

Multi-level multi-actor dynamics of European knowledge policy-making

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Overview of the presentation

- Several studies on the different aspects of multi-level multi-actor dynamics:
 - EU education policy – beyond subsidiarity
 - Transformation of governance of the Bologna Process
 - Role of stakeholder organizations
 - Party politics
 - Conditions for Europeanization
- Lessons learned

Beyond subsidiarity?

The European Qualifications Framework and standardization

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UiO : **Universitetet i Oslo**

NIFU

Nordic Institute for Studies in
Innovation, Research and Education

Relevance and focus

- Since the Lisbon agenda, observations of increased EU initiatives in the area of higher education, increased «space» for policymaking.
- Why the EQF particularly relevant?
 - Education traditionally considered nationally sensitive policy area
 - The spread of QFs in Europe has been rapid and largely initiated by European processes (Bologna and EU)
 - Overarching QFs integrating and standardizing education across sectors with varying norms, legacies, traditions
 - On surface, similarity of structure of the NQFs (29 of 34 countries had opted for a 8-level framework) despite «shocking diversity» of European educational systems

Focus and data

- What are the main factors that have led to the introduction, development and implementation of the EQF?
- Interviews with 37 policy relevant actors and experts on European level and in Ireland, Norway and Estonia
 - 22 interviews with relevance to European level developments
 - National interviews (8 in Norway, 9 in Estonia, 5 in Ireland)
 - Several respondents with «multiple hats»
- Document analysis and review of written materials

Developing the EQF

- Role of policy legacies (LLL agenda, earlier coordination attempts) and policy borrowing (QF in Bologna)
- Role of individual actors in creating linkages and providing solutions
- Role of consensus-building in policy coordination processes (no coercive mechanism in place)
- Role of expertise in consensus-building, who are the experts?
- Different sectoral perspectives and multiple aims lead to ambiguity -> consequences for implementation process
- Coordination with other instruments (directive on prof qualifications) not always smooth

Role and operation of the EQF advisory group

- Temporary groups can become semi-permanent and acquire new tasks
- Creation of procedures and common language (from translation to substantive debates), taken for granted
- Legitimacy construction and expansion of informal power
- Uneven turnover -> imbalance of expertise (group within group)
- Advisory group as a potential arena for policy diffusion (introducing and testing new ideas)

National processes in light of EQF

- Change as a result of European initiative:
 - Ad-hoc coupling to national policy problems
 - Ambiguous instruments create various options for this process
 - Dependent on actor involvement and interests
 - Local policymaking traditions matter
 - Widow-dressing if not picked up by national actors
- Considerable national variation
- But, EQF not only about assuring more similarity -
> trust building

Conclusions

- The EQF as a process of creating standards
 - Symbolic function - an idea of a closer integrated European educational area (informal agreements and increased «communicative competence» on EU level)
 - Instrumental function – standardization as a policy coordination mechanism (EQF, ECTS, ESCO, etc)
 - Market information function – the stated aim, but persistent variation in operation on national level
- Filling policy space on EU level
 - «stretching subsidiarity», but not likely formal rules would change

Transformation of governance of the Bologna Process

Background and relevance (1)

- European policy-making in the area of higher education a combination of EU processes and the pan-European Bologna Process
 - Competition and cooperation
 - Marked with ambiguity
- Policy-making relies on OMC(-like) instruments
- BUT
 - Clear influence on national and organizational change
 - Translation of European preferences into the domestic context (virtually all countries)
 - Strategic use of European initiatives (e.g. France, Norway, Serbia, Croatia, Netherlands...)
 - Both processes politically salient (?)

Background and relevance (2)

- Combination of intergovernmental and supranational characteristics
 - The EU side often described as a combination of supranational and intergovernmental
 - The Bologna side often described as predominantly intergovernmental (though EC influence has been growing)
 - Concerns the nature of involvement and extent of influence of supranational (EC) and intergovernmental actors (MS or participating countries)

Political saliency of the Bologna Process

- How does political saliency of the Bologna Process change over time?
 - Focus on Ministerial Conference as high stakes events and the size and rank of delegations
- Declining participation from EU members → losing political appeal
 - Potentially due to the “competition” from the EU processes?
- Still politically important for EU candidates and potential candidates and for European stakeholder organizations

Unusual suspects (?)

- Stakeholder organizations:
 - European University Association (EUA)
 - European Association of Institutions of Higher Education (EURASHE)
 - European Students' Union (ESU)
 - Education International (EI)
 - European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA)
 - BusinessEurope
- Consultative members of the Bologna Follow up Group
- Participating in EC consultations, contacts with EP

Transnational dimension

- Participation of stakeholder organizations adds a “transnational flavour” to European policy-making in HE
- Cross-country associations of non-state actors
- Although status primarily consultative, significant influence over the process (e.g. social dimension, public responsibility for higher education)
- Boosting legitimacy of decisions (?)

**Stakeholder organizations
- policy convergence?**

Background and research questions

- European stakeholder organizations have an impact on the process
- They are given the mandate from their constituencies to influence the European policies
- How have their policy positions changed over time?
 - In relation to each other?
 - In relation to the EC?

Policy convergence

- Convergence = increasing similarity of
 - issues are stakeholder organizations addressing – first order
 - preferences they have concerning these issues – second order
 - Ideological basis with which they argue for said preferences – third order
- Combination of quantitative and qualitative content analysis of > 250 policy positions of six consultative members of BFUG

Results – 1st order convergence

- ‘rise and fall’ of individual policy issues in each organization
- most prominent issues for the whole period:

Interest group	EUA	ESU	EURASHE	EI	ENQA	BE
Policy issues	Research	Social dimension	LLL	Research	Quality	Research
	Social dimension	Degree structure	Social dimension	Social dimension	External dimension	Employability
	Academic staff	Research	Research	Academic staff	Role and purpose of HE	Social dimension
	Role and purpose of HE	Quality	Quality	Commodif.		LLL

Results – 1st order convergence

- No ‘neat’ first order sigma convergence
 - Similarity concerning most prominent issues, but ‘rise and fall’ patterns
- Indication of changing interest OR effect of internal policy dynamics?
- Policy positions remain valid over-time (only one policy explicitly retracted)
 - Necessary to focus in more detail on internal policy procedures and dynamics

Results – 2nd order convergence (research)

- EUA – generic preferences: **all education should be research based**, quality research training and stable funding and other conditions (incl. researchers' careers) + specific preferences wrt ERC, EUA, Horizon 2020 (no to brain drain and 'Matthew effect')
- ESU – **HE should be research based**, also PhD training in the non-university sector, gender balance wrt research careers
- EURASHE – **research and education inextricably linked**, applied research is important, so is PhD training
- EI – generic preferences: research organized in such a way as to provide ample and stable opportunities for academic careers, principle of academic freedom is important, PhD education (also in non-uni sector) + specific preferences wrt European Charter and Code
- ENQA – **research and education should be integrated**
- BE – research is expected to contribute to economic development, advocates for the 'industrial doctorate'
- EU – **research key element for knowledge economy**, research output should increase + specific initiatives (ERC, EIT, Horizon 2020)
- Some 'sigma' and some 'delta' convergence, but also idiosyncratic preferences

Results – 3rd order convergence

- Variance in how explicit is the normative basis
 - that education and research should be intertwined in higher education is presented almost as a given
 - normative basis for arguing for a stronger focus on the social dimension is somewhat more explicit, but variance also there
 - ESU and EI – access to HE or stable employment are human rights
 - BE and EU - economic rationale – social dimension is important for maximising the competitive potential, not on its own
- Third order convergence is limited and is primarily present as ‘sigma’ convergence between a narrow set of interest groups
- Ambiguity of the normative basis → problems with conceptualization and operationalization of 3rd order convergence?

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Party Politics in Higher Education Policy

Partisan Preferences, Coalition Positions
and Higher Education Policy in Western
Europe

Context

- Higher education underwent numerous changes that have made it more prominent and as a result it is becoming increasingly politically salient
- Political parties in parliamentary democracies are thus becoming more interested and relevant in higher education in particular in comparison to the traditional policy-making actors (bureaucracy, experts & organised interests)

Relevance

- Parties have privileged position in policy-making (esp. formulation) and including political parties in higher education policy analysis might be necessary if one wants to do justice to contemporary dynamics → add a new conceptual approach that focuses on partisan preferences

Research question

- Key research question is to investigate how parties from different party families vary in their preferences on higher education policy, how these preferences can be structured, how the preferences are translated into coalition positions, and the situations in which partisan preferences or coalition positions become relevant for policy proposals in the area of higher education

Methodology and data

- All relevant parties in four country contexts (England, the Netherlands, Norway and North-Rhine Westphalia)
- Qualitative comparative research design
- Original coding and qualitative content analysis of documents (party manifestos, coalition agreements, policy proposals) & interviews with party officials
- Time frame: recent (approx. 2005-2013)

Findings

- Party families do show differing preferences in higher education policy, both with regard to higher education's re-distributive characteristics and the public governance of higher education which are aligned with the parties' ideology and respective electorates, but also institutional context matters

Findings

- Transfer of preferences to policy proposals in multi-party governments coalition agreements are of central importance but they are based on negotiated coalition positions instead of partisan preferences → coalition agreements have a mediating effect on the realisation of partisan preferences

Conditions for Europeanization

What is Europeanization?

- “when Europe hits home”
- Domestic institutionalization of preferences developed on the European level on the national and organizational level
 - Because of external incentives – conditionality, consequences etc.
 - Because of social learning – norms, values and ideas are considered appropriate by the domestic actors

Conditions for Europeanization

- Characteristics of European initiatives
 - Clarity
 - Consequences
 - Legitimacy
- Characteristics of the domestic setting
 - Domestic veto players and costs they might incur from Europeanization
 - Participation of domestic actors in European epistemic communities
 - Institutional legacies

Results

- Focusing on the more likely cases of Europeanization
 - Contexts imbued with a “return to Europe” discourse
- Clarity and consequences do matter
- Legitimacy not an issue (‘all things European’ legitimacy per se)
- Veto players do not activate on core Bologna issues
 - Reactions to strategic use of Bologna a different matter
- Epistemic communities a facilitating factor, unless coupled with lack of clarity

Lessons learned

- Change
 - Does not unfold in a linear manner
 - It takes time
- Politics matters
 - Political saliency of processes changes
 - Parties and stakeholder organizations matter
- Sectoral dynamics matters
 - Complexity of cross-sectoral processes
- Actors and expertise matter
 - Actors function as brokers and mediators

THANK YOU!