Introduction

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What interest may have a book about the Bologna process in Central and Eastern Europe? It is obvious to assume that the Bologna process in the participating countries of Eastern Europe takes on different features and has different functions compared with 'core Europe', from where the Bologna process was initiated. The following articles, consisting of nine national studies and two theoretical articles seeking to interpret the development of the Bologna process, actually show to what extent the assumption that, "Bologna is very different in Central and Eastern Europe" is in fact the case. However, they also suggest that astonishing parallels exist between the two regions of Europe.

A first difference, which the authors unanimously highlight, is immediately obvious. In Western Europe, the creation of the common European Higher Education Area was primarily intended to coordinate the higher education systems of the participating States through a process of structural standardization. In all post-communist societies, however, another motive is at the forefront; the Bologna process is part of an overall political transformation, a break with the old system. As a result, depending on the geopolitical situation of the country, it either represents a step towards further integration into the European Union of those countries being already members of the EU, or at the very least, a form of "catch-up Europeanization" – a movement towards the EU for countries that are not yet EU members.

However, some authors point out a puzzling paradox. The political upheaval in Eastern Europe was in many cases connected to a recovery or even a re-creation (e.g. Ukraine) of nation-states. This is true, in the literal sense, of the post-Soviet states, which (re)gained their independence when they left the Soviet Union. It is

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also true in a more figurative sense, for the new EU members of Central and Eastern Europe, which were released from the Soviet sphere of influence and thus regained their actual sovereignty: yet as some authors have observed, these countries paradoxically were relatively anxious to give up this independence in favour of new supranational bonds (such as the EU). We must note however, that since the 19th Century national universities have contributed significantly to the formation of national identity.

In this contradiction between national(language) universities as promoters of national identity, and the transnational Bologna process, one can see a general paradox in regards to the concept of education itself. Education is, in and of itself, a paradoxical phenomenon. On the one hand, in so far as it sees itself in the tradition of the Enlightenment, it pursues universalist ideals. Yet on the other hand, since the emergence of nation-states in the 19th century, each individual national education system was designed to differentiate itself from that of its neighbours in order to support the process of nation-building (cf. Hörner 2010a, 1). Thus, higher education merely reflects the position of the concept of education in general.

These conflicts are present to a greater extent in the Central and Eastern European participants in the Bologna process than in the Western European states. This is because in some countries of Central and Eastern Europe this problem is even greater by the special role of national minorities and minority languages. The restoration of national educational systems collides in part with the rights of minorities because through the Bologna process the universities of minorities need a national accreditation. This fact increases their dependence on the mainstream university system. Some aspects of the Bologna process in Central and Eastern Europe are however surprisingly similar to the experiences in Western Europe, even if the Central and Eastern European authors themselves do not always perceive this.

Among those aspects the most striking one is the failing to achieve the principle goal of significantly improving student (and teacher) mobility, a goal that was publically promoted as being one of the main objectives of the reform of the European Higher Education Area. As in Western Europe – and Germany is almost a perfect example – student mobility among the Bologna participants in Central and Eastern Europe has been increasingly hindered for the majority of students due not only to a lack of financial resources but also, paradoxically, due to curricular differences which were accentuated by the modular structure of the three-stage post-secondary system, to such an extent that a substantive recognition of foreign study content is impeded rather than facilitated.

Resistance to the reform is similar among professors who are not satisfied with the downgrading of their role in the reform process. They are merely executing agents who are to teach the reformed curriculum. As far as professors had traditionally academic teaching freedoms these have been significantly restricted. Like their German colleagues the Central-and Eastern European authors too find that the traditional features of the University in the 'Humboldtian' tradition have been lost through the Bologna process.

Controversial is the economic dimension of the reform. While some of the authors criticize implicitly or explicitly the influence of business on the University in the Bologna process, others soberly recognize that, especially in traditional university systems, the three-year Bachelor Degree does not yet have the societal recognition that the reformers expect. In fact, the Bachelor Degree has a very hard time demonstrating that its graduates can compete on the labour market. This seems, not unlike the situation in Germany, to be the case particularly in countries that, in contrast to the British context, traditionally have a structured concept of "vocation" (in opposition to the simple "job"), i.e. it is expected that a diploma is associated with complete, immediately applicable professional qualifications - unlike in Anglo-Saxon countries where "employ-

ability" means that new employees are first trained, “on the job”, to fulfil their concrete tasks in the plant.On the other hand, the authors of the volume stress that within the international framework of the Bologna process it is possible to set very different national objectives. Depending on individual national situations and stages of development of higher education, some states are carrying out their already planned reforms of Higher Education under the protective umbrella of the Bologna process. The Bologna process is used for the realization of their own goals in educational policy. On closer inspection, this feature too is not limited to the Central and Eastern European situation. Similar observations can be made also in Western Europe (as some authors have noted explicitly). They point out that the Bologna process had its origin in the Sorbonne Declaration, an initiative of the then French minister of Higher Education J. Attali. He tried to push through his reform project of Higher Education, which was highly unpopular among the academic circles, by declaring it as a common project of several European States. Initially four core countries of Europe participated in the project, but then it increasingly gained in momentum with more and more countries within and outside of the EU. With the inclusion of countries outside the European Union in the Bologna process, the EU also found a lever to overturn the interdiction to harmonize the education sector within its member states, and even more to extend its influence in educational policy, and particularly policy of Higher Education, far beyond the borders of the European Union – you may note that even Kazakhstan is a member of the Bologna process. The Bologna process appears at least as pan-European, perhaps even more as a global process directed by Europe, a process which is formally not under the responsibility of the EU and therefore it is not bound by the restrictions of the EU's education policy contracts. When one of the authors (V. Tomusk) in an overall summary interpretation of the Bologna process states, that the difficulties the Bologna process encounters in Central and Eastern

Europe are not primarily to be found in the technical and organizational realms, but rather within the complex interaction of (educational) cultures and (educational) politics in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, his interpretation coincides with our finding made two years ago from the perspective of comparative education research (Hörner 2010b, 106) corroborated by our own practical experience when introducing of the Bologna structures in the university of Leipzig. In the implementation of the Bologna process in Germany, a specific academic culture – namely Anglo-Saxon behaviourism, which is based on complex, but perceivably measurable skills – collides with an academic culture which is influenced by German legislation about examinations, which is subject to the constraint that all examination results must be undisputable. So in Germany there is a tendency to avoid labour-intensive complex testing of behavioural goals (which are actually the proclaimed module objectives) in favour of taking as object of the examination process selective fact testing. In doing so the actual progress of modularization, which lies in a scaffolded development of sets of competences of practical relevance, is reduced to absurdity. Once again, a basic fact of comparative education is made clear, namely that careful analysis is necessary when transferring apparently identical structures into different contexts. This analysis is important in order to see which contextual conditions are necessary in order to achieve the expected purpose.

Through the overall picture that emerges from the national studies on the one hand and the interpretation on the other hand, it is not surprising that Central and Eastern European observers can also come to a critical conclusion. The relocation of the university as an important sphere of Culture into the sphere of Economics – possibly dominated by the economic interests of Eurocrats – is likely to jeopardize the cultural roots of the European University (see the summary of the contribution Tomusk). Again, the analyses from the East, coincide with critical German voices (in this case,

the voice of the author of this introduction himself) who reminds us the Humboldtian principle of the “emancipatory function of Higher Education as a social corrective" (Hörner 2010b, 107) a principle which in the excitement of the Bologna process should not be forgotten.

References

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