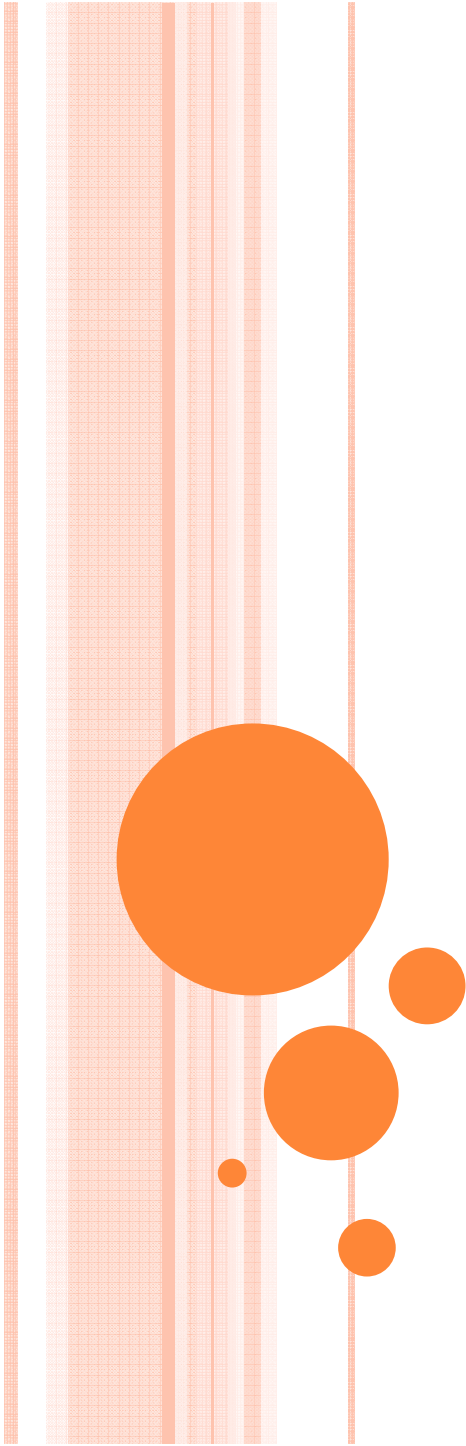




LOOSE POLICY AND LOCAL ADAPTATION: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF MASTER DEGREES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

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OVERVIEW

- The Bologna Process
- My research



WHAT IS THE BOLOGNA PROCESS?

- An intergovernmental initiative with 40+ signatory countries
- Initiated in 1999 when 29 European ministers of education signed the Bologna declaration (triggered by the Sorbonne Declaration in 1998)
- Aims at establishing the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) by 2010 through convergence of national systems of HE



BOLOGNA OBJECTIVES (INITIAL)

- A system of easily readable and comparable degrees
- Adoption of an HE system based on two main cycles, undergraduate and postgraduate
- Establishment of a system of credits (e.g. ECTS)
- Promotion of mobility
- Promotion of European cooperation in quality assurance
- Promotion of European dimension in HE



BOLOGNA OBJECTIVES (ADDED LATER)

2001

- Life-long learning
- Participation of students
- Promotion of the attractiveness of the EHEA

2005

- Implementation of national qualifications frameworks
- Doctoral level as the third cycle
- Recognition of prior learning



GOVERNANCE OF THE BOLOGNA PROCESS

- Common misconception that the EC steers the process
- Emerged from national level, EC excluded initially (only accepted as a member in 2003)
- Not limited to the 27 EU member states (now 46 signatories)
- Role of EC: Creeping competence of the EC?



POLICY MAKING AND IMPLEMENTATION

- Biannual conferences and ministerial meetings – decisions reached by consensus
- Review progress and decide on priorities/new objectives every two years
- Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) – follow-up structure which coordinates actions/conferences



BOLOGNA TOOLS

- European University Association reports (Trends reports) and ESIB reports (Bologna with Student Eyes)
- National reports (education ministers)
- Stocktaking reports (BFUG)
- Score cards (dark green to red)



MAIN POLICY FEATURES

- Bologna – not legally binding
- Employs soft law
- Peer pressure - “strategy of competitive emulation” (Neave and Amaral 2008)
- Implementation left to the individual countries



MY RESEARCH

- Focuses on the Bologna objective of comparable and compatible degrees
- Specifically, the master programme as the second cycle
- Aims to:
 - compare learning and teaching aspects and practices of master programmes
 - explore conceptions and interpretations of the master at different levels of implementation



RESEARCH CONTEXT

- Lack of comparative research which addresses issues of substance rather than structure of degree programmes implemented as a result of Bologna
- Criticism from Europe and elsewhere of the one-year master in the UK (except Scotland) given the predominant 3+2 structure



RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What conceptions do stakeholders at the different levels on the Bologna policy implementation staircase (European, national, institutional/departmental) have of the master and how do these shape implementation?
2. According to the experience of academic staff and students, what are the continuities and differences in teaching and learning within master programmes in Europe?
3. What does the comparison between master programmes suggest about the nature of master programme teaching and learning?



RESEARCH DESIGN

- Research focus: MSc programmes in Physics in England, Denmark and Portugal (two universities per country)
- Methodology
 - Interviews with staff and students on Physics MSc programmes
 - Interviews with stakeholders on different implementation levels
 - Document analysis
- Sociocultural and social practices approach (Bamber et al 2009); also informed by symbolic interactionism (Blumer 1969)



THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

- Non-linear view of policy implementation; a messy process (Ball 1994, Trowler 2002)
- Implementation staircase approach and implementation gap (Reynolds and Saunders 1987)
- Knowledge representation theories (Eraut) – conceptualisation of master education as knowledge articulation, transmission and evaluation



PROGRESS TO DATE

- **England:** Face-to-face interviews with staff at two universities
Pending: students and national actors
- **Portugal:** Face-to-face interviews with staff, students and national actors (Complete, some follow-up emails might be necessary)
- **Denmark** (two failed visits!): Phone interviews with staff, students and most national actors
Pending: some national actors



FIRST IMPRESSIONS

- Awareness and interpretations of the Bologna Process in the three countries
- Challenges
- Understandings of the master degree
- Delivery (programme structure and pedagogy)



FOR MORE INFORMATION

<http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/Bologna/>

Any questions?

