Chapter 4
The Myth of Power: Governing Reform in the Bologna Process of Higher Education

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Abstract How does one effectively reform higher education systems and structures in a transnational context? This is the key question countries have struggled with since their signing of the Bologna Declaration in 1999, which launched the Bologna Process and the development of a European Higher Education Area. Although, initiated by EU (candidate) countries, a voluntary governing model was opted for positioning the reform process independently of the EU decision making structures. Over time the national representatives stressed that national authorities should be responsible for (organizing) (higher) education. Now, after the twentieth anniversary of the Bologna Declaration, is a good moment to look back at the choices made thus far and the extent to which they were appropriate considering the ambition and scope of the Bologna agenda.

During the last two decades, did the initiators and key participants in the Process sufficiently understand the role and responsibilities of the many stakeholders involved, including their own, to make policies a reality? What started as a process to align European higher education, that is a model to be based on two (later three) cycles, applying credits and to assure recognition using shared standards and guidelines for quality assurance, developed into the policy to shift from expert-driven education to a student-centred and active learning approach. As a result, the centre of gravity moved from policy making to policy implementation. This made the governing model – in both theoretical and practical terms – obsolete. Without the key players in the Process acknowledging this reality, the initial unilateral process had become multi-dimensional and multi-layered which meant it had been replaced by a multi-level governance model. Over the years, the auspicious initiative bogged down in a repetition of promises which proved only partly to be delivered by many of the countries involved.

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4.1 Introduction

In the last years of the previous century there were many substantial reasons to reform higher education (HE) degree programmes in Europe. Existing programmes proved not able to keep up with the high speed of societal changes; changes resulting from globalisation, the internationalisation and flexibilization of the labour market, the Fourth Industrial Revolution promoted and supported by the concept of neo-liberalism, traditional manufacturing and industrial production moving to low-income countries such as the Peoples Republic of China. In the mid-1990s many European countries had to deal with a rather high unemployment (Saint-Paul, 2004). This was not much better in 2000 when the combined EU countries had an unemployment rate of 9.2% (EUROSTAT, 2020). This inspired the European Commission (EC) to prepare and publish several green and white papers in the field of HE which were meant to define suitable responses to the challenges experienced. The leading thought of these proposals was to reform HE programmes to reflect the transfer of an industrial to a 'knowledge society'. The argument was made that European economies – not able to compete in terms of working conditions and salary levels with development countries, should focus on services and high-level technology industry which would require a well-educated population. It was thought that not only a high percentage of the population should have a HE degree but also that learning would be better tailored to the requirements of the economy and society at large (European Commission XE "European Commission", 1997). At the same time, it had become evident that many EU countries were struggling with the cost-benefits of their HE systems.

Having a common problem and interests, one might have expected that in such a particular situation an initiative would be taken at EU level. However, the established and rather sensitive paradigm of 'education is a national responsibility' made this unthinkable and unacceptable. Rather unexpectedly the French government took the initiative to approach the other largest EU members to launch an initiative, the signing of a special declaration by four countries in 1998. This is the Sorbonne Declaration agreed in the context of the 800th anniversary of the oldest French university. The initiative, upsetting other EU member states, was followed up by the Bologna Declaration 1 year later, signed by 29 EU member and candidate states. Pavel Zgaga represented his country Slovenia at that occasion. In the subsequent years the initiative was turned into an undertaking, named the Bologna Process and Professor Zgaga became very much involved not as a politician but as an external expert. The consequence of turning an act of signing a document into a process, was that it required a governing model and game rules. Who to include and who not? How to implement the action agenda agreed? Who to make responsible for what? Who to make accountable for failure and success?

More than 20 years have passed since the Bologna Declaration was signed by the first group of ministers. It involves now 49 countries, which are striving 'officially' for the development of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA). This paper discusses key decisions made regarding its governance model and its scope in relation to its rather ambitious and growing agenda. It argues that the decision-making process was not based on a well thought out, seriously discussed philosophy, and not founded on relevant decision-making (theoretical) models. It was hindered by (1) opinions about the role of the EU in HE, (2) neglected the position of HE institutions as key players for implementing policies, (3) overestimated the power of governments, and the influence of civil servants in delivering what had been agreed. Initially, it was not even considered to involve students, although it was very quickly acknowledged as a huge error that ESIB – The National Unions of Students in Europe had to invite itself to be present at the Bologna Conference in 1999 (Klemenčič, 2012). This oversight was confirmed in the years to come because student representatives proved to be a very supportive and constructive partner in the Bologna Process (Zgaga, 2014, 2019). Would an alternative approach, by taking into account theory and practical experience, serve the initial aims more successfully, that is a strong transnationally well-aligned European HE sector able to compete with other world regions?

4.2 Matching Aims and Objectives and the Governing Model

The signing of the *Joint Declaration on harmonisation of the architecture of the European Higher Education system by* France, Germany, Italy, and the UK – each having their own reasons and national interests -, was the closing act of a two-day Forum (24–15 May 1998) entitled *Towards a European University*. Nearly 20 years later, on 26 September 2017, the French president Emmanuel Macron revived the idea of the 'European University' during his Sorbonne speech on the future of Europe.[1] He proposed to establish at least 20 of such European Universities by 2024, being in practice networks of four to six renowned higher education institutions (HEI) involving at least three EU member states. These European Universities should be 'drivers of educational innovation and the quest for excellence', offering 'real European semesters and real European diplomas' (Macron, 2017). A remarkable initiative in the context of two decades of discussions concerning the Bologna Process and the development of an EHEA. At the one hand Macrons remarks are a reflection of the policies outlined by the EC over time and at the other in contrast with the intergovernmental character of the process based on reforms agreed between individual nations, with the EU/EC acting as the paymaster. It is one indicator that the EU member states were not able to make the distinction between EU

[1] Full-text version of the speech: http://international.blogs.ouest-france.fr/archive/2017/09/29/macron-sorbonne-verbatim-europe-18583.html (accessed 7 May 2021).

and 'European' policies when discussing HE; one issue prominent from the very start of the Process, that would hinder innovation. It also showed doubts about the success of the initial endeavour.

There were good reasons for Domenico Lenarduzzi, the director for HE of the EC to be furious – which he indeed could not hide – at the presentation of the Sorbonne Declaration in Paris. Although more than 2000 policy makers and academics attended the meeting, initially the EC was not even invited as an observer for the event (Wagenaar, 2019). This was not an oversight, as developments in the next months would show. Although, the EC became involved as a member of the Steering Committee to prepare the Bologna Conference, besides the representatives of five (EU) countries and the two Rectors' Conference existing at the time, it was not offered the position of full partner in the process. France and the UK opposing this, using the argument this was not an EU initiative. This might be factually true, in practice both the Sorbonne Declaration and the Bologna Declaration were based on EC policies initiated by the European Communities / European Union (EU) member states since 1984. In that year, the European Council called to strengthen and promote the European identity and image, which resulted in the ad hoc committee on People's Europe, chaired by Pietro Adonnino, comprising of formal representatives of the heads of national governments. One of the many proposals the committee made, was establishing a comprehensive programme of European inter-university exchanges and studies meant for a significant number of students and supported by a European academic credit scheme to facilitate mobility and recognition (Commission, 1985). It was one of the key factors that resulted in the ERASMUS Programme. The Treaty of Maastricht of 1992 confirmed that the EU had a role to play in HE, although limited by the principle of subsidiarity. In article 126 it is stated that "The Community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging co-operation between Member States and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of their teaching and the organization of educational systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity'. Confirming the axiom that harmonization of the laws and regulations of the Member States should not be challenged in any way (Treaty, 1992).

This chapter is at odds with the expressed claim of the *Magna Charta Universitatum*, signed 5 years earlier (1988) by 388 of the leading and oldest universities at the occasion of the 900th anniversary of the University of Bologna (Magna Charta Universitatum, 1988). They require autonomy from 'all political authority and economic power' to allow for contributing to the welfare of society at large; stipulating the fundamental principle of freedom of teaching and research and not to be hindered by the national boundaries within the European Communities (the processor of the EU). The new 2020 version of the Magna Charta upholds and confirms the principles as outlined in the original document, stressing even more the global context in which universities (are expected to) operate (Magna Charta Universitatum, 2020).

The title of the Sorbonne Declaration, *Harmonisation of the architecture of the European Higher Education system,* which seemed to be well chosen and

appropriate, provoked outrage among the other EU countries because they were not being informed about the initiative, and because it felt indeed as being subverting national autonomy in educational policy making. The Declaration stipulates the role universities play in developing the 'intellectual, cultural, social, and technical dimensions' of the European continent. No reference is made to the Magna Charta. However, it refers to the Lisbon Recognition Convention (1997), 'mutual recognition of higher education degrees for professional purposes through the respective directives of the European Union' and the 'fast growing support of the European Union, for the mobility of students and teachers' (Sorbonne Declaration, 1998). This is no surprise, because the real (and only) innovative element of the Declaration is the proposal to *restructure* European HE on the basis of a 'system, in which two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate, should be recognized for international comparison and equivalence' and to tailor these better to the needs of society. The key sentence in this respect is: 'Progressive harmonisation of the overall framework of our degrees and cycles can be achieved through strengthening of already existing experience, joint diplomas, pilot initiatives, and dialogue with all concerned'. Although the ministers of the UK and France claimed that the Declaration was not meant as a hostile action versus the EC, their comments over time to defend their action showed otherwise (Wagenaar, 2019).

This was confirmed by the fact that the EU was only allowed to become a full member of the 'Bologna club' (Adelman, 2008) in 2001 when it had become clear that the countries that had signed the Declaration – could not do without EU funding and its infrastructure to run the process smoothly, it started 2 years earlier. At that time it had also become clear that the governing structure would be based on a model developed in the context of the EU, and applied directly as part of the Lisbon Strategy to turn the EU into 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world …', the *Open Method of Coordination* (Gornitzka, 2006), a governing strategy to 'progressively develop their own policies' intended to achieve greater convergence (Lisbon, 2000). A remarkable choice – which raised questions about its effectiveness from the very start (Veiga & Amaral, 2006) – for an action plan, the Bologna Declaration, that – as a follow-up of the Sorbonne Declaration – asked for system changes according to its main objectives: adaptation of a *system* of easily readable and comparable degrees (including the implementation of the Diploma Supplement according to a fixed format) and a *system* essentially based on two main cycles, undergraduate and graduate, establishment of a *system* of credits (such as ECTS) and co-operation in quality assurance resulting in comparable criteria and methodologies. The last item would result in 2005 in qualifications frameworks based on the so-called Dublin Descriptors and the *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance*, which together could be perceived as a 'system', building trust and confidence.

A system can be defined as a mutually coherent whole of parts that are organized in such a way that they fulfil a function and can achieve a goal. It has characteristics that are present in all systems: organization (structure and order), interaction, interdependence, integration, and a central objective. In addition, three basic elements can be distinguished: input, development and output. These require monitoring and

result in feedback. Each system has its limitations or scope and has to deal with an environment. Changes in the environment affect the working and impact of the system.

The Bologna Declaration did not include anything new, because its six action points had been initiated by either the European Commission / Union, the Council of Europe and the Sorbonne Declaration, without giving these initiatives (much) credit. However, the agreement to actually implement these intentions should be perceived as a serious step forward. The implication was not so much to convert existing systems, but to replace or introduce these, because it implied fundamental change, that is commanding the introduction and/or adjustment of national legislation, followed up by implementation involving many stakeholders, including students. Only the first being the prime responsibility of national governments.

4.3 What Theory Tells Us

By opting for the Open Method of Coordination – in theoretical terms – the choice was made for the research area of public policies analysis, that is policy diffusion / transfer / convergence theory. This is in accordance with the expressed aim in the Bologna Declaration to develop the EHEA and its related aims by coordinating national policies through intergovernmental co-operation, 'together with those of non-governmental European organisations with competences on higher education'. The two European Rectors' Conferences, which would join as the European University Association in 2001, were directly involved in preparing the Declaration. No surprise that a direct reference is made to the *Magna Charta Universitatum*: 'Universities' independence and autonomy ensure that higher education and research systems continuously adapt to changing needs, society's demands and advances in scientific knowledge'. The Bologna document speaks of promoting the 'European system of higher education world-wide' (Bologna Declaration, 1999).

Having these objectives in mind, it would have made sense for opting for 'harmonisation' regarding the policy making process, being stricter than the range of 'diffusion' – 'transfer' – and most far reaching 'convergence'. The first focussing on process only, the second including also the behaviour of actors and the third in addition focusing on the effects, that is similarity in change (Vögtle, 2014). Harmonisation can be defined as a process of adjustment of differences and inconsistences to align significant features. However, the term proved (still) to be toxic because those involved wanted it to be understood in (legal) terms of European integration, uniformity, and unification (Höllinger, 2010; Witte, 2006). It is remarkable that many researchers proved to be receptive to framing the process in these terms by the public authorities. Over time much attention would be devoted by them to the (trans) national processes and not to meeting the targets defined as one might have expected (Keating, 2013; Kushnir, 2014; Vögtle, 2014).

Although the policy makers distanced themselves from the decision-making process of the EU, in developing the governance structure they applied the EU Troika model with the rotating EU Presidency acting as the chair of two bodies that were set up: the Bologna Follow-up Group (BFUG) and a separate Preparatory Group, renamed Board in 2003, responsible for day-to-day activities and the preparation of the next Ministerial Meeting. The organiser of that meeting would act as vice-chair. From 2003 the vice-chair would be supported by a temporary Bologna Process Secretariat established by, and in, the organising country. In 2009, due to the growing number of signatory non-EU countries, a double Troika was set-up for the Board, one for non-EU member states and another for EU members.

As a consequence, a double rotating chair was introduced doing justice to the two Troika's.

By setting-up the Process outside the realm of the EU or – as a possible alternative – the much wider 'partnership' of the EU SOCRATES / Lifelong Learning Action Programme, in principle membership was open to any country. Because it seemed rather attractive to be part of the Bologna club, not only European countries, stretching from Iceland (member since 1999) to Russia (member since 2003) and Kazakhstan (member since 2010), also countries from other continents such as Israel (Zahavi, 2019) and Saudi-Arabia,[2] actually applied or intended to apply for membership. It allowed, in their perception, for boosting visibility and prestige of its national education sector, even perceived as an element in the many 'excellent initiatives' that developed over time (Froumin & Lisyutkin, 2015). After intense debate in the BFUG it was decided to limit membership to those countries that had signed up to the European Cultural Convention. It was not a condition that these countries had to be a member of the Council of Europe. In 2015 Belarus – a non-Council member – joined the process as member 48, although not undisputed, a country not known for championing European values and freedom of education. When in 2020 it became clear that the country did not respect the rule of law, it was publicly reproved in coordinated speeches of ministers at the Rome Ministerial Conference in November 2020 (EHEA XE "European Higher Education Area (EHEA)" , 2020). Comparable criticism could be made regarding the EU member states Poland and Hungary as well as Russia but singling them out was perceived as too sensitive.[3] Membership remained a hotly debated issue as was the establishment of a real infrastructure based on a permanent Secretariat. The Council of Europe offered the – rejected – option to host such a Secretariat. This made sense as being the home of the European Cultural Convention (Committee of Ministers, 2010; BFUG Secretariat, 2016). The discussion is ongoing (Bergan & Geanta, 2020).

[2] Learned by the author from a discussion with the Minister of Education and senior civil servants and advisors in Riyadh, 9 May 2010.

[3] According to several national BFUG representatives.

4.4 Conditions for Change

The above is of relevance because it informs us about responsibilities and the power struggle to allow for governing reform to establish *change*. Change thought necessary to allow universities to play a key role in innovation-based economies (the knowledge-based society) and global competition. This brings us to 'change theory' and 'Theory of Change', perceived as highly relevant for understanding the implementation of the aims of the Bologna Process / implementing an EHEA. The wider 'change theory', which is phrased as a framework of ideas, supported by evidence, that explains some aspect of change beyond a single initiative', is distinguished from 'Theory of Change', being defined as 'a particular approach for making underlying assumption in a change project explicit, and using the desired outcomes of the project as a mechanism to guide project planning, implementation, and evaluation' (Reinhold & Andrews, 2020). This theoretical model, based on the notion of governance and management by set objectives, was developing from the second half of the 1990s. Theory of Change is used by a growing number of governmental sectors, NGOs, companies, and institutions to promote social and political change. It makes a distinction between desired and actual sequence of outcomes: shorter-term, mid-term and longer-term ones. The model allows for measuring effectiveness regarding the changes aimed for, both in process and methods, but also for evidencing next steps. Before starting a process of change, one should be aware of the feasibility of the aims defined in relation to the starting conditions and also to assure oneself that the different steps and final product can be evaluated. This implies that solid, concrete, observable and measurable indicators should be in place, which allow for convincing stakeholders that the initiative has been implemented according to required standards and has been successful. In this respect success is much more than just knowing 'what works', because experience in HE settings shows that blindly copying or scaling will hardly ever work, because of change conditions, commitment and ownership of those directly involved (Brest, 2010; Centre for Theory of Change, 2020; Taplin & Clark, 2012).

The Bologna Process claimed to realize systemic change, which turns us to the issue, what conditions this type of change. In 2018 a model was published, which allows for comprehensive insight in the different dimensions of 'system change'. A distinction is made between (1) structural change, involving policies, practices and resource flows, (2) semi-explicit factors, that is relationships and conditions and power dynamics, and finally (3) transformative change (or implicit factors, phrased as mental models (Kania et al., 2018). The model is highly appropriate to the Bologna Process as its definitions of the terms, show us. The crux is the quality of connections and communications among actors as well as the distribution of decision-making power, authority, and the role of formal and informal influence among individuals and formal entities. The model is clearly aligned with the *Tuning governance model: Bologna Process in Higher Education* published exactly at the same time, which makes a distinction between the system dimension and the structure and content dimensions (Wagenaar, 2018). See Fig. 4.1. Centrally positioned in

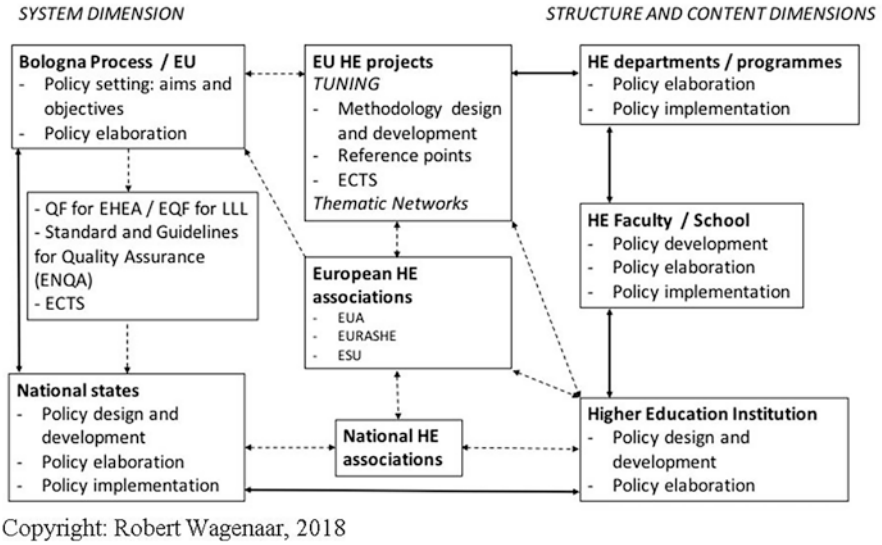

Fig. 4.1 Tuning governance model: Bologna Reform Process in Higher Education

this model are overarching initiatives and (inter)national organisations, which could be complemented with international university networks. These initiatives and organisations represent the semi-explicit and implicit factors, that is informal power, key for realising change.

These theoretical models highlight that objectives, process and actor behaviour are fully interrelated regarding the effectiveness of the governance model. It also shows the level of challenge to overcome. In that context it is important to stress that the Sorbonne and Bologna Declaration were initiated to use international leverage for national system change, to make these systems financially affordable, competitive and the education offered relevant for society at large.

The Ministerial Bologna Conference (2005) in Bergen was perceived at the time – but also retrospectively – as an overwhelming success (Haskel, 2009). The basic assumptions for a first and a second cycle had been agreed 2 years earlier, although the compromise found for the length of the second cycle was not very straight forward. A political arrangement highly influenced by budgetary arguments, not by substantive ones. While the first cycle was fixed at 180 to 240 ECTS credits – which allowed to take in to account differences in outcomes of secondary education and diversity in profiles – the formulated minimum requirements of the second cycle can be perceived as a monstrosity. The following definition was endorsed: 'While master degrees programmes normally carry 90-120 ECTS credits, the minimum requirements should amount to 60 ECTS credits at master level. As the length and the content of bachelor degrees vary, there is a need to have similar flexibility at the master level. Credits should be of the appropriate profile' (The Bologna Process Conference on Master-level Degrees, 2003). The formula meant a confirmation that there were considerable differences between countries and the

acceptance that these would be kept, which was clearly in conflict with the Bologna objective of a system of easily readable and comparable degrees. In particular with the notion, that cycles should be clearly distinguished. In the years to come the compromise would not only keep hindering transnational recognition of studies but would also block access to the third cycle in a number of European countries.

In Bergen the Ministers of Education were asked to endorse the ECTS credit-based Qualifications Framework for the EHEA offering a clear set of descriptors, what to expect from a first, a second and a third cycle programme (Bologna Working Group, 2005). In combination with the also accepted document *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (SGQA)* a powerful 'system' was created to facilitate international cooperation and trust and confidence. In particular, because the Tuning Educational Structures initiative, co-financed by the EU, obtaining strong support of the European University Association, allowed the EC to publish a completely revised ECTS Users' Guide. It implied not only moving from a transfer to an accumulation system for workload-based credits, but also for making a model available for (re)designing feasible study programmes. The 'new' ECTS conditioned the awarding of credits by achieving the (intended) learning outcomes for a degree programme and its individual units. Its formal name became European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System, still abbreviated as ECTS, keeping the brand name (European Commission, 2004).

With these 'systems' in place, one can argue that the mission of the main aims of the Bologna Process were accomplished, the actual implementation and remaining action points to be left to the individual countries. In retrospect, the Open Method of Coordination could have been perceived a successful governance model when all signatory countries would have indeed (1) fully introduced a two-cycle system, according to the model of a bachelor covering 180–240 ECTS credits and a master holding 90–120 credits, (2) integrated the SGQA in their national HE systems and (3) fully accepted ECTS as a credit accumulation system. In reality, the many evaluation reports prepared by the BFUG, the National Unions of Students in Europe (ESIB/ESU), the EUA with its eight Trends reports, the three Eurydice reports as well as independent researchers (Directorate-General, 2010) spanning the period 2003–2018 show this has proven not to be the case. As ESIB already noticed in 2003 in its report *Bologna With Student Eyes*, 'implementation' of the Bologna objectives is done 'à la carte' by the countries involved. It repeated this message in its evaluations of 2005, 2007 and 2009 (ESIB, 2003, 2005, 2007; ESU, 2009).

4.5 Derailed or Late Arrival?

Although, the Bologna Process got real momentum due to its promising results halfway through the first decade of the twenty-first Century, it also showed the first cracks. The image arises of a train with an engine not strong enough to pull a growing number of wagons – each representing a country – to keep its speed. During the period 1999–2005 the Bologna Process had been highly facilitated by involving

quality assurance experts as well as informed academics. For example, it had two academic rapporteurs, Prof. Pedro Lourtie and Prof. Pavel Zgaga, for reporting to the ministers about progress respectively at the Ministerial Conferences of Prague (2001) and Berlin (2003). The key documents mentioned in the previous paragraph had been prepared by (academic) experts. They proved to be instrumental for success. It is important to stress that in all three cases wise leadership was required to come up with results embraced by those meant to implement the 'systems' agreed.

Having the necessary 'systems' in place in 2005, it was the moment to start their roll out. The working group Institutional Autonomy and Governance was so right, when its chair Christina Ullenius, Rector Magnificus of Karlstadt University in Sweden, reported at the Bergen Ministers Conference that optimal co-operation and division of labour between public authorities and autonomous EU institutions would be required to implement 'Bologna'. She stipulated the need for a legal framework in which the autonomous role of the HE institutions would be defined, but also that governments should be accountable to HEIs for providing the necessary means to achieve the Bologna objectives. It would imply state regulated degree structures, the introduction of ECTS and student support. The conclusions of the working group are crystal clear: change regarding governance is required, legal obstacle to change and creativity should be removed, the focus should be on quality assurance and outcomes and HEIs should be trusted 'to take charge of implementation of the Bologna Process' (The Bologna Process, 2005). This is not what would happen in the years to come, to the contrary.

Logic demanded that moving from policy making to policy implementation would require clear cut decisions regarding next steps. The bold choice could have been made to wrap up the role of the BFUG as a means to steer the Bologna Process by completely restructuring the governance model involving directly the key stakeholders required to reform their degree programmes according to the 'system' changes agreed. This would have implied moving actively from a unilateral approach based on an intergovernmental model to a multi-dimensional and multi-layered one, limiting the role of the BFUG to a monitoring mechanism. Instead, the BFUG chose the option to narrow the group involved to ministerial staff and experts directly linked to the government, such as QA organisations, academic experts were deliberately side-tracked.

A remarkable choice, because in the period 2005–2009 the BFUG gradually realized that the reform of HE programmes did not only depend on system change, but required most of all structural changes in the way degree programmes were designed and delivered. To meet the *zeitgeist* the educational paradigm had to change from expert driven to student-centred education, by focussing on what students should know and be able to do to be prepared for their role in a dynamic society. It would imply both the revision of degree programmes and the introduction of additional learning, teaching and assessment approaches. This was a message that had already been sent by countries with an Anglo-Saxon educational tradition as well as the Tuning Educational Structures initiative from 2001 (González & Wagenaar, 2003). In 2009 the student-centred and active learning approached was formally embraced by the Bologna countries in the Louvain la Neuve / Leuven

Ministerial Communiqué. This was a confirmation that educational experts and academic staff had to brought into play. By endorsing the student-centred, or outcomes-based approach, governments intervened with the prime role of HEIs: how learning, teaching and assessment should be organised and delivered. It meant a clear violation of the principles of the *Magna Charta Universitatum.* Governments claimed a role they should not aspire to, because it would come with responsibilities.

Both theory and practical experience evidence that the most complicated part of change is not developing the groundwork in terms of systems, frameworks and the like but their actual implementation. In railway terms, not only the curviest but also steepest part of the track, still had to come. It is therefore remarkable that in both the scholarly and the public debate so little attention has been offered to the actual implementation process and the conditions for change. Instead, the scholarly debate concentrated on the Process itself, the role of the EC and soft power (Brand, 2011). In particular in the period 2006–2012 this resulted in a very substantial number of publications. However, the key point whether the Bologna train would make it to the station was not really covered, although there are exceptions, both regarding systemic changes (Garben, 2011) and change of the learning paradigm.

Returning to the theoretical models, lack of results should not surprise anyone. The BFUG itself concluded that general conversion at system level, let alone harmonization, had not taken place fully, the results so far to be uneven and incomplete. In 2014 in a paper *The Bologna Process Revisited* – meant for internal use – in a spare moment of self-reflection – it was noticed that the Process had failed to communicate its vision well, did not distinguish clearly between structural reforms at national level and actual implementation, had not sufficiently acknowledged and promoted 'student-centred learning' as a main pillar for reform and had fundamentally underestimated the complexity of the Process (BFUG, 2014). It was also acknowledged that in practice the Bologna train went into a tunnel, allowing for an 'agora', a meeting place limited to 'a community of officials and experts and far less genuine practitioners'(BFUG, 2014). The experts involved were staff close to governments, not the wider academic community essential for implementing the Bologna objectives.

'Change theory', 'Theory of Change' and models for 'system change', all resulting from practical experience over time, highlight how crucial the semi-explicit and informal factors are for developing commitment and ownership of change. This besides the fact that a measurable step by step approach is required to make progress and avoid pitfalls. Overseeing the Bologna Process some went right but much went wrong. It seemed in the perception of the time to make sense to transform the Bergen summit outcomes at national level: detailing an overarching European qualifications framework according to the national structure of degree programmes, to anchor ECTS in national legislation and to build a national infrastructure for quality assurance. Intended to reach comparability and compatibility at system level, it would have been more sensible to simply copy the European wide 'systems' agreement achieved, at national level.

From the very start national interests played a prominent role in the Process, in particular the (in)ability of the many countries and their HEIs to initiate real reforms.

The initial aim of the Sorbonne Declaration had been to move elephants, that is to make universities and their staffs to reform their degree programmes. In most countries they did not move much. This was due to lack of political pressure but probably in particular due to inadequate incentives. In this context it has to be understood, that the vast majority of academics are not trained in offering teaching and learning at tertiary level, have not been informed about educational paradigms, and derive their status from being 'knowledge experts' and researchers. Many still operate on the notion that a teacher is the 'boss' in his/her own class room; the notion of having a shared responsibility for delivering high level degree programmes clearly underdeveloped (Birtwistle et al., 2016).

4.6 Balance of Power

In terms of power balance and influence, it has been claimed that the EC was able to regain the initiative of agenda setting regarding educational reforms since it became a full member of the Bologna Process in 2001 (Olsen & Maassen, 2007). This might have been the case in terms of intellectual input regarding the documents, including the Commission communications and reports produced over time, it was clearly not in terms of political impact. To the contrary, from 2004 onwards it let its power base be eroded.

The strength of the EC was its direct relation with the world of academics as a result of its action programmes. It is well known that the EC was the main driver for creating an infrastructure for quality assurance, resulting in European organisations such as ENQA, EQAR and ENIC. In potential it created also a powerful infrastructure for curriculum reform by lining up with academics operating with assent and support of their HEI managements: (working) groups of academic experts operating as 'change agents'. The most significant examples: academics directly involved in developing and promoting ECTS and LLL (Yemini, 2012), Thematic Network Programmes (TNPs) and the Tuning initiative, of which Pavel Zgaga was a member of the Education Science group. All these initiatives, which were closely aligned, were meant to build trust and confidence between academics and to initiate reform of HE degree programmes based on individual and group commitment and ownership. These had as their ultimate aim to guarantee relevant and evidence-based degree programmes worth public investment.

In 2004 the EC proposed to the BFUG to turn the ECTS Expert Group, organized and financed by the EC into a Bologna Expert Group. The BFUG went along with this proposal but conditioned that their composition and ultimate responsibility for activities would be that of the national authorities, the check still to be paid by the EC (Wagenaar, 2019). It meant breaking up a transnational group into national ones. When moving from the SOCRATES II to the LLL Framework Programme in 2007, the EC gave up the TNPs, of which the vast majority had proven to be very influential in setting the reform agenda at subject area level. Peer-to-peer learning between disciplinary experts, developing reference frameworks as well as offering state of

the art models of good practice to be perceived as their main contributions. The impact of TNPs could still be traced some ten years later (Birtwistle et al., 2016). In 2015 the EC allowed the BFUG to take over the responsibility for ECTS. In that year only a very small number of national Bologna Experts teams were still operational, mainly in EU neighbourhood countries (Sphere Project, 2020).

In April 2019 the EUA concluded, on the basis of an inventory among the National Rectors Conferences, there was very limited vertical communication on the Bologna issues, that is structural contact between the Ministry and the HEIs (EUA XE "European University Association (EUA)" , 2019a). This is supported by the findings of a Tuning research project on the implementation of student-centred learning. In countries where the dialogue was established the level of implementation of the main Bologna aims, in particular the correct use of ECTS and the introduction of student-centred learning, is demonstrably more successful. These seem also to be the countries where the national Bologna teams (have) operate(d) more effectively, e.g., Austria, Belgium-Flanders and The Netherlands among some others (Birtwistle et al., 2016).

This research as well as the Tuning initiative and its follow-up CALOHEE confirm that change requires most of all horizontal (inter)national cooperation to reform HE programmes as the recently established CALOHEE Qualifications Reference Frameworks indicate; frameworks – being the products of academics – which are based on a merger of the EQF for LLL and the QF for the EHEA. This experience is fully compatible with both the multi-level governance model and the Theory of Change as visualized below. Key here are two types of experts: educationalists responsible for academic staff training and development and subject area experts. Student-centred learning expects a deep and agreed understanding of the paradigm as is outlined quite well in the *Routledge Handbook on Student-Centered Learning and Instruction in Higher Education* published in 2020. The publication also confirms the rather disappointing level of implementation (Hoidn & Klemenčič, 2020; Klemenčič, 2020). Finding common ground what student-centered learning and teaching is / should be, requires vertical but most of all horizontal multi-layered peer-to-peer learning. See Fig. 4.2.

In April 2019 the outcomes of an online survey on the governance and thematic priorities of the EHEA after 2020, completed by 32 BFUG members and 8 Consultative members, was published (BFUG, 2018). From the responses it can be digested that the BFUG membership – although acknowledging 20 years of results falling short – still sees itself in the pilot position instead of sharing that position with 'practitioners'. Main suggestions, arriving from the survey for breaking the deadlock: at EHEA level regular consultation of practitioners to be included in the BFUG working method and events and at national level involvement of practitioners in national implementation/dissemination activities; re-invigoration of Bologna expert teams (widespread positive assessment of the model) for dissemination and peer-to peer learning activities at national and sub/regional level. Furthermore, it is suggested that national practitioners should – as country representatives – be involved in the BFUG governing structure and activities. Much of this already suggested by the EUA in April 2019 (EUA, 2019b).

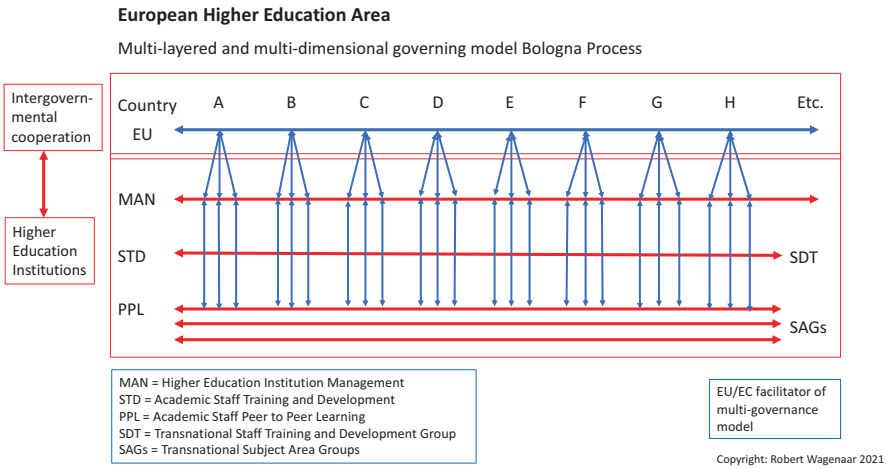

Fig. 4.2 Multi-layered and multi-dimensional governing model Bologna Process

The theoretical models outlined as well as the practical experience obtained from European projects show that this seems an inadequate way to cure the problem at stake, a derailed train or at least a train that has rescheduled its late arrival time again, adding another decade. Taking past experience seriously and taking for granted that all Bologna signatory countries really want to establish an EHEA (which one might doubt), it will be required to re-establish European wide networks of disciplinary experts familiar to curriculum reform and delivery as well as practitioners responsible for staff training and development. Such a model would be the best guarantee for building effective relationships and conditions and organising effective power dynamics (both vertical and horizontal), as well as establishing transformative change by developing ownership of the actors directly involved. This would imply a multi-level governance model – doing justice to the balance of power involved – in giving the modernisation of the European HE-sector a real boost, using multiple locomotives instead of a single one; not to diverse speed in terms of different countries, but to reflecting the levels of decision making involved.

4.7 Conclusion

Lack of grip of governmental power on the university sector was the main reason for preparing the Sorbonne Declaration in 1998. Due to stagnating economies resulting in high unemployability there was ample reason for looking at the university sector as one of the engines to turn the tide. Being part of a common market, it would have made much sense for coordinating action according to the proposals of the EC to transform university education. Public authorities thought that they could command HE change as a result of intergovernmental cooperation in the context of the Bologna

Process. This proved successful in developing the necessary 'systems', but the vast majority of Bologna signatory countries were less successful turning these paper agreements into reality. They simply underestimated the effort required to make HE education institutions and its staffs and students change behaviour.

Given the growing number of wagons of the Bologna train and the unwillingness of the machinist to split the train in time, it became rather doubtful that the train would ever arrive at its terminal station. From 2005, the chosen governance model was no longer fit for purpose.

Both theory and practice show that this was to be expected. Theory of Change and system change models offer clear indicators. The most crucial ones: dialogue/communication and ownership. Ownership requires a clear division of roles and responsibilities, that is power distribution. Covering mutual levels implies a governance model reflecting this. From the 10 years celebration of the Process in 2010 it became gradually clear the Bologna train had derailed or at least halted, after the time of arrival had already been postponed to 2020. It was an obvious indication that intergovernmental cooperation had its limitation regarding the power to deliver promises made. Further postponing the trains arrival to 2030 and the reluctance by national authorities to acknowledge that they lack the power to deliver what they promised and agreed among themselves implies that this train has come to a halt. The question remains whether an alternative train, the EU European Universities initiative, ironically based on the EU reform agenda, will offer a way out. Will these networks of universities – flagging ownership – offer the engines to develop together a strong transnationally well-aligned EU HE-sector – which is not equal to a EHEA – able to compete with other world regions? Is this an adequate response to the myth of power? It will all depend on the ability of these networks to become fully inclusive, that is doing justice to the multi-layered and multi-dimensional entities universities are. It will also require alignment of these networks at European level to allow for meeting at the same terminal station. The role of the EC, as the initiator of the European Universities, might prove crucial here and do justice to the balance of power.

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