo-Saxon traditions, adapted to suit local conditions.<sup>25</sup>

American higher education has been less a singular model than a diffused and decentralized system that seemed better positioned to cope with the major reforms in higher education following World War II.<sup>26</sup> Some comparative educationists (Archer 1984; Bidwell 2006) assert an American ‘exceptionalism’ with fewer impediments to mass higher education as compared to Europe, due to the centrality of class interests in the latter. European class-consciousness pertained not only to mass access (‘massification’), but also to university governance, and was a catalyst for the student revolts of the late 1960s. Whereas American students were rallying just for social issues that were being debated in the wider societal spectrum during this period, European

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<sup>24</sup> For example, of 377 HEIs in Poland, 252 are private schools. In Russia, the maximum number of fee-paying students per HEI was set at 25 per cent, but the national average is in fact 44 per cent, with some HEIs reaching 80 per cent (respectively: Hörner and Nowosad 2007: 602 and Schmidt 2007: 663).

<sup>25</sup> The degree structure was taken from the British university system, but a significant Prussian influence came to bear with the Morrill Land Act of 1862, in which state universities were to conduct research in technical fields and teach practical (and military) skills to better tap into the unexploited wealth of the continent (cf. Scott 1998).

<sup>26</sup> There is little doubt that many people have gained access to higher education in the post war period, and this continues to escalate. Three quarters of extant universities have been established since 1900, and half since 1945 (Scott 1998: 123). In the West (Western Europe and the developed nations of the Anglo-sphere), the national average for tertiary enrollment ratio has jumped from 10 per cent in 1965 to nearly 45 per cent in 1995. Even among non-Western countries, the ratio has gone from fewer than 5 per cent to nearly 15 per cent over the same period (Ramirez 2006: 126).



students were also fighting for better representation within their universities. In 1968, a year of notoriety with explosive protests on campuses across Europe, the United States had reached the majority threshold for mass higher education (50 per cent of citizens aged twenty-five or older reporting more than twelve years of education, cf. Ash 2006: 252). European students garnered some success from their protests: Mode One<sup>27</sup> reforms like the 1970 Dutch law on University Governance (*Wet op de Universitaire Bestuurshervorming*) overhauled administrative structures to better reflect the principles of corporate representation and participant democracy. Mode One reforms achieved much that was on the students' political agenda, but Western European HEIs remained socially buffered rather than embedded, and the 'external' governance relationship between the state and universities remained essentially the same. This would change in the early 1980s, with Mode Two reforms coming as a reaction to an economic (rather than overtly political) agenda.

Developed out of their own specific historical trajectories, European systems of higher education followed paths that had yielded to change only when confronted by powerful endogenous shocks (like student unrest) and government legislation. As economic and industrial pressures increased through the 1970s and 1980s, neo-liberal and economic globalization began to undermine the financial relationship between central governments and public institutions. From the early 1980s, governments were withdrawing from direct institutional governance in multiple social policy fields, adopting mechanisms of remote steering that were more characteristic of the new

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<sup>27</sup> Mode One reforms opened up the university to its internal constituencies through increased participation, whereas with Mode Two reforms, the university is opened up to external constituencies (i.e. industry, unions, the local community). This idea has been based on the notions of Mode One and Mode Two knowledge production, the former being in the service of narrower academic interests, the latter having wider social applications (cf. Gibbons 2002; Neave 1998).

‘facilitatory state’ instead of the traditional ‘interventionary’ state. This presented something of an identity crisis for many universities in Europe, because they were fundamentally detached from their institutional reference point: instead of emulating the governance structures of their national civil service, the private sector was put forward as a more appropriate guiding force (Neave 1998: 54-63; Zgaga 2006: 40). A devolution of authority from the state to HEI administrations meant that many universities were charting their own path – some more tentatively than others.<sup>28</sup>

### **Isomorphisms and the Effects of Globalization**

When an organizational field lacks strong hierarchical control or guidance, as was occurring in higher education, a selection process weeds out non-efficient or non-appropriate forms, as institutions seek economic fitness and/or social legitimacy. This leads to the phenomenon of isomorphism, “a constraining process that forces one unit in a population to resemble other units that face the same set of environmental conditions” (DiMaggio and Powell 1983: 149). There are three forms of isomorphism that can occur separately or operate in conjunction: coercive, mimetic and normative. Coercive isomorphism is imposed by actors or forces outside the organization (usually the state), and is manifest in terms of legislation or else a singular and conditional source of funding. The latter forms are non-coercive and involve more voluntary action by the organization, usually manifest by dominant institutions setting the course that other institutions emulate. Mimetic isomorphism occurs when goals are ambiguous and uncertainty high, so institutions try to minimize risk and increase legitimacy by emulating

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<sup>28</sup> Burton Clark (1998) has written extensively on five entrepreneurial universities in Europe that re-invented themselves in the early to mid-1990s.

successful organizations. Normative isomorphism often occurs through professionalization (in institutional settings where professionals feel capable of establishing their own policy), but allowing for a wider sociological context because professionals are also influenced by dominant societal norms (*Ibid.*). Universities have a peculiar role because one of their *prima facie* functions is the provision of educational qualifications that legitimize and professionalize individuals destined for other institutions, “the university not only holds a ‘critical position’ regarding government, industry, technology and societal relations...the university is at the same time able to put into question the institutions and values that underlie our practices” (Crawley 2000: 28). Thus, the normative ‘flow of ideas’ goes both directions as universities have the power to establish values in societal elites and professionals, but also large sections of society have experienced the institutional culture of the university and can speak to its reform.

Prior to Mode Two reforms, isomorphic change in the higher education sector was almost exclusively normative or coercive because HEIs were ‘captive’ organizations, not responding to the market and conforming to already institutionalized forces (i.e. the states and professions).<sup>29</sup> As the interventionary state waned, market considerations became more central. Having recently experienced more political autonomy from the state, European HEIs were concerned that this autonomy was now going to be circumscribed by the market. One response was to announce their collective solidarity through conventions like the 1988 *Magna Charta Universitatum*: “[t]he university is an autonomous institution at the heart of societies... To meet the needs of the world around

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<sup>29</sup> Burton Clark (1983) constructed a useful analytical tool by placing HEIs somewhere within a ‘triangle of coordination’: with the state in one corner, the market in another, and an academic oligarchy in a third (respectively exemplified by the USSR, the USA, and Italy). Prior to Mode Two reforms, the majority of continental European HEIs would be closer to the academic oligarchy/state axis of the triangle.

it, its research and teaching must be morally and intellectually independent of all political authority...and economic power” (Magna Charta Universitatum 1988: 2). Another was to establish loose partnerships and networks of universities in order to learn from one another as well as pool resources.<sup>30</sup>

However, even without the acute pressures of neo-liberal globalization, competitive forces were sufficient to bring the market to bear on systems of higher education. Economists believe that the market provides two powerful mechanisms for reversing or altering path dependence: competition and learning (Pierson 2004). Although there is a conceptual overlap between the two, policies of internationalization (like the conventions and networks above) are a response to the mechanism of learning. Policies of marketization are a response to the mechanism of competition, with the American system being an early example of this (and for some, a leader to follow). Economic globalization simply exacerbated this scenario as it was occurring on a quick and massive scale, loosely coordinated by markets rather than controlled by states, which meant it was rarely egalitarian or leveling, “flows redistribute, and a massive, fast, and expanded flows redistribute in a most extreme way” (Beerkens 2003: 138). Like with massification, the decentralized American higher education system seemed once again to be in a better position to deal with these pressures. The federal ministry of education in the United States did not act as a normative model or guide,<sup>31</sup> and many American universities – even publicly funded ones – were already run like businesses and dependent on private sources of funding. In this increasingly complex (and risky) global

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<sup>30</sup> Examples of this that continue to thrive are the Santander Group in Europe (<http://sgroup.be/glowna.html>) and the international Universitas 21 (of which UBC is a member, see <http://www.universitas21.com/>)

<sup>31</sup> The US Department of Education (<http://www.ed.gov/index.jhtml>) has a different role and much less power than its European counterparts.

institutional field characterized by competition instead of learning, it appeared as if mimetic isomorphism was pushing European HEIs into emulating American ones.

HEIs around the world, not just in Europe, were coming to the conclusion that their national higher education systems were no longer appropriate and in need of reform. With similar targets and the same types of solutions, there was the appearance that the American system was a model worth emulating and HEIs were setting their agendas accordingly. Yet Christine Musselin has argued that this emulation was somewhat illusory. The reforms mostly affected institutional design, not course content, so systems of higher education remained distinct and kept strong nationalist characteristics (and in some cases, differences actually increased over the 1980s and 1990s). Furthermore, HEIs remained quite different in day-to-day practice, thereby accounting for some of the observed discrepancies between policy and practice (Musselin 2005). That said, universities did appear to be converging in terms of structural models, as well as modes of governance and financing, yet not always in the direction of deregulation and ‘Americanization’. Whereas there was a freeing-up of government involvement in strongly state-centric systems like that of Germany, Austria and Japan, ‘Anglo-Saxon’ institutions saw government control increased by way of performance-based public funding and performance indicators to improve accountability. European HEIs were converging on a kind of ‘world’ model that was differentiated, accessible, flexible, and used mixed modes (public and private) of institutional funding (Schuetze and Bruneau 2004). While it seemed to borrow more from the Anglo-Saxon or North American education traditions than the Continental ones, this was nonetheless a ‘world’ model that HEIs were emulating.

Some theorists (cf. Amaral and Magalhães 2004) have been highly critical and very suspicious of this process of globalization, seeing it as a set of politico-economic arrangements driven to retain capitalism over other value systems; an agenda set by trans-national organizations like the WTO and OECD to universalize neo-liberalism. The new economic globalization has been characterized as an infectious disease that promotes itself as the only road to prosperity and touches on ever more countries and sectors, the EU merely a new regionalist offshoot of this ‘epidemic’, and the Bologna process the first expression of this new regionalism in higher education (*Ibid.*: 80-3). However, while institutions increasingly sought normative cues at the supranational level, the dominant values and processes of Western ideology were not just about markets. Although normative isomorphism was indeed powerful, there was still some agency, at least in terms of deciding on which discourse to take up. Universities still had the capacity to choose between the normative agendas of UNESCO or the WTO, between the policy responses of internationalization or marketization, and perhaps between the philosophies of Paulo Friere or Milton Friedman.

Until the late 1990s, HEIs had dominated the capacity to set their own agendas, but this was not the result of any coordinated action. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) concluded by cautioning policy-makers that, to the extent that organizational change can be planned, attention needs to be directed to two forms of power: normative agenda-setting (which actors define the norms and standards that shape institutional behaviour) and critical junctures (the point at which actors can define appropriate models of institutional structure and policy that will then continue relatively unquestioned until the next critical juncture). For the former, normative isomorphism has been a persistent effect

of globalization. For the latter, the Sorbonne Declaration was one such critical juncture, a point at which mimetic isomorphism could again be partially (and possibly temporarily) subsumed to coercive isomorphism.

## **Chapter Four: National Cooperation**

### **The Bologna Process**

Although the Bologna process takes its name from the Bologna Declaration signed in 1999, the initial impetus came from a 1998 meeting at the Sorbonne between the Ministers of Education from France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom. These four ministers agreed to the Sorbonne Declaration, in which some of the essential principles of the process were established: to create a European space of higher education and research that would recognize the need for European countries to be competitive in a globalized world; and to add value for students through international experience and mastery of foreign languages. In June of the following year, education ministers from twenty-nine European countries met in Bologna, Italy, and signed the Bologna Declaration to establish a European Higher Education Area by 2010. This intergovernmental initiative had broad objectives in the realm of higher education, including increased student and academic mobility, as well as improving the compatibility, comparability and competitiveness of higher education institutions across Europe. Keeping with the spirit of Sorbonne, they adopted six primary objectives, or ‘action lines’: 1) a system of easily readable and comparable degrees (‘Bologna Degrees’ and Diploma Supplements); 2) a system of two cycles of study (Bachelors and Masters); 3) a common system of credit (the European Credit Transfer System, or ECTS); 4) the promotion of student and academic mobility; 5) cooperation in quality assurance; and 6) the promotion of a European dimension to higher education.



Subsequent Ministerial meetings have expanded and clarified the Bologna process.<sup>32</sup> The 2001 conference in Prague brought the total to thirty-three countries, and included three more action lines: an emphasis on the role of students, promoting the attractiveness of the EHEA, and lifelong learning (as part of the Lisbon Agenda of 2000). The 2003 Berlin meeting sought a synergy between the EHEA and a European Research Area, increased the number of signatories to forty countries, and discussed a framework for doctoral study. No new action lines were added during the Bergen conference in May of 2005, but the Bergen Communiqué (2005) prioritized three technical objectives: quality assurance, the establishment of the two-cycle degree regime across the Bologna region, and the recognition of degrees and accreditation. By this time the number of countries had expanded to forty-five, then increasing to forty-six – almost every member state of the Council of Europe – at the London conference in May of 2007. The stocktaking report for the last conference reported good progress for the Bologna process, with further work needed in the areas of Quality Assurance and the ‘external dimension’ (Bologna Process Stocktaking 2007). The process has achieved a remarkable amount in less than ten years, but the consolidation of an EHEA by 2010 still seems a rather ambitious goal.

The process is monitored through various meetings, websites and stocktaking exercises, but the vital fora for decision-making and agenda-setting are the Ministerial conferences that occur every two years. The main decision-making body at each conference is the Bologna follow-up group (Bfug), which has voting representatives from

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<sup>32</sup> The main official Bologna process documents are the 1998 Sorbonne and 1999 Bologna Declarations, Communiqués from the Bologna Ministerial Conferences in Prague (2001), Berlin (2003) Bergen (2005), and London (2007), supplemented by additional documents (for example, the European Quality Assurance Standards and the Framework of Qualifications).

each member state and one from the European Commission. The smaller Bologna Board functions as a kind of Bologna executive between the conferences, without the authority to set new policy. The Board is chaired by the current EU Presidency and is comprised of the host of the forthcoming conference, three other country representatives elected at the previous conference, and the previous and succeeding EU Presidencies. A rotating secretariat (which corresponds with the host country of the Ministerial conference) organizes meetings and does administrative work for the Bfug and the Bologna Board. The Council of Europe plays a significant guiding role in the process, but is not itself a voting member. The other main consultative members for the Bfug are the 'E4' group: EUA (European University Association), EURASHE (European Association of Institutions in Higher Education), ESIB (National Unions of Students in the EU), and ENQA (European Network for Quality Assurance). There are also consultants from the Education International (EI) Pan-European Structure, the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe (UNICE), and the UN's European Centre for Higher Education (UNESCO-CEPES). It seems that much of the bureaucratic machinery for the EHEA is in place at a European level, if not yet at national levels.

### **Intergovernmental Bargaining to set a National Cooperation Agenda**

In 1997, Claude Allègre, French Minister of Education, commissioned Jacques Attali to report on the state of French education. The Attali report convinced Allègre that integrating European higher education would mitigate some of the negative effects of globalization and keep France (and other European countries) competitive among the new knowledge economies of the world. In May of 1998, he invited the Ministers of

Education from key nations (Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom) to meet with him at the Sorbonne and discuss the findings of the Attali report. While the German and Italian ministers were just as concerned about the effects of globalization on their higher education systems, they had yet to find viable solutions in a solely domestic context.<sup>33</sup> The United Kingdom, however, had already begun investigating the means to significant change after the 1997 election of New Labour. Tony Blair had picked up the discourse on globalization and knowledge economies in order to affect radical (and often unpalatable) changes to higher education in the United Kingdom, under their so-called ‘Third Way’.<sup>34</sup> Each concerned about their domestic situation, these national actors found common ground to negotiate the Sorbonne Declaration, an initial step that had all the hallmarks of intergovernmental bargaining, i.e. “[...] patterns of commercial advantage, the relative bargaining power of important governments, and the incentives to enhance the credibility of inter-state commitment” (Moravcsik 1998: 3). The Bologna process was a reflection of the convergent national interests of the wealthiest and most powerful member states of the EU. Barbara Haskel (2006: 3) asserts that this accounts for the incredible speed with which sweeping reform took place. By virtue of the ‘coordination imperative’,<sup>35</sup> the

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<sup>33</sup> This was for different reasons. Minister Jürgen Rüttgers was limited by the German political structure: higher education was under the jurisdiction of the *Länder* (although in the Basic Law, one regulation refers to the expansion of HEIs as a common task of the Federation and the *Länder*). For Minister Luigi Berlinguer, HEIs remained under the jurisdiction of the federal state despite a new law in 1997 that broadly decentralized many aspects of public administration. However, Italy was also pursuing a tight fiscal policy in the late 1990s to prepare for the Economic and Monetary Union, limiting their room for manoeuvre.

<sup>34</sup> The Blair administration legitimized the ‘Third Way’ as a pragmatic balance between market and state forces that would affect large sectors of British social policy, including all levels of education (Brock and Alexiadou 2007: 835-8)

<sup>35</sup> “Analytically, coordination (as opposed to cooperation) involves indifference to the content of the decision or standard, but desire to be on the side of a particular or dominant party” (Haskel 2006: 3). This should not be confused with the supranational coordinating effects of the Commission discussed in chapter five, because Haskel’s coordination imperative is coordination without a coordinator; it merely compels more nations to ‘get on board’ but not actually ‘pilot the ship’.

desire for members of the Council of Europe to be on the side of the dominant national actors ensured that the critical mass for reformation was quickly achieved.

This coordination imperative exerted intergovernmental pressure on new nations to cooperate, but each country had to choose whether or not to sign the Declaration and put it on their national agenda. It had further appeal for new signatories because it was relatively non-binding: it was neither an international treaty nor an EU Council Directive, but rather a voluntary process that had no legal consequences, a kind of governance through ‘soft law’ that a nation could exit if they believed their national system of higher education was being compromised. Without even opting out of the process, countries learned that they could deviate as well as take extra time to achieve the objectives. For example, a core aspect in the original Declaration was the two-tier degree cycle, but many national governments managed to preserve their pre-Bologna structures by implementing the two-tiers but retaining their old degree length.<sup>36</sup> The vagaries of the Declaration allowed individual governments to experiment with domestic policy agendas either towards increased internationalization or marketization, and then pass off any unpopular changes as a necessary evil to participate in the process.<sup>37</sup> Another option was for a nation to signal their agenda-setting intentions by signing the Declaration and then drag their feet with policy legislation so as not to lose too much control if it all led to unacceptable domestic losses (Barkholt 2005: 26-7). “Put rather boldly: if European

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<sup>36</sup> The Salamanca Convention sets the Bologna Bachelor at 180 to 240 ECTS credits, but the majority of undergrad degrees will likely be awarded at the lower end of the spectrum. For example (Bachelor/Masters length): United Kingdom: 3+1 years, Netherlands: 3+1 years, Germany: 3+2 years, France: 3+2 years, Spain: 4+2 years. This just adds to the many difficult recognition issues that still seem to persist even as harmonization increases (cf. Rauhvargers 2004).

<sup>37</sup> For example: in Germany, it has been an ‘open secret’ that Bologna has been used by certain *Länder* to reduce the first degree from four to three years, thus reducing their required financial assistance to first-degree students by a quarter – in theory, at any rate (Ash 2006: 261).

countries like France and Germany are able to resist the binding agreements of the Stability Pact, deviating from a non-binding agreement — whose objectives should be fulfilled by 2010 — cannot be considered an alarming violation of rules” (Huisman and van der Wende 2004: 4). This room to manoeuvre seems to reinforce the idea of a liberal intergovernmental process, in that individual countries were each trying to maximize their benefits and minimize their costs for participation.

Bologna garnered the tacit support of university administrators and certain supranational agencies, but from the outset the process was intended to be inter-ministerial. The concluding sentence of the Sorbonne Declaration was to “call on other Member States of the Union and other European countries to join in this objective and on all European universities to consolidate Europe’s standing in the world” (Sorbonne Declaration 1998: 3). It is notable that this appeal does not explicitly mention the EU and their possible role (Haug and Kirstein 1999: 28). One reason for this was the concern among the four signing Ministers that the purpose of an EHEA was to harmonize higher education across Europe, not unify all national higher education systems into a single supranational system. So to attract like-minded national-level actors, they needed to be careful with their wording. Even the semantic notion behind the word ‘harmonization’ smacked too much of abandoning national sovereignty, such that any mention of it was eliminated from the Bologna Declaration and subsequent documents (Charlier and Croché 2004: 4).<sup>38</sup> Yet the signatories did foresee that an international process would

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<sup>38</sup> Even though ‘harmonization’ and ‘convergence’ have since been accepted as conceptual equivalents by most Bologna observers, the semantic point is still occasionally reiterated. As late as 2003, Per Nyborg, then Chair of the Steering Committee for Higher Education and Research for the Council of Europe, said his vision of the EHEA would be an equal partnership between European states built on mutual trust: “The Bologna Process must be a process of recognition, not a process of harmonization. It should be a process of convergence, not one of uniformity” (Nyborg 2003: 157).

require international actors in some capacity, as long as nation-states dominated the proceedings. The Bologna Declaration became the declared policy agenda for *national cooperation* in a trans-national context: “we will pursue the ways of intergovernmental co-operation, together with those of non governmental European organisations with competence on higher education. We expect Universities again to respond promptly and positively and to contribute actively to the success of our endeavour” (Bologna Declaration 1999: 4).

### **Institutional Reception of the Bologna Process**

The Bologna architects were surprised with the positive reception that the Declaration garnered among HEIs, implicitly expecting more resistance to a reform process that imposed constraints and could favour the most powerful universities (Charlier and Croché 2004: 5). They had believed that most HEIs would prefer the status quo: increasing autonomy within largely homogenous national higher education systems. Student mobility programs like ERASMUS<sup>39</sup> demonstrated some of the shortcomings of an overemphasis on national homogeneity, but as long as these programs remained small in scale, then structural differences between national systems were not a major barrier for mobility or cooperation because trans-national representatives could simply negotiate with each other over issues of recognition at the national level. In fact, too much national heterogeneity meant that issues of recognition and equivalency had to be resolved by each individual HEI, thus making transparency and quality assurance a reoccurring

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<sup>39</sup> The EU’s *European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students* (ERASMUS) has been a major European student mobility scheme since it commenced in 1987, with 1.5 million students having already participated. It has now been subsumed under the Commission’s *Lifelong Learning* program, with an annual budget of €3.1 billion and the goal of three million students experiencing mobility by 2012. Please see [http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/erasmus/index\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/erasmus/index_en.html) for more details.

problem because individual universities or programs could be arbitrarily self-aggrandizing. Quality control would have relatively straightforward national indicators as long as ‘state institutions’ continued to function according to an almost classic Fordist design, i.e. engaged in the large-scale production of public service, professional and business elites for a national setting (Scott 1998: 127). National governments had been welcome arbiters because they were deemed neutral and fair in adjudicating accreditation issues, moreso than professional or scholarly bodies. However, by the late 1990s, it was no longer obvious that governments were impartial because of the pressures of international competition on their own economies. Universities were also not immune to these pressures, and growing competition between HEIs as a consequence of globalization was increasing the heterogeneity of standards and quality even *within* individual countries, to add to the already confusing cross-border situation. The preliminary attempts at international standards seemed to offer universities a way out of this double-bind. Mobility programs like ERASMUS and the advent of formal – not qualitative – standardization measures like the Lisbon Recognition Convention (LRC) and the ECTS had resulted in efforts at greater homogeneity both within countries and across Europe (Teichler 2004: 16). Although Bologna promised to further constrain universities, HEIs were ostensibly supportive because the process also constrained nations according to their own cooperative agenda.

Early in the process, there was a good deal of disparity in the degree to which individual HEIs ‘took up’ Bologna, perhaps with some strategic advantage won by the more enthusiastic institutions.<sup>40</sup> Yet on the whole, universities had been slow-moving,

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<sup>40</sup> In 2001, the Commission piloted a ‘Tuning’ project involving 100 HEIs, and coordinated by the Universities of Groningen (Netherlands) and Deusto (Spain). The project created a European network in

and the European higher education landscape remained relatively national: even by 2003, only a quarter of European universities claimed they served either the European or world-wide community, half the national community, and the remainder a regional community.<sup>41</sup> The national cooperation agenda had initially focused on policies of internationalization and inter-state learning, as suggested by the use of terms like ‘glocal’ and ‘glonacal’. If international activities continued to be systematized across the board, then the conceptual divide between large international research universities and small regional teaching universities would become increasingly obsolete in spite of an uneven distribution of resources (Teichler 2004; 1999). Yet this fiscal divide would be telling. In many European countries, a national government controlled its system of higher education through its function as funding provider and legislator, yet in both these core functions they were losing influence (Beerens 2003: 142-3). Through the reduction of public resources and deliberate policies of marketization, national governments had delegated authority to HEIs (or in some cases, the private sector) so that universities were forced to diversify their funding base and reduce their financial reliance on the state. Furthermore, an increase of university self-governance meant that governments had also lost some of their legislative power. Therefore the Bologna process could be seen as an effort to regain some legislative control, if not financial influence. However, the states

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particular subject areas (one of which was European Studies!). Interestingly, the 100 HEIs are referred to as the ‘Inner circle’, and some critics have seen this as an opportunity for strong harmonization or even uniformity of these institutions (cf. [http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/tuning/tuning\\_en.html](http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/educ/tuning/tuning_en.html); Amaral and Magalhães 2004: 85-8).

41 The Trends III survey showed that 16 per cent of universities (and 10 per cent of other HEIs) declared serving a world-wide community, 7 per cent of all HEIs served a European community, 52 per cent of universities (and 62 per cent of other HEIs) served a national community, and 20 per cent of universities (and 31 per cent of other HEIs) declared serving just a regional community. Interestingly, the same report had 46 per cent of HEIs believing that national legislation was undermining their autonomy, yet little more than a third of them had a Bologna coordinator to help them realize their international potential (Reichart and Tauch 2003). So it would seem that the discrepancy between the Bologna wish-list and institutional reality is not because of national constraints imposed on the institutions, but largely a result of institutional foot-dragging.



themselves were changing because of the competitive pressures of globalization, and creating a state-wide level playing field through national legislation began to seem futile and even counter-productive. For the new 'competition state', an agenda that did not incorporate the discourse on global competitiveness seemed out of touch with modern reality.

### **The 'Competition State' and Supranational Organizations**

A 'competition state' is one that systematically intervenes in social and economic affairs in the name of modifying services and opening markets, rather than preserving state autonomy or insulating key elements of the welfare state from market forces. This process is not so much deregulation as it is re-regulation, as both market and state actors will attempt to restructure the state into a quasi-'enterprise association' in a perceived global field of competitors. As nation-states transform into competition states, they deliberately pursue policies of marketization: the market mechanism is deemed natural, and protecting perceived public goods from market forces may sometimes be a necessary but nonetheless 'pathological' activity (Cerny 1997). Few European countries would qualify as absolute exemplars of the competition state, but there has been a self-perpetuating policy trend in this direction, heavily influenced by supranational organizations like the OECD and WTO but driven by individual member states. There are European vanguards of the competition state, like the United Kingdom, which "has accepted the discourse used by various international organizations (such as the World Trade Organization and the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development) that posits global economic changes and pressures as a 'fact'" (Brock and Alexiadou

2007: 846). The advent of ‘radical liberalism’ in the UK has resulted in the introduction of the Research Assessment Exercises(RAE) as a competitive performance-based funding scheme in higher education and research (Sorlin 2005: 8). Even Sweden, once considered a bastion of social welfare, has been emulating the UK as well as adopting the supranational ‘planetspeak’ (i.e. discourse) in reforming their national system of higher education (see Fejes 2005; Sörlin 2005: 6). “The post-modern irony of the state is that rather than simply being undermined by inexorable forces of globalization, the competition state is becoming increasingly both the engine room and the steering mechanism of political globalization itself” (Cerny 1997: 274).

The Bologna Declaration expressed the political, cultural and social rationales for integration as much as the economic, but national governments were recognizing and even stressing the economic function of higher education. From the 2001 Trends II report, the issue of competitiveness was “seen as ‘important’ or ‘crucial’ in an unexpectedly high number of countries...[n]o country said competitiveness was irrelevant, but it is not yet on the agenda everywhere” (Haug and Tauch 2001: 5). National policy agendas were still being driven by domestic problems and issues, but governments were also comparing their systems of education to each other on the basis of a perceived ‘best practice’ or ‘world model’ elucidated through documents like the OECD education policy reviews. Even with the supposedly cooperative agenda of Bologna, these quasi-competition states jostled for position and legitimized their policy in a competitive way. Governments that were successful in implementing a change that fit with Bologna objectives could then use it to strengthen their position vis-à-vis other states that had yet to achieve it. National progress reports confirmed this expectation, as

governments claimed that they had been among the first to fulfill a given Bologna objective, hoping to strengthen their national power position within the European ‘scene of battle’ (Huisman and van der Wende 2004: 353).

Perhaps the European dimension – one of the original action lines from the Bologna Declaration – was a way of mitigating internal competition in favour of competing with the wider world. The European dimension has yet to be fully articulated, but it could be interpreted as a European version of the ‘world model’ that better reflects European sensibilities, thus drawing national views on higher education closer to the perspective of the EU (*Ibid.*: 350-1). National actors might be loathe to admit this kind of supranational steering, but insisting that Bologna has been an intergovernmental process might simply be a fault in perception; “the explicit mention in the Bologna Declaration of intergovernmental co-operation as the means to achieve integration may reflect more the perceptions of the actors involved than the actual (underlying?) drivers of process” (Barkholt 2005: 23). Or the fault in perception might well be that the major integration theories are in fact opposites. They are more complementary than competitive, with liberal intergovernmentalism explaining the bargaining process between member states whereas neo-functionalism explains the influence of EU decision-making (Peterson and Bomberg 1999: 15). In European higher education, processes of integration frequently overlap.

## Chapter Five: European Coordination

### EU Involvement in Higher Education before Bologna

It has been alleged that Jean Monnet pondered the role of education for European integration when he purportedly remarked, “if I was to begin again with Europe, I would have started with culture.”<sup>42</sup> This certainly never manifested itself in the EC/EU Treaties – universities were not explicitly alluded to in the Treaty of Rome (1957) thereby implicitly ensuring that they were the domain of Member States.<sup>43</sup> Despite the lack of legal mandate, there were attempts by different European bodies to garner some position in the sector. During the 1960s, the Council of Europe promoted an intergovernmental approach and then in the late 1960s and early 1970s, the European Parliament envisioned pan-European curricula, courses and even universities. With national education ministers and university administrators resisting these content-driven Parliamentary initiatives, the Commission implemented a cooperative Action Program in 1976 that re-established some trust that the EU was not working towards the harmonization of higher education. The next decade was a period of strong policy entrepreneurship on the part of the Commission, culminating in the Erasmus programme in 1987 (Corbett 2005). However, if there was any ambiguity about who had jurisdiction over higher education, then Articles 126 and 127 of the Treaty of Maastricht (1992) made it explicit by codifying the subsidiarity principle for this policy field: Member States would retain national sovereignty over higher education, with the EU having a cooperative and supportive

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<sup>42</sup> Jean Monnet had apparently remarked to journalists, ‘si l’Europe était à refaire, je commencerais par la culture’ (Blitz 2003: 198). However, Blitz contested that Monnet ever seriously considered education as a potential building block for European integration.

<sup>43</sup> The word ‘university’ never even appeared in the original Treaty of Rome (Charlier and Croché 2004: 12)

role.<sup>44</sup> However, Articles 125 (employment) and 140 (social policy) of Maastricht had given the Commission the stronger mandate “of ‘coordination’ rather than ‘cooperation’, a softer concept which is clearly more intergovernmental” (Telò 2002: 253). The EU would go on to position higher education as a possible spillover sector for these other policy fields, via White papers like *Growth, Competitiveness and Employment* (1993/1994) and *Teaching and Learning - Towards the Learning Society* (1996) (Commission 2003).

### **EU Opportunities in Bologna**

If supranational governance is strictly defined as “the competence of the EC to make binding rules in any given political sector” (Caporaso 1998: 339), then the Maastricht Treaty undermines any neo-functionalist explanations for higher education integration. In fact, as the Bologna Declaration had no binding rules whatsoever, neither of the classic IR integration theories would be of much use. But the new modes of governance are using ‘hard laws’ and ‘binding rules’ less and less, so to explain them we have to re-think our paradigms and theoretical presuppositions. Newer approaches, like multi-level governance or neo-institutionalism, have been very useful in this regard, but the older IR theories can also have good explanatory power as long as the “dependent variable

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<sup>44</sup> “Community action shall be aimed at: developing the European dimension in education, particularly through the teaching and dissemination of the languages of the Member States; encouraging mobility of students and teachers, inter alia by encouraging the academic recognition of diplomas and periods of study; promoting cooperation between educational establishments; developing exchanges of information and experience on issues common to the education systems of Member States; etc..” (Treaty of Maastricht 1992: Art. 126.1). Subsequent treaties have reiterated this: the 1997 Treaty of Amsterdam (changed to Art. 149 and 150); the 2004 Draft Constitutional Treaty Art. III-282 (although not ratified); and also the 2007 Draft Reform Treaty Art. 149 and 150. Tellingly, the 2007 Draft Reform Treaty expands the EU’s powers in the European research area (Art. 163 to 170).

remains mode of governance, not the construction of a pan-European identity or of a super-state” (Stone Sweet and Sandholtz 1998: 5).<sup>45</sup>

Transaction-based integration theory (Stone Sweet and Sandholtz 1998; 1997) is a middle-range neo-functional approach which hypothesizes that increased trans-national exchanges lead supranational organizations to make rules or guidelines for these transactions. Where this is successful, there are causal connections between the exchanges, organizations, and rules/guidelines that sustain a path-dependent expansion of supra-nationalism and increased multi-level linkages. National governments remain important actors, but they are embedded in this integration process. In the case of higher education, policies of internationalization or marketization (in response to the effects of globalization) have led to more – and more valuable – trans-national knowledge transactions (pertaining to mobility, tuition fees, etc). After the initial intergovernmental bargaining in the Sorbonne and Bologna Declarations, opportunities (or invitations?) arise for European actors to become arbitrators and even agenda-setters because of their supranational scope and technical expertise. Once they are involved, path dependency ensures that it is difficult to extricate them. As we saw from the last chapter (‘National Cooperation’), even the intergovernmental bargain was a response to strong international influences like the OECD and radical liberalism. “Indeed, we argue that intergovernmental bargaining in the EC more often than not is responsive to the interests of a nascent, always developing, trans-national society...rather than being the generator of integration, intergovernmental bargaining is more often its product” (Stone Sweet and Sandholtz 1997: 307).

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<sup>45</sup> Turning from explanations to justifications for a moment, if indeed either of these were actually on the policy agenda of the Commission (as some cynics suspect), by now they must have learned not to legitimize their policy agendas with this type of language!

Therefore, from both an actors' and a structural perspective (Schuetze and Bruneau 2004: 6), the Commission had the opportunity to be a dominant agenda-setter in higher education *because of* the Bologna Declaration. From the structural perspective, in which policy change is conditioned by external events and their effects on norms and values, the overtly intergovernmental Declaration could actually be seen as a neo-functional response to trans-national society, which would then require guidance from supranational actors (see above). From the actors' perspective, in which policy change is conditioned by the preferences of political actors, the Declaration proffered an opening because no rules were established for a follow-up procedure – merely that the Ministers were to meet again in Prague in two years time. This was a window of opportunity for the Commission. Because of Maastricht, they had spent much of the 1990s in a supportive role in higher education, looking for spillover effects in sectors where they dominated the agenda. It is difficult to prove that the Commission were actually looking for just such an opportunity, but “[g]roups and individuals are not merely spectators as conditions change to favour or penalize them in the political balance of power, but rather strategic actors capable of acting on ‘openings’ provided by such shifting contextual conditions in order to defend or enhance their own positions” (Thelen and Steinmo 2002: 17). Thus the Commission could become a dominant coordinating force, provided they could sufficiently legitimize their policy agenda with the other actors. Three significant events at the 2001 Prague conference suggest that they were successful in this endeavour: the Commission was made a voting member of the Bfug (the only non-state actor accorded such a privilege); and two of the new action lines were Commission-inspired policies:

promoting the attractiveness of the EHEA, and a focus on lifelong learning (as part of the Lisbon Agenda).

### **Agenda-Setting: Lisbon and Lifelong Learning**

Concerned with the prolonged recession in the 1990s, the European Council met in Lisbon in March of 2000 to set an agenda for reinvigorating Europe's economy in an increasingly competitive globalized environment. They formulated the Lisbon Agenda, which, by 2010, was to establish Europe as “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” (Council 2000). Based on a neo-Schumpeterian supply-side diagnosis of economic stagnation, the Lisbon Agenda emphasized innovation, restructuring and flexibility as the motors for economic change in the globalized post-Fordist world.<sup>46</sup> The foci have been human capital, lifelong learning, research and development, and knowledge industries, with an obvious place for higher education.

With conceptual roots going back to the 1920s, lifelong learning became the dominant educational discourse in the late twentieth century not least of which through the advocacy of institutions like the OECD and the Commission. At its core is the notion that learning should take place ‘from the cradle to the grave’, and as a more recent development, that learning should be embedded in all of life's contexts (homes, schools, workplaces, etc.). There are three major contextual factors that have given salience to lifelong learning policies and the idea of a ‘learning society’: demographic change (in

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<sup>46</sup> In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, economist Joseph Schumpeter proposed a non-Keynesian capitalist analysis of innovation as the motor for development. This has been an inspiration for the key thinkers behind Lisbon, who have included Maria João Rodrigues and Christopher Freeman.



Europe this means an ageing population); global economic restructuring and the effects of this on skill demands (i.e. the new knowledge societies); and increased cultural pluralism. Being something of a meta-discourse – rather anomalous to education policy – it has served as the ideological vision for a variety of policy agendas (Green 2002). Legitimized as an inclusionary process that activates (makes employable?) segments of the population, it has been criticized as socially excluding because of an inherently competitive neo-liberal rationality – as in learn, or fail and be excluded (Fejes 2007: 3). It has also been regarded as a means for governments to ‘out-source’ their financial responsibilities for education, inasmuch as they are still considered a public good. “When the state can no longer pay for the quantities of learning required, it invents the learning society so that the costs can be shared” (Green 2002: 617). In this respect, it forms an appropriate agenda for the Commission because without a legal mandate and little money for higher education,<sup>47</sup> lifelong learning provides the most affordable and responsive means for them to achieve their Lisbon goals.

### **Agenda-Setting: Lisbon and the OMC**

When the Council established the Lisbon strategy, they charged the Commission with its enactment using the new open method of coordination (OMC). ‘Hard’ legislation and binding directives like the Stability and Growth Pact (1997) had failed, so the OMC was proposed as a soft enforcement mechanism that relied on benchmarking, stocktaking, and

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<sup>47</sup> However, this funding situation is changing. The Commission has funded the Bologna conferences and other Bologna-related projects (like the Tuning project), but this is a pittance compared to their funding of research through the European Research Council and the 7<sup>th</sup> Research Framework Programme (2007-2013), the latter having a budget of €50 million (cf. <http://europa.eu/scadplus/leg/en/lvb/i23022.htm>). Funding is, of course, a source of power; “the European Commission’s role as a source of funding for Bologna projects gives the Commission considerable influence in the Bologna Process” (Guide to the Bologna Process 2005: 9).

shared best practices and standards. There was no forced compliance for Member States to observe 'Lisbon', yet it was assumed that there would be sufficient peer pressure between states to comply with it because of the negative spillover effects from not being able to integrate economies, and the positive spillover effects from integration and flexible specialization. In its most sophisticated form, the OMC is comprised of guidelines, multi-lateral surveillance, performance indicators, iterative processes, benchmarking and sharing of best practices, and is implemented through domestic policy and legislation (with no EU legislation required). When it was conceived, there was as yet little critical reflection on the limitations of techniques like benchmarking, the belief being that as a technical policy process focused on innovation and case-by-case improvement, its politicization would remain low. However, because it was meant to promote European convergence in areas where the legal foundation for integration was weak, it required coordination at the highest political levels (i.e. high politicization). Thus coordination referred not only to the steering of Member States and their policy agendas, but also to coordination *between* economic and social policy – a way of controlling spillover effect. This has revealed endemic tensions in the coordination method: because of the delicate balance between economic logic and the European social model; because it encourages cooperation and imitation but also promotes diversity and competition (as a means to achieve attractiveness in the wider sphere); and finally, because Member States are allowed to develop at their own pace but that the Commission must also steer policy towards EU goals (Radaelli 2003; Lundvall and Tomlinson 2002).

Ostensibly, the OMC was meant to avoid the high politicization of EU convergence because “[it] brackets political conflict, as it does not impose a single,

European vision on the ideal welfare-state design or other policy areas” (Ederveen et al. 2005: 32). Yet with competitiveness as the master discourse, the Commission was using the OMC to improve the status quo in politically sensitive sectors by positioning learning and technical innovation as a “means of spreading best practices and achieving greater convergence towards the main EU goals” (Council 2000). This then begs the question: what exactly has been converging? The OMC has not resulted in a strong harmonization of goals or policies across Member States, but has had insidious effect in terms of ideational convergence – a kind of normative isomorphism of interests and ideas. In effect, policy inputs like agenda-setting and policy legitimization are increasingly similar, while policy outputs and effects remain variegated. The OMC has influenced policy-makers at all levels, in that they are converging in their assessment of causality, definitions of acceptable policy, and beliefs on how policy works, if not in actual policy implementation. It has become more than just a method for the Commission to achieve its policy agenda; it is part of the agenda itself – and a dominant one at that. “Indeed, the OMC has now become a legitimizing discourse. It provides a community of policy-makers with a common vocabulary and a legitimising project – to make Europe the most competitive knowledge society in the world” (Radaelli 2003: 51). The Lisbon Agenda has had a profound impact on the direction of the Bologna process, and it is likely no more coincidental that they have parallel timelines than it is that they have the same ‘enforcement’ mechanisms. Although neither the Bfugs nor the Council of Europe has formally declared the OMC as the method of coordinating Bologna, the use of benchmarking and stocktaking makes it clear that it is a guiding force. Through this competitive discourse, “[t]he OMC enables the last strongholds to be challenged:

employment, education, research, welfare standards and knowledge society” (Telò 2002: 262).

The Commission was able to position itself as the dominant agenda-setter for Bologna between 1999 and 2001, with its policy of European coordination of higher education legitimized through a global competition discourse. Competitiveness was mentioned in the Bologna Declaration, but had much more emphasis in the Prague Communiqué (2001) with the action line promoting the attractiveness of the EHEA outside as well as inside Europe. Thierry Malan, France’s General Inspector for Administration of Education and Research, has wondered whether the Commission was trying to overtake Bologna and subsume it to the requirements of Lisbon (Malan 2006) especially as “the capacity to shape and deploy these ideas is a powerful strategic tool. For example, the Commission has shown a tendency in recent years to define the external environment as ‘globalized’ and, therefore, threatening to the competitiveness of the European economy” (Rosamond 2000: 120). Ruth Keeling (2006: 215) has argued that this agenda is not really an agenda at all, because the Commission has yet to articulate a coherent vision, presenting concepts like globalization, international mobility, lifelong learning, and knowledge economies variously (and vaguely) as threats, solutions, and context. Perhaps this lack of vision could be attributed to the internal politics of the Commission’s agenda-setting capacity, as competing policy perspectives have long affected its approach to higher education (Corbett 2005). Or perhaps, considering the relative consistency of the competition discourse over the last decades, the vision has simply been to legitimize a special place for the Commission. Stone Sweet and Sandholtz (1998: 4-7) have pointed out that as integration proceeds, states become less proactive and

more reactive to changes brought on by supranational steering, as they try to adjust to the integration occurring around them. Conversely, the Commission has been very proactive in higher education integration, and “Neofunctionalists have argued persuasively that the Commission’s effective use of agenda-setting power has advanced European integration and increased its own role in policy reform” (Pierson 1998: 36). Only an ardent neo-realist or a bitter cynic would assume that the Commission is agenda-setting in the realm of higher education only to expand its functional role and give itself another portfolio, however, it is clear that “higher education is being used as a vehicle for European integration, and in this respect it has been very successful” (Newby 2001: 73).

## Chapter Six: Conclusions

### A Crowded Field of Actors

The Commission only became a full voting member of the Bfug at the Prague Ministerial conference in 2001, although their presence was certainly felt earlier. Other groups petitioned to be a part of the process too,<sup>48</sup> and while they were given consultancy or observer status rather than voting rights, they now had some capacity to influence the agenda and direction of Bologna policies. Because students and faculty were not charter members of the process, there has been concern that this new agenda-setting capacity is insufficient and that the Commission has continued to dominate (Bergan 2004: 15).

James Cemmel, a representative of ESIB, has taken issue with the marginalization of student organizations as Bologna becomes “a heavily politicized process that seeks to integrate the European higher education sector into the EU economic development strategy” (Cemmel 2006: 265). Cemmel suggested that the Commission and the OECD have been patronizing towards ESIB, viewing ESIB as utopian and unrealistic because of disagreements over Bologna’s agenda (*Ibid.*). Yet these supranational and international policy-drivers can ill afford to ignore the new stakeholders, because of the very public discourse for legitimizing policy.

The Prague conference was the scene of very intense public debate regarding the marketization and commercialization of European higher education. Representatives from France and French-speaking Belgium feared that Bologna would put universities at

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<sup>48</sup> Two of the more vocal NGOs to be given a consultancy role have been ESIB and the EUA, the latter formed at the Salamanca convention on 31 March 2001 to better represent university administrators across Europe (Froment 2003: 29). Without the European equivalent to the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), European professors have lacked a unified forum to slow or shape the process, spurring Voldemar Tomusk to comment that “there is no necessity for the project of creating the European Higher Education Area to take a radically anti-intellectual shape, as it currently seems to be doing” (Tomusk 2006: 8).

risk of being beholden to the private sector. The French asserted that higher education is a public good, not a quasi-market, and their conception of *le service public* demanded a collective responsibility and solidarity that was incompatible with unfettered capitalism (which would presumably serve only elites and reinforce social inequality). As they were unwilling to acknowledge any corrective force in capitalism, they put themselves in direct opposition to any perceived ‘Americanization’ that would open up the EHEA for private sector intervention, for-profit activities, external quality assurance, or entry into GATS negotiations (Langan 2006). ESIB and Education International were quick to join in condemning the marketization of higher education, spearheading a Joint Declaration on Higher Education and GATS that was signed by the EUA, the Association of Universities and Colleges of Canada (AUCC), the American Council on Education (ACE), and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) on 28 September 2001. This declaration did not categorically oppose private sector involvement in higher education, but asked that its member institutions not make commitments on higher education services in the context of GATS, nor any trade policy regime. When the United States sought to include education in GATS negotiations in 2003, Pascal Lamy, then EU Trade Commissioner, responded with the announcement that the Commission was ruling out any immediate commitments to liberalize post-secondary education services (CAUT 2004). Clearly, higher education had become a crowded policy field with many interests and actors that had to be accommodated. No longer could the Commission, nor any other single institution or policy-driver level, dominate the higher education agenda.

## **Bologna Then and Now**

As a multi-actor and multi-level process, Bologna is increasingly understood in the context of newer explanatory frameworks like multi-level governance. However, in its inception it went through phases which suggested that different theoretical frameworks would aid in its understanding. Through the 1980s and 1990s, HEIs were dominating the policy agenda through their *uncoordinated convergence* towards a world model, an isomorphic trend best understood through neo-institutionalism. Centuries of historical path dependence had ensured that European higher education had plenty of programmatic diversity (i.e. different degree structures, durations of study, access, etc.) but much less institutional diversity (compared to the United States). Amaral and Magalhães (2004: 93) have argued that because HEIs were already harmonizing their structure and governance, the somewhat coercive convergence of Bologna risked destroying programmatic diversity without increasing institutional diversity. In spite of this risk, national governments wanted to regain some control over higher education,<sup>49</sup> and the Sorbonne and Bologna Declarations were a critical juncture in this policy process. National ministries of education engaged in intergovernmental bargaining in order to dominate the agenda, legitimized through a policy of *national cooperation*. Because nation-states seemed to be transforming into competition states under the pressures of globalization, the countries could be accused of a ‘have your cake and eat it too’ attitude: they wanted to integrate to achieve the benefits of marketization and competition, but they also wanted to keep higher education a public good and state responsibility (Barkholt 2005: 28). The Commission was also a strong proponent of the global competition discourse, and used it

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<sup>49</sup> Possibly because they were losing control of other sectors and higher education seemed a vital *raison d'être* for the state: “The monopoly of legitimate education is now more important, more central than is the monopoly of legitimate violence” (Gellner 1983: 34).



to legitimize their policy of *European coordination*. Although the Commission had no legal mandate to take more than a supportive role in higher education policy-making, they discovered that there was opportunity to dominate the agenda because “the legal basis for EU activities has been substantially extended by intergovernmental agreements” (Ertl 2006: 5). Neo-functionalists have argued convincingly that even without the tools of ‘hard law’, the Commission acquired substantial influence – even control – through governance mechanisms like the OMC. The dominance of the Commission has subsided since 2001, yet opportunities remain for supranational actors to significantly influence the Bologna process.

Leading up to the 2005 Bergen Conference, there was a shift in emphasis from the ‘Anglo-American challenge’ and marketization to issues of accreditation and degree recognition within the proposed EHEA. The general direction and purpose of the Bologna process had become normalized (or marginalized) to the extent that technical aspects were treated as paramount. Stocktaking (another element of the OMC) was employed at Bergen to ensure that Bologna was progressing towards its procedural action lines, such as the two-cycle degree structure and quality assurance networks. On appearance, these intermediate priorities have had a lower degree of politicization and can presumably be hashed out by technocrats and expert committees. Yet there are elements of higher education policy where stronger leadership is required. Up until now, this institutional guidance has either come from the Commission, or from the Bfugs (that only meet every second year). Per Nyborg (2008) has suggested reforming the governance of Bologna to make it a strong institution in its own right, with an elected and permanent general assembly to dominate the agenda and tackle policy issues as they

arise. At the next conference in Leuven, Belgium, they will have to decide whether the process should end in 2010, having developed the general structure of the EHEA, or continue to develop beyond 2010 and possibly beyond the current forty-six nations. These types of critical decisions require strong leaders, as well as leaders that are accountable to all the stakeholders involved.

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