




ORGANISATION FOR ECONOMIC
CO-OPERATION AND DEVELOPMENT

Convergence and/or diversity? The argument for transparency


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Convergence

- Convergence in higher education systems worldwide
- Drivers:
 - Integrated global system of scientific research
 - Increasing mobility of students, researchers, teaching staff and institutional leaders
 - Emerging market of academics and researchers
 - Technology-driven expansion of new delivery modes in teaching and learning
 - International labour market of graduates
 - Globalising organisation of professions

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Convergence

- Strong impact of regional integration
 - E.g. Bologna Process in Europe
 - Other examples: ASEAN, NAFTA, Commonwealth, Africa
- Bologna Process:
 - Remarkable achievements in convergence
 - Transparency: degree and credit systems, transparent quality assurance systems
 - Increasing mobility, interaction and communication

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Convergence

- Inclusive and mobilising process of development
- Interest from outside world
- But not all objectives of (optimistic) agenda of 1999 have been realised
 - Risk of loss of momentum
- What about post-2010 agenda (Bologna 2.0)?:
 - Leuven 2009 ministerial meeting organised by BENELUX



Convergence

- Misunderstandings about convergence in Bologna Process 1.0
 - Every programme should try to achieve the same learning outcomes: standardisation of curricula is dangerous
 - Every bachelor should be able to enter whatever master's programme in Europe (in the same field of disciplines)
 - Quality assurance at threshold level (accreditation) is a sufficient generator of trust
 - Governments often try to protect national coherence
- => by confusing convergence with harmonisation the Bologna Process has not (yet) well addressed the real demands for transparency, i.e. transparency of diversity



Convergence

- Alternative concepts and models of convergence better equipped to address diversity:
 - Content-oriented systems of convergence: Tuning project, qualification systems
 - National regulatory systems based on performance indicators
 - European policy developments: Lisbon Strategy, ERA, EQF, initiatives of French presidency, etc.
 - AHELO feasibility study (OECD)
 - Global rankings



Diversity and transparency

- Increasing agreement on crucial importance and richness of diversity
 - of institutions, programmes, profiles, missions, delivery modes, teaching & learning arrangements, etc.
 - We need more, not less diversity to address demands
- Convergence
 - Is a condition for the “readability” and recognition of diversity
 - Is in fact a favourable condition for further diversification

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Diversity and transparency

- Convergence
 - Also increases need for reputation management; risk of proclaimed and not-evidence-based status differences (academic drift, vocational drift, etc.); risk of inclusion/exclusion games on the basis of power
 - Asks for complementary measures to limit the possibilities of claiming status on the basis of undocumented identities
- => convergence (and, thus, recognition and mobility) can only work with sufficient evidence-based transparency

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Diversity and transparency

- Risks of diversity without transparency
 - Quasi-markets of higher education, based on reputation, not on merit (“higher education arena organised as a bazaar of undemonstrated reputations”)
 - Disclosed diversity, not capable of meeting the needs for diversity of students, employers and society at large (problem of asymmetric information)

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Diversity and transparency

- Loss of system dynamics and decreasing system innovation: newcomers will have it very difficult to gain status because they will not be able to demonstrate their real (in contrast to reputed) identity
- Mission overload and lack of focus: institutions trying to do everything at the same time
- => in order to avoid 'wild' competition we need a trustworthy system of evidence-based transparency

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Autonomy and transparency

- Risks for autonomy without transparency
 - Diversity without evidence-based transparency will inevitably lead to unrestrained competition and, hence, market failure
 - In Europe, national governments and the EHEA will not be in the position of tolerating unrestrained competition which endangers national coherence

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Autonomy and transparency

- And, therefore, risk to 'fall back' in models of public regulation that will refrain the further development of institutional autonomy
- Institutional autonomy will only survive in the public domain if proclaimed identities and profiles can be documented; autonomy has no substance without a documented identity
- => if we want to develop institutional autonomy, we need a trustworthy system of evidence-based transparency

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Autonomy and transparency

- Governments and institutions need to address needs for diversity and transparency together, or markets will do anyway
 - To address more diversified student demand
 - To answer diversified needs of labour markets and society
 - Integration of HE systems didn't solve problems of academic and vocational drift, nor those of artificial 'binarism'

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Autonomy and transparency

- Not well addressed needs: lifelong learning, world-class research, post-doc training because most institutions want to do the same
- To create legitimate spaces for various profiles
 - Where institutional missions can be better realised
 - Where there is a level playing-field and competition is more productive
 - Avoiding competition based on rumours and organised confusion

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Evidence-based transparency

- 'mapping higher education' on the basis of robust, trustworthy and scientifically generated knowledge
 - Producers of science and knowledge should be capable of defining and measuring trustworthy measures of their own performance

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Evidence-based transparency

- Conceptual and methodological challenges are enormous
 - What is the real added value of universities in teaching and learning processes? (but: if universities are trivial and learning environments are contingent, what's the point of having them?)
 - Definitions of categories, levels, thresholds, cutting-off points, etc seldom are value-free and tend to organise inequity

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Evidence-based transparency

- Political problems are substantial, both within and outside HE
 - Resistance to change = resistance to know
 - Myths of equality (whereas equality is: treating differently what is substantially different)
 - Legitimate fears of abuse (but: do we refrain to know what can be abused?)
 - Fear of hierarchies
 - Need for sophisticated models of valuing different profiles

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Bologna Process v2.0

- 'Rankings will not go away': true, but too weak an argument
 - In fact ranking is nothing more than a very common and relatively simple cognitive procedure to handle complex information

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Bologna Process v2.0

- The real argument is that higher education as a whole will benefit from well-developed systems of transparency
- Convergence, diversity and transparency should be the cornerstones of the next decade of the Bologna Process
 - => And, therefore, should be clearly stated in the Leuven Communiqué (2009)

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