

THE BOLOGNA PROCESS: AN INTERGOVERNMENTAL
POLICY PERSPECTIVE

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INTRODUCTION

In this and the following chapter the empirical complexity of the attempts to integrate Europe as applied to the university sector, and very particularly the Bologna and Lisbon processes, will be discussed. Both chapters show that to study any single process of European integration in isolation is problematic. Under some conditions, as both Bologna and Lisbon demonstrate, reform processes interact and intertwine, if not integrate, as several partially interconnected developments intersect, cross and meld.

An important foundation stone in the Bologna process can be traced back to 1988, when university leaders of Europe came together in Bologna to sign the Magna Charta Universitatum. This declaration extolled certain fundamental values of the University: academic freedom, the freedom to teach and learn, and with it, university autonomy. Ten years later (May 1998) the 800th anniversary of the Sorbonne was celebrated in Paris, during which occasion the British, French, German, and Italian Ministers responsible for higher education signed a joint declaration (the Sorbonne Declaration) aimed at harmonizing the structure of higher education in the four countries. One year later (June 1999) Ministers of Higher Education of no fewer than 29 European countries signed the so-called Bologna Declaration. Given that at that time only 15 member states made up the European Union, this was an amazing feat of intergovernmental action and commitment to a joint interest, namely the creation of an open European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

The Bologna Declaration laid out policies and joint measures for establishing the EHEA. It included a schedule for achieving the joint objectives thus agreed upon, and a commitment by the Ministers of the countries involved to meet every other year for discussing and assessing progress. The pursuit of the joint policies and measures is commonly referred to as the Bologna process.

The Bologna process has been one of the most studied, if not *the* most studied European integration attempt with respect to the University.¹²⁰ However, such studies usually treat the University as an isolated phenomenon – isolated from the dynamics

¹²⁰ For an overview of various aspects of the Bologna process, see, for example, Hackl (2001), Neave (2003) and Witte (2006: 123–148). See Corbett (2005), Neave (2003), and Wit and Verhoeven (2001) for analyses of the development of a European-level higher education policy.

of science and research policies at the national and European level, cut off from the overall processes of European integration, and in many cases divorced from its specific institutional history.

Given the abundance of studies available we will not present an overview of the nature of the Bologna process in this chapter. Instead we will discuss its changing agenda. First we will reflect upon the way in which the Bologna process has shifted gradually from a project with an agenda dominated by a vision of European integration set down by the university world itself to a process where the agenda reflects a vision of European integration that comes from external sources. The latter suggests in the first place that the main aims of the Lisbon agenda – namely, strengthening Europe’s economic competitiveness and bolstering its social cohesion – are filtering into the Bologna process. Since social cohesion has been largely neglected in the “Bologna literature” special attention will be paid to it in this chapter and in particular to the way it has become related to the Bologna process.

CHANGING POLICY AGENDAS

The concept of policy as a moving target is not new (Wittrock and deLeon 1986). Many of the changes in University and State relationships that have been introduced over the past two decades have to deal with this particular phenomenon. The redistribution of responsibility and initiative between central government and the institutional level, between setting the strategic framework on the one hand and increasing the scope for institutional initiative on the other, are justified to a very large degree by the pace of change, whether that pace of change is held to be technological innovation, shifts in the labour market, the redundancy of acquired skills or shifts in various forms of student demand for different modes of acquiring knowledge or updating it. Strategic vision and institutional flexibility are prior conditions for anticipating change and that, in turn, adds a further dimension to the definition of policy as a moving target, a metaphor that Wittrock and deLeon introduced more than two decades back to the process of implementation.

The notion of policy as a moving target can also be applied to the Bologna process. It has shifted from a declaration of intent put out by Ministers responsible for higher education in 29 countries on June 1999, to becoming a regular occasion in Europe’s Ministerial round. As a statement of intent, Bologna has currently acquired the endorsement of 45 European governments. Every two years the Ministers involved come together to set new goals, insert new ambitions of standardization into the Bologna agenda, and strengthen further, if not agency control, then at the very least the extension of agency remit to coordinate their efforts across frontiers. The biennial Bologna meeting of Ministers allows the success of intentions and policies jointly and previously endorsed to be revealed, registered and feted, and to ascertain where it is we are along the path towards constructing a European Higher Education Area. The Bologna Declaration has become institutionalized, an institutionalization evident in the regularity of its Ministerial and other formal meetings, as well as the studies

carried out in the framework of the process and the formal working groups that form part of it.

Yet, a number of paradoxes remain. For if the Bologna process has rapidly acquired a certain standing, its organizational basis, compared to the Commission on the one hand and the member states and other Bologna countries on the other, remains fragile. There is no permanent secretariat of any size or scale. Nor did the signatory states embark upon building up a (semi-)permanent administration with an executive capacity to support the pursuit of the process. Moreover, organizing the biennial ministerial meeting falls to the country where the meeting is to be held. Clearly, whilst the Bologna process provides the setting for the countries committed, the Commission, and other major stakeholders to take stock of how far Europe's universities are moving towards a "new architecture," it is evident by no means who retains the guiding hand.

Nor is it implementation alone that stands as a moving target. The continued adding by successive Ministerial Conferences of further dimensions to the original six objectives means that both the agenda and the range of issues at the political and inter-governmental levels are themselves targets both moving and multiplying as they move. In short, we have two very different perspectives on Bologna: first, the high profile and, from the standpoint of issues injected into the Bologna process, the rapid evolution of the political agenda; second, when attention is turned to the grounded realities of implementation, the difficulties of grasping where precisely we are. This is caused, amongst other things, by the grossly inadequate methodology that accompanying progress reports, including the EUA trend reports,¹²¹ display.

This implies that the Bologna process advances at various speeds. The purchase we might have of the dynamics of Bologna depends intimately upon which level of analysis one focuses. There is a "high speed track," represented by the statements of intent and the continuous adding of new items by each succeeding Ministerial Conference. However, one gets a less complacent vision of progress achieved when attention turns to implementation, which moves at a very different pace, as most of the progress reports admit, albeit reluctantly.

Analyzing and understanding the Bologna process would be relatively simple if it advanced only at *two* different speeds. Self-evidently this is not so. For if attention is turned to the state of play in individual university systems – irrespective of the particular perspective – the impression one retains is one of great variation and diversity in the implementation of the Bologna Declaration, an impression that emerges, for example, in the passing of legislation, the intention of institutions and their leaders (EUA 2003; Neave 2005), not to mention the percentage of all students in a given university system enrolled in the Bachelor/Master degree structure. It is possible – and indeed is indulged with enthusiasm, for example, in the work carried out under

¹²¹ For an overview of all progress reports published until June 2005, see the Bologna-Bergen website (Main Documents): <http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no>

the auspices of the European University Association (EUA) – to hail every shift as a success. However, that the EUA played a central role in the signing of the original Declaration, that it now engaged in observing and admiring the consequences of its own handiwork places grave doubts as to the plausibility of such a monitoring exercise.

Even so, to view Bologna less as a statement of intent but rather in terms of what has been achieved, fulfills a purpose no less important. It serves to moderate the more exaggerated goals which Ministerial enthusiasm has heaped upon Europe's universities. When Bologna is examined from the perspective of the individual university – and only recently has this been tackled by the European University Association (EUA 2006) – the stage of implementation stands in sobering contrast to the speed at which the political agenda moves. In the wine of Ministerial ambition, implementation of the Bologna process puts much water.

Thus, it is not entirely surprising that from very early on in the dynamic of the Bologna process, a gap emerged between "*le pays politique*" arraigned around the Bologna process at intergovernment level and "*le pays reel*" that is, the grounded response at institutional level (Neave 2004a). The intentions of the former are not always reflected in the capacities – or perhaps the willingness – of the latter to move at the same pace. In short, the gap between the political agenda and institutional take-up, far from closing is, on the contrary, widening.

Yet, this is not the only aspect that portrays the Bologna process as a moving target. There is another one which entails moving on from that fundamental principle which in the educational domain hitherto determined the relationship between member state and Commission. It involves a fundamental shift in the grounding principle which, from the very outset, determined the relations between member states and the Commission. The practice long established first within the EC and later the EU held that university policy was wholly the affair of the individual member state (Neave 1987). However, negotiating the "roadmap" of the University in Europe has itself moved on from "mutual adjustment" to intergovernment negotiations (Scharpf 2001). In the domain of university policy, the Bologna process is, in effect, the main vehicle that brings about this shift, shaping and consolidated it. Formally the Bologna process functions as a major intergovernmental arena. The question remains how far and how fast its current status may evolve further. How far will the process be assimilated into the Commission's ambit? Another way of looking at this is to revert to Scharpf's typology. Is higher education policy in Europe destined to move on from intergovernmental negotiations towards "hierarchical direction?" Hierarchical direction sees competences hitherto sited at national level, centralized at the European level, carried forward by supranational actors with the *participation* and support of member state governments.

THE CORRECTIVE LENS OF HISTORY

At this point, it is worthwhile setting the Bologna process against an historic backdrop. Even if we rely on the least intelligent of criteria – that of sheer geographical coverage – it is clear that the Bologna process figures amongst the most significant

reforms to have taken place in the 900 odd years of the history of the University in Europe. Even when confined to the basic six objectives the Bologna process remains significant for the sheer variety in the different systems ostensibly willing to be committed to a single purpose, not to mention their apparent willingness to subscribe to the schedule fixed in the Declaration (Tomusk 2006). Both these features have no precedent in the long history of Europe's universities. Leaving aside for the moment the dimensions of competitiveness and attractiveness, it may be argued that the remaining principles of employability, readability (of diplomas), transparency and comparability that form what is now taken to be the basic minimum of the Bologna agenda, have less claims to historic significance and originality *per se*. Indeed, the historically minded might also point out that the medieval *quadrivium* of music, arithmetic, geometry and astronomy together with the Faculties of medicine, law civil and canon and theology (Frijhoff 1992: 1254) upheld remarkably similar principles in Europe of the early Middle Ages.

If we take this latter interpretation into account, namely that it is less the principles stated in the Bologna Declaration so much as their geographical coverage which gives Bologna its special nature, we obtain a very different perspective on what may truly be said to constitute the exceptional nature of the process. The early medieval University rested in principle on a single system of individual certification to teach (*jus ubique docendi*) which was in the gift of a single authority to wit, the Pope. It also depended on the same source for what today would be termed "accreditation," namely the recognition of institutions as qualified to dispense the *studium generale* (Cobban 1992). Furthermore, the early universities shared a high degree of similitude in both curriculum and, to use a further anachronism, a homogeneity in the levels of certification. This implies that there are precedents, however remote, to these aspects of the Bologna process. Put another way, from this very particular historic perspective, the significance of Bologna resides less in the basic principles to which authorities set their hands in June 1999. Rather, it resides in an "ideograph," that is, an implicit referring back to an earlier age, intending to show that the radicalism of what is proposed indeed has a historic precedent (Neave 2001: 10).

THE UNIQUE ASPECTS OF BOLOGNA

However, as a policy process Bologna has other dimensions that are of relevance. These involve some important omissions or oversights which emerge in three details. First the imposition of datelines for its completion by 2010 – with the operational definition of completion being the proposed template for study duration across the signatory systems. It is not the principle of setting a schedule that may be contestable. More daring was the assumption that a bare decade would be sufficient for the Bologna principles to be embedded at institutional level. Remarkably, no prior assessment was made into the capacity of national systems to adapt to these principles, still less whether the dateline set was realistic.

Second was the absence of any special budget, allowance and allocation to sustain universities in their transition from their tried and tested study programs to the

Bachelor/Master format, and to offset the forcible re-adjustment within the curriculum to accommodate the change in the modal study duration at undergraduate level in Western Europe from 5 to 3 years.

Finally, there stands the total absence of prior consultation with the university world's equivalent of the social partners. The failure to consult the social partners prior to moving on to the Declaration itself is more than a glaring omission. It may well be the prime feature which, in the pattern of negotiation the agenda for European integration, sets the university dimension aside from its counterparts, for example, in the areas of social affairs or health policy. That the Bologna process should drag on for six years without any formal representation for the one Estate on which implementation ultimately depended – namely academia – is also remarkable (Neave 2005), given that the student Estate, represented by ESIB, the National Unions of Students in Europe, was recognized and consulted almost from the beginning.

These three weaknesses raise a number of subsidiary issues that take on a more enduring importance as Bologna moved on from a Declaration to a process, from being a tactic to clear a political logjam between Commission and some of Europe's universities, to becoming the coping stone in a broader venture (Neave 2003: 157).

From the perspective of changing policy agendas the Bologna Declaration represents a significant shift in the discourse that was underlying the interpretation of higher education as a nationally sensitive policy area. As with the broader Lisbon agenda and the Council of Ministers' meetings after the Lisbon summit in 2000 (see chapter 8), so with the signing of the Bologna Declaration in 1999: Ministers responsible for higher education stopped to celebrate the divergence and diversity of their university systems and started to come together for discussing common challenges and interests.

Apparently, the EU member states that signed the Declaration were prepared to yield on the principle of harmonization, at least in an intergovernmental setting. After the Lisbon 2000 summit the Commission, for its part, gave way on its interpretation that the University should be conceived wholly and solely in terms of vocational training, which formed the basis of its university policy since the passing of the Gravier Judgement in 1986. This quid pro quo emerges in the text of the Bologna Declaration itself, which asserted that the central purpose of the University lay less in economic than in cultural terms. Even though the virtues of competition were not played down, they were nevertheless restated in a broader and somewhat more ambiguous notion of "cultural viability," which from a perspective external to Europe, was presented in terms of the **cultural** attractiveness of "European" higher education on a world market.

Compared to the combined economic and social focus of the Lisbon 2000 agenda, the Bologna Declaration thus marked a different, cultural focus in university policy. Briefly stated, the Bologna Declaration's text included no direct reference to the economic paradigm and thus subordinated it to the central vision of Europe as a cultural entity. The Declaration clearly emphasized the University's central role in developing cultural dimensions in Europe (European Ministers Responsible for Education

1999). Seen within this context, the Bologna Declaration and thus the first phase of the Bologna process, were built more upon the Magna Charta Universitatum (1988), the joint declaration of European universities, than on earlier Commission's communications, such as the "Memorandum on Higher Education" (Commission 1991), the "Teaching and Learning: towards the learning society" White Paper (Commission 1995a), and the so-called Delors White Paper (Commission 1993).

The contrast between the two modes of discourse – between the Commission which, from the early 1990s took on an increasingly utilitarian, technocratic mindset, and the Bologna Declaration which (re-)stated the primacy of the cultural dimension, may, at one level, reflect the long drawn out tension between member states and Commission that marked the mid 1990s (Wit and Verhoeven 2001). The cultural discourse was then an expression, upheld by the member states, of cultural diversity as a permanent condition, permanently to be defended. Economic utilitarianism, for its part, reflected the Commission's notion that diversity served merely as a prior condition to convergence and an integrated market. Beneath these two very different constructs is the struggle inherent in the transition of higher education policy at European level from highlighting educational diversity to embracing joint education interests, which constitutes a very specific form of Scharpf's notion of intergovernmental negotiations (Scharpf 2001).

THE SOURCES OF A NEW SENSITIVITY

That certain member states revealed a new sensitivity should be seen less in terms of their having second thoughts about the basic principles of Bologna, about a common architecture, still less doubts about the drive towards a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) or a European Research Area (ERA). Rather tension appears to lie in two different domains. The first, an old source of friction that often surfaced in the mid 1990s over the control of the finance and selection in the ERASMUS program (Wit and Verhoeven 2001) – namely in whether setting the pace of European integration with respect to the University, should be the responsibility of individual member states or the Commission.

However, there is a second element which specifically related to the dynamic of the Bologna agenda itself. Should the Bologna process permeate into such areas as curricular content, teaching methods and last but not least, into organizational autonomy as part of the necessary adaptation of the University in Europe to external competition? How far should the Bologna process extend beyond the public domain of higher education and infiltrate to its private domain, and thus redefine its core values and tasks? From a short-term perspective, this issue raises an interesting point, that is, whether it does not reflect a certain disquiet amongst some national authorities over the implications of cross-frontier mobility for social cohesion within host countries.¹²²

¹²² This theme was debated as part of the run up to the Bergen Meeting of May 2005 four months earlier (27–28 January 2005) in a seminar at the Sorbonne. The theme of the seminar was: "The social

SOCIAL DIMENSION OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

Social cohesion has for long been one of the tasks of education in general and higher education more specifically so (Neave 2006b). Indeed, the reforms at the beginning of the nineteenth century that established the two basic variations of the modern European University – the Humboldtian and the Napoleonic – had, amongst other purposes, the very deliberate task of promoting social cohesion. This is scarcely surprising given the situation both countries then faced – the collapse of the social order of the first after the battle of Jena (Nybom 2003) – and seating a dynasty on firmer footing in the case of the second (Verger 1986). Yet, neither in the text of the Bologna Declaration nor until the Berlin meeting of Ministers in 2003 was hardly any formal attention paid either to the social dimension or to the key dimension of social cohesion. What changed this situation? What led the European Ministers responsible for Higher Education (2003) in their Berlin Communiqué to reaffirm “the importance of the social dimension of the Bologna process”? What lay beneath the subsequent debates, conferences and publications dedicated to this theme? Whilst we do not claim that the motives can be limited to two possible explanations, nevertheless there are two that merit further exploration.

The first has to do with the fact that only in 2004 higher education, and thus the Bologna process, were “formally” linked to the Commission’s education work programme (Council and Commission 2004). Neither the Sorbonne nor the Bologna Declaration formally involved the Commission. Indeed, at the Sorbonne meeting the Commission was not even invited as observer. Thus the drawing up of an intergovernmental Declaration on Higher Education can be interpreted as an effort by those EU member states involved to “re-patriate” the initiative for higher education policy at the European level back to the national, and in some aspects, institutional level. Earlier moves by the Commission to profit from the momentum that had build up in the aftermath of the very real success of especially the mobility programs, by creating a European level policy arena, failed. Thus, the proposals for European level policy making in higher education presented in the Memorandum on Higher Education (Commission 1991), were rejected by the member states (Petit 2002). The mid-1990s were a time when tensions between the Commission and the member states ran high on the subject of higher education. These tensions found a real echo in both the Sorbonne and the Bologna Declaration, in the language used as well as in their programmatic foci. Far from subscribing to the economic role of the University, which the 1991 Memorandum and the Delors White Paper both advanced, the signatories “reaffirmed” the cultural basis of the European University, thus renewing in a number of respects the spirit of the 1988 Magna Charta declaration.

As is discussed at more length in chapter 8, the initiatives that followed upon the acceptance of the member states at the Lisbon 2000 summit that in the area of education joint interests of the member states should override the traditional national

dimension of the European Higher Education Area and world-wide competition” (http://www.bologna-bergen2005.no/EN/Bol_sem/Seminars/050127-28Sorbonne.HTM).

sensitivities, did not at first extend to higher education. The momentum that had accumulated around the Bologna process, its emphasis on the cultural primacy of the University, and the unpleasing memories of the relations during the mid-1990s were apparently a deterrent sufficiently strong for the Commission to not interfere directly in university policy. However, given the main aims of the Lisbon agenda and the University's role in it as the "Knowledge Institution" it is no surprise that the separated intergovernmental and supranational university policies and visions came to be linked.

In this respect a gradual adaptation of the Bologna process' main focus can be observed, amongst other things, in the text of the Prague and Berlin Communiqués (European Ministers responsible for Higher Education 2001, 2003). If the Prague Communiqué still emphasized the cultural role of the University, it also invoked the link between lifelong learning and the future competitiveness of the European economy. In addition it noted that "The quality of higher education and research is and should be an important determinant of Europe's international attractiveness and competitiveness" (European Ministers responsible for Higher Education 2001: 3). While this statement by the Ministers established no direct link between University and economy, the text of the Berlin Communiqué included for the first time in the short history of Bologna process direct references to the economic role of the University. It also stressed the need to take the conclusions of the Lisbon and Barcelona Councils into account in the Bologna process (European Ministers responsible for Higher Education 2003: 2). As is discussed in more detail in chapter 8, as a consequence, the Bologna process and the Lisbon strategy (as well as the Copenhagen process) were linked closely through the "Education and Training 2010" work programme¹²³ of the Commission (Council and Commission 2004). Thus, implicitly the main aims of the Lisbon strategy, strengthening economic competitiveness and stimulating social cohesion, have become central to the Bologna process as well.

Second, the current interest in the implications the Bologna process has for higher education's role in promoting social cohesion relates to the issue of funding European students to study elsewhere in the EU. This second set of arguments underlines the complexity of the European integration efforts in higher education. They also show that the "stylized visions" introduced in chapter 2 (Table 1) provide an important analytical framework, but are unable to capture all facets involved in the complexities of this "social experiment."

The concept of social cohesion can be operationalized around very different criteria, which may include the disparities between modes of student financing and the

¹²³ On this matter the "Education and Training 2010" website of the Commission indicates that "Education and Training 2010 integrates all actions in the fields of education and training at European level, including vocational education and training (the 'Copenhagen process'). As well, the Bologna process, initiated in 1999 is crucial in the development of the European Higher Education Area. Both contribute actively to the achievement of the Lisbon objectives and are therefore closely linked to the 'Education and Training 2010' work programme." (http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/et_2010_en.html; visited 25 October 2006).

differences in portability.¹²⁴ The differences between member states in ways of student financing, and hence portability are considerable. More surprising is that such differences should be seen as posing obstacles to “social cohesion” (Vossensteyn 2004). It may well be that such a diagnostic term is not meant to be understood as it stands. If so, it opens the door to further questions, for example, concerning the particular type of governance required to ensure cohesion defined solely in terms of student finance, the actor(s) who shall exercise it, and the type and the range of “solutions” that may be envisaged to this end. The core issue turns around whether such solutions are to be set in unitary terms – one size fits all –, or whether they are to perpetuate the notion of national diversity by defending the continuation of national practice.

A Broader Understanding

Once “social cohesion” is interpreted in the narrow terms of financing students when abroad, it risks re-kindling the conflict over the distribution of power between Commission and member states, quite apart from the issue by whom and how student mobility is to be sustained in the near future. Who is to pay what, for whom, how and how long? Nor does the issue stop there. If, for a moment, we assume that “social cohesion” is in reality a stalking horse for issues of co-ordination, a question of far broader import for policies of European integration targetted on the University can be raised. It is this: “where are we to set the limits to conceiving differences as obstacles, for example, for realizing (some of) the Bologna aims?” If differences in national practice are an obstacle, and we have spent the last two centuries seeking in every way possible to mark ourselves off from our neighbors by our differences, where is the process of “removing obstacles” to stop?

However, social cohesion only comes into question with the imminent prospect of social instability or its likelihood. In Europe a number of feline phrases are currently going the rounds that give voice to this anxiety, though it has to be said that they are not identified with the Bologna process as such, even though Bologna might be used to amplify our awareness of them. Within the nation state, marginalization and exclusion fall into the category of those forces in society that weaken the social fabric. Or, as another possibility, as forces that work in favor of new definitions of collective identity that do not lend themselves easily to accommodation within existing institutional or social structures. Notorious poverty or a shared sense of what Gary Runciman termed “Relative Deprivation” may serve to accelerate and precipitate such tensions (Runciman 1966).

That the Bologna process has opened up the social dimension (European Ministers responsible for Education 2005) serves to underline that factors of disparity, which determine and accompany differences in the quality of life within the nation state, are now shared across them. Such disparities, whether socially or geographically sited,

¹²⁴ “Portability” refers to the right to use a study grant awarded in one country to support studies in a second – in short, whether students can “take their grant with them” to support themselves during periods spent in study abroad.

are not new. Indeed, higher education policy – at least in Western Europe – has from the mid-1960s onwards been engaged in seeking to remedy them. This has been done either through policies of institutional distribution or through various measures to strengthen the influence of regional authorities in the affairs of academia, beginning in Sweden with the 1977 reforms, and spreading into Spain with the Organic Law of 1983, Belgium with the federalization of the Kingdom in 1988, and Britain with the regionalization of the higher education funding base in 1992. Others are certainly not backward in this sphere. The “fit” between the location of universities and regions of notorious deprivation is not always close. Nevertheless, the use of the University to spur regional development, if not always regional identity, remains an enduring trend during the past four decades (Kyvik 2004).

SOCIAL COHESION AND THE UNIVERSITY: A BRIEF
EXCURSION ACROSS HISTORY¹²⁵

In linking social cohesion to the University, two key questions are posed. “Is its purpose to achieve even closer harmony, architecture or common practice?” Or “Is social cohesion evoked simply because the thrust of social and technological change is dissolving the established mechanisms of social stability?” What evidence has come from the domain of the University, and how does that relate to the Bologna process?

Competition, meritocracy, value and worth, are among the abiding values of higher education (Rothblatt 2006). But their continuing and vital role in determining who goes to higher education can be made to serve vastly different social objectives and thus very different interpretations of social cohesion. The historic and identifying feature of the European University, contrary to its US counterpart, has been its continuous close alignment with public service, construed in terms of the services of the State (chapter 4). The historical origins of this engagement to the collectivity, not unnaturally, vary from country to country. They may be traced back to the Josephine reforms at the end of the eighteenth century in Austria, were reaffirmed in the Memorandum of Wilhelm von Humboldt on the future of Berlin University in 1806 and, for France were re-stated in the form of the Imperial University (Neave 2001). The University acting on behalf of the nation supplied the talent that in turn fed what Dahl termed “the value allocating bodies in society” – the church, the law, the education system, national administration, occasionally the military, and, not least, the tax system (Dahl 1966). These ties were made closer by what in some countries is termed the civil effect of university education, namely that certain degrees were held to be valid to compete for a place in public service and for a place in what economists qualify as “the fixed price labour market” (Kerr 1986).

Clearly, in Europe the first major break in the saga of the elite University took place with the drive towards massification from the mid 1960s onward. Its rationale remained fully within the post-war settlement which involved the nation assuming

¹²⁵ This section as well as the following ones is to a large extent based on Neave (2006b).

new responsibilities and thus taking over new dimensions that underpinned social cohesion in the form of the welfare state – with high aspirations in areas such as health care, unemployment and child benefits, pensions, and not least the right first to secondary education and later to higher education. Key to this was the recognition that education determined life chances. Higher education took on an active and re-distributive role as indeed the welfare state itself performed. Education and the University by extension were seen as a public instrument for the aspired re-distribution of wealth through investing in social mobility and above all, through public investment in the younger generation.

Seen from this perspective, the first stage in Western Europe's drive towards massification stood as an unprecedented act of social solidarity and very explicitly so in its focus on "first generation students." The fundamental assumption that underpinned this interpretation of social cohesion rested on the conviction that social mobility and raising the general level of education amongst the population was an issue of collective responsibility. It extended into higher education the basic tenets of the welfare state in the broad domain of social security. In this, three aspects remained constant. First the principle of merit itself. Second that mobilization of society around technological and social change was primed by the public sector – a social counterpart of Keynesian theory in economics. Third that the pace of economic change was dependent on the capacity of the higher levels of the labour force to remain updated in the area of relevant competencies and skills on the basis of the intellectual baggage it had once acquired in the University.

In effect, the factors that undermined this particular model of the University's part in social cohesion are also to be found along these three dimensions, especially in the relationship between social cohesion and economic development. Is social cohesion a condition of economic development? Or, on the contrary, is economic development a condition of social cohesion? The fundamental assumption that lay beneath the "welfare state" model of university policy inclined towards the former, namely that social solidarity was a prior condition to economic development, a view which received operational definition by placing priority on equality of opportunity, often expressed in terms of "social justice." If we accept this interpretation of social cohesion, we have to ask ourselves: What were the elements of dissolution as can be observed, for example, in the Lisbon agenda, that assumes economic development to be a condition for social cohesion?

Erosion of a Model of Social Cohesion: The Welfare State

The usual explanation given for the demise of the "welfare state" model of social cohesion with respect to the University is astounding in its simplicity – namely, that the nations of Europe could not afford to fund the mass University in the same lavish manner as they had its elite predecessor. None will disagree concerning the part cost played. But there is another explanation, and whilst both are inextricably linked to the process of massification itself, the second is important on its own account. Social demand for university education not only outstripped the ability – or, as the theory of fiscal stress suggests (Vossensteyn 2003) – the willingness of governments and their citizens to pay (an interesting example of de-solidarization). It also outstripped the

capacity of the public sector to absorb the increase in qualified output from university education. Precisely when this historic watershed was reached is not greatly important. There is evidence aplenty to suggest that the latter part of the 1970s – with variations between countries – provides a reasonable marker. There are other pointers as well, not least of them being the refocusing of university policy and research away from access to output, occupational change and the increasingly problematic ties of the University with the labour market.

Such a refocusing went hand in glove with a root and branch revision in re-thinking the place of the public sector and, more to the point, the economic condition of the nation, a revision which, in its more extreme forms set about defining the economy as the prime lever in social cohesion. This, in essence, is precisely what is meant by the twin credos of “marketization” and “privatization.” In other words, the relationship between social cohesion and economic development which, in the welfare state interpretation of the University, saw social cohesion as the path that led on to economic fortune, was thus reversed. Economic development was thus the prior condition to social stability, if not to social cohesion.

Effects Upon the University

Placing the emphasis upon the market as the prime condition of social cohesion has had weighty consequences indeed for the European University – as the unprecedented 20 years saga that lies behind us of reform in purpose, administration, governance, authority, funding and intake capacity of the University all bear witness. This is not to say that the place of the University is any the less central to society. Indeed, the very idea of a knowledge economy and within it, the strategic place of higher education, affords it even greater significance as the prime supplier of trained human capital and capital expressed through ideas and innovation (Kogan 2006; Maassen 2006). Even so, the University occupies a very different position precisely because social cohesion is held to be conditional upon the economy rather than the other way round.

Our tendency in the area of policy research on the University has been both to conceive and to analyze these reforms individually and separately. Each is, after all, a highly complex affair. There is, however, an excellent case to be made for trying to weld them into a whole and to re-contextualize them within the framework of the consequences they have for the notion of social cohesion. The first thing to note is that inverting the relationship between the economy and social cohesion places the latter as a sub set of a particular ideology that is variously described as “economic liberalism” or in certain quarters, “ultra-liberalism” which has a certain kinship with supply-side economic theory. It is, amongst other things, claimed to be the guiding Mantra behind the process of globalization (Marginson 2004), even though this claim has also in the field of higher education been driven more by a certain form of ideological conviction than being substantiated through empirically founded analyses.

The interpretations that may be placed upon this ideology are many. For its adepts, the market provides the freedom for individual initiative and as such, a necessary corrective to the restraining influence of the state. Individual freedom and enterprise, thus liberated, drive the economy forward, create jobs, satisfy consumers and contribute

to the wealth of individuals inside the nation (Neave 2003). The central credos of neo-liberalism turn around individual performance, efficiency and above all competition which, aggregated up, ensures national prosperity. Placed in an organizational setting, its institutional form of reference is the business enterprise and the world of corporate practice.

There are two features well worth noting that accompany the permeation of this doctrine into society. This first is that the nation state itself assumes the status of the local context and very particularly so in the case of multi-national firms. But the firm does not simply exist in the nation or across nations. Nor is it simply the prime operant of “globalization.” Economic liberalism, since it cannot entirely eliminate the value allocating bodies without putting itself in danger, in effect adds one more to those bodies that operated within the nation state: it adds “The Firm.” If one wishes evidence for this statement, one has only to consider how far current-day reform of the University turns to “business practice” as the yardstick of its successful modernization (see chapters 1 and 6). And whilst practices are not always the same thing as “values,” nevertheless the influence of what is held to be “good business practice” exercises upon universities – whether entrepreneurial (Clark 1998) or innovating – suggests that institutional centrality of the firm, which characterizes economic liberalism in its relationship to society, is indeed every bit as comparable in its pervasiveness and its norm-shaping power as earlier bodies of value allocation. Indeed, business efficiency becomes a value in itself.

However, there is a second difference and it, too, has direct bearing upon the notion of social cohesion just as it does in the relationship of the University to social cohesion. The relationship of a firm with other enterprises may carry obligations. But in essence, it is contractual, formal, written and based on a utilitarian notion of securing services, advantages or advancing opportunities – most of which are time specific and conditional – that is, there are objectives to be attained as part of the exchange, the attainment of which determines the fulfillment of the contract. And indeed, it is precisely this type of contractual, targeted and conditional relationship that now governs the ties between the University and the public. As is discussed in detail in chapters 1 and 9, this contractual relationship is very different from the traditional “pact” between the University and society. The University is no longer perceived in terms of collective identity, as a repository and as hander down of the national genius or, for that matter as the crowning example of national unity, all of which are forms of cohesion expressed through notions of continuity and commonality pursued across generations.

One can, of course, point out that this nineteenth century vision of the University had already been severely mangled in the heady days of May 1968 and its aftermath that spread across Western Europe. Very certainly, the advent of participant democracy (chapter 5), of group interests inside the groves of Academe, (Groof et al. 1998) antedated the arrival of neo-liberalism and the advent of New Public Management (Pollitt 1990). Nor is it out of place to note that even the welfare state model of social cohesion defined and measured how far the University had met its mission of social cohesion in terms of groups defined by social background or relative disadvantage.

If anything, the drive into higher education from the mid 1980s through to the mid 1990s, put a final touch to the fragmentation of the student Estate, extending its range of ambition. Most significant of all, it brought to an end the concept of students as part of an organic collective order – the student Estate as opposed to the academic Estate. In keeping with the tenets of neo-liberalism, the status of students was individualized, in the sense that they became “consumers.”

Towards the Stakeholder Society

In Europe few systems have gone as far down the path as the UK in shaping the University as a “consumer service.” However, that the student qua consumer is today a common-place, is much more than a shift in analogy and symbolism. The shift from collective “student estate” to individual “consumer” is in itself a very sensitive indicator for some of the basic changes taking place in the meaning of the concept of social cohesion within the University. What separates the “student qua consumer” from the student as member of a one-time privileged order is not just that the notion of “privilege” has disappeared and with it the sense of obligation to public service that implicitly accompanied student funding under the welfare state. It is the shift towards the individual assuming responsibility for investment in him- or her-self. As enrolment fees are introduced across Europe and repayable loans replace grants or indirect subsidy, so the cohesion symbolized by inter-generational investment transmutes into an instrumentality representing individual competition as well as individual accommodation to rapid economic change. With it also changes the notion of the State both in its relations with higher education and vis a vis the individual student. For whilst one may argue that a certain element of solidarity has not entirely vanished and is visible in the form of publicly provided loans, they constitute very much a short term conditional solidarity. Student funding systems become stakeholders in the student, just as students in turn, for the period of their studies, become stakeholders in the University: the former for the repayment of the loans, the latter for that training which will furnish him – or her – with the operational competencies and skills to ensure “employability” and thus permit the repayment of that loan. Seen from this angle, loans are not so much an act of solidarity – though means-testing permits a nicer rationing of the amount of solidarity to be afforded – so much as a lien upon the individual and as a spur for the individual to be “performing” if the debt is rapidly to be discharged.

The individualization of student status, the fragmentation and diversity in ability and social origin have radical consequences for the University. Whilst the notion of the “Stakeholder University” is more evident in English speaking systems – especially Australia, the UK and the USA – certain dimensions of the Stakeholder University are becoming generic to the University elsewhere in the world, and are also visible in the Bologna process. The first of these features is the re-formulation of the idea underlying the University as an expression of national culture and instead characterizing it as a service and training institution the purpose of which is predominantly defined in terms of serving one particular interest within the nation, namely the firm

and the development of one over-riding priority – the embedding of entrepreneurial culture as its central referent.

Of relevance here is that the University as an expression of national culture has primarily been linked to education. This is also clearly visible in the text of the Bologna Declaration that emphasizes the central role of universities in developing European cultural dimensions (European Ministers of Education 1999). However important the cultural dimension is, universities have also been regarded throughout their history as important carriers of European humanism (chapter 3) and they have played a core role in the development and maintenance of the European civil society. On the other hand, the research and science function of the University has a stronger universal component.

Re-socialising the University

There are many pointers to this re-alignment, both in the terms some higher education institutions use to distinguish themselves from the historic University and in terms of the skills which they claim to engender amongst their students. Evidence of the former emerges, of course, in such self-descriptions by individual universities as “Entrepreneurial,” “Responsive,” “Innovative” or “Service-enterprise” (Neave 2004b). From a European perspective, such descriptors are a good pointer to the detachment of the University from public service. They also point to an amazing reduction in its central purpose, which, if more precise and for that reason more capable of being operationalized, is but the servicing of one interest in society. Such descriptors thus stand as a fundamental re-alignment in the dialectical relationship between the University and society which calls for the University to adapt to external change – a far cry from its civilizing mission within the nation state that once it had.

The second feature is rather more subtle. It involves an equally marked shift in what may be seen as the University’s role in socialization. This has narrowed from the broader definition in terms of broad social obligation, professional skills and ethics to concentrate on the technical and operational skills and attitudes that accompany performance in the private sector – to wit, the much quoted trilogy of flexibility, adaptability and performance. Certainly, few systems have gone so far as the United Kingdom which, in the mid 1990s, sought to inject an “enterprise culture” into academe in the shape of the “Enterprise in Higher Education Initiative” project (Kogan 2005). By the same token, few universities in Europe will deny their engagement to this new and more focused edition of socialization presented under the guise of “professionalization.”

There remains, however, a third dimension and that is the pace of change itself. That the University has entered a phase where, if the growing literature on the matter is to be believed, change is held to be continuous as new occupations are created – above all in the area of Information and Communication Technology (ICT). This is why such a premium is placed upon responsiveness in universities, adaptability amongst their students, and flexibility in both.

Taken together, these three features of the contemporary University pose a number of very crucial questions about the viability of the cohesion they appear to endorse. The first of these is whether the transformation of the University into a University of interests is not itself a dissolvent of collective solidarity. This is not to say that conflict of interests is absent from academia and that all is sweetness and light. Even so, the individualization of the student status, the notion that the purpose of the University is to optimise individual choice as a means for the individual to ensure his/her own “employability,” poses another highly uncomfortable question. That question is whether the University may be said to be symbolic of any kind of unity – regional, national or for that matter, European – let alone of solidarity and cohesion. That the governing ethic of the contemporary University is one of competition serves merely to underline the issue.

The Ambiguous Nature of Competition

Competition may indeed secure brilliant students and lavish sources of revenue. But it cannot, by definition, do so for all. Competition discriminates – in the original meaning of the word; or it differentiates. Just as the massification of higher education posed the issue of public service versus private advantage, so the drive towards universal higher education – which 30 years ago Trow (1974) set at a 40% enrolment rate for the appropriate age group – raises another highly delicate problem – namely, that of exclusion. Many systems of higher education in Europe have already gone beyond the threshold of “universal” higher education – with France in the lead as it was in passing the tipping point to mass higher education in the early 1970s.

Exclusion takes two forms. The first being the consequence of massification. When the number of people having a university degree is growing, its value will subsequently diminish. Certainly, advantages – and very substantial ones at that – are still to be had by participating in the University: as discussed throughout this chapter these concern social, political, cultural as well as economic advantages. But, by the same token, as more students enroll in the University, so the penalties for those who do not, increase. The problem of downward substitution – that is, those better qualified replace those less qualified in jobs once identified with the latter, an outcome of the diploma spiral – may not be as great as many feared (Teichler 1998). However, the perception that this process stands in the wings is most assuredly present and with it the very real possibility that, even if the University does not generate exclusion through its graduates replacing secondary school leavers in the central labour market, thereby forcing the latter into the peripheral labour market, the belief that it does, is present, powerful and highly detrimental to the public image of the University. There is no greater threat to the University than for it to be seen wholly and exclusively as a competitive arena, above all by those who, for one reason or another, cannot – or will not – come in from the cold. And whilst it may be argued that compensatory opportunities are present in the form of lifelong education and training, one cannot ignore the fact that for the most part, those who take up these opportunities are largely those who have already been hearty consumers of the University’s services.

CONCLUSION

The real question the Bologna process poses is how far in advancing both an economic and social dimension a balance may be struck between the principles of individual opportunity and those of collective advantage. From the standpoint of political philosophy, this is a very old dilemma and one which, when extended beyond Europe, is no less evident in the relationship Europe seeks to have with the rest of the world. It is also explicit in the narrower terms of “social cohesion” as it applies to the different modes of financing those who study abroad. As we have argued, this particular instance is but one manifestation of a broader and deeper-seated dilemma.

In truth, the dilemma that confronts both Bologna and the EHEA is how to reconcile Adam Smith with Thomas Hobbes. Each in his way was concerned with the place of competition in the social construct. For Smith, competition was the driving force of human society and individual initiative. For Hobbes, competition was most certainly an innate human trait. It was not, however, positive (Oakshott 1972). On the contrary, competition was the brutish comportment of man in the state of nature, prior to the social contract, when “Every man’s hand was turned against his neighbour,” and where the lot of Mankind was “poor, solitary, nasty, brutish and short.” For Hobbes, in competition lay the heart of mayhem and civil strife. These two contrary imaginings extend to the place of the state as a very real restraint upon individual adventurousness in the case of the father of Economics or as a restraint upon the bestial excesses of Man’s otherwise natural instincts in the case of Hobbes as advocate for the rule of Leviathan.

That competition can be subject to so different interpretations is quintessential to the current challenges that confront us in the construction of the European Higher Education Area. We are facing the same dilemma about the degree of solidarity that forms the basis on which social cohesion in its deepest sense reposes. Yet very precisely, this dilemma is in-built to the Bologna Declaration itself. It emerges in the notion that relations between university systems inside the European Union are to rest on the principle of cooperation and that competition – in the form of our civilized attractiveness – shall shape our dealings with the world at large. As a statement of intent, it is a fine and splendid thing. We agree to reserve Adam Smith for “external use only,” and we hope that Thomas Hobbes will serve us well on the home front.

The European dilemma is how far the gospel according to Adam Smith should be seen as “the way, the truth and the life,” just as it is how far we see it desirable to abandon Leviathan and with it the social cohesion Leviathan regulated and shaped – in higher education, not least. The problem can be stated conversely, of course. How far is Europe prepared to accept a possible further weakening of social cohesion by utterly embracing the unpredictable acts of Adam Smith’s more ardent pupils who in their organized expression may just as well be Leviathan dressed in corporate clothing?

These are delicate issues for whilst their resolution lies at the heart of building the European Higher Education Area, they also re-shape the social and institutional fabric in general. Yet, if Europe is to generate any citizen cohesion – apart from that

expressed in the administrative, legislative and formalistic domains – it is important to ensure that interests external to Europe do not confine the European identity to that construction from which we are just emerging, namely a “Common Market,” populated not by citizens but by consumers. Yet, the translation of consumers to citizens depends precisely on creating a sense of solidarity. Whether that sense of solidarity without which social cohesion remains a technocratic code word, is to permeate from above or grow up from below is very certainly a task that deserves our engagement, if only to find ways by which Mr Smith and Mr Hobbes may be reconciled.