

Adrian Curaj · Peter Scott
Lazăr Vlasceanu · Lesley Wilson *Editors*

European Higher Education at the Crossroads

Between the Bologna Process
and National Reforms

Part 1

 Springer

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Preface

Romania is the host country for the 2012 Bologna/European Higher Education Area Ministerial Conference and the Third Bologna Policy Forum. In preparation of these ministerial meetings the “Future of Higher Education Bologna Process Researchers’ Conference” (FOHE-BPRC) was organized in Bucharest on 17–19 October 2011 by the Executive Agency for Higher Education, Research, Development and Innovation Funding (UEFISCDI)¹ with the support of European University Association and the Romanian National Committee for UNESCO. The event aimed at bringing the researchers’ voice into higher education international level policy making. The conference results of the FOHE-BPRC are presented further in this book, which will be distributed to the participants attending the 2012 ministerial events.

The innovative character of the Bologna Process Researchers’ Conference was given by an unprecedented opportunity for researchers dealing with higher education matters to interact and contribute to the political process shaping the European Higher Education Area, as well as national policy agendas.

With the Bologna Process reaching a new level of maturity, reflections on higher education policy themes are being done in a more broader and systemic way. In this context, the authors aim to reach a better empirical and conceptual understanding of the Bologna action lines and their implementation. The following pages aim to bring an added value with the fresh and constructively critical analysis of different features of the Bologna Process, as well as national higher education reforms in general.

As stated in the introduction, “Going beyond Bologna” is about moving ahead by recognizing and realizing the creative potential of the Bologna Process. The next Chapters make headways on issues presented and discussed in the eight thematic tracks of the conference regarding: European Higher Education Area (EHEA) principles, learning and teaching, quality assurance, governance, funding, differentiation, mobility and foresight/futures of higher education, all under the motto

¹The event was organised in the frame of the six higher education strategic projects carried out by UEFISCDI and funded through the European Social Fund, the Sectoral Operational Programme for Human Resources Development.

launched at the start of the event: “Be(e) a visionary!”. The ‘visionary bee’ is also the logo of ForWiki portal (www.forwiki.eu), as the on-line host of the Bucharest Dialogues on Higher Education.

The “European Higher Education at the crossroads: between the Bologna Process and national reforms” calls for an innovative, systemic and visionary approach to higher education. As the Bologna Process is in a phase of consolidation, the focus on the role of new research and on enhancing further dialogue on the nature and future of European Higher Education was timely. The book intends to respond to these challenges and offer the reader a stimulating and enriching experience.

We wish that you enjoy the reading and join in the future debates!

Head of the BFUG Secretariat (2010–2012)
Member of the FOHE-BPRC Editorial Board

Ligia Deca

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Chapter 1

Going Beyond Bologna: Issues and Themes

Peter Scott

1.1 Introduction

Bologna is a dynamic process. Few who attended the original signing of the Bologna Declaration in that city in 1999 could have imagined the momentum that would build behind efforts to establish a European Higher Education Area (EHEA), or that the policy process they were initiating that day would become one of the most significant aspects of the wider European project. Although education had initially been a minor focus of efforts to promote European integration (and, indeed, had only been ‘smuggled in by the back door’ because of the relevance of educational policies and structures to professional formation – and, consequently, the free movement of labour), future historians may well judge that the Bologna process was among the most important elements in building the movement to build a common European ‘home’ in the last decade of the twentieth and the first decades of the twenty-first century. In the scope of history, the Bologna process is likely to rank alongside the establishment of the Euro – and higher perhaps than efforts to establish more integrated foreign and defence policies. It has become one of the most powerful symbols of ‘European-ness’.

There are a number of reasons for this transformation of a rather narrow and tentative policy process, focused very much on administrative and structural reforms, into a wider process of modernisation of European higher education and, wider still, of scientific and cultural renewal:

1. One reason is that Bologna has always gone wider than the territory of the European Union (EU). Initially this may have been regarded as a constraint, because of the need for nation states to agree to concrete policies and ‘action-lines’ outside the administrative framework provided by the European Commission (EC)

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in Brussels. In practice, it has been an advantage – because the EC has still been able to play a key, if unofficial, enabling role (the fact that some of the key Bologna players were also members of the EU has given the Bologna process a coherence, and robustness, which otherwise might have been absent); but also because its geographical reach, from the Arctic to the Mediterranean and from the Azores to Vladivostok, has meant that Bologna is close to being an ‘open’ process in contrast to the ‘closure’ of the EU itself in the wake of economic difficulties (and also perhaps the growing backlash to multiculturalism);

2. A second reason is that European universities already shared both a centuries-old tradition but also a series of contemporary policy preoccupations. Eleven years before the signing of the Bologna Declaration a meeting of university leaders in the same city had endorsed a ‘Magna Charta’ setting out core principles of institutional autonomy and academic freedom. The European University Association (EUA), the product of a merger of two earlier Europe-wide associations of Rectors and of Rectors’ Conferences, had also established a powerful identity. So Bologna, although initiated by Ministers (and prefigured by the Sorbonne Declaration signed a year before by the Ministers of Education of France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom), was not simply a ‘top-down’ process imposed on the universities; it was also to a significant degree a ‘bottom-up’ process building on the common values and traditions and the shared reform agendas of the universities themselves;
3. A third reason is that the Bologna framework has proved to be highly adaptable. Not only has the process itself evolved as connections have become established between its initial, apparently limited, objectives and wider goals (and also as confidence in the effectiveness of the process has grown both among politicians and civil servants and university leaders); but Bologna has also become one element within a basket of initiatives. For example, the EHEA has been followed by the establishment of the European Research Area (ERA), and the links between the restructuring of higher education (in the form of academic programmes) and the evolution of European research agendas have been made explicit. At the same time, the external projection of Bologna, as a model of higher education reform and as a symbol of the wider European project, has become increasingly significant.

For all these reasons Bologna has always been a dynamic process with the capacity to transcend its original objectives. That capacity continues, as the title of this introduction ‘Going Beyond Bologna’ suggests. In practice, as the conference of Bologna researchers held in Bucharest in October 2011 demonstrated, it is difficult to distinguish between research on Bologna topics and research on European higher education more broadly. Everything, potentially, is connected with everything else. The principal reason is the dynamism, and openness, of the Bologna process itself.

This introduction is divided into three sections:

- Bologna in context: a discussion of the contexts in which the process has developed (with particular emphasis on prospects for Bologna following the successive crises in financial and then wider economic systems after 2008);

- The evolution of Bologna: a discussion of the successive extensions of the process for the reasons which have already been briefly outlined, and the implications of these extensions for wider European agendas;
- Bologna themes: a summary of the major themes explored during the Bologna researchers' conference (and an identification of possible gaps, in terms both of policy and of research).

1.2 Bologna in Context

1.2.1 *Before Bologna*

The Bologna process has had a long and rich prehistory, as has already been suggested. This prehistory extended far beyond its immediate prequel, the meeting of four Ministers in the previous year and their endorsement of the Sorbonne Declaration or even the complex policy environment that provided the short-term motives for greater integration of European higher education (such as the desire to promote the mobility of professional workers by increasing the compatibility, and transparency, of academic awards; or to support national reform agendas). The prehistory of Bologna reached further back into the values and traditions of European universities, but also their administrative practices and regimes.

Three aspects in particular deserve to be emphasised:

1. The first is the powerful commonalities that European universities already shared. The importance of these commonalities should not be underestimated simply because they are often described in idealistic language. They included most prominently what might be described as 'Enlightenment' values – in other words, a shared commitment to scientific and critical enquiry and to a scholarly and intellectual culture. Also common across Europe, despite significant differences in administrative regimes in higher education, was a commitment to academic freedom and (subject to these differences) institutional autonomy. Of course, the extent to which these shared values were respected varied across Europe (especially before the collapse of Communist regimes in central and Eastern Europe). But they provided the common foundational principles articulated in the earlier 'Magna Charta' declaration in Bologna. A third key shared commitment across Europe was to the social mission of the university, even if many universities continued to recruit many of their students from socially privileged backgrounds (leaving it to non-university higher education institutions to enrol students from more diverse social backgrounds). So, before Bologna, European universities shared common normative structures;
2. The second aspect is the important differences that existed between European higher education systems in the pre-Bologna period. These differences have taken three main forms. First, they have been legal and administrative.

For example, in some European countries – for example, the United Kingdom and Ireland – universities have always been autonomous institutions with their own legal personalities. In many other countries, although equally autonomous in terms of academic freedom, they have been administratively subordinate to state administrations. These differences have been reflected in important differences in the appointment and status of university employees, including professors. Secondly, they have been structural – for example, in some countries distinctions between universities and other higher education institutions (such as *fachhochschulen* in Germany and *HBÖ* schools in The Netherlands) have been maintained, while in others (of which the UK system is the best example) unified systems have been established. Finally, important differences in terms of intellectual traditions and cultural mentalities have been maintained. One example is that in France history is generally regarded as a social science but in England it is regarded as a humanities subject. The impact of Bologna, and of related reform movements, has been to reduce some of these differences. For example, there has been a broad trend across Europe to increase the administrative, as well as the academic, autonomy of universities (although not necessarily of other higher education institutions). Also the adoption of a standard two-cycle pattern of courses has tended to reduce the distance between university and non-university sectors even when ‘binary’ systems have been maintained. But other differences, in terms of intellectual traditions and cultural mentalities, have persisted – or, when convergence has taken place, it has owed almost nothing to the Bologna process;

3. The third aspect is that the ‘action-lines’ that have emerged from Bologna have always had to be negotiated within terms of a delicate balance between Europe-wide initiatives and the prerogatives of nation states. As a result, the identification of issues that can be regarded as subject, directly or indirectly, to the Bologna process, has always had to be done within the context of this dynamic between European institutions and nation states. This dynamic has determined which topics are to be included and which are to be reserved for national determination (and the overlay between Bologna ‘action-lines’ and national reform movements has added an additional layer of complexity – and ambiguity?). It has always largely determined the rate of implementation even when Bologna ‘action-lines’ have been formally agreed. In some respects the confusion between the competencies of the EC, as the executive arm of the EU, and the responsibilities of the ad-hoc organisations established by the wider group of member-states to implement the Bologna process has led to further complications. But there have been occasions when the ‘misalignment’ between the EU and Bologna has created spaces in which actions can be taken which might be more difficult to take within a less complicated (and less confusing) environment.

These contrasting legacies – of fundamental commonalities in terms of academic norms, of significant legal, administrative and cultural differences, and of the tensions (but also synergies) between European institutions (whether formal EC and EU structures or ad-hoc institutions established to support the Bologna process) and nation states – have shaped the context in which Bologna has developed. Although present in the pre-history of Bologna, they have an enduring significance even today.

1.2.2 *The ‘High Tide’ of the Bologna Process*

It is important to remember the climate of political and public opinion in Europe when the Bologna process was being gestated. These were years of hope. If the aspirations for greater European integration represented by the Maastricht treaty had not been fully realised, substantial progress was still being made. The fall of the Berlin Wall and the collapse of the Communist regimes in Central and Eastern Europe was still a comparatively recent memory. The establishment of a common currency in the form of the Euro was proceeding. With hindsight the late 1990s are likely to be seen as a particular moment in the history of Europe, a moment of optimism, hope and progress.

The early years of the Bologna process also coincided with a period of considerable economic prosperity. The liberalisation of financial, labour and other markets, which a few years earlier had provoked substantial resistance, was now more generally accepted – mainly because the economic growth associated (perhaps wrongly) with this liberalisation also enabled states to increase social expenditure at an unprecedented rate. It seemed that welfare states could comfortably coexist with dynamic market economies – to a degree that had not seemed possible in the 1980s when social expenditure and economic growth were regarded as a zero-sum game, or would be possible after the onset of the banking and then wider economic crisis after 2008.

European higher education benefited from this benign political, and economic, environment. Universities received increasing levels of public investment, partly to enable them more effectively to fulfil their social mission but mainly to enable them to contribute more powerfully to the development of a dynamic knowledge-based economy. The Lisbon Declaration of 2000 (reconfirmed in 2005), which set the ambitious goal that Europe should become the ‘most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world’ by 2010, made this link between investment in higher education and science and the development of such an economy explicit. But, at the same time, the ‘modernisation’ of European higher education systems was being actively promoted. This took several forms, including the granting of enhanced administrative economy to universities but also the development of funding mechanisms that mimicked the actions of the market (for example, state-university ‘contracts’) and even the moves towards outright privatisation.

This was the background against which the Bologna process was developed and its initial ‘action-lines’ implemented. Indeed Bologna itself was widely regarded as an important element within the ‘modernisation’ agendas being pursued by nation states. However, despite the opposition of some student organisations and trade unions to Bologna on the grounds that it was promoting the ‘marketisation’ of public higher education systems, it is important to recognise the post-Communist pre-crisis optimism, and hope for social renewal, that was also a feature of the late 1990s and early 2000s. The ambiguity of the Bologna process reflected these two strands in the *zeitgeist*, as well as being interpreted in different ways across the newly established EHEA.

1.2.3 *Bologna and the Crisis*

The economic difficulties that began with the banking crisis in 2008 and culminated in the crisis in the Euro-zone in 2010–2011 have created an entirely new context for Bologna:

1. Social expenditure has come under sustained pressure as state deficits have increased – although it is significant that many European countries have attempted to sustain levels of public investment in higher education and science. As a result the tensions between the ‘public’ and ‘private’ sectors, welfare states and market economies, which had appeared to have been resolved through benign compromise (in the UK the Government headed by Tony Blair between 1997 and 2007 emphasised what it called the ‘Third Way’), have re-emerged;
2. Increasing levels of unemployment, even among higher education graduates, have complicated earlier (and simplistic) accounts of the links between investment in education and economic growth. Although the Lisbon agenda, and the emphasis on the crucial importance of the global knowledge-based economy, was not seriously weakened, it was acquired a defensive and even pessimistic tinge in stark contrast to the perhaps naïve hopes of the early 2000s;
3. There continues to be deep uncertainty about the eventual resolution of the economic crisis. At a macro-level is there likely to be a decisive move away from the economic liberalisation of the late twentieth century, and the neo-liberal political order that sustained and was sustained by it? At an intermediate level is the crisis in Euro-zone likely to lead to more rapid fiscal integration, giving renewed emphasis to European unity (at least in its ‘core’), or to a disintegration of the European project begun a quarter of a century ago by Jacques Delors?

It is in this new context that the Bologna process must now be carried forward. Paradoxically the pressure on social expenditure has placed greater emphasis on ‘market’ solutions in higher education – at a time when ‘market’ solutions in the wider economy have been called into question by the catastrophic events since 2008. Equally paradoxically nation states, despite concerns about sovereign debt crises, have emerged more strongly – as funders of last resort and as guarantors of economic stability. This new state activism may have implications for how Governments view their relationships with universities, especially at a time when economic stability may breed social instability. As a result, the social mission of higher education could be re-emphasised, if only as an antidote to unemployment among young people.

Finally the uncertain future of the wider European project has important implications for the Bologna process. Could Bologna survive the collapse of the Euro – and would this lead to a collapse of confidence in all forms of European integration? How would it be affected by a much more explicit division between a rapidly integrating ‘core’ and a heterogeneous ‘periphery’? It is possible that such an outcome could make the Bologna process even more permeable, if the implicit links with the larger project of European integration was weakened; but it could also sap the confidence necessary for its continuing development. There are many questions

about the future of Bologna that cannot be answered. But it is clear that those qualities of incrementalism and optimism that have characterised the process in its decade may be eroded by current events, and that new strategies – whether more decisive or more diffuse – may need to be adopted.

1.3 Evolution of the Bologna Process

The strength of the Bologna process has been (and perhaps still is) in its ambiguity and permeability. It means different things to different audiences and the boundaries between what is ‘inside’ Bologna and what is ‘outside’ have always been porous.

This ambiguity takes several forms. As has already been pointed out, more radical student groups and trade unions have sometimes criticised Bologna as a mechanism both for introducing ‘market’ values into higher education at the expense of ‘public’ values and also for encouraging managerial, if not corporate, modes of organisation to replace collegial modes of organisation in universities. Yet, viewed from outside Europe, the Bologna process has often been seen as representing and strengthening the ‘social dimension’ of European higher education (in other words, emphasising the social purpose of higher education at the expense perhaps of realising its entrepreneurial potential). Both these readings of Bologna are equally valid. Another example of the ambiguity of multiple meanings of Bologna is the contrast between the various instruments, or processes, used to implement successive ‘action-lines’ agreed at bi-annual ministerial meetings and the overall framework of objectives, even ideals, of the Bologna process. A third, and linked, example is the contrast between Bologna ‘experts’, whether researchers or officials, who naturally pay attention to the details of implementation and a wider group of individuals who stress the importance of Bologna as a contributor to a wider cultural or ideological project (and who, equally naturally, are less concerned with these details).

The permeability of Bologna is also striking. One aspect arises simply from the progressive enlargement of the EHEA and the increasing number of European states that have ‘signed up’ to the Bologna process. Not only has this meant that the geographical scope of Bologna stretches well beyond the member states of the EU, but also that even non-European states have been encouraged to align their higher education systems with the Bologna ‘model’. A second aspect is the progressive extension of the scope of Bologna – for example, to embrace the third cycle (or doctoral phase) of higher education, which has made explicit links with research that previously were implicit, or the attention paid to the external projection of Bologna as a – potentially global – model for the organisation of higher education. After each ministerial meeting new ‘action-lines’ have been added. The dynamism of the Bologna processes consists to a significant degree in its ambiguity and permeability.

One way to represent these qualities is to describe the evolution of the Bologna process in terms of three phases that are both broadly chronological but also conceptual. Convenient labels for these three phases are Bologna, Bologna + and ‘Bologna’.

1.3.1 Bologna

In the first phase, attention was concentrated on a number of concrete objectives:

1. The first was the development of a common two-cycle, or Bachelors and Masters, pattern of courses. Later this was extended to include doctoral programmes as a third cycle. Some countries, of course, already had such a pattern notably the United Kingdom, Ireland, the Netherlands and most of Scandinavia. In other countries the introduction of a two-cycle pattern presented little difficulty. But in others again it ran into significant opposition (as often outside higher education, among employers and professions, as inside universities);
2. A second objective was the development of the diploma supplement, as an additional to formal academic awards, with the intention of further easing credit transfer and promoting the employability of graduates by providing employers with more accessible and relevant information. This provoked little opposition in principle, although the impact of the formal introduction of the diploma supplement on credit transfer and employability has not perhaps been as decisive as had originally been hoped;
3. A third objective was the development of compatible quality assurance systems. The intentions were to ensure the consistency of academic standards across the EHEA and also when responsibilities had been devolved to institutions within national systems. Progress towards achieving this third objective has been more limited, being limited essentially to the development of Europe-wide framework within which national accreditation and quality agencies could operate.
4. The final objective was to promote greater mobility among staff and students, building on pre-existing European mobility programmes. Although Bologna simply provided an over-arching context in which these programmes continued to operate, the fact that student and staff mobility were now linked to the wider harmonisation and integration of European higher education systems created positive effects. The gradual adoption of a common two-cycle pattern also removed some of the obstacles to mobility.

During this first phase the emphasis was largely instrumental – literally so, in terms of the necessary development of transparency instruments; but also conceptually, in the sense that attention remained focused very much on issues of detailed implementation. It took some time for the broader significance of the Bologna process to become established.

1.3.2 Bologna +

In the second phase, new agendas emerged which came to emphasise this broader significance. First, as has already been mentioned, the extension of the Bologna framework to include doctoral programmes made the links between higher education and research, and between the EHEA and the ERA, more explicit. This remedied a major weakness in the original Bologna design, the dislocation between teaching and research that had sharply reduced its relevance in the eyes of the more research-intensive

(and highly ranked) European universities. It also tended to give coherence to the various European-level initiatives in the field of higher education – not only the Bologna process itself and the (non-coterminous) EHEA and ERA but also research funded under successive EC Framework programmes and also projects funded by EC structural funds. Although the integration of these various initiatives is far from complete (and, indeed, may not be desirable or possible), it has made it easier to grasp the totality (and so reinforce the identity) of European higher education. Close linked, of course, was a second agenda set out in the Lisbon Declaration. In some respects, it became more realistic to talk of a shared Bologna-Lisbon process.

A third agenda in this second phase was the external projection of Bologna. Although originally been designed as a largely ‘internal’ process to promote harmonisation and modernisation measures across and within Europe, its potentially wider application was present from the start. Not only was there considerable interest in Bologna outside Europe, but it was also important to articulate the relationship between the emerging Bologna ‘system’ in Europe and other ‘systems’, or blocs, in other regions of the world. This objective was added as an explicit ‘action line’ following the London ministerial meeting – both to promote European higher education but also to open up a policy dialogue between Europe and other world regions. A fourth agenda, present from the start, received additional emphasis during this second phase. This was the need to strengthen Europe’s universities so that they could compete more effectively. The EUA’s strap-line summed (sums) it up – ‘stronger universities for a stronger Europe’. One strand was the continuing drive towards modernisation of national systems, which was seen as being indirectly supported by the Bologna process. Another was the increasing impact of global league tables that continued to be dominated by universities in the United States. This challenge to Europe to have more ‘world-class’ universities provided a significant stimulus. As a result Bologna came to be seen as a mechanism to promote the competitiveness of Europe’s universities – both in terms of marketing (Bologna, perhaps unexpectedly, had become a *succès d’estime*), but also in terms of positive measures to strengthen them (the links between Bologna in this second phase and proposals to develop separate strata of ‘research universities’, or to segment national systems, remain suggestive).

1.3.3 ‘Bologna’

In the final, and contemporary, phase of the evolution of the Bologna process, it is possible to argue that Bologna has become a powerful brand (hence ‘Bologna’). It is also possible to argue that other, more mainstream organisational and academic, agendas have become attached – however informally and tangentially – to the Bologna process. These potentially include:

1. Reforming university governance: the implementation of national higher education reform programmes, which have often included significant delegation of administrative responsibilities to individual institutions, and also of Bologna ‘action-lines’ (and wider challenges presented by Europeanisation and globalisation) have made it imperative to reform how universities are governed;

2. Strengthening university management: the same challenges also make it equally imperative to enhance the management capacity of universities, by adopting what have sometimes been seen (and criticised) quasi-corporate practices. The fact that many Bologna ‘action-lines’, for example on compatible quality systems, place the responsibility firmly on institutions rather than state bureaucracies has reinforced this need;
3. Promoting inter-disciplinarity: several Bologna ‘action-lines’, such as the move to a two-cycle pattern of courses, and the emphasis on institutional quality systems as the primary guarantors of academic standards, and the emphasis on skills and employability in the Lisbon Declaration and linked agendas have encouraged a shift towards greater inter- and trans-disciplinarity. Although there have been other, more powerful, influences on the transformation of the pattern and content of higher education in Europe, the influence of Bologna has not been negligible;
4. Stimulating entrepreneurship: similar forces have also encouraged a shift to what has been termed the ‘entrepreneurial university’. These forces have been expressed not simply in terms of inter-disciplinary courses but also of more applied, embedded and distributed modes of research. To some extent these changes also reflect the instrumental/neo-liberal pressures on all higher education systems, outside as well as inside Europe;
5. Emphasising engagement: in European terminology the ‘social dimension’ has been interpreted by some as code for a backwards-looking defence of the ‘public’ university and resistance to ‘marketisation’. But new forms of social and cultural engagement, which reflect both the growth of mass university systems and also the globalisation of higher education, can also be subsumed under this label.

The extent to which all, or any, of these agendas can be attributed, even tangentially, to the Bologna process is open to debate. However, in two respects such an attribution can be defended. First, there is sufficient evidence that Bologna has either directly contributed to these agendas or at any rate opened up a (policy and intellectual) space in which they can at least be discussed across Europe to form the basis of a plausible argument. Secondly, the links between these agendas and the Bologna process are reflexive rather than linear or causal. The overall effect is that Bologna has become a much more interesting cultural and intellectual project, and also a more creative policy arena, that could have been imagined when the original declaration was signed.

1.4 Bologna Themes

The Bucharest conference attempted to mobilise the results of Bologna-related research under eight themes:

- EHEA principles
- Learning and teaching

- Quality assurance
- Governance
- Funding
- Differentiation
- Mobility
- Foresight

The papers given at the conferences on these themes are included as chapters in this book. What follows is simply some key messages that arose during the discussion of these papers in Bucharest:

1.4.1 EHEA Principles

One of the key messages is the difference between formal objectives and ‘tacit’ principles. This is manifest in a number of ways. First, the aim should not be to produce a final list of EHEA principles but to maintain an open and productive debate about European higher education. Secondly, implicit if not explicit in the Bologna process are rules of behaviour and shared values. Bologna is much more than a set of programmatic ideas and initiatives; it provides the space in which the common parameters of European higher education can be discussed, negotiated and coordinated. Finally, the distinctiveness of European higher education needs to be confronted – in two dimensions. First, it shares many common characteristics with advanced systems in other world regions. Secondly, the rest of the world has come to Europe, leading to increasingly heterogeneous student populations and raising key issues relating to multiculturalism.

1.4.2 Learning and Teaching

This second theme is at the core of the Bologna process. The revision of course structures, i.e. the move towards a two-cycle pattern, has important implications for the academic objectives of higher education, which in turn influences notions of employability and career outcomes. As has already been argued, this transition from course structures to academic cultures is one of the most potent elements within the Bologna process – but among the least explored (in terms both of research and of policy formation). A key strand is the potential tension between emphasis on skills and employability, as a response to the challenges facing Europe within the global knowledge economy, and social equity, an equally significant aspect of the construction of more cohesive Europe-wide society.

1.4.3 Quality Assurance

Quality assurance is important in two ways. First, it can act as an essential catalyst for the debate about the purposes of higher education as a whole in advanced economies and societies (and within the particular context of Europe) and also the aims of specific academic and professional programmes. In this sense it fulfils a similar role to reforms in learning and teaching. Secondly, quality assurance is a key instrument in the modernisation of European higher education systems – although this raises the question of whether the aim purposes of QA systems to provide top-down surveillance of academic standards or to promote institutional self-responsibility; and to police these standards (in the interests of ‘users’, whether Governments, employers or students) or to drive quality enhancement.

1.4.4 Governance

The Bologna process has not been a major driver of governance reform in European higher education, although it has been used to legitimate national reform movements that have promoted important changes in how universities are governed. However, much of the emphasis in these reform movements has been on procedural rather than substantive autonomy, and has often been accompanied by strong emphasis on performance management and other instruments of so-called ‘audit culture’. The Bologna process itself provides a weak layer of Europe-wide governance in the sense that its ‘action-lines’ have mandated national – and, therefore, institutional – policies. But the full implications of Europe-wide governance or coordinating structures have generally been avoided.

1.4.5 Funding

Like governance, the funding of institutions and students has remained firmly a national responsibility. As a result, the Bologna process has had very limited impact – although other European initiatives such as mobility programmes and framework funding have had significant impacts. At first sight, it appears that funding policies are diverging across the EHEA, with some countries moving rapidly to increase the direct contribution made by students in the form of fees and others maintaining the principle of ‘free’ higher education. But, the longer-term trend appears to be towards higher fees (as national budgets come under increasing pressure). However, it is important that funding should be embraced within the new space for dialogue that has been opened up by the Bologna process.

1.4.6 Differentiation

European higher education systems exhibit a variety of structures – from traditional ‘binary’ systems divided between universities and other higher education institutions to ‘unified’ systems in which all institutions are embraced within common legal, funding and administrative structures. However, there is growing awareness of the importance of global rankings of universities and also increasing pressure to differentiate institutional missions. Europe is now expected to rise to the ‘world-class’ challenge – and increasing differentiation is widely seen as the most effective strategy. At the same time, national Governments across Europe have embarked on higher education reform programmes that often involve, directly or indirectly, restructuring. However, it is important to develop more balanced indicators of differentiation than those used in global rankings, and also to recognise that differentiation within institutions has at least as important a part to play as differentiation between institutions.

1.4.7 Mobility

Promoting mobility among students and staff was among the earliest European initiatives in higher education – and is still among the most visible. By establishing more compatible course patterns and encouraging greater transparency the Bologna process has played a key role in promoting mobility. Although still unbalanced student mobility has steadily increased. Levels of mobility among staff have been less impressive (perhaps because other countries outside Europe, especially the United States, have been more attractive and, in the case of early-career researchers, the need to establish themselves at home has taken precedence). The tensions – or synergies – between the wider internationalisation strategies of European universities and their commitment to mobility and exchanges within Europe have not been sufficiently explored.

1.4.8 Foresight

The development of the Bologna process has to take into account structural changes in the global economy and also the evolution of new ‘world’ cultures. The context in which any strengthening of the EHEA will have to proceed is very different from the environment that prevailed at the time of the original Bologna Declaration was signed. Of particular importance is the changing dynamic between ‘Europe’ and the ‘world’ – which has both positive features (the increasing importance of world-wide ‘social movements’ and the growing acceptance of economic interdependencies and the need for decisive political action) but also negative features (the growth of

popular opposition to inward migration and the – cultural – perils of Eurocentrism). One possible outcome could be that the whole basis on which the Bologna process has been constructed, and the fundamental idea of higher education as a ‘public good’, might be invalidated.

1.5 Conclusion

The 2008 banking crisis, and the economic difficulties that have ensued, have created a new context for the continuation of the Bologna process. But there are other more subtle changes, including new life-styles, new technologies and new communicative codes and cultures, which may be equally significant. One of the most important changes, of course, is the success of the Bologna process that has transformed the landscape of European higher education.

For more than a decade Bologna has been the policy theme around which efforts to introduce a greater degree of coherence into European higher education systems and to reform and modernise these systems have been organised. Bologna has proved to be a creative and dynamic process, with multiple effects (indirect as well as direct). Its success has greatly exceeded the intentions and aspirations of those who signed the original declaration.

However, Bologna must now confront change – economic and political change but also social, cultural and scientific change. The way forward is for the Bologna process ‘to go beyond Bologna’ – not so much in terms of adding new ‘action-lines’ that would inevitably encounter political difficulties, but in terms of recognising and realising its creative potential (which this introductory chapter has attempted to sketch in outline). There is a need for Bologna to become a more systematic and more open process – more systematic, because the synergies that already exist and the potential for new connections need to be better recognised; and more open, because ‘Bologna’ (as a policy theme and a symbol or ‘brand’) offers European higher education a vital space for dialogue.

Part I
European Higher Education
Area Principles