

Governing Europe by comparison, peer pressure & self-interest
— On the Bologna Stocktaking Process as operator of national education policy —

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Abstract

The Bologna Process and the creation of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA) signify that European nations commit to making different education systems comparable and advancing quality by competition. Employing a governmentality lens, this article scrutinizes the Bologna Process as a set of transnational political technologies at work. The Open Method of Coordination appears as the key political technology to advance the Bologna Process. In a voluntarily based political process the OMC brings about a transnational forum by simultaneously catching national players between the lures of peer pressure and self-interest. This complex of advancing national educational policies by means of on-going and gradual transnational consensus-building is exemplified in analyses of the crucial 2009 Bologna Stocktaking Report and its context.

Key words

Bologna process, transnational policy-making, Open Method of Coordination, governmentality, peer pressure

Introduction

The modernizing cultural narratives produce an imagined space, a Europe newly created, with a mission, incorporating older national artefacts and symbols in a new form. Europe then becomes a place and a project through which the "citizens" of transnational governance emerge. (Nóvoa, 2002, p. 6)

Education programs in European countries increasingly conform to OECD policy advice, EU policy advice and regulations and, as shall be evident in this article, to performance indicators and standards within the so-called Bologna Process. The over-arching goals of these transnational players tend to focus upon creating transparent and competitive educational systems capable of comparison (Lawn & Grek, 2012; Nóvoa, 2002; Henry, et. al. 2001).

This article will focus on the Bologna process as an expression of a particular transnational governmental technology¹. In particular, it will outline the imprint of that technology as can be observed in the so-called stocktaking reports from the Bologna Follow-Up Groups (BFUG) (<http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/actionlines/stocktaking.htm>). These reports reflect the ongoing Bologna process as it progresses at the biennial ministerial meetings (Bologna 1999, Prague 2001, Berlin 2003, Bergen 2005, London 2007 and Leuven/Louvain la Neuve 2009).

The Bologna Process aims at creating a so-called European Higher Education Area (EHEA), which was

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officially launched in March 2010 during the Budapest-Vienna Ministerial Conference (<http://www.ehea.info/>). Concepts and interpretations deriving from the Bologna Process are, nonetheless, given different meanings in the meeting with the culture, education policy and education courses of each individual country (Olsson, Petersson & Krejsler, 2012; Lawn & Grek, 2012; Cf. Klette et. al., 2002; Hopmann, 2006). The question is, however, whether increasing commitment to comparisons operationalized into performance indicators and score-cards will in the end result in quasi-identical education programs?

Governmentality, political technologies and transnational policy-making

The thinking on educational policy in the European Union at large pays increasing attention to safeguarding the competitive success of these nations, within the region as well as globally (Olsson, Petersson, & Krejsler, 2011). In Foucauldian terms, one can observe this as a governmental problematic, i.e. an issue that deals with the political governance of entire populations as well as on the characteristics and dispositions of individuals within that political space (Foucault, 1991; Popkewitz, 1998). Seen through this lens modern educational policy thus has to do with the formation of mobile, employable and independent individuals that are engaged in lifelong learning, and with teachers that are capable of dealing with a future that is perceived as increasingly uncertain (Petersson, Olsson, Popkewitz, 2007; Krejsler, 2005). At an individual level desirable dispositions are assumed to become detectable as ‘learning outcomes’, ‘competences’ and so forth. These outcomes can then be aggregated to organizational, national and global levels in order to make achievements – and hereby make the expected successes of this regime – comparable.

Foucault introduced the concept *governmentality*, or political epistemology, with the aim of scrutinizing the relation between governance and knowledge, a relation that is not to be seen as external, but as internal (Foucault, 1991). And in relation to the type of governmentality that characterizes so-called advanced liberal democracies the term governmentality refers to societies where power is de-centered and its members play an active role in their own self-government. A particular form of governmentality is characterized by a certain form of knowledge. In our case we thus focus upon the kind of governmentality that is produced as national education policy gets produced in a particular transnational setting, the Bologna setting. Here a number of national subjects mutually produce knowledge in a transnational setting that is itself produced by these interactions. The knowledge produced works back on the individual nations by means of the internal discursive logics and relations of mutual peer pressures produced in these on-going interactions. In this case this means that political practice can be viewed as a process of knowledge production that produces the educational policy framework of freedom within which individuals in participating countries can realize their educational potentials. By realizing their own potentials they also realize the potentials of the nation, and collectively contribute to making Europe the most competitive and dynamic region among global knowledge economies, as espoused in the Lisbon agenda.

The investigative potential of the concept of governmentality lies in its potential to unite the governance of the actions of individuals with the governance of exercised by and through organizations at transnational, national and local levels (Foucault, 1991; Masschelein, Simons, Brockling & Pongratz, 2007). The object of this article, therefore, is constituted by the multitude of practices and knowledge that interact to operate as the governance that construes education policy templates within the framework of a European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

Political technology constitutes an important concept to advance into the details of this enormous governmental field. Within a Foucauldian framework, political technologies signify procedures that “...*advance by taking what is essentially a political problem, removing it from the realm of political discourse, and recasting it in the neutral language of science*”(Dreyfus & Rabinow, 1982, pp., p.196). Political technologies

seek to shape conduct by channeling the often 'bloody' fights that position holders within particular discourses do with things and words into civil procedures that make such fights look reasonable, just and fair (e.g. Krejsler & Carney, 2009). Examples of political technologies that will appear later in the article are the Open Method of Coordination (OMC), stock-taking reports, quality assurance standards and guidelines for quality control (ESG).

Governance within this governmentality perspective appears to acquire its particularly productive effects by governing without appearing to govern, controlling without appearing to control, and disciplining without appearing to discipline (Deleuze, 1995; Krejsler, 2006). Among other instances, this is effectuated by means of dialogical technologies framed in the language of goal and outcome orientation, quality assurance and evaluation. Or, to quote The Swedish National Agency for Higher Education in their evaluation of the quality systems of recent years:

The quality assurance system functions well in many respects [...] All education programmes that are scrutinised provide feed back and suggestions for measures to improve their quality. Follow ups after three years show that nearly all recommendations are taken into consideration and that quality is improved. (The Swedish National Agency for Higher Education 2006, p.4).

We shall argue that dialogical governance between transnational and national levels, as well as between national policy and educational institution levels are neither stronger nor weaker than earlier forms of governance, but different (Cf. Petersson, Olsson & Popkewitz, 2007; Krejsler 2006). We shall argue that hierarchies may appear to have disappeared, but that governance appears to have been transformed into non-hierarchical hierarchies (Deleuze, 1995).

The Bologna process and its specificity

The Bologna Process currently appears as the most pervasive strategy to reorient and integrate European Higher education. The Bologna Process was initiated in 1999 to create a *European Higher Education Area* with the explicit purpose of facilitating mobility of students, graduates and higher education staff; prepare students for their future careers (employability) and for life as active citizens in democratic societies, and support their personal development; offer broad access to high-quality higher education, based on democratic principles and academic freedom (The Bologna Declaration, 1999). The Bologna Process goes beyond the European Union and currently includes 47 European countries.

The process was initiated as a European project that reached beyond the European Union following the Sorbonne meeting in 1998, where the UK, Germany, France and Italy met to discuss a transnational framework for enhancing European educational systems. The EU and the European Commission were bypassed education is defined as one of the areas that fall under the principle of subsidiarity, i.e. an area that should be governed at the national level and where the EU does not have explicit authority (Lawn & Grek, 2012). The EU and the Commission, however, have in reality – albeit not formally - largely assimilated and taken over the governance of the Bologna Process as a consequence of their being the key players within Europe that furthermore possess superior institutional and administrative capacity. The Bologna process should furthermore be seen as an element in the EU Lisbon Agenda (“making Europe the most dynamic and competitive region globally”) and the follow-up – albeit in more humble language – of the Europe 2020 strategy (to make Europe a “smart, sustainable and inclusive” economy). Bologna discourse thus talks a lot about European citizens developing competencies to succeed in working life and hereby simultaneously furthering Europe an innovative knowledge-based economy. Key focus is upon issues that may facilitate mobility of students and professionals/workforce, which is obvious concerning the performance indicators on diploma

supplement, mutual recognition of diplomas, quality assurance formats that make national systems mutually comparable, ECTS and so forth.

The relation between the Bologna Process and the EU and the European Commission in particular is thus a touchy issue that it is beyond the scope of this article to explore in depth. The main point is that within the EU education is basically understood as being within the jurisdiction of the individual member states, cf. the principle of subsidiarity. However, education acquires increased importance for the economy and inner market as the discourse and practices of global knowledge economies advance. The Maastricht Treaty thus defined education as an important area of responsibility for the EU and explicitly called for the development of a European dimension within the field of education. During the 1990s and the beginning of this millennium the educational policies of the EU have gradually developed from policy to political practice in spite of the principle of subsidiarity (Lawn & Grek, 2012; Rinne, 2006). The purpose is not to create a common system of education, but rather to discover different ways of comparing and evaluating the educational systems of the nations within the framework of the overarching ambitions of the EU to make the Union the most competitive and dynamic knowledge economy in the world, as stated in the Lisbon Agenda (Tuschling & Engermann, 2007). An important feature of the governing ambitions of the EU is its program for lifelong learning (Rinne, 2006).

Lifelong learning is an overarching strategy of European co-operation in education, training policies and for the individual in order to ensure development of citizenship, social cohesion, employment and for individual fulfillment (European Commission, 2012, p. 1). As the European Union has a stronger mandate in relation to its member countries than is the case with other transnational organizations like OECD or the Bologna Process, there are, obviously, struggles between member states as to where responsibility for education policy should be placed (Olsson, Petersson & Krejsler, 2012; Kallio, 2006). The Bologna Process is based on voluntary agreements and has no coercive measures to apply beyond arguments and peer pressures. Each member can comply as much – or as little – as they wish.

The biennial ministerial conferences are at the top of the Bologna process. These conferences are prepared by a Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG), which in turn receives input from working groups and Bologna Seminars. The Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) thus oversees the process between the ministerial conferences and is composed of representatives from the 46 countries participating in the process of creating the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Furthermore, a number of transnational stakeholders considered relevant are added: The European Commission participates as full member. There are eight consultative members, namely Council of Europe, UNESCO's European Centre for Higher Education, European University Association, European Association of Institutions in Higher Education, European Students' Union, European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education, Education International Pan-European Structure, and BUSINESSEUROPE. The Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) meets at least once every six months, is chaired by the country holding the Presidency of the European Union and is supported by a Bologna Secretariat, provided by the host of the next ministerial conference. The host of the next ministerial conference also acts as vice-chair of the BFUG (e.g. http://www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/about/how_it_works.htm).

The explicit purpose of the Bologna Process is not to create uniform systems of education, but to further mobility and employability by making existing national education systems transparent and comparable. Efficient political technologies have thus been developed to making countries comparable according to a set of criteria up against which each individual country can be measured. It is a key aim that all countries elaborate easily readable and comparable degrees organized in a three-cycle structure (e.g. bachelor-master-doctorate). Furthermore, countries are currently setting up national qualifications frameworks that are compatible with the overarching framework of qualifications for the European Higher Education Area and define learning

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outcomes for each of the three cycles in accordance with *Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area* (ESG). This drive towards mobility and comparability is further underlined by the requirement of increasingly *fair* recognition of foreign degrees and other higher education qualifications in accordance with the Council of Europe/UNESCO Recognition Convention.

The Bologna process as a governmentality problematic

Within this newly created governmental space, new forms of governance and influence develop (Dale, 2006; Nóvoa, 2002). The Bologna process is thus permeated by softer political technologies that have proven remarkably efficient in governing nations, local entities, groups and individuals.

Maybe the most pervasive of these softer technologies is denoted as the *Open Method of Co-ordination* (OMC) (Moutsios, 2010; Olsson, et al., 2011). The OMC represents a set of procedures designed to make policy processes progress even in situations where explicit decision-making appears impossible. European integration may indeed be considered a virtually impossible project by many; a project attempting to gather hugely different member states into a single common set of purposes. However, employment of the OMC seems to do the trick and make the impossible possible. The OMC can be considered an expression, in a procedural form, in and through which politicians, administrators, researchers, organizations and so forth, meet at formal, informal and virtual levels to discuss and co-ordinate with one another in extended on-going processes. But above all the OMC is a producer of particular political technologies that enable measurement and comparison (indicators, benchmarking, accountability, standards, guidelines, outcomes etc.): These particular political technologies are not being forced upon the individual member states. They nevertheless appear quasi-inevitable, if one does not want to exclude oneself from the mainstream policy-making processes. So, in practice the OMC functions by means of an opaque network of peer pressures. Here no particular persons or office-holders can be made accountable as such, as it is through endless processes among a variety of stakeholders that recommendations gradually emerge as appropriate. The logic of OMC comparisons is based on the idea of ‘*identity*’ and ‘*diversity*’, i.e. the sovereignty of each member states, “*leading nevertheless to similar solutions*” (Nóvoa 2003). The reasoning of comparability as political technology is not primarily a way of knowing or justifying, but rather a mode of governance, regardless of its conclusions or recommendations.

In line with the functioning logic of the OMC, the structure of the Bologna process can thus be described as a loosely coupled governmentality-like structure. It is not a traditional transparent political process that gets debated in a parliament upon which it is drafted into a proposal that is submitted to the vote of a representative assembly. It is rather a process of a number of organs, seminars, meetings and so forth that gather a number of different stakeholders such as ministers, officials, administrators, professionals, advisors, union representatives and so forth at national, regional as well as transnational levels. Progress depends upon the gradual build-up of consensus around the developing key issues. Everything is voluntary. However, a strong mutual peer pressure to remain at the center of the key issues ensures that participating countries comply. Inversely they would gradually make themselves irrelevant to the Bologna process that has advanced to become the agenda-setting transnational agent in Europe on what should be subjected to comparison and how as well as the standard-setting agent on issues like mobility, quality assurance, diploma templates and so forth.

The Bologna process proceeding by stocktaking technology

Trailing the impact of the Bologna Process on national policy-making is an arduous task that – in order to be complete – would include at least the official Bologna Process itself and all its associated developments and documents and at the national level the overarching texts, local guide lines relating to the work associated with the Bologna Process, educational syllabi, course curricula, course organization, study guides and examination

methods. In addition, documents concerned with questions of globalization, quality assurance and evaluation, but also local innovation management could be included in the analysis.

The so-called Stocktaking Process, however, represents a crucial and very visible political technology within the Bologna Process. It links the more overarching purposes and goals to a largely peer pressure organized procedure of securing implementation with these according to a fixed template that contains a number of performance indicators. This detailed political technology makes achievements of each participating country visible in relation to each indicator, which is measured by a score card political technology that ranges from red (i.e. non- or close to non-compliance) to green (full- or close to full-compliance). The whole exercise makes each country comparable to any other participating country in an ongoing process which is staged in a language that – on the one hand – the process is progressing, however, - on the other hand – it is continuously mentioned that many countries are behind, that progress is slow in relation to many indicators, and that great commitment must continuously be upheld, if the ambitions of the Bologna Process, which all signatories have committed to, are to be achieved.

The Stocktaking Process was initiated in 2005 and linked to progressively increased commitments to implementation in 2007 and recently in 2009. At each biennial meeting detailed assignments are set up in relation to stocktaking as well as other issues. At its meeting in October 2007, the Bologna Follow-Up Group thus – in the spirit of the OMC political technology - adopted a work program for the time leading to the next ministerial meeting in April 2009 and established working or coordination groups on the following topics: data collection, employability, European higher education in a global setting, lifelong learning, mobility, qualifications frameworks, social dimension, and stocktaking.

In the course of this process all countries have voluntarily agreed to have their national systems evaluated according to a template that includes the following ten performance indicators and rates these according the above-mentioned red-to-green score card: *Degree system* (Stage of implementation of first and second cycle; Access to the next cycle; Implementation of national qualifications framework); *Quality assurance, ESG* (Stage of development of external quality assurance system; Level of student participation in quality assurance; Level of international participation in quality assurance); *Recognition* (Stage of implementation of diploma supplement; National implementation of the principles of the Lisbon Recognition Convention; Stage of implementation of ECTS; Recognition of prior learning).

The 2009 Bologna Stocktaking Report: governmentality embedded in discursive procedures

We shall now observe the so-called 2009 Bologna Stocktaking Report process through a governmentality analytical lens, understood as part of the larger discursive strategies that are orchestrated at a transnational level within the Bologna Process. This allows us to see how an intricate system of procedures is set up that produces knowledge in the form of standards, performance indicators and so forth. This system is intended to optimise the citizens of Europe by means of national educational systems that supposedly get increasingly fit and efficient by means of mutual competition. The Open Method of Coordination here serves as the political technology par excellence to continually stage the peer pressures whereby the participating countries mutually motivate one another to compete according to the same formulas. Gradually a consensus was reached around which template and performance indicators should count. OMC processes here further deepen the levels of detail at which comparisons are made.

The Bologna Process Stocktaking Report 2009 was prepared in conjunction with the 2009 Leuven meeting by BFUG Stocktaking Group (Bologna Process, 2009). In the report the BFUG summarized results from corresponding national reports, made comments and recommendations corresponding to the language of *we*

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are moving in the right direction, however, there is no time for complacency as sufficient progress is lacking on a number of issues. In perfect compliance with the OMC-related difficulty of placing responsibility for decisions and of assessing the legal and political character of this supposedly central document this stocktaking report in its title page unambiguously states: *“This publication reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained herein”!*

Whereas in 2005 it was sufficient to show that work had been started, and for the 2007 stocktaking it was often enough that some work towards achieving the goals could be demonstrated or that legislation was in place, in 2009 the criteria for the indicators were substantially more demanding. It is visible many places in the report that the OMC peer pressures now become demanding:

“(…) is being implemented, but not as widely as would have been expected. (…). The Diploma Supplement has been implemented fully in just over half the countries”(71). “There is a discrepancy between the information provided by the countries in their National Reports and the real life situation as reported by students” (71). Action is thus emphatically recommended: “Strengthen the promotional campaign about the Diploma Supplement as a transparency tool aimed at HEIs, students and employers. (…) Encourage all countries to use the standard Diploma Supplement format” (p. 71).

The BFUG thus concludes about recognition practices that the process has advanced since the previous meeting in 2007, but that plenty of work remains to be accomplished: *“It is “greener”² than in 2007 but the indicator alone does not measure the actual recognition practices, especially those inside the HEIs. Complementary analysis of the National Action Plans on Recognition submitted before the London conference shows that there is a long way to go before there is a coherent approach to recognition of qualifications within the EHEA” (ibid. pp. 9).*

“Achieving the goal of implementing the first and second cycle degree system across all higher education in the EHEA seems to be only a question of time; however in some countries the actual proportion of students studying in the Bologna three-cycle system is still low, mainly because these countries have just recently started admitting students to bachelor and master programmes” (ibid. pp. 6)

In line with the logic of the Open Method of Coordination (OMC) the 2009 Stocktaking Report issues a number of recommendations to further the integration among participating countries by means of expanding mutual competition to include new areas and groups. Efforts to include the professions and disciplines that are currently not included in the two-cycle system are thus to be supported, *“and progress should be monitored in the coming years” (ibid. pp.32).*

The discursive consensus to rally in good faith the participating countries around the Bologna Stocktaking process is underlined when it is said that *“good progress on implementing the first and second cycle since 2007 even though the indicator was more demanding in 2009, the results are substantially better” (ibid. pp. 32).*

The motivating efforts to secure that participating countries engage in efforts to comply with ever more detailed templates become visible in the efforts to link curricular programmes with learning outcomes and designing assessment procedures to measure achievement of the intended learning outcomes. It is acknowledged that these are difficult parts and will take longer to implement. In an OMC-logic, however, the point is that more ambitious goals are set that will – over time – produce consensus by peer pressure at more

² The green to red colors refer to the score card system developed to make comparisons between countries concerning the agreed performance indicators visible. Green: At least 90% of all students are enrolled in a two-cycle degree system that is in accordance with the Bologna principles. Light green: 70-89 % of all students are enrolled in a two-cycle degree system that is in accordance with the Bologna principles. Yellow: 50-69, Orange: 25-49 % , Red: less than 25%.

expanded and detailed levels. Thereby the Bologna Process will be advanced.

According to the BFUG-group, the 2009 national reports demonstrate that learning outcomes are often confused with overall programme goals which are not measurable and therefore cannot be used in student assessment (ibid. pp. 8). The 2009 stocktaking clearly indicates that fully-fledged introduction of a learning outcomes-based culture across the EHEA still needs a lot of effort, and it will not be completed by 2010, when the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) was to be officially announced. The BFUG therefore attempts to advance the process by pushing forward the recommendation to disseminate more actively the 2009 edition of the ESG (Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area) where the link with learning outcomes is clearly underlined. (ibid. pp. 8).

The working of OMC efforts to integrate is highly audible when it is said that “*There is still not enough integration at national level between the qualifications framework, learning outcomes and ECTS, as was suggested in the 2007 Stocktaking report. In attempting to improve their practice on each individual indicator many countries appear to have pursued these action lines separately*” (ibid. pp. 13).

An integral part of the OMC peer pressures to ensure that a participating country is serious in its commitment to the Bologna process consists in the taken-for-granted that a quality assurance system of national higher education is adopted. Here full membership of ENQA (the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) and registration in EQAR (the European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education) are considered the hallmarks, which indicate that a national QA agency complies with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance (ESG). The Stocktaking follow up group (BFUG) notes that Quality assurance agencies from only 22 countries are full members of ENQA, which reflects badly on the non-members. This discourse of differentiated ranking of committed members in relation to less committed members continues as the BFUG notes that in more than half the countries QA agencies are not full members of ENQA, although the QA agencies in some of these countries have associate membership of ENQA and are striving to fulfil the criteria to become full members. There is acceptance that networks other than ENQA also fulfils the criterion for ‘green’. Nonetheless several countries had indicated membership of countries or their HEIs in the ENIC/NARIC network, EUA, EURASHE, Coimbra and Utrecht networks, but these were not considered as ‘International quality assurance networks’ (ibid. pp. 64).

The Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) has a Working Group on employability (Employability WG), which links to Lisbon Agenda and Europe 2020 discourse. The BFUG has defined employability as:

“*The ability to gain initial meaningful employment, or to become self-employed, to maintain employment, and to be able to move around within the labour market*” (ibid. pp. 43).

The Employability WG works hard at sensitizing participating countries to step up efforts along the OMC template of intensifying consensus-building efforts. The WG argues that while countries say that employability is important, they have not gathered sufficient data to support this assertion. The following statements stir up motivation that participating countries justify how they deal with education and employability issues in ways that make them comparable in even more ways: “*Due to the rapidly changing economic environment and the impact on labour markets, there is an urgent need for countries to set up systems to rack the employability of graduates in the future. The number of bachelor graduates is growing and therefore the efforts to ensure employability of bachelor graduates need to be strengthened*” (ibid. pp. 7).

The BFUG asserts a particular agenda and terminology as it recommends that in times of financial and economic difficulties, countries need to pay more attention to developing flexible learning paths which will

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“open up opportunities for people who are newly unemployed to enhance their skills and employability” (ibid. pp.86).

In its scrutinizing tone of writing the BFUG notes with contentment in its 2009 Bologna Stocktaking Report that several countries support student mobility by planning a ‘mobility window’ or ‘free space’ in the curriculum which can then be used for a period abroad or as a period for foreign students coming in to study. In some countries the mobility figures are used as indicators of external quality assurance/accreditation. According to the BFUG this is a good way of stimulating mobility and is therefore considered worth following. It is noted that some other countries see improving recognition of study periods as one of the preconditions for increasing outgoing mobility (ibid. pp. 90).

These examples constitute illustrative examples of how ideas for what count as good/or best practices and worthwhile benchmarks gradually emerge in the intricate processes of the political technology of the Open Method of Coordination. In this work the BFUG appears to play the role of taking minutes and preparing the summing up, i.e. the important role of taking stock over – and hereby defining - where the process currently moves. And in order to put pressure on everybody to make the Bologna Process proceed, political technologies such as ‘performance indicators’ and ‘scorecards’ seem to be useful in making visible who is compliant versus less compliant in the on-going competition among the countries.

It is intriguing, nonetheless, that a process that proceeds by the Open Method of Coordination can proceed so successfully. It appeals to peer pressure and the will of participating countries to making themselves mutually comparable on a fully voluntary basis. This success is emphasized when the BFUG refers to the London Communiqué where ministers noted that the Bologna reforms had begun to create considerable interest in many parts of the world and to stimulate discussion between European and international partners on higher education issues. They adopted the strategy ‘The European Higher Education Area in a Global Setting’ and agreed that they would continue to work towards improving information; promoting the attractiveness and competitiveness of the EHEA; strengthening cooperation based on partnership; intensifying policy dialogue; and improving recognition of qualifications. They noted that this work should be informed by the OECD/UNESCO Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education. (ibid. pp. 93)

In order to underline the apparently effective advance-by-scolding strategy of the BFUG, we find it appropriate to end this section by quoting when the BFUG really pulls out the discursive whip to scold the reluctance of participating countries to positively advance the European Higher Education Area. According to the BFUG national promotion of self-interest suggests that plenty more peer pressure and compliance with a vision of the EHEA common good is necessary to promote: *“It is clear that the Bologna Process has enhanced the cooperation between countries, organisations and higher education institutions inside and outside Europe. However, while considerable progress has been made in the fields of information and promotion most countries seem to promote their own higher education systems internationally and very few promote the EHEA”* (ibid. pp. 95).

National strategies between self-interest and peer pressure

In order to understand the micro-dynamics that make the Open Method of Coordination such a cumbersome – albeit successful – political technology within the Bologna Process context, it is useful to take a brief look at the level of national stocktaking reports. The national stocktaking reports constitute a national self-reporting exercise according to the above-mentioned. In accordance with the spirit of the OMC political technology the nations are explicitly encouraged to consult on the one hand as many relevant stakeholders as possible. However, no sanctions are applicable if they do not do so. On the other hand, however, the highest authority at

the biennial ministerial conferences is undoubtedly the ministerial level. And the ministers can be expected to be more guided by the constraints of national politics than by BFUG appeals to objective and correct reporting. Nonetheless, the national reports appear to reveal a number of problems that occur when so many countries enter into a process of becoming mutually comparable by means of a policy process where procedures are largely optional, only constrained by peer pressure and self-interest.

A brief look at the Danish and Swedish national reports to the 2009 BFUG thus raises the question whether the comparisons between countries can reasonably be made on the basis of national reports that are compiled in apparently very different ways.

In the general Bologna Process Stocktaking Report 2009 as well as in the national stocktaking reports Sweden and Denmark appear as countries in the lead. In all but one of the performance indicators Denmark gets a full green score card, which for Sweden is the case in all but two. And concerning these three blemishes to a score card of full compliance it can reassuringly be said that these blemishes are colored light green. However, the bulk of contributors to the Danish stocktaking group are ministerial representatives and representatives from the Danish Evaluation Institute (EVA), a quasi-independent unit established by the government in 1999 to monitor and contribute to develop the Danish educational system at all levels. EVA is an ENQA-member and is registered within EQAR (The European Quality Assurance Register for Higher Education). The group compiling the Swedish national stocktaking report represents a broader section of stakeholders than the Danish. Besides a representative from the Ministry of Education and Research, the National Agency for Higher Education and the International Programme Office for Education and Training it also includes representatives from the Association of Swedish Higher Education, the Swedish Association of University Teachers and the Swedish National Union of Students.

The language employed in the Danish National Stocktaking Report portrays Denmark and Danish policy as doing its best to comply fully with Bologna Process performance indicators (downloaded 2012-09-04 from www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/links/National-reports-2009/National_Report_Denmark_2009.pdf). The report is further used to highlighting issues that are seen as particularly Danish as being particularly conducive to enhance Denmark's position as an equitable, innovative and affluent society (e.g. p.26). Danish national stocktaking report appears to be used on the one hand as describing and legitimizing Danish education policy in relation to the Bologna Process. On the other hand, however, it also appeared to serve as an arena for the government in office to present Danish developments as though they were neutral policy actions.

The Swedish report appears to have less explicit profiling of the government perspective in the report, albeit nonetheless still a self-reporting report written in largely positive terms, and highlighting issues that are considered particular for Sweden, such as gender equality (downloaded 2012-09-04 from www.ond.vlaanderen.be/hogeronderwijs/bologna/links/National-reports-2009/National_Report_Sweden_2009.pdf).

Conclusion

Seen through a governmentality analytical lens, the Bologna Process emerges as a surprisingly effective framework to making European national education systems comparable according the similar templates. The political technology of the Open Method of Co-Ordination represents a procedure of moving policy processes ahead by means of dialogues in various forums among various stakeholders, be they ministers, administrators, researchers, practitioners and so forth at transnational, national and local levels. Gradually forms of consensus grow forth, which subsequently acquire agent like status in the form of standards, performance indicators and compelling peer pressures you cannot ignore if you still want to be included in these opaque policy processes.

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This article has highlighted the biennial stocktaking process that has from 2005 gradually developed out of the Bologna Process as a forceful set of political technologies to make national policy processes align to the direction of the overarching European trend. The explicit aim is to make national education systems comparable, but not to make them identical. This will serve the purpose – it is argued – to expose quality and best practices, whereby different countries may learn from each other in order to advance educational success of individuals. This in turn will contribute to national economies, and ultimately to Europe's aspirations to becoming the most dynamic and competitive region among global knowledge economies.

As a political technology the Stocktaking Process is marshaled out into ten performance indicators. Each participating nation elaborates a national report according to a standardized template in order to legitimize how they comply with these indicators. This enables the compilation of a general stocktaking report that concludes on progress as well as lacking progress among all participating countries. The score card political technology is here applied to make all countries comparable in order to increase peer pressure by making visible who are successful *viz à viz* less successful in implementing agreed criteria for success.

The analysis of the 2009 Bologna Stocktaking Report process allowed us to see how this intense governmental system of procedures was advanced. Here the Open Method of Coordination served as the political technology that incentivized everybody to get increasingly fit and efficient by means of mutual competition. Peer pressures were staged whereby the participating countries mutually motivate one another to compete according to the same formulas. Gradually a consensus was reached around which template and performance indicators should count. OMC processes further deepen the levels of detail at which comparisons are made.

However, the opacity that this set of political technologies operate by means of is illustrated by the different constitution of the groups of reporters compiling the Danish and Swedish national reports. The former largely represents the government and a quasi-government evaluation institute whereas the latter includes potential adversaries. This may raise questions of doubt as to the criteria for comparing the two reports and so forth.

In Foucauldian terms the complex represented by the Bologna Process constitutes a comprehensive governmental regime that governs largely by inducing its subjects to increasingly govern themselves, and thereby securing optimal activation of resources within the realm to be governed. A particular kind of governmentality is produced as national education policy gets produced in a particular transnational setting, the Bologna setting. Forty-six national subjects mutually produce knowledge in a transnational setting called the Bologna Process that is itself produced by these interactions. The knowledge produced works back on the individual nations by means of the internal discursive logics and relations of mutual peer pressures produced in these on-going interactions. By realizing their own potentials they also realize the potentials of the nation, and collectively contribute to making Europe the most competitive and dynamic region among global knowledge economies, as espoused in the Lisbon agenda.

It has been shown, however, that the governmental processes that constitute European policy development on higher education are vastly intricate.

Had we pursued the politics of why transnational educational policy development in Europe was positioned so emphatically in the Bologna Process and so much less so within the framework of the European Union and her institutional framework, then we would have unveiled other important aspects of the jig-saw puzzle.

Had we followed the transnational processes beyond the national stocktaking reports to national policy

debates, administrative and institutional practices, then we would have been able to observe how this governmental regime operates out into the capillary levels of the national educational systems.

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