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## International Student Mobility and the Bologna Process

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**ABSTRACT** The Bologna Process is the newest of a chain of activities stimulated by supra-national actors since the 1950s to challenge national borders in higher education in Europe. Now, the ministers in charge of higher education of the individual European countries have agreed to promote a similar cycle-structure of study programmes and programmes based on the strategic aim of enhancing student mobility in two directions: to increase the attractiveness for students from other parts of the world to study – primarily for the whole study programme – in European countries, and to facilitate intra-European – primarily temporary – mobility. Studies aiming at establishing the results of this policy face various problems. Statistics move only gradually from ‘foreign’ to ‘mobile’ students, but remain insufficient with respect to temporary mobility. Individual European countries opt for such varied solutions that an overall overview is hardly feasible. Yet, some general trends are visible. First, Bologna has contributed to greater internal mobility of students from other parts of the world, but not to a more rapid increase of intra-European student mobility. Second, the event of outwards mobility during the course of study up to graduation has turned out to be more frequent than expected by many experts, but differences by country do not fade away. Third, the value of student mobility gradually declines as a consequence of gradual loss of exclusiveness.

### **1. Continuous Efforts to Challenge National Borders in Higher Education in Europe since the 1950s**

The essence of higher education can be viewed as *not being confined by borders*. Knowledge in various fields and the logic of science are universal; ideally, the search for new knowledge is not limited by borders; universities are more international in scope than most other organizations, and many scholars harbour cosmopolitan views. However, the structure and the organization of higher education are strongly shaped by individual countries (or even regional bodies within countries) and cultures, including factors such as funding, the regulatory framework, governance, curricula and credentials (Kerr, 1990). The term ‘higher education system’, as a rule, is employed to depict a national system of higher education (Teichler, 2007).

Since the end of World War II, repeated activities have been undertaken in many European countries to counteract the idiosyncrasies and the relative isolation of national systems of higher education. Such policies were promoted by different supra-national agencies, as a brief glance at the five most influential activities within four stages of development shows (Teichler, 2010).

In the first stage, efforts were made to increase the mutual understanding between the various European countries. In this framework, activities to facilitate student mobility played a dominant role in the hope that more detailed knowledge of other countries would dilute prejudices and increase sympathy for other ways of life and thinking. In Western Europe, the Council of Europe has been active since the early 1950s to facilitate mobility through conventions signed and ratified by individual countries for the recognition of study – more precisely for the recognition of

prior education as entry qualification to higher education, of periods of study for mobile students during the course of study, and of degrees for mobile graduates. Similar activities have been undertaken by Eastern European countries since the 1970s for all European countries through cooperation between the Council of Europe and UNESCO and, eventually in 1997, through the Lisbon Convention for the recognition of studies. Again, this was initiated by the Council of Europe and UNESCO, this time in cooperation with the European Commission (Teichler, 2003).

In the second stage, since the 1960s, most Western European countries, as well as market-oriented economically advanced countries outside Europe, have collaborated in the search for best ways to stimulate and accommodate the quantitative expansion of student enrolment in higher education, thereby aiming both to contribute to economic growth, and to reduce inequalities of educational opportunity. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has suggested expanding the enrolment capacity of higher education through upgrading and extending relatively short study programmes, generally at institutions which do not have close links with teaching and research. As a consequence, diversification in higher education through types of higher education has begun to play a major role in a substantial number of European countries.

The third stage was characterized by increasing cooperation, mobility and the search for collective European dimensions of higher education. This was initially put forward in the European Union in the 1990s. The ERASMUS programme, inaugurated in 1987 for the promotion of short-term student mobility within Europe, is the most prominent example of initiatives that sprang up at this stage.

In the fourth stage, the individual European countries jointly aimed to pursue similar higher education policies and to strive for a system convergence. The Bologna Declaration of 1999 called for the establishment of a common stage structure of study programmes and degrees. The aim was that various other measures, such as the introduction of a credit system, improved information about the value of credentials through a 'diploma supplement', and cooperation in 'quality assurance' would contribute to structural convergence without endangering the substantive variety of study programmes and eventually lead to a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010. Subsequently, in the Lisbon Declaration of 2000, the European Council, i.e. the assembly of the heads of governments of the countries of the European Union, agreed to cooperate and to take joint measures of investing into research and development and eventually to establish a European Research Area by 2010. Notably, public and private expenditure for research and development needed to be increased on average to 3% of the gross domestic product, thus helping to make Europe 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy of the world', as formulated in the Lisbon Declaration. These European campaigns were obviously ambitious in their intention to increase the common characteristics of national higher education systems in Europe.

## **2. The Signing of the Bologna Declaration**

A major policy move such as the Bologna Declaration cannot be seen as simply a sudden and surprising action. The views vary, however, as regards the major factors triggering the decision to advocate a convergent system of study programmes and degrees in Europe (Witte, 2006). It seems to be justified, though, to argue that three contributing factors have been frequently cited:

- First, since the 1960s there have been debates in various European countries about the most desirable patterns of the higher education system, whereby a need was felt to make relatively short study programmes more attractive in the wake of expansion of higher education.
- Secondly, the ERASMUS programme inaugurated by the European Commission in 1987 was viewed as such a success story that it stimulated debates how temporary student mobility within Europe could be spread further.
- Thirdly, in around the mid-1990s many politicians and other actors became concerned that study in non-English-speaking European countries seemed to lose its attraction for students from other parts of the world; the introduction of a Bachelor–Master structure of study programmes was considered to be a major vehicle for increasing the attractiveness. Such views quickly spread, notably in France and Germany. In Germany, for example, the Framework Act for Higher

Education was already revised early in 1998 in order to facilitate the establishment of stages of study programmes and degrees, before joint declarations were signed across Europe.

On the occasion of an anniversary of the Sorbonne University in Paris in 1998, the ministers in charge of higher education of France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom declared that they would establish a 'harmonized' structure of programmes and degrees. The signing of the Sorbonne Declaration was criticized as an isolated attempt at harmonization by a few European countries, but the concept found widespread support in other European countries and was considered to be a great leap forward, so efforts were made to establish a broader basis for further action. In June 1999, the ministers of 29 European countries signed the Bologna Declaration in Bologna (Italy), according to which a structure of programmes and degrees would be established and eventually a European Higher Education Area implemented by the year 2010. Subsequent ministerial follow-up conferences for monitoring, specifying and stimulating this process were held in Prague (Czech Republic) in 2001, in Berlin (Germany) in 2003, in Bergen (Norway) in 2005, in London (United Kingdom) in 2007, in Leuven (Belgium) in 2009 – this time jointly prepared by the governments of the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg, and eventually in Vienna (Austria) and Budapest (Hungary) in 2010. In the meantime, 47 countries signed the declaration.

The major supra-national actor in what was now called the Bologna Process is not the European Union, but rather, the ministers of individual countries jointly promote this process. Actually, the European Commission, the governmental body of the European Union, was caught by surprise in 1998, because the four ministers signing the Sorbonne Declaration advocated exactly what they had previously forbidden the European Commission from doing: to challenge the variety of higher education systems in Europe.

Actually, the basic assumptions behind the Bologna Process were not well founded statistically. First, the proportion of students from all around the world studying abroad, who opted to study in the non English-speaking European countries has not really been on the decline, as was often claimed (Teichler, 1999). Moreover, it is not certain whether measures of structural convergence are most likely to make higher education in Europe more attractive: The language issue, the scarcity of highly organized doctoral programmes or the deficiencies regarding individual academic and administrative support for the students in some European countries might have been more salient factors. But, clearly, beliefs are also facts: the belief spread quickly in Europe around the year 2000 that structural similarities of the European higher education systems would make them more attractive for persons from outside Europe.

Second, the Bologna Declaration pointed out that similar programmes and degrees in Europe would also serve the intra-European student mobility. But intra-European student mobility already worked quite well beforehand in the framework of ERASMUS for a variety of programmes and degrees. It might work better if programmes and degrees were similar, but one could conclude that European countries would not have taken on the burden of revamping the programmes and degrees in Europe, just for the sake of a moderate increase of student mobility within Europe.

### **3. The Bologna Reform Programme**

The Bologna Declaration emphasized an operational objective: establishing a cyclical system of study programmes and degrees throughout Europe: a first study programme leading to a Bachelor's degree, and a second leading to a Master's degree. In fact, the ministers involved never agreed on a common model as regards the length of the study programmes. Three-year Bachelor and two-year Master programmes were generally established, and five years of study up to Master degree level is the most widespread model, but room for manoeuvre has remained for other options (Reichert & Tauch, 2003, 2005).

Over the years, the communiqués signed by the ministers in the follow-up conferences highlight that doctoral studies should be viewed as the third stage of the Bologna model. However, no concrete agreements have been reached as regards the character of such a third stage, status of the doctoral candidates or similar salient issues.

The Bologna Declaration also suggested accompanying measures to reinforce the possible impact of the structural convergence of higher education systems in the European countries. First, a credit system should be introduced everywhere in order to measure study achievements

cumulatively, and in order to have a common 'currency' when it comes to recognizing the study achievements of temporarily mobile students upon return. Second, a 'diploma supplement' should be awarded to all students upon graduation in order to provide easily readable and internationally understandable information about the national higher education system, the study programme and the students' individual achievements. Thirdly, close cooperation between the European countries was advocated in evaluation activities, in this context often called 'quality assurance'.

This structural reform and the accompanying measures are called for in the Bologna Declaration as serving the strategic objective aim of contributing to student mobility. Actually, two aims are declared:

- To increase the attractiveness of higher education in Europe for students from other parts of the world, and
- to facilitate intra-European mobility.

Without explicitly stating so, the Bologna Process aims primarily to increase the following modes of student mobility: (a) inbound mobility for whole degree programmes from other parts of the world, and (b) temporary (between three months and a year) inbound and outbound mobility between European countries (Teichler, 2009b; Wächter, 2008). It is also clear that the Bologna reform programme considers the cyclical system of degrees to have a positive impact on students' options and for a better articulation between the provisions of the higher education system and the needs of society. Further, the aim is that short study programmes should be made more attractive, and students should have more flexibility in the course of their study career, whereby study could be more easily stretched over the life course ('lifelong learning').

In the course of the years, the Bologna agenda seems to have broadened. As the Bologna Process has turned out to be a motor of change, many actors aim to widen the agenda, either by suggesting that European governments add new themes into the communiqués of the follow-up conferences or, less officially, into the official conferences held under the auspices of the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG, the coordination group between the ministerial conferences), or by just reinterpreting the Bologna discourse as including their preferred themes. For example, the European Commission published various papers in which they claimed the philosophy underlying the Lisbon Process is more or less identical to the philosophy underlying the Bologna Process (European Commission, 2010).

There is no doubt, however, that a second major theme of the Bologna Process emerged and grew over time in addition to the structural theme (the stage structure of study programmes and degrees): that of the substance of the study programmes, notably the major curricular thrusts as well as the relationships between study and subsequent graduate employment and work. 'Qualifications frameworks' and 'employability' became the most frequently used terms to underscore the relevance of this second major theme.

Initially, it was frequently pointed out that the Bologna Declaration calls only for a structural convergence, thereby leaving the European variety of curricular approaches unchanged. There should be a 'greater compatibility and comparability of the systems of higher education' whereby the varied competences could be easily accepted as being on equal terms.

The Bologna Declaration of 1999 refers to the relationships between higher education and the world of work only once in a pronounced way: 'The degree awarded after the first cycle shall also be relevant to the European labour market'. This formulation, calling for the professional relevance of the university Bachelor degree reflects the concern that universities from countries where only long study programmes have existed in the past, might shape the Bachelor degree programmes in such a way that holders of Bachelor degrees turning to the labour market will be handicapped because their degree will be similar to interim certificates such as the French DEUG or the German Vor-Diplom; it also shows the awareness that employers might have to reconsider their recruitment strategies for accommodating university graduates with Bachelor degrees.

The subsequent debates and activities in the Bologna Process went beyond this issue, as far as curricular approaches were concerned. When a stronger need was felt to disentangle the level of competences and knowledge attached to a Bachelor's or a Master's degree, the ministers approved the formulation of 'qualifications frameworks' in their communiqué of 2005 which might be formulated broadly for European higher education as a whole, within national and disciplinary settings. For example, graduates with Bachelor degrees should be able to 'apply their

knowledge/understanding in a manner that indicates a professional approach', while Master graduates should be able to 'apply their knowledge/understanding and problem solving abilities in new and unfamiliar environments within broader contexts'. The terminology also indicates that the educational discourse in higher education moved gradually from 'knowledge' and 'achievement' to 'learning outcomes' and 'competences' in the course of the first decade of the twenty-first century.

Concurrently, a multitude of issues was addressed within or along the Bologna Process under the label 'employability'. Some advocates of 'employability' called for a subordination of the curricula under the presumed employers' demands, others recommended a quantitative steering of higher education according to expected labour market developments. Again, others preferred more 'learning to learn' and 'key skills' to cope with labour market uncertainties, and others saw curricula as an opportunity to prepare students to proactively change their job roles. Still others advocated the spread of knowledge and competences relevant to the search for employment and for fostering the ability to manage one's own (professional, but not only professional) life. Thereby, the term 'employability' misleadingly suggests that issues of employment (salary, pensions, stability of contracts etc.) are at stake, while the discourse actually concentrated on substantive matters of learning, competence and work (and could possibly be named 'professional relevance', see Teichler, 2009a).

The debates and policies in the framework or in the context of the Bologna Process have spread beyond those themes. Joint activities of 'quality assurance' have extended beyond the initially envisaged objectives. Various themes have been added to the list: widened access to higher education and permeability between the vocational training system and higher education, as well as the 'social dimension' of higher education, among other themes, in terms of the financial conditions for study and the actual study conditions.

#### **4. The General Results of Ten Years of the Bologna Process**

On the basis of various studies published around 2010 it is possible to paint a first picture of the general results of the Bologna Process. Even though occasionally views diverge and it is not yet possible to grasp all the consequences at this point in time, the following interim account might be appropriate (see the more extended account in Teichler, 2011).

##### *Speed of Implementation*

The operational objectives of the Bologna Process were implemented at enormously varied speeds in the various European countries. In some countries, the new degree structures and most of the accompanied measures were already implemented by 2002. In other countries, the process of implementation started early but lasted many years. In other countries, the first years were characterized by debates as to whether the new structures should be implemented at all, and only after a few years of discussion about the 'if' of the reform, did the 'how' become the focus of the debate. In other countries not much has happened even after a decade since the Bologna Declaration (Alesi et al, 2005; Sursock & Smidt, 2010).

##### *Extent of the Introduction of the Bachelor–Master Structure*

Surveys undertaken on behalf of the European University Association (EUA) in 2009 (Sursock & Smidt, 2010) suggest that a Bachelor–Master structure of study programmes and degrees was implemented by 2010 at most higher education institutions in the countries participating in the Bologna Process. According to the EUA survey, 53% of higher education institutions in the European countries participating in the Bologna Process had implemented a stage structure – Bachelor, Master and possibly doctoral award – by 2003. The proportion rose to 82% in 2007 and to 95% in 2010.

It might be added here that the 'accompanying measures' to the structural change seem to have been implemented to a similar extent. Some 96% of the institutions responding in the EUA survey published in 2010 stated that they have a credit accumulation system for all Bachelor and

Master programmes. Therefore 88% were making use of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) (which counts 60 credits as a normal nominal workload for one academic year). Also, the use of the diploma supplement has become more widespread in a short time. While in the 2007 EUA survey 48% of the higher education institutions reported that they issued it to all graduating students, the respective rate was 66% in 2010. A further 14% of institutions reported in the latter survey that they issued the diploma supplement upon request.

The EUA survey results are reported here, even though only 15% of the institutions of higher education responded to the survey. Certainly, institutions are more likely to respond to such a survey if they actually implemented the changes addressed in the survey. Thus, the figures certainly exaggerate the actual extent of implementation. Yet, most experts agree in being convinced that the formal implementation of the Bologna mechanisms have moved very far.

#### *Variation by Field of Study*

However, the Bachelor–Master degree structure was not introduced to a similar extent across all fields of study. As one might expect, a Bachelor–Master structure remained a minority phenomenon according to the EUA 2010 survey in most medical fields (veterinary 16%, dentistry 21%, pharmacy 27%, medicine 28%, midwifery 36% and nursing 46%). There are other fields with a relatively low extent of implementation: architecture (46%), law (61%), teacher training (68%) and engineering (73%).

#### *Bachelor – a Terminal or Transitional Degree?*

The Bachelor degree at universities seems to function predominantly as an interim stage towards a Master degree. Some 85% of the representatives of universities responding to the 2010 EUA survey expected the majority not to go directly to the labour market. The respective proportion was 55% for other higher education institutions.

#### *Length of Study Programmes*

Although common goals and operational objectives were emphasized, individual countries varied substantially in their interpretation of the goals and the actual operational activities. Even the most obvious possible measure of European coordination within the new system of study programme, namely a standardization of the length of study programmes, has never been achieved. In fact, 18 countries introduced three-year Bachelor and two-year Master programmes. Six countries have a 4-2 system, and four countries have four-year Bachelor programmes and Master programmes comprising one or one and a half years. The remaining countries have varied models (Eurydice, 2010).

#### *Concurrent Curricular Reforms*

The majority of higher education institutions responding to the 2010 EUA survey claim that curricular reconsiderations have taken place along structural changes. Among those introducing a Bachelor–Master structure, 77% reported that curricular reconsiderations had been on the agenda in all departments.

#### *Thematic Range of the Bologna Process*

As already pointed out, the thematic range of the Bologna Process has widened substantially over time. As the Bologna Declaration obviously was successful in triggering intensive discussions and efforts to change higher education, efforts were frequently made to put additional issues on the Bologna agenda. Some observers consider this as steps towards a comprehensive reform of higher education in Europe, while others view this as a dilution of the Bologna reform programme.

### *Curricular Change*

In some countries the introduction of the stage system of study programmes and degrees was accompanied by intensive activities of rethinking and changing curricula, while in other countries operational changes were implemented with few curricular changes. In the course of the ministerial follow-up conferences, increasing emphasis was placed on substantive matters of the new study programmes. This might be viewed as an indication of disappointment that the initial aim – to strive for structural convergence of the higher education system across Europe – was a less powerful instrument for overall reform than was initially envisaged. Indeed, one might have assumed from the outset that structural reform must be accompanied by major curricular reform. Most observers believe that the curricular debates on the need to enhance the awareness of the results of study ('competences', 'learning outcomes'), on feedback of experiences for the improvement of teaching and learning ('quality assurance'), on the levels of competences to be reached at the end of the various stages of study ('qualifications frameworks'), on the links between study and subsequent employment and work ('employability') and on the role of higher education programmes in the life course ('lifelong learning') indicate the need for improvements as well as demonstrably effective changes. But nobody seriously dares to assess the extent to which changes in those directions have actually taken place. The actual aims of such reforms remain controversial. And it has remained open as to how far a paradigmatic shift towards a curricular convergence across Europe has taken place in recent years or how far the initial aim of preserving curricular variety amidst structural convergence is upheld.

### *Involvement of Actors*

Many assessments of the Bologna Process point out that governmental actors have been the strongest advocates of the key reforms from the outset. Leaders of higher education institutions soon followed, while many academics continued to consider the Bologna programme an undesirable imposition from 'above'. And protests by students were by no means infrequent. There were widespread critiques that a university Bachelor degree was not a sufficient level of academically based study and, in practice, many university teachers and students view the university Bachelor as a transition stage to the Master. The learning processes are often viewed as over-regulated in the short Bachelor programmes and heavily impacted by frequent examinations as a consequence of implementation of a credit system. There are concerns that the strong drive towards 'employability' undermines academic quality as well as the critical and innovative reasoning of students.

### *Extent of General Acceptance*

As the debates about the strengths and weaknesses of the Bologna agenda are highly emotional and, as we note, accompanied by a plethora of 'eulogies and protests' (Reichert, 2010), it is very difficult to establish how far the major reform trend is actually accepted or refuted. In a 2007 survey of academic staff in 31 European countries, about one-third agreed to the statement 'It would have been better if the old single-tier system (without a split in Bachelor and Master) was kept', while almost six out of ten disagreed (Gallup Organization, 2007). Disapproval of the Bachelor–Master system was most frequent on the part of academics in Germany (53%), followed by those in Estonia (46%), Hungary and Italy (42% each).

### *Protracted Process towards a European Higher Education Area*

The Bologna Declaration of 1999 called for the realization of a European Higher Education Area by 2010. Actors and observers agree that major changes have taken place since 1999, but that a comprehensive reform had not taken place by 2010. The ministers of the European countries involved in the Bologna Process indicated in their communiqués of 2009 and 2010 that they could see a further decade of the Bologna Process shaped by further implementation of the initial goals, necessary revisions and in some respects efforts to reach even more ambitious goals.

*Heterogeneous National Approaches of 'Bologna'*

Finally, it became clear that higher education in the various European countries, in spite of such efforts for increased similarity and cooperation, has remained quite heterogeneous. This is clearly mirrored in enormous differences, as far as the length of study programmes and the curricular approaches are concerned. But it also affects the frequency of student mobility across Europe – i.e. the prime target area of the Bologna reforms.

### **5. The Bologna Process and Student Mobility**

Since the Bologna Declaration named the enhancement of student mobility as the major strategic objective of the reform programme, one might have expected that efforts would have been made to establish a system of statistics and surveys suitable for monitoring the actual quantitative development of student mobility. In practice, however, the information base for measuring trends in student mobility has remained fairly weak. In a study on the available statistical basis undertaken in 2006 by the Academic Cooperation Association (ACA), the following problems were stressed (Kelo et al, 2006):

- International statistics have traditionally provided information about foreign students and study abroad; these data are weak approximations in terms of student mobility, because a substantial proportion of foreign students in various European countries are not mobile for the purpose of study, but have already lived and been educated in the country of study. On the other hand, some students have lived and learned in another country prior to study and moved to the country of their citizenship for the purpose of study.
- Many countries include temporarily mobile students – i.e. the most frequent mode of intra-European student mobility – only partially or not at all in their student statistics. Some countries even count temporarily outbound mobile students as home students during the study period abroad.
- The available international statistics do not offer any distinction between 'degree-mobile' or 'diploma-mobile' students, i.e. those intending to study a whole study programme abroad, and 'temporarily mobile', 'short-term mobile' or 'credit-mobile' students, i.e. those intending to study abroad for one semester or for a somewhat longer time-span within a study programme.
- There is no distinction made in the international statistics according to citizenship or mobility according to Bachelor and Master programmes.
- There are no statistics and surveys across Europe suitable for establishing the event of student mobility, i.e. how many students have studied abroad during the course of study – either the whole study programme or at least some period during the course of study.

Therefore, we can only repeat the widespread practice in Europe of reporting the results of statistical analysis on foreign students as an approximation of student mobility. For a limited number of countries we can add examples of more appropriate data.

A recent study 'The Bologna Process in Higher Education in Europe: key indicators on the social dimension and mobility' (Eurostat & Eurostudent, 2009) presented data on the changing trends in foreign students and study abroad in Europe in recent years based on statistics jointly collected by UNESCO, OECD and Eurostat. According to this study, the percentage of foreign students among all foreign students in the 27 EU countries increased from 5.4% in 2000 to 7.5% in 2006.

According to a new, not yet published study of the Academic Cooperation Association on 32 European countries (ERASMUS-eligible countries and Switzerland):

- the number of foreign students increased from about 827,000 in these 32 European countries in 1999 (5.4% of all students) to about 1,118,000 (5.8%) in 2003 and to 1,516,000 (7.0%) in 2007; thus, the overall increase over eight years is more than 80% in absolute figures and about 30% in relative figures;
- the rate of foreign students in these countries who are citizens of other European countries increased from 3.0% in 1999 to only 3.3% in 2007, whereas the rate of foreign students from outside Europe (and unknown nationality) increased during that period from 2.4% to 3.7% (Teichler et al, 2011).

The total absolute growth of foreign students over the period of eight years is quite impressive: the overall increase in foreign students in Europe during this period is clearly higher than 53% overall growth of the total number of foreign students in all countries of the world (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2009). The available statistics reinforce the view that *higher education in Europe has become more attractive for students from other parts of the world wishing to study abroad*.

According to another study comprising data for all 46 countries which had joined the Bologna Process by 2009, the percentage of foreign students in the EHEA increased from 3.5% in 1999 to 4.6% in 2007; the substantially lower figures than those reported in the previously named studies are primarily due to the fact that Russia – characterized by a large absolute number of students and a low percentage of foreign students – is included in the latter data (Center for Higher Education Policy Studies et al, 2010).

The proportion of foreign students among all students varies dramatically among European countries. In disregarding the special conditions of a few very small countries (Luxembourg, Liechtenstein, Cyprus, etc.), we note rates of 15-20% in Switzerland, the United Kingdom and Austria in 2007, as well as rates slightly above 10% in Belgium, France, Germany and Sweden; in contrast, less than 1% of foreign students are reported, for example, for Poland, Slovakia and Turkey.

According to the same source, the rate of students studying abroad of the home tertiary enrolment decreased from 3.3% in 1999 to 2.8% in 2007 in Western Europe. The respective rate in Central and Eastern Europe remained constant during that period at 1.7%. Actually, the UNESCO statistics suggest that about 80% of European students studying abroad went to other European countries and only about 20% went to other continents.

Information as to how much data on genuine student mobility differ from data on foreign students, is provided for 2003 by the above-named ACA study (Kelo et al, 2006):

- In Switzerland, 14.1% of all students were foreign mobile students and 2.0% were home country mobile students, totalling 16.1% of all mobile students, while 5.4% of the students were foreign non-mobile students (the international statistics show 19.5% foreign students).
- In Austria, 10.6% of all students were foreign mobile students and 1.3% were home country mobile students, totalling 11.9% of all mobile students, while 2.7% of the students were foreign non-mobile students and 13.3% altogether were foreign students.
- Finally, in Spain, only 1.7% of all students were foreign mobile students and only 0.1% were home country mobile students, totalling 1.8% of all mobile students, while 1.0% of the students were foreign non-mobile students and 2.7% altogether were foreign students.

For these three countries, information is also available regarding 2007. Accordingly, the proportion of foreign mobile students has increased within four years from 1.7% to 2.7% in Spain, from 10.6% to 11.7% in Austria and from 14.1% to 14.3% in Switzerland (Teichler et al, 2011).

Information on the development of foreign mobile students since the Bologna Declaration is only available for a few European countries. In Germany, foreign mobile students ('Bildungsausländer') comprised 6.0% in 1999; increased to 9.5% in the 2005 to 2007, and thereafter slightly decreased to 8.9%.

In spite of the weaknesses of the available data, one can infer that of the two strategic aims of the Bologna Declaration as regards student mobility, one was successful: more students from other parts of the world came to Europe than one could have expected from trends in worldwide mobility increase. The other was not successful: student mobility within Europe seems to have increased during the first decade of the twenty-first century but only at a slow pace – obviously lower than in the 1990s.

When the ministers in charge of higher education formulated in the Leuven Communiqué in 2009 that an intra-European student mobility quota of 20% should be reached by 2020, they did not provide any definition of the quota. But they obviously envisaged that in the minority of cases students would spend the whole programme and in the majority of cases one or more short periods of one or two semesters abroad during the overall course of their study.

The event of having studied in another country can be measured with the help of two different approaches. First, the frequency of temporary study in another country can be established with the help of surveys of students who are already close to graduation or with the help of graduate surveys undertaken soon after graduation. Second, the frequency of 'diploma mobility',

i.e. mobility for a whole study programme, can be established with the help of educational statistics collected internationally by UNESCO, OECD and Eurostat.

As regards the former, the 'Eurostudent' studies regularly undertaken are the best possible source among student surveys and student statistics. Unfortunately, however, the most recent 'Eurostudent' study provides only data on the event of study abroad during the course of study for all students (Orr, 2008); in contrast, the earlier studies in Germany undertaken by the Hochschul Informations System GmbH provided data on study periods or other study-related activities for students shortly before graduation.

A comparative graduate survey – the so-called REFLEX survey – covered graduates of the academic year 1999 and 2000 from more than a dozen European countries (Schomburg & Teichler, 2008). A glance at the findings with respect to three countries might suffice to show the complexity of the international experience. Accordingly, 16% of the graduates from higher education institutions in France, 23% in the United Kingdom and 8% in Germany had a migration background (i.e. they or their parents came from another country), among them 12%, 3% and 6% were born abroad. 36% of the graduates from higher education institutions in France, 30% in Germany and 19% in the UK had either studied or had other study-related experiences (internships, summer courses, language schools, etc.). In the case of Germany, further information shows that about 15% had studied abroad and that about 15% had other study-related experiences. Moreover, 21% of the graduates from higher education institutions in each France and the UK, and 16% in Germany, were internationally mobile during the first five years after graduation. Among them, 4%, 7% and 3% were employed abroad five years after graduation. In combining the above we conclude that 50% of graduates from higher education institutions in France in 2000 had some 'life-course international experience' up to five years after graduation. The corresponding figures for graduates in the UK were 46% and for graduates in Germany 40%.

It is difficult to establish whether temporary mobility during the course of study has increased due to the Bologna Process. First, regular representative graduate surveys are undertaken in only a few European countries. Second, the implementation of the Bachelor–Master structure has been relatively slow in various countries; therefore only a small number of graduates had passed through both the Bachelor and Master programmes at the point when the most recent graduate surveys were undertaken. Third, most surveys do not combine the event of mobility during both the Bachelor and the Master degree programmes for those continuing study beyond the Bachelor degree.

According to an overview on recent graduate surveys in 10 European countries, clearly more than 20% of students in the Netherlands and in Austria spend at least a semester of study in another country (Schomburg, 2011). In Germany, 16% of the graduates from Bachelor degree programmes, 17% from Master programmes and 19% of single-cycle programmes at universities have studied at least a semester in another country; the corresponding figures for graduates from Fachhochschulen are 14%, 9% and 9% again. By taking into account the frequency of the various degrees as well as transition rates from Bachelor to Master programmes, we estimate that 17-18% of graduates from German institutions of higher education have studied abroad during the course of study; other sources suggest that 2-3% of German students study the whole period abroad. Thus, the figures suggest that about 20% of German students study abroad during the course of study in one way or other – as many as are expected to do on average in Europe by the year 2020. But there are contrasting cases reported in this overview: Only 4% of British Bachelor graduates had studied abroad as had 2% of Bachelor and 3% of Master graduates from Poland.

## **6. The Experiences and Prospects of Mobile Students**

The most obvious findings of systematic information available on the international mobility of students (see the overviews in Teekens & de Wit, 2007; Vincent-Lancrin, 2009) is that mobile students cannot be viewed to be a single group. Certainly, international offices at higher education institutions might be in charge of all mobile students, and all internationally mobile students might experience the opportunities and risks associated with living conditions and an educational environment different from what they have experienced before. But from the European perspective, certainly three different groups of mobile students have to be distinguished:

- Students from low-income and middle-income countries moving mostly for degree-study to a more economically advanced country and a more mature higher education system.
- Students from economically advanced countries moving for degree study to another economically advanced country.
- Temporarily mobile students within economically advanced countries.

‘Vertical mobility’, i.e. mobility from economically and academically less favoured countries to economically and academically more favoured countries, is undertaken mostly for entire degree programmes. It is more widespread in fields of study with a universal knowledge base and/or fields of study which as a rule lead to a relatively higher income for graduates. Many of the mobile students are academically ambitious and/or come from relatively wealthy backgrounds. In order to succeed in study abroad, they have to adapt to a high degree to the academic and cultural environment of the host country.

There are substantial proportions of students who actually face major problems as far as academic achievement is concerned; there are countries and institutions where higher drop-out rates of foreign students are reported than those of home country students, and there are countries and institutions where students from academically and economically advanced levels are awarded degrees with some leniency which low achievers among home country students could not expect. There are also success stories, and many vertically mobile students aim to get employment in the host country of study or in another economically advanced country; this tends to be appreciated by the students and graduates themselves, but is often deplored by their country of origin as ‘brain drain’.

Least is known about the second group, the degree-mobile students within economically advanced countries, but all available information suggests that they are quite heterogeneous. Among doctoral and Master degree students, the percentage of these students is higher. In many instances, students go to another country because they are attracted by the academic reputation of the host institution. There is a not infrequent degree of mobility between neighbour countries. Some students study abroad because they have not succeeded in being admitted in the field of study or the institution where they originally wanted to enrol in their home country. As a consequence, hardly any generalization can be made about the challenges of study abroad and its eventual impact.

In contrast, quite a number of studies have been undertaken about temporary mobility within Europe. Many of these studies concern students who are mobile within the ERASMUS programme – the world’s largest programme for the support of temporary student mobility which was inaugurated in 1987 and which currently helps more than 150,000 European students annually to spend one or two semesters at a higher education institution in another European country. Under ERASMUS, students can generally expect that their study achievements abroad will be recognized by their home institution upon return (Teichler, 2002; Center for Higher Education Policy Studies et al, 2008; Janson et al, 2009; Bürger & Lanzendorf, 2011).

Obviously, temporarily mobile students in Europe outside the ERASMUS programmes are somewhat better academically prepared and on average report a slightly more impressive impact of study abroad than ERASMUS students. This finding is not surprising, given that the ERASMUS programme was established as a programme mobilizing those who would not go without an additional stimulus. The evaluation studies show that academic and cultural learning during the study period are closely intertwined. The majority of ERASMUS students believe that their academic progress abroad is higher than that expected during a corresponding period of study at home, even though upon return many students report that they experience an incomplete recognition of their study achievements abroad. Available information suggest that academic learning abroad in the framework of ERASMUS is not in general superior in substance, but in the stimulation of reflection and comparative thinking.

ERASMUS students by no means consider the study abroad period as unproblematic. According to most surveys, one fifth or more of former ERASMUS students report administrative and accommodation problems in the host country, as well as financial constraints. Academic problems such as following lectures in a foreign language, getting along with the teaching and learning styles abroad and coping with the academic challenges at the host institution, are less frequently cited.

Former ERASMUS students from Western European countries view themselves as slightly superior to other students and are similarly viewed by their teachers and employers, as far as specific academic knowledge and general study-related competences are concerned. They seem to have slightly better chances of finding employment easily, but do not differ substantially from non-mobile students as far as their position and income are concerned. However, they clearly feel superior in competences directly linked to international experiences, e.g. foreign-language proficiency as well as knowledge and understanding of various countries and comparative thinking; it is evident that they more frequently take job assignments with clear international elements; and last but not least they are far more often internationally mobile in their job than non-mobile students.

It should be added that ERASMUS seems to have a clearly higher value for students from Central and Eastern European countries, than for those from Western European countries. The former report higher achievements and competences as compared to non-mobile students and clearly rate the professional impact of temporary study abroad more positively than their fellow students from Western European countries.

In comparing the statements of former ERASMUS students in recent years with those of the earlier cohorts of the ERASMUS programme, we note that the 'value-added' of temporary study abroad seems to have decreased over time. A comparison of surveys on ERASMUS 1988/1989 students surveyed five years later, graduates from 1994/1995 surveyed four years later who had been mobile with ERASMUS support, and ERASMUS 2000/2001 students surveyed five years later (Janson et al, 2009) shows:

- A decline in the perception that the ERASMUS experience had a positive influence on employment and work. The perception that ERASMUS had had a positive influence on obtaining a first job declined from 71% to 66% and eventually 54%. A positive influence on type of work-related task involved was reported by 49%, 44% and eventually 39%; and a positive influence on income levels by 25%, 22% and finally 16%.
- The following visible international work-related tasks were reported: 'using the language of the host country orally' declined from 47% to 42% and 38%; 'using the language of the host country in reading and writing' similarly from 47% to 40% and 38%; 'using first-hand professional knowledge of the host country' from 30% and 25% and again 25%; 'using first-hand knowledge of the country culture or society' from 30%, then an increase to 32%, before a decrease to 25%; and 'professional travel to the host country' from 17%, 18% in the second survey, to eventually 14%.

These findings seem to reflect –according to the authors of the three studies – a declining exceptionality of temporary study abroad. The study and living environment becomes more international for students living in Europe, even if they do not study abroad.

## **7. Student Mobility and the Bologna Process: a provisional account**

We note a worldwide trend towards increasing international student mobility. Most notable is that the number of students from low-income and middle-income countries opting for study in a foreign country, particularly an economically advanced country, keeps growing. This is partly triggered by the substantial expansion of student enrolment within low-income and middle-income countries, but the rate of study abroad has also grown slightly. The percentage of foreign students among all students in the European countries has increased in recent years as a consequence of this kind of 'push effect' of increasing numbers of study-abroad students from outside Europe, but the overall growth in the number of students from outside has been even higher. Thus, the Bologna Process has made study in European countries more attractive for students from outside Europe. In various European countries, efforts have been made to facilitate mobility through improved services, an increased number of study programmes in the English language, and a stronger international focus of the study programmes. Yet we do not know how far these changes have gone, and most experts believe that further improvements are needed to help students from outside Europe cope with all the challenges they face as foreign students in Europe.

With a few exceptions, higher education policies advocate increasing both inward and outward mobility, whereby the latter students head mostly for other economically advanced

countries and in this framework most to other European countries. Intra-European temporary student mobility has substantially increased in the 1990s. Notably, the ERASMUS programme established in 1987 was viewed as a success story; many students came to the conclusion that 'learning from contrasts' within Europe is highly valuable. The available data are too poor to establish clearly whether intra-European temporary student mobility has grown in the early years of the twenty-first century at more or less the same pace as it did in the 1990s, or whether the growth of intra-European temporary student mobility has increased at a higher pace or even slowed down in the recent past. This is due to the poor state of statistics on temporary student mobility. In any event, there is no evidence that the Bologna Process has worked as an accelerator of intra-European student mobility.

Obviously, temporary study abroad still is viewed as an exceptional period of rich experience which might also be helpful for career enhancement in the various countries in Central and Eastern Europe as well as some South-Eastern European countries. It will take time until barriers disappear, and certainly many of these students need help in order to cope with the changing study environment abroad.

For students from Western European countries, temporary study abroad became a normal option within easy reach. It might continue to grow in the future because 'learning from contrast', as the major result of the ERASMUS programme might be called, might continue to be appreciated. But it is by no means sure whether the trend of the past years will persist. If the curricular changes in the various European countries will move towards a European 'convergence', the increasing similarity across Europe and might reduce the value of temporary study abroad as 'learning from contrasts'. Moreover, international learning is bound to lose its exceptionality further as a consequence of the general internationalization of daily life and the increasing 'internationalization at home' of the study provisions.

The aim recently formulated within the Bologna Process – that 20% of students should spend all or a period of study in a foreign country – seems to be already realized in some Western European countries and is likely to be achieved in some other countries in the near future. However, rather than simply relying on a trend extrapolation, it might be worth considering new ways of making study within another European country an even more worthwhile experience. We could imagine the emergence of new concepts of curricular innovation aimed at making study in another European country an even more valuable experience than it has been in the past.

## 8. Implications for Comparative Research

The Bologna Process was accompanied by a magnitude of evaluation activities:

- For the preparation of each ministerial follow-up conference, the individual countries were asked to write progress reports, and every time a working group synthesized these reports to write an overall 'stocktaking' report.
- The European University Association (EUA) or individual experts were regularly commissioned to undertake 'trend' surveys at higher education institutions on the implementation of the Bologna Process (Haug & Tauch, 2001; Reichert & Tauch, 2003, 2005; Crosier et al, 2007; Sursock & Smidt, 2010).
- At various occasions, higher education researchers were asked to comprehensively assess the overall development of the Bologna Process (Alesi et al, 2005; Kehm et al, 2009; Center for Higher Education Policy Studies et al, 2010).
- Several studies were commissioned on specific themes, such on statistics of student mobility (Kelo et al, 2006), the opinions of academic staff (Gallup Organization, 2007), student statistics and surveys in general (Eurostat & Eurostudent, 2009; Teichler et al, 2011) and the implications of the Bologna Process for relationships between higher education and employment (see the overview in Schomburg & Teichler, 2011).
- Moreover, various studies were commissioned within individual countries or undertaken by various agencies and scholars on their own initiative.

Yet, most actors and experts discussing the implementation and the results of the Bologna Process come to the conclusion that the information base achieved is not very good. Available statistics are often not suited to measure Bologna-relevant phenomena well. There are few valuable surveys

covering all the European countries. Information provided by actors is often highly politicized. Many reports focus on just the extent to which the actors comply with the official operational objectives, without any discussion of salient effects and possibly unintended effects (Reichert, 2010). Many reports are characterized by premature expectations: they aim to measure and assess the results at a point when the first steps of change are only just underway: for example, reports on the acceptance of the new Bachelors programme on the labour market were often undertaken and presented as valid findings before even one tenth of the graduates had studied in the new degree system. Last but not least the exciting and controversial reform climate stirred up by the Bologna Process has led to many emotionally coloured reports on the processes and impact of the Bologna Process.

In addition, there is a need for conceptual reasoning. In the past, higher education systems have been national systems to a considerable extent. In comparative studies, one could pay attention to country specifics and similarities across countries, and try to explore the causes for the extent of those specifics and similarities. In the meantime, activities crossing country borders, cross-fertilization of national concepts of higher education, policies in favour of convergence across countries as well as 'globalization', i.e. changes taking place worldwide across blurred borders, became more salient. The conceptual approach that is needed under these conditions no longer fits the traditional divide between – mostly implicit – national approaches of analysis on the one hand and comparative studies across borders on the other. The trend towards European 'convergence' in higher education is clearly more limited than the advocates would have liked it, mobility is still a minority phenomenon, and 'globalization' is more of a slogan than a reality, but changes in those directions are sufficiently strong to call for post-comparative analytic approaches.

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