Higher Education in 2030: A look into the crystal ball

Bologna: all forgotten?

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Structure

- Review: understanding Bologna, explaining its dynamics, assessing the outcomes
- Signs of the future: latest developments
- The crystal ball: scenarios
Review (1): Nature of Bologna

- A process with
  - intergovernmental nature – but increasingly interwoven with EU policies, programmes and processes
  - legally non-binding but de facto binding character
  - immense geographical reach
  - an evolving and incrementally increasing agenda
  - fuzzy and conflicting aims, e.g.:
    1. Diversity & convergence
    2. Profile-building & mobility
    3. Inward & outward orientation
   
   (in „Higher Education to 2030“, OECD 2009)
Review (2): Explaining the dynamics

- Initiation outside of the EU framework, but use of EU framework and funding: further needed
- Potential to use (alleged) international trends and commitments as support and arguments for national reforms: power fading
- Vagueness and openness of agenda allows different boats to sail under Bologna flag: more precision difficult
- Some real shared challenges in European higher education system (access, drop-out, duration of studies, funding, quality assurance...): here to stay
- Lock-in, including unintended effects resulting from special dynamics resulting of complex international process: hard to change what has locked in, but also increasing returns!

**Difficult (but not impossible) to maintain dynamics when changing core characteristics**
Review (3): Consequences of main characteristics

- Nature of „implementation“ in HE systems dependent on their HE policy system: no immediacy of “EHEA”, but mediated by national systems and their dynamics
  - Low level of convergence compared to expectations
  - Hard to get accurate picture of developments and trends
  - But: high level of change in national higher education systems compared to other reform efforts
Review (4): Implications for the future

What will happen to central goal conflicts?

1. Diversity & convergence
2. Profile-building & mobility
3. Inward & outward orientation

Conditions for more convergence, mobility and outward orientation:

- more focused formulation and follow-up of aims and instruments (difficult, see above!)
- more critical appraisal of relationships between aims & instruments (difficult, psychologically)

(see Witte, Huisman and Purser in “Higher Education to 2030”, OECD 2009)

➢ Do we see any of these?
Signs of the future –
The latest Bologna communiqués (1):

- More focused formulation and follow-up of aims and instruments?
- Some new impetuses towards focused convergence:
  - Leuven: Subject-specific “reference points” for programmes, 20% mobility target
  - Bukarest: e.g. mobility strategy, reminder of use of learning outcomes in ECTS, pathfinder group for “automatic recognition of degrees”
- Some impetus for better assessment of achievements (through Eurostat, Eurydice and Eurostudent monitor)
- But overall:
  - tendency of broadening a fuzzy agenda carried forward
  - new or revolving foci at every conference
Signs of the future – The latest Bologna communiqués (2):

- More critical appraisal of relationships between aims & instruments?
- Some self-criticism about improper “implementation”:
  - Budapest (2010): “some of the Bologna aims and reforms have not been properly implemented and explained”
  - Bukarest (2012): “We will strive for more coherence between our policies”, “constant efforts to align our practices with the objectives and policies of the EHEA”
Signs of the future –
The latest Bologna communiqués (3):

- Meta-level aims are not in question
  - European competitiveness, European labour market, European civil society

- ...nor are aims for higher education
  - widening access, social dimension, quality, mobility, flexibility, (employability), recognition

- ...nor the tools:
  - tiered degree structure, ECTS (+ modularisation), DS, qualification frameworks, quality assurance

- But: No fundamental thinking about how instruments contribute to aims
What does this imply for the future (1)?

- **On the downside:**
  - Not yet sufficient focus on targeted pursuit of certain convergence aims
  - Not yet sufficient assessment of which instruments work to support the aims
  - Not yet sufficient work on refining instruments to make them more effective (e.g. reform template for DS using Adelman‘s ideas („Bologna with US eyes) to make it more useful)
  - Plus: fading belief in „Bologna as duty“
What does this imply for the future (2)?

**On the positive side:**
- No questioning of aims and instruments
- Lock-in of Bologna reforms, instruments and policy processes
- Self-enforcing dynamics of convergent developments increase
- Pressure on Europe to stand together if it is not to be marginalised internationally increase
- Therefore: Careful optimism that Bologna will not be „all forgotten“ in 2030
Diversity & convergence: the future

- More ways of ensuring recognition & mobility with diversity of institutions, programmes and degrees → partial decoupling of recognition and degrees
- Three-tier structure discovered as tool for more flexibility and diversity, not convergence: Diffusion into more variable field of subject-specific solutions including
  - „short“ (2-year) degrees
  - 3-4-year Bachelor & 1-2-year Master programmes (implying 4-6 years up to Master)
  - Bachelor degrees leading to immediate employment
  - Bachelor degrees meant as stepping stones for Master degrees
  - integrated long first degrees leading directly to Masters level
  - integrated post-grad phases (Master + PhD)
  - „vocational“ Bachelor degrees
  - Masters for adult learners etc.
Profile-building and mobility: the future

- „Automatic recognition“ not the norm, but more frequent
- „Bologna tools“ refined for more targeted use
  - European-wide subject-specific „reference points“ and qualification frameworks make programmes more comparable
- Level-specific ECTS adhered to by ever more institutions as basis for recognition
- Standards for module sizes develop pulling force
- Recognition as condition for EU funding in mobility programmes
- Application of Lisbon recognition principles fought through at European Court of Justice
- Revival of bilateral recognition agreements between some states
- Spread of organised mobility in networks of equals as element of profile-building
  - „automatic“ recognition agreements at subject and institutional levels
  - joint degrees and buildt-in periods abroad
- Besides: rediscovery of stay abroad as „experience“
- tensions not unsolvable
Inward and outward orientation: the future

- US remains first choice for international students (probably unavoidable), strong US – China nexus (Marginson in „Moving target“)
- But: Convergence makes European HE more transparent and attractive
- Europe remembers that original Bologna impetus was attracting talent worldwide into European Masters degrees
- Europe does not use formalistic approach towards recognition of foreign first degrees
- Set-up of holistic programmes for attracting and retaining non-European talent, particularly from Asia (China!): visa, work permits, academic careers…
- US and European degree models converge: broader zone of 3-4 year first degrees, competence-based assessment
- Other world regions use Bologna as „role model“
Literature: