

# LESS RATHER THAN MORE INTERNATIONALIZATION? UNINTENDED EFFECTS OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS\*

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## Resumen

Este documento da inicio con unos comentarios generales que dan a conocer la situación de las universidades alemanas previo y durante la incorporación del Proceso de Bolonia, asimismo, explica tres efectos no ideados relacionados con el proceso de Bolonia y que tienen que ver con: acortar la duración de los estudios, disminuir la edad promedio de los graduados y reducir el alto índice de abandono de estudios.

Inmerso en este contexto, las universidades alemanas dejaron de ser instituciones educativas autónomas para convertirse en unas totalmente centralizadas. Por otro lado, los nuevos cursos presentaron grandes diferencias en áreas esenciales en comparación con sus antecesores. Esos nuevos programas contemplan grupos más reducidos, por tanto, hay más cursos que impartir, menos tiempo para prepararlos, más materias que tomar, menos entusiasmo de los alumnos.

De igual forma, y según las estadísticas, el número de estudiantes alemanes que se van a estudiar a universidades extranjeras es cada vez mayor. Más aún, los alumnos se enfrentan a obstáculos que tienen que ver con la movilidad y el pesimismo que enmarca el panorama laboral, lo cual indica la urgente y necesaria corrección. Muchos de los problemas reportados explican que el Proceso de Bolonia, debido tal vez a su corta edad, no está cumpliendo con las altas expectativas impuestas. Por tanto, parece inevitable una reforma de la reforma ya hecha.

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## Some Introductory Remarks

I will start with some general remarks in order to allow you an appraisal of recent trends in Germany's Bologna process. The traditional study courses in Germany before the Bologna process had a regular study time of 9 to 10 semesters with a real average study time up to 13.5 semesters. The successfully students were awarded the "Diplom" title which is comparable to a master's degree in the Anglo Saxon study system.

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\* Paper presented to the 5th International Workshop on HE Reforms, Shanghai Nov. 2008

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Ingreso: 05/05/09. Aprobado: 21/06/09.

When talking about the Bologna Process we look back on a practical experience of about three to five years.

Actual figures (as of Aug 27, 2008) show the increasing but still inferior relevance of the Bologna process: In 2007 nearly 80 % of all university degrees (286,400) were still traditional diploma degrees, whereas only 8 % left the tertiary system with a BA degree and only 5 % with a master's degree. 8 % gained a PhD degree (Federal Statistical Office of Germany, Press release No. 312 / 2008). As there are no more admissions for diploma courses the weight of the new study model will rapidly increase.

Within the European "two cycle structure" German universities were obliged to a specific BA – MA relation of six to four semesters thus planning to graduate their BA students after three and their MA students after another two years.

Against this backdrop I will dwell on three main unintended effects related to the Bologna process in Germany.

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## Constant Drop-Out-Rates

The shortening of the:

- study duration,
- the lowering of the high age of the graduates and
- the decline of high drop-out rates compared to international standards were one of the main goals of the Bologna process in Germany. (Federal Ministry of Education and Research, 2008 a, and Heublein / Schwarzenberger, 2005).

These aims could only be achieved in part.

- The average length of BA-studies after the Bologna reform amounts up to 6.8 semesters.
- The average age of all diploma holders decreased only slightly from 28.2 to 27.6 years in the period from 2000 to 2006. The age of BA-alumni averages 25.8 years (Wirtschaft und Statistik 7/2008: 607- 608) whereas after an adjacent master course of two years the alumni would be at least as old as in the traditional system.
- The overall drop-out rate lowered only slightly from 22% to 21 % in 2006. This means that still 55.000 students of the 2001 student cohort left their studies without graduation (Ulrich Heublein, *et al.* (2008). The figures are even worse for the new BA study courses. Here the overall drop out rate averages 30 %! (Universities 25 %, Universities of Applied Sciences 39 %).

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## Bureaucracy of the new course systems

### Examination Offices

The bureaucracy linked with the implementation of the Bologna process has been completely underestimated. There was an “explosion of examines” within the study courses which overran the universities (Grigat, 2008: 288). This resulted in an imperative of the coverage of all examines in the examination office.

In the old system the student himself was responsible to collect his final marks to get the admission for his final exams.

In the new study courses -such as to get an BSc in Business– the students have to pass 42 (written) examinations which have to be documented by the examination office (Grigat, 2008)- plus numerous retests.

The amounts of examinations that have to be documented have increased tenfold compared to the *status qua ante*. With about two million students in Germany and considering retests at least 100 millions of examines will have to be covered and carried by the examination offices.

Thousands of new staff members have to be employed within Germany. Efficient standard software is not at hand.

This may be a contribution to settle the economic crisis. The universities, however, have to spend lots of money of their budgets which will be missed in teaching and research.

### Course coordination and quality assurance

The new courses differ in essential areas of their predecessors.

Against the background of the former Diplom curriculum, were the professors who defined the study courses from semester to semester. The students made their individual choices from a wide range of courses.

Under the new system a thoroughly planned curriculum is expected for each student cohort. This means a complete BA study program without overlapping courses which have to be organized parallel in order to guarantee smaller courses of about 30 students compared to 100 before. Again a study coordinator is needed for each study program which again implies an overall amount of about thousand staff members in Germany.

Particularly labor-intensive are the quality requirements and their internal and external monitoring. Six agencies (*Bewertungsagenturen*) are currently admitted at the Accreditation Council which approved each new course for only a limited number of years so that a self generating evaluation instance with hundreds of new jobs has been created.

From the perspective of a large university a problem is located in the scaling phenomenon that is hardly to be solved. When students should have a freedom of choice for a second elective programmed in a university with 20 different study programmes there are already 400 possible combinations in which temporal overlaps are simply unavoidable. Forced windows of time for big lectures and a uniform regulation of all courses are the result.

In hurry-written software programs do solve this problem only insufficiently: They dictate solutions arising from the temporal and spatial constraints without regarding the learning needs of the students. So “function follows form” and not vice versa as it is expected from co-evolutionary

software or as it is known from architecture and the founder of the famous Chicago School, Louis Sullivan.

### **The consequences: Cultural breaks and the centrally planned organization of the University**

The German university is thus in a break from an autonomous educational institution to a centrally managed organization, with less self organizing freedom as regards to contents and time structuring both for the professors as for the students.

Was the “market risk” for the study success in the old system among students it is now at the university. It would be naive to believe that this will not affect the self-concept and learning attitudes of the students.

The provision of organizational and coordination services formerly provided by each student has to be made available by the university system today. The commitment to self organization and self responsibility –as difficult and as with so many side effects this has been connected– will be replaced by a guided system in which the individual student has much lesser responsibility for his own studies.

Within the former idea of university a culturally influenced learning and science orientation was expressed which enabled the students to adopt different professional roles and vocational challenges. On the other hand the German employment system could rely on such extra-functional and functional skills of the graduates.

Graduates of BA courses can not acquire such skills systematically because their lashed curricula do not require these skills any longer.

This interpretation may seem like a glorification of the old German understanding of a university. But even from the perspective of a U.S. scientists this lack of opportunities for development in the new courses are criticized: “It lacks the freedom that allows the students to determine their own course of study. (Schulze-Cleven / Davidsen, 2007: 404).

This also changes the role of professors who have to examine only themes from a tightly planned and written curriculum in the BA courses. This process is accompanied by an increase of the teaching load which in almost all universities increased by 12%. This change in their tasks increased the tendency of professors to “escape” from BA to PHD and masters courses.

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### **Less rather than more national mobility and internationalization**

If one looks at the mobility and the internationalization of German universities one will be confronted with two contradictory findings: The latest statistics show that more and more German students are enrolled at foreign universities. In 2006 these were 83,000 students and thus seven percent more than the year before (HIS, 2008). It must be taken into account that these students came predominantly from the “old” diploma courses. By means of these figures it can be clarified, however, that students are increasingly taking into account into their planning to study a semester abroad.

Also the number of foreign students in Germany is rising significantly. Within the 10-year period from 1996/97 to 2006/2007 it nearly doubled from about 100,000 to about 190,000 students (HIS, 2008). Currently, approximately 25,000 Chinese students are enrolled at German universities and

colleges. The number increases up to 30,000 when including those students who are participating in training or retraining programmes. The Chinese students therefore constitute the largest group among all foreign students in Germany (The Chinese ambassador MA, 2005.)

For the new Bologna study courses the balance looks quite different though the promotion of national and international mobility was one of its main goals in the Bologna Declaration of 1999 (Bologna Declaration 2000). There is, however, increasingly evidence that international mobility is dropping for students within the new study structures (DAAD / BMBF 2007: 5).

Only 3 percent (!) of the BA-university students have been abroad within the first 6 semesters though 40 percent of all student beginners are planning to go abroad within their first two study years. In a recent student survey the authors therefore draw the pessimistic conclusion that the international mobility may still further decline. (Federal Ministry of Education and Research Germany – BMBF 2008 b: 45). But this is not only true for Germany: The Swiss Student Union complains in a Letter to the Swiss Rectors Conference (16, January, 2008) that the small scale penetrability amongst different types of universities prevents students from moving from one university to another. And in the Final report to the Directorate-General for Education and Culture of the European Commission in 2006 (Final Report 2006) on the extent and impact of higher education curricular reform across Europe almost all countries report that mobility is still high on the agenda, but that some countries worry about the lack of mobility (also Eurostudent.eu (2008). Social and Economic Conditions of Student Life in Europe).

The reasons for this lack of mobility in Germany are (taken from own experiences)

- Too strictly designed study courses within the first 6 semesters that generate an enormous time pressure.
- Highly specialized study courses which differ from university to university -sometimes combined with a likewise specialized labeling of the study course (i.e. 'European Tourism Management') thus promising the students specific advantages in the labor market. (The organization of the former diploma studies was much more similar between different universities because of discipline orientated national examination rules (RPO)).
- No match of the German lecture period and semester breaks with the Anglo-Saxon practice.

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## Reform of the Reform

Even though many of the reported problems of the Bologna Process may be due to its infancy the process could not fulfill its high expectations.

Therefore, a reform of the not even universally implemented reform seems inevitable. Above all, the described obstacles to mobility and the pessimistic outlook of the BA graduates on the labor market require urgent correction. According to the German Professors Association the defined final degree should be the Master's degree (DHV, 11/2008, 18, August, 2008).

Without any doubt the Bologna reform changed the German universities seriously. But the objectives of this reform could only be partially implemented, while serious side effects are generating a different university.

Though the main elements of the reform like national and international mobility, recognition

und flexibility are strongly supported high skepticism remains amongst students and professors (see for a likewise appraisal of up to 1/3 of the respondents: (Final Report 2006, Part 4, 6.4).

The students experience the reform as an outside-directed process, especially with an overload of the study contents which comes along with diffuse labor market perspectives.

The professors connect with Bologna a superimposed top down reform which was decreed without their participation. In their opinion it deeply intervenes in the university culture of teaching and learning and hence is changing their professional role to a pure mediation instance of standardized knowledge.

Given the failure of the reform in key areas, those who shared the conviction that the Bologna process in Germany was mainly thought as a media to bring more students to a first academic degree with lower costs are not refuted in this assertion - and even this implicit goal threatens to fail in the face of significantly higher administrative costs associated with the needed personnel recruitment.

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