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## The Bologna Process's Model of Mobility in Europe: the relationship of its spatial and social dimensions

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**ABSTRACT** Cross-border mobility is among the pillars of internationality in higher education. Understood as central to educational and economic growth for individuals and societies, mobility also should facilitate social cohesion. Yet those who can afford spatial mobility are unevenly distributed; elites benefit in far greater measure. Policymakers in Europe aim to bolster the competitiveness and attractiveness of European higher education, especially through enhanced mobility of students and staff. Extending beyond the successes of Erasmus, the Bologna process defines a new model of mobility in higher education to foster spatial mobility, but how is the social selectivity of spatial mobility addressed? Based on a theory-guided content analysis of official Bologna policy documents, the authors examine the principles and standards of mobility. Which dimensions of mobility are mentioned in these declarations and communiqués from 1998 to 2012? To what extent are spatial mobility's social significance and selection processes reflected? The authors find that the dimensions, benefits and effects of spatial mobility have been mainly taken for granted, and both its social selectivity and its effects on social mobility understated. However, if the Bologna process is to facilitate social inclusion, inequalities must be addressed. The authors argue that if the 47 signatory countries to the Bologna process simply follow the principles espoused in this model, considerable disparities in participation in international exchange are likely to persist, reproducing social reproduction of dis/advantages.

### **Mobility on the Rise?**

The number of cross-border educational exchanges continues to rise worldwide, to over four million in 2010 (IIE, 2012), reflecting the attraction of intercultural experiences and networks for personal enrichment and advancement. Among the main factors strengthening mobility throughout Europe, the Bologna process identifies spatial mobility as the key to facilitate Europeanisation and construct the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). Simultaneously, mobile individuals emphasise the impact of experiences in other cultural contexts for their own life courses, including employment and social status (Anefore, 2012). Extending beyond the success of twenty-five years of Erasmus programme exchanges, the Bologna process defines a new model of mobility in higher education, the characteristics of which we analyse here, that emphasises the benefits of mobility for Europe and for students there. Bologna affirms that mobility is vital for individuals and nation-states alike in educational contexts affected by globalisation (Rivzi, 2009) and Europeanisation (Dale & Robertson, 2009; Lawn & Grek, 2012). Yet what aspects of the multidimensional phenomenon of mobility are addressed in this principal reform of higher education?

A comprehensive content analysis of official European policy documents from 1998 to 2012 uncovers the principles and standards of mobility evolving in the Bologna process (see also Powell et al, 2012). Multiple dimensions of mobility are elaborated in these declarations and

communiqués, but to what extent are the selection processes and social significance of spatial or geographic mobility reflected? In the Bologna model of mobility, analysed here, we find that the dimensions, benefits and effects of mobility have been mainly taken for granted. Despite the fact that the ideal of spatial mobility is attained by only a minority of students in higher education, issues of social selectivity are understated, when reflected at all. We argue that by ignoring this selectivity, the model undercuts the vision of realising social cohesion via cross-border mobility. Indeed, if this European model of mobility is to be achieved, social selectivity must be addressed.

From the beginning, higher education has been a major gateway to elite status positions, by way of knowledge acquisition, professional training and network development. Increasingly, due to massive educational expansion in societies around the world (Schofer & Meyer, 2005), higher education is viewed as the most assured pathway to higher incomes and maintained or upward *social* mobility.[1] At the same time, higher education institutions have continuously facilitated *spatial* mobility, as individuals cross national borders to study or conduct research abroad – finding opportunities for career advancement. Selective higher education institutions recruit young adults from privileged segments of society (with the means and desire to cross borders) and are a key factor in global 'brain circulation'. Although higher education exhibits durable national differences, even nationalistic tendencies, it has become increasingly transnational in orientation over recent decades, measured by educational exchanges or scientific collaborations (e.g. Rivza & Teichler 2007; Rizvi 2009; Knight, 2012).

Individual mobility across borders is viewed as beneficial for education and employment careers; such activity has been shown to enhance individual social mobility (Favell & Recchi, 2011). Major immigrant countries have depended on the mobility of workers and families, offering myriad opportunities in return. Yet the promise of high wages and social mobility depends increasingly on educational chances and attainment. In the United States, for example, the higher education system's attractiveness for global talent depends not only on myths of meritocracy and social mobility (Liu, 2011), but also on very real employment benefits and returns to higher education (Gallup, 2011; OECD, 2011). Thus, mobility's spatial and social dimensions are linked.

By analysing how mobility is approached and substantiated within the Bologna documents, we contribute to a more complete understanding of the Bologna process and its contents, which is a prerequisite to investigating its diffusion and implementation in national and local contexts. Our research is located at the nexus of border-crossing spatial mobility, social mobility through education and the Bologna process in higher education. These topics have been widely discussed by political actors and researchers alike. First, international mobility (of students) and cross-border activity is an essential part of debates about the internationalisation and Europeanisation of higher education (e.g. van der Wende & Huisman, 2004; Knight, 2012). Often, these flows are interpreted as a driving force thereof. Frequently analysed, discussions of global flows of mobile students contrast the conditions for and consequences of such movements (e.g. de Villé et al, 1996; Rivza & Teichler, 2007). Various exchange programmes have been assessed, with the scholarly focus lying clearly on the symbolically but not quantitatively dominant Erasmus programme. Serving a quarter of a million students each year, this is the European 'success story' (Rivza & Teichler, 2007, p. 464) with regard to short-term student mobility. Its underlying ideas and rationales (Papatsiba, 2006), conditions (Rodríguez González et al, 2011) and professional outcomes (Bracht et al, 2006) have been investigated. Further, analyses of the socio-economic status of mobile citizens in general and mobile students in particular find that mobility is highly correlated with social background variables (see Pineda et al, 2008; Souto-Otero, 2008; Mau & Büttner, 2010; Brooks & Waters, 2011; Finger, 2011; Lörz & Krawietz, 2011).

This leads, second, to the broader topic of social mobility. Here, institutional and individual-level analyses examine the decrease in educational attainment inequalities over time (e.g. Breen et al) and the conditions for social mobility (e.g. Breen, 2005). However, whereas the relationship between socio-economic status and student mobility is clear – those with higher status are more mobile – the ways in which student mobility affects later social advancement are rarely analysed.

Third, a profusion of research about Europeanisation has gained momentum since the late 1990s when the Bologna process began. Apart from descriptive accounts of its origin and development (e.g. Rauhvagers, 2010), diverse evaluation studies have been commissioned at the European and national level to monitor progress, such as the regularly published *Stocktaking Reports* (authored by the Bologna Follow-up Group, based on national reports), the *Trends Reports*

(European University Association) and *Bologna with Student Eyes* (European Students' Union). However, these studies often remain rather descriptive and 'merely collect the views of actors and experts who present sophisticated guesses rather than reliable information' (Teichler, 2011, p. 6). The remaining literature on the Bologna process focuses either on the development of Bologna as a new form of 'soft' governance (e.g. Ravinet, 2008) or on its impact on member countries (e.g. Teelken & Wihlborg, 2010) and non-member countries (Voegtle et al, 2011).

However, whereas some well-known phrases are cited regularly and are used as a starting point for diverse arguments, few systematic analyses of the actual contents of the Bologna model exist (but see Zgaga, 2003; Powell et al, 2012). In-depth examinations of the contents of the Bologna model uncovering its underlying ideals, norms and regulations are rare. Especially when it comes to examining the relationship between social and spatial mobility and the Bologna model, the literature remains silent. Yet to measure the consequences of the Bologna process for national systems, organisations and individuals, we need to know what the emerging European model proposes, instead of simply ascribing characteristics to it. Thus, we approach this research gap by investigating the substance of this proposed model longitudinally, over the course of the Bologna process (from 1998/99 to 2012), examining all mentions of mobility, a self-proclaimed key goal. This contributes to our understanding of the Bologna process, facilitating research on various types of mobility, on trends in educational exchange and educational inclusiveness, and on institutional change in European higher education.

We proceed as follows. First, the links between social and spatial mobility and the Bologna process are discussed to embed our analysis in relevant literature. Then, we present the tools of sociological neo-institutionalism used as an analytical framework. Examining contents of documents, we present the Bologna model of mobility – in particular, its ideals, goals and norms – and contrast its European and national aspects. What dimensions of mobility are being touted, and how is its social selectivity evaluated? Which arguments legitimate the goal of increased mobility, spatial or social? In policy terms, how is mobility to be promoted and why? In conclusion, the model's implications are discussed.

### **The Links between Spatial and Social Mobility and Higher Education in Europe**

The Bologna process provides a case study of Europeanisation, shedding light on intergovernmental and national responses to common problems with regard to mobility. Recent works emphasise the challenges – and opportunities – that Europeanisation and transnationalisation pose for national educational systems. We review the main forms of mobility – social and spatial – and their attendant selection processes in higher education.

#### *Transnationalisation and Europeanisation: the case of the Bologna process*

The rise of globalisation and Europeanisation in education challenges traditional nation-based analyses of institutional change in education. Yet even cross-national analyses often discount long-standing differences in the foundational principles undergirding these complex systems. In response, neo-institutional analyses uncover the ideologies, values and assumptions that guide educators and policymakers as they (continuously) attempt to optimise these institutions and organisations based on comparisons with other countries.

The Bologna process exemplifies regional reactions to global forces in education. The European Higher Education Area (EHEA) should facilitate mobility, the transparency and recognition of qualifications and degrees obtained elsewhere, and coordinated national quality assurance systems. Reflecting broader international ideals such as quality, employability and lifelong learning, this pan-European process parallels the Lisbon strategy of the European Union (EU), a programme which aims to create 'the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world' (EC, 2004).

Although Bologna has been controversially discussed in some countries, including protests of teachers, staff and students, within a decade dozens of countries have recognised the Bologna model and implemented its standards, which have gained influence beyond Europe's boundaries, including the United States (Brookes & Huisman, 2009; Dale & Robertson, 2009). Bologna exerts

pressure on national systems, even as nations' own voluntary commitments become solidified and national debates are influenced by the European level (Ravinet, 2008). While its main influence has been standardisation, some national policymakers use the process as a device to increase the legitimacy of domestic reform agendas (Musselin, 2009), thus sustaining diversity in higher education (Krücken, 2003). There may be convergence at the macro level of global rhetoric, but at lower levels of analysis, considerable differences remain (see Ursin et al, 2010).

Bologna is not just managed from above, via intergovernmental agreements, because education remains mostly a national responsibility. It has been primarily government officials in interaction – and over time increasingly the stakeholders, such as national universities, the social partners and students, as well as European institutions – guiding this process. Using the tools of the 'open method of coordination' (OMC) – a 'new architecture of experimentalist governance' (Sabel & Zeitlin, 2007) – the Bologna process also emphasises mutual feedback processes of policy planning, evaluation, comparison and adjustment that extend beyond the regulative (not coercive in the traditional sense) to create a 'European Learning Space' (Lawn, 2006; see also Lawn & Lingard, 2002). Such methods seem particularly relevant for education governed mainly by nation-states (see e.g. Dobbins et al, 2011). The OMC, as a method of multilevel governance in Europe, neither officially sanctions non-compliance nor requires convergence. However, powerful norms are set in such forms of soft governance, with considerable peer pressure exerted on policymakers, especially when they seek to legitimate their decisions. Further, standards are often interpreted as legally binding even when they are not (Ravinet, 2008).

#### *Social and Spatial Mobility and Selection Processes*

Higher education systems majorly affect both social and spatial mobilities. Here, we identify overarching trends in both mobilities before linking these in higher education. This contributes to the reintroduction of social structural analysis into studies of the EU and European society (see Favell & Guiraudon, 2009). Favell and Recchi (2011, p. 51) emphasise that in the European Union today, both spatial *and* social mobility are quantitatively limited (indeed, structurally marginal) – yet of great symbolic impact.

Comprehensive studies of intergenerational social mobility (Breen, 2005) show that countries are converging in rates of absolute mobility (i.e. flows between class origins and destinations). Simultaneously, we find persistent differences in social fluidity (i.e. the relative chances of individuals of different class origins achieving certain class destinations). Very few countries have succeeded in reducing class inequalities in educational attainment. Not only has social fluidity in many European countries been limited, but also the EU has not provided great protection against skill polarisation (Beckfield, 2006). If education has become the central variable in *social* mobility, it also heavily impacts *spatial* mobility.

A quarter of all Europeans travel outside their home country every year, a prime source of cross-cultural interactions and of European identity; however, this group is selective along the lines of class, education and politics (Fligstein, 2008, pp. 153ff; Recchi, 2009; Mau & Mewes, 2012). Overall, while the privileged travel, the disadvantaged stay home: 'Mobility climbs to the rank of the uppermost among the coveted values – and the freedom to move, perpetually a scarce and unequally distributed commodity, fast becomes the main stratifying factor' (Bauman, 1998, p. 9). Nevertheless, migration has increased tremendously due to factors such as economic globalisation and cultural internationalisation, both fed by learning processes that transcend national borders (Brooks & Waters, 2011). In Europe, contemporary migration flows mainly lead from East to West to escape higher unemployment and lower wages; however, among developed countries mainly highly skilled people opt for short-term or mid-term migration (Mau & Büttner, 2010).

Educational systems routinely sort students, whose class backgrounds affect their propensities to continue after each transition between levels (Müller & Karle, 1993). Differentially distributed, education reflects national characteristics in ideology, values, social norms and governance structures. Such institutionalised differences result in contrasting opportunity structures. Higher education participation rates reflect educational and social structural barriers to entry. The latest Eurostudent report (Orr et al, 2011) detects only three out of 25 analysed European countries – namely, Ireland, the Netherlands and Switzerland – with a 'socially inclusive' higher education

system, measured in parental educational attainment (minimal underrepresentation of students from families with low attainment).

International statistics indicate that despite the enormous *absolute* increase of student mobility, the *relative* share of mobile students remained quite constant during the last decades (at only around 2% of the whole student population). In Western Europe, the ratio of outgoing students has even decreased, from 3.3% in 1999 to 2.7% in 2007 (UNESCO, 2009), with 77% staying in Western Europe and 14% going to North America. The other way round, the rate of non-European mobile students coming to Europe for the purpose of studies increased from 2% to 4%, surpassing the ratio of mobile students worldwide (Teichler, 2011).

However, those numbers only tell half the truth: They are based on national statistics that use varying criteria to measure the number of mobile students (nationality, permanent residence, prior education). Nationality, as a measure, often leads to inaccurate estimations. Furthermore, temporarily mobile students – who account for a large proportion of European mobile students – are frequently not reported. Erasmus statistics often are used as a proxy for short-term student mobility, ‘though one does not know whether Erasmus mobility comprises half, a third or even less of temporary student mobility in Europe’ (Teichler, 2011, p. 25). In Europe since 1987, Erasmus has sponsored around 2.5 million individuals to study or teach in another country (Bürger & Lanzendorf, 2011).[2] Yet as a proportion of all students in higher education (HE), this number remains a small group – less than 1% of all tertiary enrolments in Europe (Eurostat, 2009). The vast majority of students stay home.

Those students most likely to study abroad come from well-educated, higher income families. In study abroad, nearly all countries exhibit much lower rates of enrollment for those students whose parents have low educational attainment (measured according to the International Standard Classification of Education [ISCED] levels) (Orr et al, 2011, p. 196). Although barriers in access to educational exchange do vary across countries, Erasmus participation depends on financial considerations and is related to students’ socio-economic background, individual preferences, language skills and commitments (Vossensteyn et al, 2010). While access to Erasmus has been enhanced somewhat, socio-economic barriers to participation remain (Souto-Otero, 2008), which is not surprising when taking the ‘pocket money’ format of Erasmus grants into consideration. Analyses of Erasmus mobility determinants confirm that family educational background, speaking multiple languages, reputational prestige, and location (proximity to home; climate) affect propensities to study in particular universities outside the home country (Rodríguez González et al, 2011). A significant barrier, directly addressed by Bologna standardisation efforts, is the lack of recognition of qualifications or (the risk of) not receiving credit for prior studies.

In sum, the literature emphasises that social and educational background considerably affects both spatial and social mobility. Higher education access and study abroad exhibit persistent inequalities in participation. To what extent does the Bologna model of mobility address the clear linkage between these types of mobility? To systematically analyse this emergent model, we next present neo-institutional concepts used to explore the model’s dimensions.

### **Analytic Framework: ideas, standards and policies**

The nascent Bologna model of mobility may be ideational, focus on standards, or even identify entire policies. We follow Scott (2008) in defining institutions as cultural-cognitive, normative and regulative structures and activities that provide stability and meaning to social behaviour (see a;sp DiMaggio & Powell, 1983): if the regulative is enforced through coercion and comprises the defined rules of a society, the normative dimension of institutions is based on norms, standards and values – the means of European standardisation. The cultural-cognitive pillar consists of shared conceptions and frames, such as the ideas codified in the Bologna process. Aiming to fully represent the Bologna model, we sort its characteristics along these three pillars of institutions.

A neo-institutionalist approach emphasises *legitimacy* rather than efficiency, and the striving for legitimacy leads to the global *diffusion* of institutional scripts, such as the ideals of higher education and international mobility, regardless of national economic or democratic developmental level (e.g. Schofer & Meyer, 2005). International organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and supranational

governments like the EU accelerate diffusion. The striking scope and speed of the diffusion of the Bologna model result not least from the newly created follow-up structure (Schriewer, 2007) in which experts and national representatives continuously revise and adjust the model. Consequently, the legitimacy of the Bologna model continues to gain momentum; all European countries must play the Bologna game (Ravinet, 2008, p. 354), even though the pressure exerted is mimetic and normative rather than coercive (Powell et al, 2012). The Bologna model is based on a broad consensus between the signatories. It is therefore very likely that it mainly consists of normative and cultural-cognitive elements. Finding compromises for concrete, regulative elements is more challenging. However, with the standardisation of the national reports and the utilisation of scorecards, comparisons between nations become simpler; they increase normative leverage (see Lawn & Grek, 2012). Because of the EU's limited competence in educational governance and its standardisation initiatives, we expect that cultural-cognitive and normative aspects will predominate. That is, instead of specific rules and regulations, the emphasis will likely be on ideological principles and standards that reflect those priorities.

In cultural-cognitive terms, we hypothesise that because all countries' education systems are understood as crucial in providing both status maintenance and upward mobility, meritocratic and equity elements will be evident in the Bologna documents. Because of increases in cross-border exchanges and globalised (labour) markets that have come to depend on flows of highly educated workers, we expect the nexus of spatial and social mobility in higher education to be discussed in these documents designed to increase European competitiveness. But *spatial* mobility will likely be discussed more often because it is more amenable to pan-European, supranational policies and programmes than is *social* mobility, still understood largely as within the domain of nations in which individual lives are lived (with cosmopolitan exceptions).

In the normative pillar, we expect that the proposed standards for European skill formation will be *general*, not content-specific, and will leave room for interpretation by the nation-states because this avoids controversy and contention resulting from 'harmonisation' attempts. Even within Europe, education and training models contrast strongly (Powell et al, 2012). As spatial mobility depends on the location of countries at the centre or periphery, economic development, and cultural values as to cultural openness and travel, the specifics of exchange are likely to be general standards like quality, not specific participation-rate benchmarks. Given the overarching goal of increased permeability within education systems discussed in the Lisbon accord, we expect the developed standards to also have implications for social mobility.

In regulative terms, although the nation-state retains authority over education, educational exchange extends beyond the national. Thus, the residual power left for Europe will probably be limited to those areas that no nation-state can easily manage individually, such as cross-border mobility programmes. We expect that Bologna developed a policy framework to facilitate cross-border mobility – building on such successful existing programmes as Erasmus. But because social mobility is an intensely national issue that implies considerable education and social policies and programmes, we do not expect the national representatives to dwell on this issue. Nevertheless, the EU – as an increasingly influential actor within the Bologna process – clearly supports disadvantaged people and aims to facilitate educational and social inclusion. Thus, we expect particular groups to be identified, the problem of educational inequality and its consequences over the life course to be addressed, and the vast disparities in life chances even within Europe to be discussed.

### **Data and Methods**

To identify the components of the emerging European model of mobility, we conducted a 'theory-guided qualitative content analysis' (Gläser & Laudel, 2009) of key Bologna process documents: European declarations signed by representatives of the participating nation-states and communiqués that concluded the follow-up conferences every two years. We chose the English-language versions of these official documents, which result from extended discursive processes relying on the input of knowledge and preferences of the participating national experts. In total, nine documents – from Bologna to Bucharest – were selected that refer to and justify the joint goals set forth deliberately and identify agreed-upon standards that the member-states should reach of

their own volition.[3] As we are interested in the consensus achieved by national representatives, we do not include reports and statements of European and national actors that mirror individual viewpoints and have been judged as overconfident, often ambiguous, or even misleading (Teelken & Wihlborg, 2010, p. 111).

Our content analysis combines deductive and inductive elements: theory-guided in that it builds on existing theoretical knowledge; open in that structure reflects the data contained in the empirical material. At the centre of this approach is a classification system deduced from theoretical assumptions that can be altered inductively during the analysis, as subcategories and specific values are revised as analysis proceeds.

These categories are divided among the cultural-cognitive, normative and regulative pillars. To decipher the ideational elements, we examined the stated mobility ideals and goals in higher education, and identified conditions viewed as necessary to reach these goals and the arguments used to legitimate European reforms. To analyse the normative dimension, we asked which target groups and destinations are addressed and which benchmarks are defined. To evaluate regulative elements, we asked which mode of governance is applied and which mobility-related policies are suggested. Analysing the model *on its own terms*, the classification system was established in a theory-guided interpretative process, in which the materials were generated step-wise, repeatedly refining the values of previously defined categories; a total of 115 text passages were coded.

### **The Bologna Model of Mobility: European or national?**

In this section, we sketch the emergent European model of mobility codified in the Bologna process and its key characteristics, uncovering arguments for both spatial and social mobility. Then we concentrate on the nexus of these mobilities to assess the extent to which these dimensions overlap – the social exclusivity of spatial mobility, for example.

#### *The Bologna Model of Spatial Mobility: genuinely European?*

Given that spatial mobility often transcends national borders, it represents a genuinely pan-European and increasingly prevalent global theme. Whether understood as an umbrella category emphasising the European vision of comprehensive ability to move across borders or taken to refer more specifically to particular groups (teachers, staff and students), spatial mobility was routinely emphasised.

Starting with the cultural-cognitive elements of spatial mobility, we found a framework of goals, ideals and conditions of spatial mobility – and its legitimisation. It is well known ‘that mobility of students and staff among all participating countries remains one of the key objectives of the Bologna Process’ (Bergen 2005). Accordingly, official documents have identified the goal to promote and facilitate spatial mobility from the beginning. The European ministers responsible for education thus repeatedly confirm ‘their intention to make every effort to remove all obstacles to mobility within the European Higher Education Area’ (Berlin 2003). The focus is clearly on the *quantitative* increase of spatial mobility among European students, not on the *qualities* of mobile periods. Another dimension of mobility goals was added later: since the ministerial conference in Bergen in 2005, the attraction of students and especially ‘highly qualified teachers and researchers’ (Leuven 2009) from outside the EHEA has become increasingly important.

The goal to promote spatial mobility is legitimated by listing purportedly positive outcomes of spatial mobility. Generally, ‘[m]inisters emphasise its importance for academic and cultural as well as political, social and economic spheres’ (Berlin 2003). Spatial mobility helps strengthen cultural pluralism and citizens’ European identity. It should contribute to the building of the EHEA and to improving the quality of European HE systems. However, it is mainly *individual development*, not social integration or network-building, that is emphasised as a desirable consequence of spatial mobility: ‘mobility will help students develop the competences they need in a changing labour market and will empower them to become active and responsible citizens’ (Leuven 2009).

As necessary conditions to achieve the goal of facilitated spatial mobility, the documents stress the EHEA’s creation, interpreted as both a *condition* for and a *result* of spatial mobility. Further conditions include increasing cooperation with the EU (e.g. universities’ take-up of existing

mobility programmes), introducing comparable quality standards and especially strengthening the transparency and recognition of study contents and structures. Although in Europe self-organised mobility is more relevant than programme mobility in quantitative terms (Westerheijden et al, 2010), the Erasmus programme especially is successful, well known and far-reaching in supporting students to study abroad. Erasmus is not directly mentioned within the documents; its importance for the development of intra-European student mobility is not acknowledged or emphasised. This omission, a neglected opportunity to build directly on the evident successes of this programme, resulted from Erasmus's limited range (only within the EU).

Next, we discuss general norms and specific standards for spatial mobility. The term 'mobility' as used in the Bologna documents nearly always refers exclusively to the norm of being spatially – especially internationally – mobile. Phrases like 'social mobility' or 'upward mobility' were not found. Mobility standards mainly refer to the proposed country of destination, the duration and target groups. Unsurprisingly, spatial mobility should mainly take place within the EHEA as a means to construct the EHEA. The problem of imbalances in student flows between European countries is mainly discussed in the latest Bucharest Communiqué (2012), which suggests bilateral or multilateral solutions. Compared with intra-European mobility, 'student and staff exchange and cooperation between higher education institutions' from 'other regions of the world' (Bergen 2005) is only occasionally discussed, even though its relevance has increased over time.

Likewise, the duration of mobile periods is seemingly irrelevant: although the Sorbonne Declaration (1998) calls for at least one semester abroad for every student, this specific claim is, pragmatically, not repeated again. (Across Europe, the only university to require every BA student to study for at least one semester in another country is Luxembourg.) The duration of mobility (temporary or complete degree programme) was only specified in 2012, at 15 ECTS points and 3 months abroad.

As target groups for stays abroad, students, researchers and administrative staff were identified. Indeed, the phrase 'mobility of students and academic and administrative staff' (Berlin 2003) is a standard, oft-repeated formulation within the Bologna documents. However, the emphasis is clearly on *student* mobility. The target group and the duration can be characterised as general standards allowing considerable national and local interpretation. In contrast, mobility benchmarks define more specific standards that are to be fulfilled by Bologna member states. Although spatial mobility is one of Bologna's key goals and benchmarks are frequently set, no concrete mobility benchmark was defined until 2009: by 2020, 'at least 20% of those graduating in the EHEA should have had a study or training period abroad' (Leuven 2009). This claim was indirectly repeated in Bucharest (2012) in the supplementary strategy 'Mobility for Better Learning' (Working Group on Mobility, 2012a). Even the countries with the most mobile HE students – namely, Finland, Norway and the Netherlands (at 14%) – do not come close to that benchmark; within Europe, spatial mobility rates among enrolled HE students range between 2% and 14% (Orr et al, 2011, p. 191). Such a large range indicates that countries' capacity and attractiveness for study abroad differs considerably across Europe.

Finally, the regulative pillar refers to more concrete mobility policies. Which measurements are seen as necessary to increase the number of spatially mobile students and staff? What mode(s) of governance are suggested? We expected that – despite national competencies in educational matters – a supranational policy framework would be constructed because spatial mobility must be treated as a special case since it often extends beyond the national and can thus hardly be managed by single member states alone. However, reflecting the limits to European authority in education, in Bologna we found no binding policies comparable to national laws, despite the clear international component of cross-border academic mobility. Only reform *recommendations* were identified that seem necessary to achieve the above-delineated mobility goals. While the national representatives have defined an agenda, they did not formulate concrete policy measures. However, despite their formally non-coercive character, these documents exert pressure on national and organisational actors not to 'lag behind'.

Policy suggestions mainly deal with ways to promote individual mobility, mobility/exchange programmes or joint degrees, the reform of framework conditions, such as visa and social security policies, flexibilisation of study structures and improving available information. However, these suggestions are formulated vaguely and often mentioned without any content-related specification. Such a policy list can, for instance, be found in the Leuven Communiqué (2009):



Joint degrees and programmes as well as mobility windows shall become more common practice. Moreover, mobility policies shall be based on a range of practical measures pertaining to the funding of mobility, recognition, available infrastructure, visa and work permit regulations. Flexible study paths and active information policies, full recognition of study achievements, study support and the full portability of grants and loans are necessary requirements.

Involving a more comprehensive collection of data and a more intensive use of mobility programmes, the portability of loans and grants was stressed. However, 'portable grants' are never explicitly linked to social mobility, so that they may – depending on national regulations – be based on mainly *merit-based* grant systems that can hardly be expected to reduce social inequality, given socially stratified primary and secondary education systems. Grant programmes would need to address the financial situation of applicants and provide sufficient scholarship funds to facilitate the costs of study abroad, which are often higher than those at home.

The identified mode of governance reveals limited competences at the European level. As described above, the 'soft law' process of the open method of coordination is applied most frequently (e.g. stocktaking activities). The Bucharest Communiqué (2012) in particular refers to action plans or strategies prepared, for instance, by the BFUG to be implemented by national actors. Other quotations refer to *national reforms* as important ways to achieve mobility goals. However, as expected, these are not obligatory. The Bologna signatories, for instance, 'recognize the responsibility of individual governments' (London 2007) or they 'are committed to the full and proper implementation of the agreed objectives and the agenda for the next decade' (Budapest/Vienna 2011). Where no consensus was achieved, responsibilities are passed to lower levels. The discursive demands become less demanding with every level: whereas they 'charge the Follow-up Group with presenting comparable data on the mobility of staff and students' (Bergen 2005), they 'encourage the institutions concerned to increase their cooperation in doctoral studies' (Berlin 2003).

In Bologna's communiqués, the motto 'the more mobility the better' is unquestioned, at least in spatial terms. However, concrete suggestions remain scarce, despite existing mobility programmes like Erasmus. Qualitative dimensions, such as cultural openness and identity formation, of obvious significance to the development of European society, were likewise rare. Given only voluntary guidelines even in the genuinely transnational topic of spatial mobility, the prospects for the theme of social mobility – always determined by national conditions – may be further reduced.

#### *The Bologna Model of Social Mobility: genuinely national?*

After analysing the border-crossing topic of *spatial* mobility, the next question is whether and how the Bologna documents deal with *social* mobility. As expected, we find that it is not given equal treatment. However, access to higher education for students 'from diverse backgrounds' was already mentioned in the Sorbonne declaration (1998). If the so-called social dimension entered Bologna discourse in 2001, it has become a buzzword since. After the Bologna follow-up meeting in Bergen (2005), it attained its own heading, on a par with degree structure, quality assurance – and spatial mobility.

In cultural-cognitive terms, the social dimension refers to 'the objective of improving the social characteristics of the EHEA' (Berlin 2003), as higher education should reflect diversity in the national population. It acknowledges 'the need for appropriate studying and living conditions for the students' (Berlin 2003) and 'the principles of non-discrimination' (London 2007). The first Bologna documents focus on access to higher education for students from underrepresented groups; since the Berlin ministerial meeting (2003), also equal completion of tertiary education is mentioned and in Bucharest (2012) the aim of 'timely progression' of all students is introduced. However, even though wider, more equitable access to higher education institutions is stipulated, this access should be 'on the basis of capacity' (Berlin 2003). Simultaneously, the social origins of these 'capacities' in educational systems are neglected. Thus, the Bologna documents include meritocratic principles, but the focus on HE masks the social selectivity of the primary and secondary levels of education systems and ignores significant barriers of *access* into HE. Only in

2009 was this problem tackled by acknowledging that '[e]fforts to achieve equity in higher education should be complemented by actions in other parts of the educational system' (Leuven 2009).

To legitimate the social dimension of the Bologna process, it is framed as 'a necessary condition for the attractiveness and competitiveness of the EHEA' (Bergen 2005), contributing to economic development and improving social cohesion. However, the necessary *conditions* defined for spatial mobility were not found for social mobility. Thus, even in cultural-cognitive terms, the Bologna documents do not define national responsibilities in reducing inequalities or enhancing mobility. They provide scant advice about conditions that must be fulfilled to strengthen permeability of HE, especially in stratified HE systems (see Shavit et al, 2007), and social fluidity in society at large. This is not surprising given that research on both forms of mobility exhibits large group differences, in terms of the overall impact of spatial mobility for intellectual gains (see McKeown, 2009), and in terms of enhancing social mobility (see Breen, 2005).

If the goal is to promote higher participation rates of less advantaged groups, the Bologna documents should also contain norms and standards referring to social mobility. Compared with the defined target groups for spatial mobility – students and academic and administrative staff – the social dimension is almost exclusively addressed towards students who should be provided with 'appropriate studying and living conditions' (Berlin 2003) and who 'should be able to enter the academic world at any time in their professional life and from diverse backgrounds' (Sorbonne 1998). We find more specific references to gender and social and economic background of students. Through the discussion of the recognition of prior learning and alternative access routes, there is implicit reference to students who enter tertiary education via non-traditional pathways. In 2009, the Leuven Communiqué extended the target group to 'underrepresented groups' in general, which may include migrants or students with disabilities. This is not defined further, the authority and responsibility to specify lying once more at national level. The Bologna documents do not contain specific benchmarks with reference to the social dimension. Moreover, even the responsibility to 'set measurable targets for widening overall participation and increasing participation of underrepresented groups in higher education' (Leuven 2009) remains national. Transformative change in these dimensions depends on conditions operative within countries, concerning their institutionalised education systems and labour markets.

As expected, the reluctance to set concrete standards and policy formulations is reflected in the regulative pillar. Since social policy clearly belongs to the national realm, suggestions remain scarce and unspecific. As with spatial mobility, they refer to data collection, albeit without concrete definition of indicators. Once or twice, recommendations also deal with financial and service-related assistance: 'The social dimension includes measures taken by governments to help students, especially from socially disadvantaged groups, in financial and economic aspects and to provide them with guidance and counselling services' (Bergen 2005). Accordingly, the most frequently proposed mode of governance is the OMC, including the organisation of seminars, development of indicators and collection of comparable data, which seems to have facilitated the achievement of broad consensus. The initiation of 'a pilot project to promote peer learning on the social dimension of higher education' (Bucharest 2012) also promotes soft governance.

In general, the Bologna documents lack concrete ideas about social inequalities – or mechanisms that could reduce them. The general problem seems to be identified and recognised, but remains indistinct. This displays the minimal consensus reached during the Bologna meetings – as well as the lack of promising solutions to these intractable problems available to the national representatives. In fact, the initiative to formally include social elements in the Bologna process resulted from student demands (Deca, 2013). Protesting students have responded to poor conditions and rising tuition fees in many European university systems, such as France, Germany and the UK. Compared with spatial mobility, the Bologna model has even fewer concrete standards and policy suggestions for social mobility. Thus, Bologna hardly provides a comprehensive blueprint to guide national decision-makers. Lastly, are the significant linkages between both mobility dimensions – as discussed in the literature – acknowledged in the Bologna documents?

### The Neglected Nexus of Spatial and Social Mobility

Within most higher education systems, those students from highly educated and high-status families are more likely to study abroad (Orr et al, 2011; see Finger [2011] on Germany), thereby creating a new elite group within already socially stratified HE systems. Yet the nexus of social and spatial mobility is largely neglected in the Bologna process. However, if both Bologna goals – to promote spatial mobility and to strengthen the social inclusiveness of higher education – are taken seriously, the selection mechanisms and support programmes needed to equalise participation in spatial mobility must be addressed.

Our search for the relationship between spatial and social mobility revealed that these topics are overwhelmingly addressed separately. Paragraphs in which they appear together are mainly composed of a list of different goals to be achieved or policy suggestions that apply to both realms, such as ‘the need to improve the availability of data on both mobility and the social dimension’ (London 2007) or the claim for sufficient financial support ‘ensuring equal access and mobility opportunities’ (Bucharest 2012). A direct link between spatial and social mobility is drawn only twice: in the Prague Communiqué (2001), ministers ‘emphasized the social dimension of mobility’, and eight years later ‘an improved participation rate from diverse student groups’ (Leuven 2009) was stipulated. This gap clearly demonstrates the relative lack of attention that is paid to this topic. It does therefore *not* follow the logic of extension and consolidation described by Voegtle et al (2011), since the social inclusiveness of spatial mobility is *neither* extended *nor* consolidated within the examined Bologna documents. Both quotes remain at such an abstract level that they hardly provide national policymakers with any guidance; there are not any more specific benchmarks for participation rates or target groups.

The expansion of European mobility programmes and the portability of grants could be used to increase the social inclusiveness of spatial mobility. However, as this link is not explicitly drawn, the definition of standards and the implementation of respective policies rest with the interpretation and goodwill of national and organisational actors. While the Bologna model does reflect the collective wisdom or at least the common perspectives on challenging issues, the national representatives failed to define concrete standards or identify best practices. Indeed, they hesitate to discuss what, given the inequalities identified in empirical studies of mobility, would have been a controversial topic not amenable to easy consensus, yet all the more important to bolster social cohesion, as students across Europe demonstrated.

### Conclusion

Often transcending the nation-state, mobility represents perhaps the most genuinely European of themes. The in-depth content analysis of the European declarations and communiqués uncovered expected as well as surprising elements of the key theme of mobility developed during the Bologna process from 1998-99 through to the Bucharest follow-up meeting of 2012.

In exploring the Bologna process, we contrasted ideals and goals and arguments that legitimate the proposed model of mobility. The Bologna model follows the motto ‘the more mobility the better’. It stresses the goal to promote mobility of students, especially within the EHEA, to contribute to their individual development. The findings indicate that although spatial mobility was a dominant theme, selection processes both into and within higher education in terms of study abroad were left unspecified, likely due to the contentious nature of such topics for national publics and policymakers. Furthermore, spatial mobility’s origins in stratified systems and even its generation of social inequality and mobility were largely ignored.

The goals of social cohesion and inclusion were underrepresented in the Bologna documents. Questions relating to issues of equity were hardly discussed; they enter the discourse later than spatial mobility. Fostering a social dimension remained rather abstract, despite its centrality in the EU Lisbon strategy and general proclamations of European unity and identity. Although European integration implies far more than market integration, and includes civic and social participation as well as cultural exchange and identity formation, the relevance of equity in education for these goals was not well articulated. Indeed, there are few specific benchmarks or references to concrete programmes, such as the universally popular Erasmus. The Bologna process now reaches far beyond the EU member countries. More national instruments, such as portable grants used to fund

study abroad, could be used to address the social dimension and lessen barriers to accessing higher education generally and international student mobility specifically.

Mobility was most often defined as spatial flexibility to move horizontally between cultural spaces rather than vertically in terms of social advance or socio-economic status differences within stratified societies. Responsibility for investing in education and training lies with individuals. And the European model identifies employability, not other qualities like citizenship or identity, as the central goal of education and training (see Powell et al, 2012). This suggests a lost opportunity for European integration, even if transnational mobility was a core theme throughout.

Presented in the Bologna documents, the emergent European model results from consensus-building and competitive processes. Bologna's representatives seem to reduce controversy by emphasising general, abstract themes. Certainly, the links between spatial and social mobility were not made explicit. Our research shows that the Bologna model of mobility is heavily oriented toward spatial dimensions. Thus, it may unwittingly stabilise or even reinforce the existing disparities in participation in higher education generally, and specifically in study-abroad programs, which tend to be highly socially selective. In terms of contents, Bologna also underrepresents, or even misrepresents, the conditions and consequences of both major forms of mobility.

If countries emulate the model of mobility proposed in Bologna, they may well ignore the selection processes that (re)produce educational inequalities in terms of educational exchange or broader dimensions. Signing on to Bologna should not result in picking and choosing only the uncontroversial, easily implementable elements. If the 47 signatory countries to the Bologna process follow these principles, considerable inequalities in participation in international exchange are likely to persist, implying less social mobility through spatial mobility. Thus, we find that this model fails to provide a blueprint for reforms that facilitate either socially inclusive higher education systems or equitable exchange programmes.

As Bologna's elements are interpreted and implemented in diverse contexts, its implications become clearer; however, the European model of mobility is still in the making. At the Bologna follow-up meeting in Bucharest (2012), the BFUG Working Group on Mobility (Working Group on Mobility, 2012b) presented a draft of the mobility strategy 'Mobility for Better Learning' that specifies benchmarks for spatial mobility. Yet even here the social exclusiveness of spatial mobility is rarely broached, except to repeat the need for better data, portable grants and the promise of providing 'extra attention and opportunities to under-represented groups to be mobile' (Working Group on Mobility 2012b, p. 3). The more detailed report of the Working Group (Working Group on Mobility, 2012a) illustrates how the topic has been discussed. Students demands in particular have been crucial – though not important enough to be included in more official documents or even in the 20-page report of the BFUG Working Group on the Social Dimension (BFUG, 2012), in which the link between social and spatial mobility is acknowledged once.

Furthermore, the reluctance of national actors to deal with the topic of social mobility in a European context is evidenced in the 2009 Stocktaking Report, which reports a 'striking discrepancy between the rather optimistic description and the data on overall participation in higher education provided by Eurostat and Eurostudent' (Rauhvagers et al, 2009, p. 125). Thus, the European model of mobility seems unlikely to extend beyond the merely spatial – or to provide an ideational, normative and regulative framework for social cohesion and inclusiveness. Yet exactly that is needed if persistent educational and social inequalities are to be lessened – a central goal held by the European Union and many Bologna signatory countries alike.

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## Notes

- [1] The OECD average net long-term economic advantage of having a tertiary degree instead of an upper-secondary degree is more than US\$175,000 for a man and just over US\$110,000 for a woman (OECD, 2011, Indicator A9).
- [2] Erasmus is perhaps the most wide-reaching EU programme ever launched: 2.2 million students and 250,000 higher education teachers and staff have participated, supported by an annual budget of €450 million and 4000 higher education institutions in 33 countries taking part ([http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc80\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme/doc80_en.htm) [accessed 25 January 2013]).
- [3] Bologna process documents: Sorbonne Declaration (1998); Bologna Declaration (1999); Prague Communiqué (2001); Berlin Communiqué (2003); Bergen Communiqué (2005); London Communiqué (2007); Leuven/Louvain-la-Neuve Communiqué (2009); Budapest/Vienna Declaration (2010); Bucharest Communiqué (2012). In the following, quotes are identified by the meeting location and year. We analysed the English-language versions of the European documents available at <http://ec.europa.eu/education> and <http://bologna-bucharest2012.ehea.info> (last accessed 25 January 2013).

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