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HIGHER EDUCATION GOVERNANCE AND POLICY CHANGE IN WESTERN EUROPE

INTERNATIONAL CHALLENGES TO
HISTORICAL INSTITUTIONS

MICHAEL DOBBINS
AND CHRISTOPH KNILL



Higher Education Governance and Policy Change in Western Europe

Palgrave Studies in Global Higher Education

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Higher Education Governance and Policy Change in Western Europe

International Challenges to Historical
Institutions

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Abbreviations

ACQUIN	Accreditation, Certification and Quality Assurance Institute
AERES	Agence de l'évaluation de la recherche et de l'enseignement supérieur (Agency for the Evaluation of Research and Higher Education)
AHPGS	Accreditation Agency in Health and Social Sciences
ANR	Agence Nationale de la Recherche (National Research Agency)
ANVUR	National Agency for the Evaluation of Higher Education and Research
AQAS	Agency for Quality Assurance through Accreditation of Study Programs
ASIIN	Accreditation Agency for Engineering, Computer Science and Mathematics
BERR	Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform
BTS	Brevet de Technicien Supérieur (Advanced Vocational Training Certificate)
CDU	Christian Democratic Union
CEDEFI	Conférence des directeurs des écoles françaises d'ingénieurs (Conference of the Directors of French Engineering Schools)
CIVR	National Research Evaluation Committee
CNE	Comité national d'évaluation
CNER	Comité national d'évaluation de la recherche
CNESER	Conseil national de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche (National Council for Higher Education and Research)
CNRS	Centre national de la recherche scientifique
CNVSU	Comitato Nazionale per la Valutazione del Sistema Universitario
COMETT	Community Action Programme for Education and Training in Technology

CONVUI	Coordinamento Nazionale dei Nuclei di Valutazione delle Università Italiane
CPU	Conférence des présidents d'université (Conference of University Presidents)
CSU	Christian Social Union
CUN	Consiglio Universitario Nazionale
DFG	Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft
DHV	Deutscher Hochschulverband
DIUS	Department of State for Innovation, Universities and Skills
DPDU	Direction de la programmation et du développement universitaire
DUT	Diplôme Universitaire de Technologie
ECTS	European Credit Transfer System
EDF	Énergie de France
ENA	École Nationale d'Administration (National School of Administration)
ENS	Écoles nationales supérieures (National Schools)
ERASMUS	European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students
EU	European Union
EURYDICE	Network on Education Systems and Policies in Europe
FDP	Free Democratic Party
FIBAA	Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HEFCE	Higher Education Funding Council for England
HEROBC	Higher Education Reach-Out to Business and Community
HRG	Higher Education Framework Act
HRK	Hochschulrektorenkonferenz
IUFM	Instituts universitaires de formation des maîtres
IUP	Instituts universitaires professionnalisés
IUT	Instituts universitaires de technologie
KMK	Kultusministerkonferenz
LMD	Licence, Master, Doctorat
LOLF	Loi organique relative aux lois de finance
LRU	Loi relative aux libertés et responsabilités des universités

MEN	Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale
MEP	Member of European parliament
MESR	Ministère de l'enseignement supérieur et de la recherche (Ministry of Higher Education and Research)
MSTP	Mission scientifique, technique et pédagogique
NPM	New Public Management
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OFFA	Office for Fair Access
PISA	Program for International Student Assessment
PRES	Pôles de recherche et d'enseignement supérieur
QAA	Quality Assurance Agency for Higher Education
QUANGO	Quasi-governmental organization
RAE	Research Assessment Exercise
RDA	Regional Development Agencies
SPD	Social Democratic Party
U3M	Université du troisième millénaire
UGC	University Grants Commission
ZEvA	Central Evaluation and Accreditation Agency

1

Introduction: Higher Education Governance between Historical Roots and Transnational Convergence Pressures

1.1. Context and objectives of the book

Around Europe, higher education (HE) governance is currently subject to profound changes. Various socio-economic challenges, in particular the emergence of the knowledge society, demographic developments, sluggish economic growth, and increased competitive pressures, have stimulated an array of reforms to contemporary HE systems. In view of convergence-promoting processes such as the Bologna Process and the spread of New Public Management, domestic HE institutions are increasingly subject to competing visions of how university systems and institutions of HE should be governed.

Previous research has shown that, amid demands for universities to “do more with less”, national policy-makers are designing and embracing new models of governance and frequently transforming individual HE institutions, the role of the state, as well as the socio-economic role and function of HE. Many of the ongoing reforms in Europe, in particular, have been subsumed under the banner of “marketization”, ranging from the partial retreat of the state as a financier, to the allocation of strategic authority to university management, and to an increasing focus on the economic utility of teaching and research. Various analyses have shown that the Bologna Process has enabled domestic actors to shore up support for a range of only loosely related HE agendas, for example tuition or privatization (see Bieber 2010; Dobbins and Knill 2009; Niemann 2010). At the same time, the European Commission has put forward a clear vision

for the governance of European universities, which includes, among other things, a diversification of funding sources, an intensification of ties between universities and industries, and a closer match between the supply of qualifications and labour market demands. As a result of transnational pressures and domestic exigencies, national systems of HE governance are – to a greater or lesser degree – being reshaped, transformed, modernized, and, in many cases, “marketized”. These changes are altering the role of the state, heralding new paradigms for university management, and contributing to new forms of university–industrial relations.

There is a wide consensus that soft governance mechanisms at the European level have unleashed the forces of change in national HE and prompted national policy-makers to engage in proactive reforms (see Martens et al. 2010; Paradeise et al. 2009). However, individual national HE systems are still also anchored in country-specific regulatory and coordinative regimes, which to a great extent reflect national historical, institutional, and cultural developments (Neave 2003). Thus, national HE arenas are still entrenched in pre-existing historical institutions and opportunity structures. At the same time, HE systems are still marked by culturally embedded guiding principles on the function and utility of education (Martens et al. 2010). It is against this background that the proposed book aims to comparatively analyse the reforms in HE governance in Western Europe. In this regard, three crucial questions arise which will guide our study: First, how does the state react to transnational pressures for change and modernization? Second, how is transnationally inspired policy change “digested” by the pre-existing, and often deeply embedded, country-specific structures of HE governance? Third, to what extent have national HE systems converged on a common (market-oriented) model of governance?

The aim of the book is to provide a systematic and comparative assessment of such changes in HE governance in the four largest Western European countries: France, Italy, Great Britain, and Germany. By focusing on the reform trajectories of European HE systems of the past 25 years, we examine the interplay between transnational soft governance mechanisms and historically embedded institutions of HE. Looking at public universities, we address how the Europeanization and transnationalization of the policy area have reconfigured institutions of governance and reshaped

the allocation of autonomy between the state, professoriate, and university management.

Against this background, the book pursues several theoretical, conceptual, and empirical objectives. In theoretical terms, it is one of the first studies to add a political science perspective to the study of HE. It goes beyond the mere description of the reform process and seeks theoretical explanations for national outcomes. This analysis draws on theories of historical institutionalism and institutional isomorphism to explain the competing forces likely to push or pull HE systems towards a certain policy model. In so doing, the book adds new perspectives to the body of literature dealing with comparative HE, while offering new insights into the public policy and policy convergence literature.

At the same time, the book offers an innovative and encompassing concept for measuring change and convergence of national HE governance. Our analysis focuses on three different levels which together provide the foundations for the governance of HE systems: (1) the system level, that is relationship between the state and HE institutions, (2) the institutional level, that is patterns of governance within universities, and (3) the intermediate level involving the relationship between universities and society and external stakeholders (e.g. businesses). In this context, we draw on three visions of the modern university derived from historical models – the French state-control model, the German-based model of academic “oligarchy” or “Humboldt” model, and the Anglo-American market-oriented model (Neave 2003). Although all three models have ceased to exist in their purest form, they remain anchored in modern-day university practice and collective memory and continue to circulate in public discourse as templates for reform endeavours. Thus, they function as poles towards which HE systems may converge. Against this background, we provide a framework of empirical indicators which allows us to trace the changes that European HE systems are currently undergoing. We develop three ideal types that take internal university governance as well as the role of the state and external stakeholders into account. For each model, we derive indicators with regard to the university decision-making, financial governance, personnel autonomy, and substantive autonomy. This shall enable us to systematically and comparatively analyse the areas in which and to what extent policy change has

taken place over the course of three time periods (1984, 1998, and 2010).

Finally, the book offers new empirical insights into the change and convergence of HE governance in Western Europe. More specifically, we conduct four country case studies of HE governance in transition (France, Italy, Germany, Great Britain). The justification for these countries lies not only in the fact that they are home to the largest Western European HE systems, but also in their key role in initiating the Bologna Process and thus the Europeanization of HE. Moreover, each of these countries bears a distinct historical model of HE governance – Germany (academic self-rule), France (the state-centred model), Great Britain (an early New Public Management reformer), and Italy (parallelism of state bureaucracy and academic “barons”). Thus, the case selection provides solid foundations to assess to what extent the transnationalization of the policy area has pushed their historical models of governance in a common direction.

In the following sections, we first outline the broader analytical context of this study, with a specific focus on the Europeanization and transnationalization of HE governance, as it unfolds in particular through the Bologna Process. In a second step, we show in which ways the underlying study contributes to the state-of-the-art literature. Finally, we briefly sketch out the structure of the book.

1.2. Analytical point of departure: HE governance as an unlikely case of Europeanization

Before the initiation of the Bologna Process in 1999, nearly all European HE systems had experienced some degree of reform, generally as part of overarching public-sector reform or due to educational supply and demand considerations. However, in the past 15 years, national HE policies are increasingly also being shaped by the international environment.

Of particular, but by no means exclusive, significance in this regard is the Bologna Process, which has provided a major impetus to the Europeanization or transnationalization of HE. The launching of the Bologna Process in 1999 has facilitated the diffusion of new HE strategies and models, which are aimed at enhancing the performance and transparency of European HE systems. As a result, HE policy is no longer viewed exclusively as a purely national policy domain,

rather increasingly as the result of new network-like relationships with a new array of public and private actors at the supranational, national, and university level. As argued below, the Bologna Process can be viewed as the culmination and collective European answer to an array of interrelated challenges. These include, to name just a few, the emergence of the knowledge economy, stagnant economic growth, the lacking attractiveness of European universities, demographic changes, and the impact of globalization. As a result, it is difficult to empirically disentangle its impact from other factors which are triggering change in national HE systems. For example, bilateral learning processes, worries over global competitiveness, and international rankings (see Hazelkorn 2011) may equally fuel domestic reform processes. Thus, in our empirical analyses of policy change and convergence we are careful not to overestimate the impact of the Bologna Process. Nevertheless, by creating a learning-promoting platform for “governance by comparison” (Martens 2007), it is legitimate to argue that the Bologna has intensified transnational communication regarding HE and added a further impetus to the above-mentioned catalysts of policy change.

1.2.1. The long path to Bologna

In view of the national uniqueness of education systems and their strong linkages to the nation-state and/or nation building, the Europeanization of HE governance would appear to be an unlikely prospect. For a long time, HE could not be found on the European policy agenda, and the term “education” is missing in the original treaties to establish the European Economic Community since 1957. The reluctance towards increased policy coordination was based on an understanding of education as a socializing institution which serves to create and shape national identity (see Gornitzka 2005; Neave 2003). The resilience of HE institutions and their resistance towards transnational homogenization can further be explained by the utmost diversity of national systems and practices. Any comparison of national systems at any level would reveal their vast heterogeneity and virtual incompatibility with regard to financing, curricula, rights and obligations, as well as systems of regulation and coordination. As a result, European or transnationally harmonized solutions would likely not only infringe upon national sensitivities, but could also be seriously disruptive to the historically entrenched

institutions and patterns of regulation (Scharpf 2002: 22–27; see also Gornitzka 2005).

By the 1970s though, European policy-makers increasingly agreed that a well-functioning market requires highly educated workers and that state-funded national education systems could not cope with the pressing numbers of students and the demands of the increasingly de-industrializing society (De Wit and Verhoeven 2001: 180; Neave 2003: 148 et seq). Against this background, in 1971 European ministers responsible for education drew up non-binding resolutions. At the same time, cooperation projects were launched, such as the 1976 Action Programme, which aimed to promote cooperation, mobility, and mutual recognition between HE institutions. However, there was no mention of moving towards common practices and policies due to the lacking incentive to apply supranational policies. Thus, any measures concerning HE retained a financially insignificant and strictly intergovernmental character.

The resistance of the Member States to further Community leverage over HE could not hinder the emergence of informational networks for education such as EURYDICE (Network on Education Systems and Policies in Europe) in 1980. In several subsequent landmark decisions, the European Court of Justice broadened the legal basis for community-level cooperation in HE. For example, the Court ruled that the admission to and conditions governing vocational training apply to all citizens of EU (European Union) member states, not just the citizens of the state in which the institution is based. In the so-called *Blaziot* case, the Court asserted that HE fell within the legal scope of vocational training, a legal definition which provided the Commission formal grounds to take initiative (Shaw and Wiener 2000: 81). At the same time, the EU took advantage of the budgetary weakness of member states by bolstering a series of mobility schemes for students and academics with substantial budgets. As a result, the Commission acquired the capacity to frame HE as a matter of economic urgency.

The “creeping competence” (Pollack 2000) of the EU was particularly boosted by student mobility programmes such as ERASMUS¹ and COMETT.² These programmes facilitated the formation of networks between institutions and the establishment of offices for international relations and enhanced the leverage of the EU by stipulating requirements which institutions had to comply with to receive

financial support. The cross-border fluctuation of students and professional academics had an additional unintended consequence: it quickly exposed the utter incompatibility of national systems (Neave 2003).

The perceived need for recognition, transferability, and compatibility was influential in the EU's shift from inactivity to a reactionary, yet constrained approach. This is best reflected by the Maastricht Treaty, which essentially enabled the *de jure* fixation of the supranational level in HE decision-making. In line with the principle of subsidiarity, the Commission was authorized to take action when the states could not act alone and when action at the EU level was deemed justified (see De Wit and Verhoeven 2001: 206). However, the Commission's persistent efforts to anchor HE as a vocational and economic enterprise were a point of criticism among the member states. Universities asserted the historical role of education to reach beyond one segment of society, that is employers, and contended that the social and cultural dimension of HE should be attached greater significance. Moreover, academics criticized the EU's fixation with the economic viability of the university to the exclusion of other factors (Neave 2003: 153). Against this background, the subsequent Bologna Declaration was not driven exclusively by economic necessity (see van der Wende 2003), rather by the nation-states' desire to outflank the EU with their own (initially) purely intergovernmental HE agenda.

Over the last 15 years, the Bologna Process has become the main slogan behind the integration of HE in Europe. On the occasion of the 800th anniversary of the Sorbonne, French Education Minister Claude Allègre contacted his German and Italian counterparts Jürgen Rüttgers and Luigi Berlinguer and somewhat later English junior minister Tessa Blackstone with the aim of drawing up a joint European declaration as a lever for national reforms (see Witte 2006). The resulting Sorbonne Declaration saw for the creation of a European university space to promote mobility, transparency, and labour market qualification and the harmonization of the overarching architecture of the European HE systems. The Declaration thus served as a roadmap for the Bologna Declaration (Table 1.1) which was signed by the ministers of 29 European countries on 19 June 1999.³ Specifically, the Bologna Declaration aims to eliminate some of the obstacles to increased mobility of students and graduates

Table 1.1 Objectives of the Bologna Declaration

-
- Adoption of a system of degrees easily readable and comparable in order to promote European citizens' employability and the international competitiveness of the European system of HE
 - Adoption of a system based on two cycles, the first, of three years at least, that may be spent on the European labour market and in the HE system as an adequate level of qualification
 - Establishment of a system of credits – developing the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) – acquired also in non-education contexts, provided they are recognized by the university system, as a proper means to favour the widest and most diffused student mobility
 - Elimination of remaining obstacles to the effective exercise of the rights to free mobility and equal treatment
 - Enhancement of mobility within and to Europe
-

in obtaining employment by fusing degree structures into a compatible and transparent system understood by both employers and academics (see Field 2003: 184).

Thus, from a technical standpoint, the Bologna Process does not directly address governance issues, rather paves the path to common study cycles from the Bachelor to Doctoral level, while enhancing the mobility, transparency, and comprehensibility of academic achievements. It is substantially different than previous initiatives, because it did not come from Brussels, rather from university leadership and member states. This perhaps explains the relationship between the supranational and subordinate communities laid down in the declaration. It includes no mention of harmonization of policy, but instead attempts to strike a balance between change and continuity, and hence between viability in the midst of competition and the defence of education as a cultural good.

1.2.2. Bologna as a novel form of Europeanization

Seen from the outside, the Bologna Process might appear to be nothing more than a voluntary declaration of intent. There exists no task force, monitoring authority, secretary-general, or an institutional body to promote progress. This explains not only the lack of legally binding measures, but also the lack of coordination of the implementation of the process. However, since becoming a member in the Bologna follow-up group in Prague in 2001, the European

Commission has become more and more integrated into this initially intergovernmental process. For example, the EU financially supports various activities inherent to the Bologna Process such as quality assurance, the shaping of educational structures, and the creation of joint Master degrees (Batory and Lindström 2011; Duclaud-Williams 2004; European Commission 2003a, 2003b). In light of the non-legislative character of the Bologna Process, the EU has elaborated a new approach to transnational policy coordination aimed at achieving greater cross-country convergence towards the main objectives as stipulated by the EU. This so-called *open method of coordination* (European Commission 2006a; see also De Ruyter 2009) is conceived as an instrument to assist member states in systematically developing their own coherent and transparent policies in areas in which common policies are not feasible. Instead of generating clear-cut legislation, it aims to pinpoint and define joint objectives to be reached by setting common benchmarks (statistics, indicators) and employing comparative tools to stimulate innovation (European Commission 2006).

Upon these foundations, the Bologna Process operates as a loosely coupled system for the exchange of expertise and know-how and the promotion of concrete principles, approaches, and policy strategies (see Knill and Lenschow 2005: 595; see also Teichler 2005: 22). In other words, Bologna is a means of mainstreaming HE activities into coherent overarching policy (Martens et al. 2004). Unlike previous arrangements, the unique nature of the process begins with the fact that it provides a common transnational platform for HE actors. This entails not only the bi-annual ministerial meetings, at which the implementation of joint objectives is addressed, but above all the so-called follow-up groups at the European level, national committees, and national Bologna groups supporting responsible ministries. These consist of representatives of the various Bologna countries and the EU, who jointly draw up concrete plans for the realization of objectives. This framework provides the infrastructure for international and multilateral communication and a means of channelling transnational HE activities. Participating actors jointly identify and define objectives to be attained, thus “moving national administrations out of a persistence-driven into a responsive mode of behaviour” (see Knill and Lenschow 2005: 597). In other words, the Bologna Process goes beyond merely channelling transnational

communication. The system of joint objectives translated into national action plans and assessed through consultative follow-up and peer review (and/or pressure) promotes the dissemination of best practices and dominant policy models (Huisman and van der Wende 2004: 40–41).

Altogether, the process has created a platform for *comparative cooperation* or *cooperative competition*, which in turn allows for the identification of advanced performers. Thus, in view of these underlying mechanisms, it is safe to say that the Bologna Process dovetails with the increasing trend towards “governance by comparison” (Martens 2007) and plays into other forces of change such as bilateral learning, international HE rankings, and national reform activism. As a platform for learning, it – at the very least – increases pressures on national HE policy-makers to assert the legitimacy of national policies amid transnational scrutiny. This in turn is likely to have a stimulating effect on national policy change and innovations.

1.2.3. The Bologna Process and HE governance

It is still an open question to what extent the emergence of a European dimension in HE has impacted historically embedded governance structures. For numerous reasons, we argue that the Bologna Process is likely to have a “snowballing effect” and spillover into reforms of HE governance systems, even though the main lines of action aim to transform study structures, rather than national institutional settings for HE (Musselin 2009).

By lifting the iron hand of the nation-state and framing HE policy as an economic issue requiring a European approach, the Bologna Process has provoked a normative and cognitive shift (see Gornitzka 2005: 18). Policy-making is no longer conceived as a private national domain, in which policies are generated within the vertical–hierarchical relationship between the nation-states and universities. The Bologna Process implies the emergence of new horizontal modes of interaction through network management in a dynamic, interactive policy arena. In other words, national governments are expected to act in tandem with a variety of public and private actors, at the supranational, national, and university levels.

The European Commission has also taken a more prominent position and finds itself at the centre of a burgeoning array of networks of knowledge exchange, policy coordination, and communication,

which enable it to propagate its own role as an “opinion former”, promote objectives and exert leverage over the integrated framework for transnational policy-making. Particularly worthy of mention in this context are the Commission’s efforts to incorporate the Lisbon Process, which strives to make the EU the “most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world”, into the Bologna Process (see Martens et al. 2007: 9).

The fact that the European Commission is not a neutral bystander is demonstrated by various other aspects. First, the Commission’s funding facilitated the initial Bologna meeting and many thematic preferences of the Commission (mobility, quality assurance, lifelong learning) have been incorporated into the process. The 2003 Commission communication *The Role of the Universities in the Europe of Knowledge* (2003) also offers clear insights into how top European decision-makers look at HE today. Essentially, the report mirrors the Commission’s strategy for promoting a stronger market orientation in European HE. Besides mapping out the central challenges (internationalization, massification, competitiveness), the Commission also puts forward a clear vision for European universities. This includes, among other things, a diversification of funding sources, an intensification of ties between universities and industries, and a closer match between the supply of qualifications and labour market demands. In other words, “universities have a duty to their ‘stakeholders’ (students, public authorities, labour market and society at large) in order to maximise the social return of the investment” (European Commission 2003: 14). Moreover, the Commission calls on universities to “open up to a greater extent to society outside and increase their international attractiveness”, which specifically would involve a stronger dialogue between academics and citizens, as well as the transfer and dissemination of knowledge between universities and the private sector (e.g. via spin-off companies, licensing intellectual property, and research results).

With its significant financial leverage, there is a strong argument that the European Commission is increasingly in a position to shape and steer the incentive structures for national HE policy actors. For example, Batory and Lindstrom convincingly argue that the Commission has turned individual universities into agents for its preferred policies. Seeking Commission funding, universities lobby national governments to pass legislation which enables them to conform

to Commission requirements and policy preferences (Batory and Lindstrom 2011). Hence, in view of these changing dynamics of the Bologna Process itself and, in particular, the manifest preference for a stronger market orientation in the Commission's strategy, there are solid reasons to suppose that the supranational level in European HE will trigger changes in governance patterns as well.

First, as argued above, the Bologna Process is the European response to other protruding external forces – the knowledge society, demographic changes, sluggish growth, and the impact of globalization, to mention a few. Thus, a collective supranational platform has been developed to confront parallel problem pressures and meet the challenges of national HE systems. Moreover, the implementation of the Bologna objective is likely to draw attention to other pressing issues at the national level (see Teichler 2005: 22). A transnational or European lens may indeed shed light on the incompatibilities between the features of national systems and the demands of the knowledge economy, globalization, and the transnational flow of academics.

Second, the Bologna Process may be used by national policy-makers to lend legitimacy to domestic reforms which exceed the actual scope of the declaration. In its effort to address a broad range of overarching issues like the knowledge society and staggering competitiveness, the Bologna Process offers a broad scope of interpretation and enables domestic level actors to shore up support for a range of only loosely related HE agendas, for example tuition, privatization, and managerial steering instruments. Moreover, the implementation of the core Bologna objectives creates new constellations and can shift the balance of power between the governments and universities, although it is likely to vary from country to country which actors are actually strengthened by the process.

Against this background, the Bologna Process can be viewed as the culmination of and central platform of a process of Europeanization of HE. Although its impact on governance structures should not be overestimated, the intensification of transnational communication and policy exchange stimulated by Bologna is likely to have a stimulating effect not only on national reform processes, but also other unrelated or only loosely related catalysts of policy change. For example, the Europeanization of HE may provide an impetus for the spillover of public-sector reforms into HE. Therefore, our

theoretical framework, outlined in the following chapter, will focus on the interplay between the mechanisms of transnational communication enhanced by Europeanization and the historical institutions in which HE systems are embedded. This approach will enable us to incorporate other internal and external forces of change and inertia. However, before we present our theoretical considerations and analytical framework for the empirical analysis, we will now briefly discuss the previous academic literature on the Europeanization of HE and the Bologna Process.

1.3. State of the art

As a result of the proximity between universities and their socio-economic environment, the study of HE has, for the most part, not been a separate scientific discipline, rather an appendage to other areas of scholarly inquiry – for example history, economics, educational science, and philosophy. In recent years though, it is safe to say that the Bologna Process has functioned as an “icebreaker” for the study of HE from a political science perspective. In this context, research activities can be categorized into five main thematic areas: the Bologna Process as a transnational policy-making process, the implementation of the Bologna Process at the national level, political and HE-related effects and side-effects of the Bologna Process, the impact of the Bologna Process on interest intermediation structures and networks, and, finally, convergence studies.

1.3.1. The Bologna Process as a transnational policy-making process

As explained in the previous segment, the Bologna Process can be viewed as a unique policy-approximation process, which takes place outside the policy-making framework of the EU. The unique nature of the process has provoked diverse academics to analyse the origins, governance, and underlying mechanisms of the process in great depth. In the early 2000s, diverse descriptive studies were published, which dealt with the Bologna Process in the context of European integration (see De Wit and Verhoeven 2001; Wächter 2004). Afterwards, authors increasingly attempted to elaborate on the Bologna Process from an analytical and institutionalist standpoint. Walter (2006), for example, examines whether the Bologna

Process constitutes a turning point in European HE policy and argues that the process constitutes a dual process of reconfiguration: on the one hand, the structures of HE in Europe find themselves in a profound process of change; on the other hand, a new European coordination mechanism has evolved. This process of reconfiguration is, in turn, steered by complex, multilateral, and hybrid-like institutional arrangements. Toens (2009b) deals with the intergovernmental character of the process and argues that governmental representatives were particularly concerned with maintaining their capacity for action vis-à-vis non-governmental and supranational actors when signing the Sorbonne Declaration and initiating the Bologna Process. Ravinet (2008) also deals with the genesis, further development and institutionalization of the process, and highlights how voluntary and flexible coordination in the area of HE has led to a system of monitored coordination (see also Banscherus 2009; Huisman 2010; Neave 2009; Westerheijden 2008; Witte et al. 2009).

1.3.2. Implementation of the Bologna Process

HE researchers from various disciplines have increasingly become interested in whether supra- or international HE agendas, in particular the Bologna Process and the education policy activities of the OECD, have influenced various aspects of national HE policy (see Jakobi et al. 2010; Martens et al. 2007; Martens and Jakobi 2010). Huisman and van der Wende (2004) discuss whether the European HE agenda and the emergence of a tight-knit transnational policy platform have facilitated or impeded national reforms. Inspired by the recent Europeanization literature, such researchers have focused on the national implementation of policies, which were decided on the European level. For example, Pechar and Pellert (2004) analyse the harmonization of study structures and the integration of the “European dimension” into study content and structures in the case of Austria, while Malan (2004) and Sieh (2007) describe the Bologna-related reforms in France (see also Fátima and Abreu 2009 for Portugal; Moscati 2009 for Italy). Meanwhile, studies have also been published which address the impact of the Bologna Process in the post-socialist context (see e.g. Leisyte 2008 for Lithuania; Slantcheva 2007 for Bulgaria; Tomusk 2007 for Russia) and in non-EU countries (see e.g. Bayrakdar 2007 for Turkey).

In recent years, there has been a trend towards comparative analysis of the implementation of the Bologna guidelines. Witte