Chapter 2

WHAT IS THE USE OF BOLOGNA IN NATIONAL REFORM?

The Case of Norwegian Quality Reform in Higher Education

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1. INTRODUCTION

Few national higher education systems or policies can claim to operate in total isolation from their international environment. Systemic changes and policy shifts in higher education are linked in various ways to what is happening in the international arena, as well as to developments in other national systems. This chapter discusses one such linkage; it explores how a process of higher education policy co-operation at the European level, the Bologna Process, has impacted in practice on the comprehensive reform of Norwegian higher education of the late 1990s and the beginning of this century known as the Quality Reform; and questions the extent to which the reform proposals that are part of the *Quality Reform* are a response to the Bologna Process, and how 'Bologna' was used in the context of this national reform.

The Norwegian higher education system is located on the northern periphery of Europe. Given this location and the ongoing Europeanisation of higher education, the Norwegian government and other stakeholders concerned with higher education are putting increasing political emphasis on the importance of internationalising higher education, and especially on strengthening its ties with Europe. In this the Bologna Process, being a part of the Europeanisation development, has received considerable attention. An important assumption in this chapter is that the nature of the peripheral status of Norway might have conditioned the use, and therefore ultimately the effects of the Bologna Process in the Norwegian *Quality Reform*.

The Bologna Declaration states that to establish a European Area of Higher Education and to promote the European system of higher

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education in the world, amongst other things, the following objectives will have to be attained:

- Adoption of a system of degrees that are easily readable and comparable in order to promote the employability of European citizens and the international competitiveness of the European system of higher education
- Adoption of a degree system based on two cycles
- Establishment of a system of credit transfer, preferably based on the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS)
- Promotion of mobility, overcoming obstacles to the effective exercise of free movement for students, teachers, researchers and administrative staff
- Promotion of European co-operation in quality assurance with a view to developing comparable criteria and methodologies

This chapter takes the adoption of the two-cycle degree structure, as one of the core items of the Bologna Declaration, as its main point of departure. It discusses subsequently how this new degree structure was introduced in the context of higher education in Norway. We also attend to several of the other items on the Bologna agenda that can be retrieved from the reform processes currently taking place in Norwegian higher education. This allows us to discuss the extent to which the reform of Norwegian higher education should be interpreted as a response to the developments in European higher education as embodied in the Bologna Declaration.

A key concept for discussing the use of the Bologna Process in national reforms is *translation*. This concept, borrowed from organisational theory and science studies, addresses the way in which ideas are transformed as they travel, rather than being *diffused*, because people translate them according to their own frame of reference. Our discussion focuses on two different, yet interconnected arenas of translation. The main part of our analysis discusses the translation of the items of the Bologna Declaration, especially the drive to create a converging degree structure in Europe, and how these ideas were picked up and processed in the Norwegian *policy context.* Thus, the focus is on the role of the 'European' ideas in national public reform efforts in the higher education sector. Special attention will be given to how these ideas were moulded and shaped by the local policy process, and how they were converted into tangible policy measures. We look into the normative and cognitive foundations of this translation process by analysing the underlying arguments and rationales. Furthermore, the analysis takes us to the *arena of public debate* on higher education as contextualised by the national reform processes referred to earlier. We will discuss how the core ideas of the national reform were perceived

and received at an ideological level, and whether the ideas embodied in the Bologna Process featured in the public debate. We look at the kinds of arguments that were put forward in the discussions about Norwegian higher education and the recent comprehensive reform in the sector, i.e. the *Quality Reform*. As such we look for a possible 'public translation' of the ideas of the Bologna Process. As an introduction to the discussion we outline the main aspects of the 'peripheral' situation of Norwegian higher education. But first we give a brief outline of the analytical perspective used in this chapter.

2. DOMESTIC POLICY DECISIONS AND INTERNATIONAL IMPACT: AN ANALYTICAL PERSPECTIVE

National government reform can be seen and analysed as a decision-making process, where the decisions consist of a confluence of policy problems, solutions, actors and choice opportunities (Lægreid and Roness 1999). The 'garbage can perspective' on decision making (March and Olsen 1976) allows us to untangle a decision and break it into different streams: problems, solutions, actors and decision-making opportunities. When these streams meet, a choice has been made. The basic idea in the garbage can perspective is that choices are not necessarily made in the 'normal' sequel, rather choice opportunities seek out problems, problems seek out situations where they can be aired, and solutions seek out issues to which they can be an answer (Cohen, March and Olsen 1972).

In this chapter we take a look at national higher education reform and discuss how international trends have impacted on the policy process. We could expect international developments to impact on the 'streams' that such reform consists of. In the study of policy change and changes in organisa-tional forms and structures there is growing attention paid to the role of diffusion in such change processes, including the spreading of policies and organisational structures that takes place among countries. Such impacts have been referred to as policy transfer, copying, imitation, emulation and diffusion (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000; Böllhoff 2002). However, borrowing from science studies, in particular Latour (1987) and Callon (1986), and the study of public reforms and organisational change (Aberbach and Christensen 2003; Czarniawska and Sevon 1996; Czarniawska and Joerges 1998; Olsen and Peters 1996), the distinction we make in this chapter between diffusion and translation refers to the essential characteristics of the way that inter-national trends travel across systems and how they are *used* in a national setting. In the case of diffusion, what is imported remains unchanged. The imported policy or structures will retain their essential features even when adopted in a new

system or context. From this perspective we would expect the original definition of problems and solutions in a policy area and the links between them to remain the same. On the other hand, translation denotes a process where policies and structures are affected by the road upon which they travel from one context to another. The definition of problems or solutions may change, or solutions become linked to other problems, and in this sense a transformation has occurred. In the study of Europeanisation processes in areas other than higher education it has been noted that diffusion is not necessarily the mechanism involved. Rather, external changes are interpreted and responded to through existing institutional frameworks:

> In sum, European-level developments do not dictate specific forms of institutional adaptation but leave considerable discretion to domestic actors and institutions. There are significant impacts, yet the actual ability of the European level to penetrate domestic institutions is not perfect, universal or constant (Olsen 2002, p. 936).

Consequently, we could argue that whether the ideas, policy problems and solutions that are represented by the Bologna Process are subject to either diffusion or translation is largely dependant on the particular context of the national higher education system.

3. THE 'PERIPHERAL' CONTEXT OF NORWEGIAN HIGHER EDUCATION

One of the particular features of the context of Norwegian higher education is its peripheral position. There are several aspects to this periphery. Despite the growing attention paid to globalisation, and despite physical distances becoming ever shorter through modern means of trans-portation and communication, geographical location is still a major defining characteristic of a nation-state. The territorial position of Norway on the northern periphery of Europe is a crucial dimension of the particular structures that constitute the backbone of the Norwegian economy, including access to and use of the natural resources of the North Sea, i.e. oil and fish.

Politically, the peripheral status of Norway is particularly evident in that it is not a member of the European Union; having twice rejected membership by national referendum (1972 and 1994), its political peripheral position is 'self-inflicted' from the perspective of the lack of political integration into Europe. However, although not a member of the European Union, Norway is, through the European Economic Area (EEA) agreement, a part of the European internal market. Norway also participates fully in the Socrates and Leonardo programmes, and in the

EU's Framework Programmes for research and technology. The participation in EU research co-operation programmes has not been a controversial issue, and the Norwegian contribution to them has come to be substantial. The 'Europeanisation' of Norwegian knowledge policy has until recently been most noticeable in the area of national research policy. The internationalisation of research has meant that in research and development (R&D) funding Norwegian organisations do not merely fund domestic research, but also send their funds abroad for international research co-operation. There has also been a noticeable internationalisation of policy in the sense that Norwegian Ministries have increased their level of funding for international research co-operation (Wendt 2003). Moreover, there has been a shift towards the EU in research funding from the national govern-ment, both directly in the state budgets and also in the budget of the Research Council of Norway. Likewise, both in terms of collaboration and international co-authorship, at the practical research level there are definite signs of Europeanisation in Norwegian research (Trondal and Smeby 2001).

Norway has well-established traditions of sending students abroad. In the 1950s about 30 percent of the student body studied abroad, largely as a result of a lack of national capacity in Norwegian higher education. Today, the relative share is not that high (between 7 and 10 percent), but in absolute terms the number of students studying abroad is considerable (about 15,000 in 2002/2003). This aspect of higher education has not mirrored the unequivocal development towards Europeanisation that appears to have occurred in research collaboration. In terms of geographical destinations, Norwegian students going abroad have increasingly turned towards Anglo-phone countries (Great Britain in particular, and in recent years Australia) especially at the expense of the rest of Western Europe and German language areas (Wiers-Jenssen 2003, pp. 17-22).

From an international perspective Norway does not loom large in terms of the absolute size of its research and higher education endeavours. Norway's approach to internationalisation is thus framed in its position at the geographical periphery of Europe, and to some extent in the global 'knowledge periphery'. Clearly, emphasis on internationalisation as the main strategy for a small country has been amply emphasised in recent years in the national policy for research and higher education.

One aspect of Norway's geographical position is its set of neighbour countries, with whom ties are not merely geographical but also cultural and political. Norway has a long shared history with the group of Nordic countries. Across Europe there are a number of government-supported, regional, cross-border co-operation programmes in higher education, and the Nordic co-operation agreement in higher education is one of the most

far-reaching in Europe. The vision of a common Nordic educational market was launched in 1988, long before the open European Higher Education Area was even conceived. The Nordic dimension includes an agreement on the recognition of qualifications concerning higher education, the Nordic mobility programme and an agreement on admission to higher education within the Nordic region. For Norway the Nordic dimension is not only part of a policy of internationalisation of higher education but also an element for strength-ening the joint Nordic dimension in Nordic societies in several areas. It should also be noted that Nordic co-operation in higher education is far less based on structural homogenisation, e.g. harmonisation of grade structures, than are the ambitions of the Bologna Process (Maassen, Uppstrøm 2004, p. 29). The main arguments for Nordic co-operation are, first of all, the historical and cultural ties between the Scandinavian countries. In Norway, Sweden and Denmark, the Nordic language area is seen as a natural stimula-tor for co-operation, however, in the Finnish language area and Iceland language is something of a barrier to co-operation. The Nordic languages create a natural 'educational community' within the Scandinavian countries where there have also been similar approaches to higher education policy—an emphasis on equal opportunity access and no student fees (Sivertsen and Smeby 2001, pp. 26-27). However, Nordic co-operation in general is influenced by the developments in European integration, and in practice it has become more difficult to point to Nordic co-operation as an independent alternative between Europe and the nation state (Olsen and Sverdrup 1998, p. 23). In the area of higher education Norway's position as a non-member of the EU has also most likely served to underline the importance of Nordic co-operation to a stronger degree than in other Nordic countries that are EU members.

4. TRANSLATING BOLOGNA IN THE NATIONAL POLICY ARENA

4.1 The Quality Reform

In many respects the Bologna Process runs parallel to the current national reform process in Norwegian higher education. The work of the govern-ment's Mjøs Commission paved the way for this reform; the Mjøs Commission began its work in 1998 and presented its report in 2000: *Freedom with Responsibility—On higher education and research in Norway* (NOU 2000). The Commission's work was followed up in the government White Paper on Higher Education, submitted on 9 March 2001: *Do your duty—Demand your rights* (KUF 2001). The reform based

on the White Paper is referred to as the *Quality Reform*. One of the main policy visions included in the reform is the internationalisation of Norwegian higher education. Consequently, one of the projects in the preparation for the implementation of the *Quality Reform* is specifically directed at *internationalisation.* As indicated above, in national research policy internationalisation has been one of the core issues for several years, and the Research Council of Norway has played a key role in promoting international research co-operation (RCN 2000, Simmonds *et al.* 2001). This was emphasised in the latest White Paper on Research: *Research at the Beginning of a New Era (*KUF 1999), and will be a core aspect of the White Paper on Research that is being prepared for 2005.

Internationalisation was incorporated into higher education policy documents in the 1980s and 1990s, but primarily with reference to student mobility. For instance, in the 1980s the government made changes in the student support systems that had a major impact on the mobility patterns of Norwegian students taking their full degrees abroad. The government White Paper from 1991 dealt more broadly with internationalisation, while at the same time mainly focussing on student mobility (KUF 1991). The intro-duction of the *Quality Reform* pushed the issue of internationalisation to the forefront of the national higher education policy agenda for the first time, extensively underlining the international dimension of research, teaching and learning.

The *Quality Reform* is comprehensive in the sense that it affects major aspects of higher education institutions (HEI), national agencies in higher education and the student body. The reform initiatives pertain to the status of institutions and institutional funding models, institutional governance, modes of teaching and learning, student support, as well as degree structure. The main changes introduced by the reform are:

- Change in governance at the institutional level.
- Increased institutional autonomy.
- New funding formula for institutions.
- Establishment of The Norwegian Agency for Quality Assurance in Education (NOKUT).
- New degree structure.
- New forms of student guidance, evaluation and assessment.
- New financial support to students.
- Internationalisation.

Below we pick out the items on this list of changes that are also on the Bologna agenda in order to discuss the potential impact of this process on the definitions of solutions and problems in the national reform process.

4.2 Reforming degrees—resolving domestic problems or making Norwegian higher education compatible with Europe?

The *Quality Reform* introduced a new degree structure to replace the former system, which comprised of three types of degree encompassing 90 different degree titles and vocational qualifications. The universities offered degrees based on two cycles, four years of study for the first and two for the second cycle, and professional degrees (ranging from four to six years). Colleges primarily offered three-year professional degrees, although the teacher training degree entailed four years of study. In addition to this it is important to note that the *Cand. Mag* first cycle degree, which had liberal rules regarding the recognition of study credits, was eventually offered as a national first cycle degree that could be awarded by both universities and colleges.

The model for the new degree structure is the Bachelor's Degree (3 years), the Master's Degree (2 years) and the Ph.D. (3 years). In a few subject areas students will enroll for a five-year integrated Master's degree course. Medicine, Veterinary Science, Psychology and Theology are exempted from this new structure. These changes form the main element in the general reform of study that was proposed as part of the *Quality Reform* with the introduction of Bachelor and Master degrees for most fields of study in both universities and colleges.

The aim of the reform was primarily to improve the quality and efficiency of university and college studies. Some elements of the reform were inspired by the Anglo-American tradition in their emphasis on student-centred learning, closer supervision and follow-up in the course of studies, thereby underlining the responsibilities of the universities towards their students (cf. Aamodt 2003). Quality of higher education, as well as the issue of efficiency constituted the main foci of the *Quality Reform*. The nominal duration of studies was excessive, and what is more, in practice students took even longer to complete their studies. Initially, the Ministry of Education perceived the former six-year degree structure (4 + 2) as rather costly for Norwegian society; the change towards a Bachelor/Master degree structure implied a reduction of one whole year in the total study time, which was expected to reduce government spending considerably. In the White Paper that introduced the reform, the Ministry of Education argued, amongst other things, that one factor in favour of changing degree structures was a more cost-

effective use of public resources. Problems of low efficiency among Norwegian students also led to a relatively high average age for students at graduation. By changing the degree structure and establishing a closer link between teachers and students (through tutoring, team-work, follow-up), it was argued that the issues of quality and efficiency would follow hand-in-hand (KUF 2001, p. 34).

In addition to the issue of study efficiency, the first cycle degree did not have a strong position in the labour market. If the first degree had been an effective ticket with which to enter the labour market, the share of students pursuing the second degree would have been significantly lower. Further-more, the first degree lacked a distinct profile. National regulation provided ample room for students to freely choose among academic study courses that could be included in the first degree. However, the freedom of students to choose caused delays in the progression of study. During the 1990s, several processes at the institutional level attended to the idea of reforming the first degree, but the reform process only gained momentum when the issue was included on the main agenda of the national reform effort and the work of the government commission.

The modern history of the degree reform in Norwegian higher education dates back to the 1960s. A higher education commission (The Ottosen Commission) proposed the shortening of the university degree structure in the latter half of the 1960s. The proposal was based on a 2+2+2 model. Opposition to reforming the university degree structure was massive and the proposal was killed-off with the issue remaining a political 'hot potato' in the years that followed. Moreover, the introduction of a binary system in the 1960s made it possible to cater for the need for shorter and vocationally-oriented studies by allowing the college sector to offer such studies without changing the degree structure for the universities.

In previous Norwegian higher education reforms, especially in the 1980s, features of the international input to the national reforms can clearly be detected in the treatment of the degree structure. An objective set in the 1988 government Green Paper on Higher Education (the Hernes Commission) and its proposed change of the degree structure nation-wide was to achieve flexibility between types of educational institutions and "a system that at the same time works well internationally" (NOU 1988, p. 92.). Yet the reform that followed the Hernes Commission in the 1980s did not pursue any comprehensive changes in the degree structure. The need to shorten the studies for academic degrees was an issue in most higher education systems, particularly in the transition to mass higher education systems, and in this respect Norwegian higher education was no exception. The theme had also been pursued before as a common international item on the

agenda, especially by the national and thematic reviews of the OECD. In the Norwegian context, adjustments had been made to the degree system in the years before the advent of the *Quality Reform*, in particular, the duration of study cycles for professional degrees offered by the college sector was reduced. The introduction of new doctoral degrees and the organisation of doctoral education also placed pressure on the university sector to reduce the time-to-degree for the traditional second degrees and to improve efficiency. By the time the Mjøs Commission commenced its work in the late 1990s the degree system in Norwegian higher education was more than ready for a significant make-over.

The question of whether this aspect of the reform should be seen as the Norwegian way of implementing the Bologna Process or not, is not straight-forward. The theme of converging degree structures internationally may have played a significant role in the current reform. In the Mjøs Commission the issue of degree reform was given an 'international treatment', especially in comparing the Norwegian degree structures with the situation in other countries. The Commission, for instance, based its work on a separate comparative report that it had commissioned (Dybesland 2000). However, it also could be argued that the Bachelor/Master degree structure has been introduced as a means of solving other, more 'domestic' problems with respect to the former diversified degree structure.

In the original report from the Mjøs Commission, the primary rationale for proposing to change the degree structure was the lack of national flexibility that the old conglomerate degree structure entailed. There is ample reference to the Bologna Process when the issue of degree structure reform is being discussed, but based on international comparisons the Commission concluded that Norwegian higher education was better off than many other European countries when it comes to international compatibility. The major deviance in the former degree structure was the lengthy higher degree course offered by universities, as well as the limited freedom of students to choose between study programmes and institutions during their studies (KUF 2001). If we compare this menu of problems to those stated in the Bologna Declaration, the problem definition of the Norwegian degree reform is not parallel to the Bologna Declaration in its emphasis: degree reform was not primarily justified on the basis of making the Norwegian system of degrees "easily readable and comparable" *to Europe*. Also the text of the Bologna Declaration makes degree reform an issue of promoting employability and the competitiveness of the European system of higher education. This emphasis is not retrieved in the original policy documents of the Norwegian reform.

Looking back at the history of the reforms in this particular national context, the slowly emerging nature of the seemingly abrupt reforms is

clearly visible. Second and even third attempts at launching both grading system reform and degree reform have had international reference points. In this respect Bologna did certainly not hit Norwegian higher education as a bolt from the blue.

Yet, one should not underestimate the role that Bologna has had both as a symbol and as menu of solutions. First, it represented an external reference point with an authoritative status that differed from any general reference to trends or status in other systems; and it represented a specific political development that the higher education community and higher education policy makers were aware of. Thus, it became a tangible external reference point in the area of study reforms that earlier commissions and policy makers had not had. After all, the Bologna Declaration had a clear official position in the Norwegian higher education policy community. Bologna also served to simplify the choice. When one takes the range of possible degree structures into account, without Bologna there would have been a practically indefinite list of alternative degree structures that might have had to be considered in a different way. However, a point of interest is the fact that while it was the 3+2+3 model that was defined as the Bologna model, the text of the Declaration equivocates in its promotion of that particular model. While the information leaflets from the Ministry specifically state that the 3+2+3 year degree structure is "adopted from the Bologna process" (UFD 2003, p. 5), nowhere in the Bologna documents is such a narrow requirement actually established.

One could argue that such a reference had more political clout nationally because at the end of the 1990s and the beginning of the twenty-first century Norway had drawn much closer to the European continent by integrating into Europe through the EEA—by 2000 the nation had become accustomed to 'bending the bananas the European way'. As such, one could argue that the international and in particular European references would carry more weight than in previous reform periods. On the other hand, the political effect of referring to international trends is not necessarily beyond dispute; 'becoming like the others' may not be attractive in certain domestic settings, it could be seen as an affront to national distinctiveness and consequently mobilize local resistance, as we will later discuss.

The Bologna Process cannot be seen as solely setting the agenda with respect to degree reform. As already indicated, the evolution of the national system over time necessitated a certain direction in the changes. National priorities seem to have been a strong driving force behind the introduction of the Bachelor/Master degree structure. The lack of strong opposition to the implementation of this model should not be seen as a consequence of the weight of European prescriptions in Norwegian higher education. Local conditions, such as the fact that the college

sector degree configuration already fitted the new structure, favoured the implementation of the reform; also, it was prepared in such a way that key actors became a party to it, thus securing a sufficient amount of commitment to push it through to implementation.

Regardless of the driving-forces behind the introduction of the new degree structure or the introduction of an accreditation system in Norwegian higher education, the *result* is obvious. Through these reforms Norwegian higher education has become much more internationally transparent. Furthermore, what we have seen is that the Bologna Process probably gained importance as an element in the degree reform *with hindsight.* National policy makers have made ample reference to Norway's taking the lead in 'implementing Bologna' in national and international fora, creating political capital internationally.

4.3 Bologna's impact on student evaluation and assessment

With the implementation of the *Quality Reform*, the academic performance of students will be assessed both through final examinations, as well as through various term assignments. A new standardised grading system has been introduced, with a descending scale with passes from A to E and F for fail. Prior to the *Quality Reform*, Norwegian universities and colleges practised a variety of grading scales even within the limits of a single institution. The most commonly used scale was numerical, ranging from 1 to 4 with one or two digits, i.e. a scale that in principle made it possible to apply a minimum of 40 different grades. There was very little uniformity in how this seemingly extraordinarily precise grading scale was understood and used in different study programmes.

The present credit system of 20 credits per year has been replaced by a system in which a full academic year is equivalent to 60 course credits. The new grading scale and course credit system are both equivalent to those of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS). The academic courses will now be structured to a much greater extent than previously. There will be regular guidance and monitoring of each student. An Individual Study Plan containing both the student's and the institution's mutual commitments will be signed by both parties. This is to ensure that the student receives adequate guidance, as well as to provide the institution with an overview to ensure the proper use of resources. Thus, the *Quality Reform* has introduced significant changes in the grading and credit systems, a change unparalleled in the history of Norwegian higher educational reform.

Changing the grading system had been on the policy agenda in previous reform efforts and the impact of international experience could

also be traced in earlier policy papers. For instance, in 1988 the Hernes Commission suggested a 6-point grading scale with reference to both the US system and also to work done in the European Community context to co-ordinate the grading scale (NOU 1988). Evidently, international references and solution-seeking had already had an impact on the national reform agenda. However, these proposals were rejected. In the *Quality Reform* the Bologna Process provided a solution to both the problems of the quality of teaching and learning and also to what was perceived as unnecessarily fine grading of student assessments. A need to be understood internationally was seen as a core aspect of the problem of the traditional grading scale. This invites two speculative questions. First, would the A to F grading scale have been the preferred solution if no link had been made to the Bologna Process? Second, would the proposal to introduce the A to F scale have met with such surprisingly scant opposition without the 'backing' of the Bologna Process? The answer to the first question is probably no. The issue of the lack of opposition must in all likelihood be sought not so much in the legitimising power of reference to the Bologna Process, as in the 'grand scale' of the reform. One could speculate on the kind of counter arguments and resistance that such a change might have mobilized if these changes had been presented to the higher education community as a single event. Clearly, the grading scale change and ECTS were part of a large package and other aspects received the bulk of attention in the responses to and discussions of the *Quality Reform*.

One area where the convergence of the Norwegian policy with European developments is easily detectable is that of the use of ECTS. All HEI are expected to actively use ECTS to reduce the barriers to student mobility. Along with the introduction of the Bachelor/Master degree structure, it will be easier for the institutions to use this system because all the study programmes will have been assessed according to a credit point standard. Also, in order to simplify and make qualifications more transparent for foreign higher education institutions and employers, the Ministry decided that all higher education institutions should issue a *Diploma Supplement* as a part of the standard diploma. The Supplement is in English and describes the student's individual study programme.

With respect to changes in student assessment and evaluation, it is important to look at the *Quality Reform* as a choice opportunity where national policy makers were able to toss in a number of the items from the Bologna agenda to mingle with the other substantial policy issues that were being processed. This is one part of the *Quality Reform* where the element of diffusion of the Bologna Process in terms of both problems and solutions is clearly detectable. The grading system and the diploma supplement as a requirement are examples of the direct import of the 'Bologna format'.

4.4 Organising quality—the establishment of a National Agency

NOKUT was established on 1 January 2003. The agency's role is to be an independent state body monitoring the quality of Norway's higher education institutions by means of accreditation and evaluation. NOKUT's accredita-tion and evaluation processes are also designed to support the institutions in their own quality assurance and development. The terms of reference of NOKUT include assessing the quality assurance systems of HEI, and the accreditation of private institutions, in addition to institutions asking for a change of status (from *university college* to *university*). Accreditation of academic courses, when such accreditation is not within the authority of the individual institution, is also a part of NOKUT's responsibilities, as well as monitoring and reviewing accreditation already granted. NOKUT has also been granted a significant international role with respect to assessing the overall quality of Norwegian higher education in an international context, and in the recognition of foreign education/diplomas (UFD 2003).

The establishment of both a new accreditation system in Norway and a new independent evaluation agency for higher education (NOKUT) can only partly be seen as a direct response to the Bologna Process. Several domestic issues are also linked to it. Arguments presented by the Mjøs Commission in favour of establishing a system of accreditation were related to an on-going process of 'academic drift' in Norway, with several of the state university colleges intending to become universities. The Mjøs Commission established the criteria for obtaining this status (a minimum of five Master's degree study programmes and four doctoral education programmes), and suggested that the responsibility for checking the criteria should be given to an independent body (NOU 2000). The fact that institutional accreditation is given a very prominent place in the accreditation system, contrary to the more common system of evaluating study programmes in Europe, suggests that national policy issues have influenced the process quite strongly (Stensaker 2003). However, accreditation and quality assurance as an organised activity in higher education is clearly an area where international trends in general have been important, and where Norway on several occasions has been seen as a latecomer both at an institutional and national level (cf. Gornitzka 2003). This illustrates the complexity involved in singling out different sources of international impact on domestic developments and assessing the relative weight that they carry. In the area of quality assurance such effects are especially hard to isolate given the constant process of translation that occurs at a number of international locations. The diffusion and translation of different practices and organisational

models for national quality assurance systems contain not only European, but also American ideas and experiences.

5. TRANSLATING BOLOGNA IN THE PUBLIC DEBATE ON HIGHER EDUCATION?

In recent public debates on the reform of higher education, which have primarily focused on the 'marketisation' of universities, a typical headline might be 'Freedom to be run by market forces' (Hansen and Midré 2000). This debate gained even more momentum in 2003 when another government commission proposed a change in the legal status of universities and colleges (NOU 2003). The discussion of the element of European con-vergence in the reforms—the introduction of the new degree structure, the new grading scale and ECTS—was eclipsed in the public debates that the Mjøs Commission's report and the subsequent White Paper aroused. It became a fundamental debate over the idea of the university and the possible normative threat that the reforms represented. The tone of the debate was set by a critical essay included as an appendix to the Mjøs Commission's report. This declared that the Mjøs Commission's proposal was an 'Atlantic' affront to the specific and fundamental values of Norwegian higher education based on the German von Humboldt's traditions (Slagstad 2000). Several contributions to the debate spoke in defense of traditional academic values and against submission to market forces. This is not to say that international debates and trends on higher education did not feature as items in the debate. The push for accountability, for performance-based funding and value for money were recognised as a part of international trends in the discussion, although the most prominent and tangible features of the Bologna Process were not singled out as such in the discourse. The debate triggered by the Mjøs Commission concerned the values and norms of the university that were seen by the academic community as being under pressure. The specifics of the degree reform, ECTS, the grading scale and the 3 + 2 structure, were not at the heart of the discussion. The extent to which they featured as elements was in line with a general discussion on the normative luggage carried by the reform. The major dispute concerning degree reform revolved more around the second degree as an example of how the pressure for study efficiency would be detrimental to the *bildung* aspect of a university education in the second cycle. There was strong opposition to the sacrifice of the country-specific traits of the university second degree, presented as "Norway's gift to the academic world" (Forr 2000), on the altar of international compatibility (Slagstad 2000, pp. 474-475). But as we have seen, the most significant changes actually concerned the first degree, i.e. the former first degree awarded by Norwegian universities

was reduced from 4 to 3 years with the introduction of the Bachelor/Master system.

Reform was thus perceived and discussed in terms of which image of the university was embodied in the reform package. The public discussion, particularly as related the Mjøs Commission's green paper, was in principle a discussion of the ideology of higher education. Its major issues related to the Commission's proposal for changes in the governance structure of universities, the formal status of universities and changes in the funding system. Specific reference was made to the OECD and its review of tertiary education (OECD 1998). In the debate, reform proposals in the Green Paper preparing the *Quality Reform* were criticised for uncritically importing an international reform ideology that sees universities as service companies and society as a market place (Olsen 2000, pp. 240-241). How the Bologna Process was perceived in terms of the underlying values attached to higher education is far less clear, however, and in this respect it was not directly translated in the public debate on higher education.

In the public debate the political leadership of the Ministry promoted the notion of the *Quality Reform* being firmly rooted in the academic tradition of continental Europe. The Minister publicly defended the strong emphasis on the need to internationalise higher education and contribute to the efforts to establish a European Higher Education Area, inviting higher education on "a voyage through a Europe of Knowledge" (Giske 2001).

In order to discuss the normative impact of the Bologna process on a national system one has to have some kind of grip on the discourse promoted by the Bologna Process. What fundamental values are promoted in the Bologna Declaration and in the ensuing work? One of the main difficulties here is that the "meaning" of the Bologna Process is not fixed and is subject to continuous definition and redefinition. As such, the Bologna Declaration is a text in need of decoding (Neave 2003). This is a task that lies beyond the scope of this chapter. A general observation might be that the market discourse is probably more pronounced in the framework of the Europeanisation of research than with respect to the educational function of universities. Furthermore, the General Agreement on Trade and Services (GATS) discussion carries a stronger flavour of commodification and commercialisation of higher education. This implies that the perceived challenge of the developments in the GATS/WTO negotiations is more readily seen in the pro-market discourse than in the implementation of the Bologna Declaration. It has been argued that the European Ministers of Education, by signing the Declaration, underlined higher education as a public good and accepted the public responsibility towards higher education (cf. e.g. Nyborg 2003). The Prague Communiqué also delivered the political message that

higher education should be seen as a public good. In this respect the Bologna Process should not be interpreted as promoting the values of commodification and marketisation of higher education. On the other hand, as mentioned earlier in this chapter, the text of the Declaration makes the connection between labour market exigencies and a new architecture for higher education in its underlying rationale. Also, the Prague Communiqué underlines that European co-operation needs to deal with the international competitiveness of European higher education but without addressing how this emphasis is made compatible with higher education as a public good (Hackl 2001).

6. DIFFUSION, TRANSLATION AND USE OF BOLOGNA—INTERPRETING THE NORWEGIAN EXPERIENCE

Through the changes introduced in the *Quality Reform*, the introduction of the Bachelor/Master degree structure, the use of ECTS and of a new standardised grading system, and the establishment of NOKUT, the Norwegian government has implemented most of the provisions of the Bologna Declaration (Eurydice 2003). Norway has in this respect reached further than most other European countries in implementing Bologna. If there is a general consensus that the Bologna Process entailed the intro-duction of a Bachelor/Master degree structure, then we might conclude that a process of isomorphism has taken place.

Thus in the current implementation of the *Quality Reform* the Bologna Process has been funnelled into universities and colleges. Yet, we argue that this is not a case of clear and simple domestic implementation of a European commitment.

First, we should be aware that national reform had already been scheduled before the Bologna Declaration was signed. The domestic reform process thus provided a choice opportunity that made it possible to incorporate the international trends into a national change process—in this respect it caused Norway to shift from being a 'reluctant reformer' to a 'forerunner' (Stensaker 2004). However, having this kind of decision-making opportunity is not something that can be easily reproduced in other systems. Second, we argue that the translation process in the policy arena clearly is characterised by national policy makers using the European agenda as a *menu of solutions* for *domestic problems*. This seems particularly to be the case with respect to the reform of the degree structure. In the explanation to the Bologna Declaration it is stated that the declaration "reflects a search for a common European answer to common European problems" (p. 3). In the context of the Norwegian degree reform, we have argued that domestic problems have been linked

to a European solution. With respect to other items on the Bologna agenda, especially the introduction of ECTS and the A to F grading system, the process resembles more what we would expect from a diffusion model where both problems and solutions are diffused from the European to the national level.

Analysing such processes easily ends up in discussions of contra factual hypothesis. As a research strategy that is seldom advisable, but as an analytical heuristic it can be useful. So if we ask: Would the current *Quality Reform* have looked the same if there had been no Bologna reform and 30 Ministers of Education had not signed such a declaration? In the particular case discussed in this chapter, it can be argued that the degree reform would have been introduced, but perhaps not as quickly and with greater controversy. However, the A to F grading scale would most likely not have been introduced.

With respect to higher education, the most specific items on the Bologna agenda—degrees, ECTS, the comparable grading system and comparable criteria and methodologies in quality assurance—are recognisable in the Norwegian reform. However, one can also discern the more diffuse impact of European developments and general international trends impacting on the higher education policy discourse domestically: the import of perceptions about the roles of universities and colleges, the underlying values that are promoted, commodification of higher education, the import of new public management inspired organisational principles into higher education, and the introduction of market discourse in higher education. The task of tracking the diffusion and translation of such a discourse is not easy, nor manageable within the frame of this chapter. A general observation is that the Bologna Process as a discussion space and as a setter of agendas is also important in the Norwegian domestic higher education policy arena. In the general debate Bologna has not been targeted as the main nesting place of an ideology that promotes the marketisation of higher education.

What kind of change does the impact of the Bologna Process represent? In part, there have been some significant structural changes, and a change in terminology. Whether there are significant normative changes in the reform of Norwegian higher education that are attributable to the impact of Bologna is more doubtful. The debate that the *Quality Reform* aroused was in its essence a normative debate that clearly took seriously the discussion of the role of higher education and the underlying value it represents, but the critique naturally targeted the national commission and the policy text of its report.

Is Bologna the explanation for national degree reforms? The Bologna Process is far from being the driving force of the internal process of reform. The situational contingency that Bologna and the national reform processes represent, the random or accidental combination of opportunity and international events, does play a role in explaining why

Norway introduced this particular degree reform. Yet, the juxtaposition of opportunity (national reform) with problems (national) and solution (international) provided by the Norwegian signature to the Bologna Declaration probably should not be interpreted as mere coincidence. The actors involved used the reference to the Bologna Process to some extent; in other words, the combination should not in itself be interpreted as a temporal accident, but rather as attempts to add legitimacy by reference to (1) trends outside the national system; (2) the obligatory aspect of the Norwegian signature. The Bologna Process represents more than 'international trends' in higher education; it is a formally acknowledged political commitment. The reference to it served as political clout when the reform was adopted.

Furthermore, the Bologna Process offered a major international definition of what constitutes an appropriate degree structure for a national higher education system that aspires to strong international connections. Periphera-lity and strong ideological support of internationalisation as a policy objective in the *Quality Reform* served to increase the political efficiency of Bologna and general international references. However, we have also seen in the public debate on the *Quality Reform* that referring to the need to adopt international trends is not necessarily a forceful argument when the perception is that national and academic traditions are threatened by an influx of foreign trends. It would not be a gross overstatement to indicate that colleges and universities, as well as individual academics see themselves as implementing a national reform rather than as directly adjusting to European developments. If we look at a national reform as the locus of translation in this case, it is fair to say that the layers through which Bologna has reached the institutions make the implementation setting domestically-orientated. This influences the actors' perception of what they are doing within universities and colleges.

Why would Norway's experiences in this matter be of any relevance to anyone beyond its particular national setting? As indicated above, Norway is cited as one of the top three countries in Europe in terms of its adoption of the provisions of the Bologna Declaration (Eurydice 2003). As a result of European level eagerness in monitoring and comparing developments, Norway has been officially recognised as having implemented Bologna. Domestically, this has also been noted. If the Norwegian case has a lesson to offer, then it must be that understanding the dynamics of the Bologna Process within a national higher education system is impossible without considering the local circumstances that translate the Bologna 'menu' and agenda into domestic change. The circumstances in this case are marked by the following characteristics. First, there was a strong political emphasis on internationalisation as a

goal in itself, and this ambition was largely shared by the national higher education community. This we might argue made national policy makers and a small higher education system on the Northern periphery of Europe open and attentive to the Bologna Process. Also, the political peripheral position of Norway as a non-member of the EU might have made Norway's attention to the Bologna Process more pronounced—Norway could participate and excel in this arena without being encumbered by the lack of membership status. Second, the decision opportunity was provided by the broad general national reform process that ran parallel to the Bologna Process. In other words, while ministers were signing the Bologna Declaration the national Norwegian Commission on Higher Education was writing a Green Paper that, with some modifications, became the White Paper of 2000/2001. So the events in the European arena contributed to setting the national agenda. They provided one menu of solutions to the concurring domestic problems and challenges in higher education.

7. CONCLUSIONS

The case of the Norwegian Quality Reform and the Bologna Process shows some of the ways in which international processes of policy co-operation can impact on a national reform process. The Bologna Process can be seen in this particular instance as having penetrated the domestic level and produced significant changes. We have discussed the possible mechanisms by which this penetration occurred. The case illustrates how both policy problems and solutions can be *diffused* from the international arena to the domestic level, as seen when the Bologna Declaration, agenda and process, diffused into Norwegian higher education in the remodelling of the grading system and introduction of ECTS. However, diffusion is not the most dominant aspect of the linkage between the international arena and domestic policy change—our case underlines that this link involves the *translation* of internationally defined solutions as they are coupled to domestic problems. This we see especially with regard to degree reform and with respect to the establishment of a National Quality Assurance Agency. The Bologna Process and Declaration served as a menu of solutions to domestic problems in higher education. Finally the use of Bologna in this particular case is not merely a question of how international processes can make an imprint on definitions of problems and solutions in national policy processes but also how international processes can enhance the political clout of national reform proposals. The reference to the Bologna Process has been used as political leverage in a national reform process. On the other hand, this case also demonstrates the difficult task of

isolating the effects of a specific international process. The Bologna Process itself is not without ambiguities, especially in terms of its normative and ideological flavour, and is also itself subject to several sources of influence and definition. This chapter has identified some of the elements that characterise the use and translation of Bologna in a specific national and peripheral context—it illustrates how the fate of the texts and ideas of the Bologna Process are in the hands of its later users, as with other texts and objects that travel across different contexts.

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