



WORLD EDUCATION NEWS AND REVIEWS

April 2007

Feature

The Impact of the Bologna Process beyond Europe, Part I

The European higher education reform process is having an impact way beyond its borders.

In June 1999, ministers of education from 29 countries gathered in Bologna, the birthplace of Europe's oldest university, to sign a declaration aimed at harmonizing degree structures and quality assurance procedures across their diverse higher education systems by 2010.

Almost eight years later and membership has grown beyond the geographic borders of Europe to include a total of 45 nations. This expanded membership has prompted questions as to how far the borders of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) might grow. And beyond the geographical profile of the new EHEA, the [Bologna Process](#) is having an impact on higher education reform in countries and regions as far away as Australia, Latin America and Africa.

The ministers that signed the [Bologna Declaration](#) in 1999 committed to a "Europeanization" of their higher education systems through greater compatibility and comparability of degree structures, credit systems and quality assurance procedures. In doing so, greater intra-European academic mobility would be encouraged and the attractiveness of Europe as a study destination for non-Europeans would also be greatly enhanced.

This inward-looking, European focus has undergone something of a sea change in recent years, and today the EHEA is looking to share its experiences beyond the borders of Europe while also seeking to understand its impact and relevance in a global setting. Evidence of this progression can be seen in the language used in official Bologna communications and documents. Buzz words from early declarations such as "competitiveness" and "attraction" have been replaced in more recent communiqués with terminology such as "cooperation," "partnership" and "exchange."

As Bologna framers look to expand their horizons, so higher education professionals in other parts of the world are beginning to look at Bologna as a potential model for educational reform. Globalization presents many challenges and opportunities for higher education systems and institutions around the world. Increased student and faculty mobility offers new and exciting opportunities for international academic collaboration and cultural exchange, while advancements in information and communication technology allow for faster exchanges of knowledge and greater flexibility in the creation of joint study programs. However, this new spirit of international cooperation in higher education represents a host of challenges related to issues such as academic recognition, quality assurance standards, and compatibility of qualification frameworks.

In many ways Bologna sits at the center of this flux as one of the biggest and boldest modern examples of change and reform in higher education. As such, it is emerging not only as a recognition and mobility vehicle within and between EHEA member states, but also as a model for change in other countries and regions of the world from which lessons can be learned, templates borrowed and ideas exchanged.

There appear to be two distinct ways in which Bologna is impacting reform beyond Europe. In some countries, Bologna tools and action areas, such as the Diploma Supplement and the harmonization of quality assessment procedures, are being piloted on an 'a-la carte' basis, while in other countries, more wholesale efforts are being adopted as countries restructure higher education in terms of the three-cycle Bologna model.

Many centuries after European nations imposed their systems of education on foreign shores through imperial conquest, and half a century after the US model was adopted in parts of Asia, it might be argued that a new 'Euro model' is beginning to

emerge as an influence on education systems around the world via the more collaborative means of cross-border cooperation.

In this and upcoming issues of WENR we take a region-by-region look at the impact Bologna is having beyond its borders. We begin with a brief background to the broadening of the Bologna Process, and finish with a look at its impact in Africa.

GEOGRAPHY

With the exception of Belarus, Monaco, Montenegro and San Marino, every country on the Eurasian landmass west of the Caspian Sea has now signed the Bologna Declaration, and with the addition of Russia in 2003 the EHEA now literally stretches from the Pacific to the Atlantic. Therefore, from a purely [geographic standpoint](#), the European Higher Education Area can no longer be considered a uniquely European initiative. In view of this expansion into Russia and other states of the former Soviet Union, it might be asked where exactly the boundaries of the EHEA could or should be, and if they might continue to broaden.

Under [guidelines](#) set at the 2003 Berlin summit of education ministers, further expansion is unlikely as membership is open only to countries that are party to the European Cultural Convention and that are prepared to “declare their willingness to pursue and implement the objectives of the Bologna Process in their own systems of higher education.” These guidelines, which are broader than those originally penned in 2001, essentially limit further expansion to the four states listed above.

Furthermore, it seems unlikely that criteria for membership will be relaxed when one considers the recommendations made by a Bologna Working Group prior to the Berlin summit: “Accomplishing the objectives in the Bologna Declaration is a huge task for the signatories. This task should not be complicated further by associating non-European countries to the process at this stage.”

However the next sentence from those recommendations speaks volumes about where Bologna has gone since then in terms of broadening its international impact: “Instead the Bologna countries should cooperate in an open way with regions and countries in other parts of the world by promoting the idea and practice of regional cooperation and through practical cooperation and dissemination of experiences.”

Although further expansion of the EHEA is unlikely in the near future, *cooperation* beyond the borders of the EHEA is now very much part of the Bologna agenda. At the Berlin meeting of education ministers in 2003, attendees embraced the recommendations of the Working Group quoted above and explicitly advocated the need to encourage cooperation with other parts of the world. Not only would this increase the appeal of Europe for foreign students and researchers, but it would also help to promote the idea of Bologna as a model for regional cooperation and reform. To encourage these two agendas, the [communiqué](#) from the Berlin summit recommended that future Bologna meetings and seminars be opened to representatives from non-European countries, while also advocating the need to expand cooperation, exchange and scholarship programs for administrators, faculty and students from non-Bologna countries.

EXCHANGE PROGRAMS

Tempus

Since the early 1990s, the [Trans-European Mobility Scheme for University Studies](#) (Tempus) has been highly successful in promoting cooperation between the higher education sector in the European Union and its ‘[partner countries](#),’ most notably in the early years after the fall of the Berlin Wall with the countries of Central and East Europe – many of which are now members of the expanded EU. With its focus on cooperation projects in the areas of curriculum development, teacher training, university management, and structural reforms in higher education, the Tempus program offers an ideal vehicle for the promotion and exchange of Bologna ideas to interested neighboring countries.

Today, the program promotes exchange with non-EU countries in the Western Balkans, East Europe, Central Asia, North Africa and the Middle East. Although many of the nations participating in the Tempus Program are not signatory to the Bologna Process, much of the work they are doing through the program is aimed at incorporating Bologna principles as part of an overall higher education reform effort. In Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia for example, the latest round of Tempus exchanges are focused on developing curricula for new bachelor/master/doctoral programs in a range of subject areas. In the five Central Asian states there appears to be a greater focus on developing quality assurance and accreditation procedures in higher education.

Alfa

Similar avenues of cooperation with 18 Latin American countries are encouraged through the [Alfa Program](#). Cooperation through this program is focused on building networks between universities in member countries, increasing academic mobility between the two regions, and promoting the “attractiveness” and “excellence” of the European Higher Education Area.

Erasmus Mundus

In a bid to reach beyond the 26 partner countries involved in the Tempus program, the European Commission launched in 2004 the [Erasmus Mundus](#) program with an aim of “enhancing the quality of European higher education by fostering cooperation with third countries.” Unlike the Tempus program, Erasmus Mundus is focused more on academic exchange at the graduate level and the promotion of Europe as a destination for highly talented students and scholars. By 2008, almost 9,000 graduate students and 2,000 academics will be moving to and from Europe on Erasmus Mundus grants.

BOLOGNA AS A MODEL FOR HIGHER-EDUCATION REFORM

What impact is the Bologna Process having in other regions and countries of the world?

A comprehensive study of this and other related questions was recently published by a Bologna Working Group. The 105-page report, [“External Dimensions” of the Bologna Process](#), offers an in-depth history of recent educational cooperation initiatives between Europe and other regions of the world.

One of the most important conclusions that can be drawn from this study is that while Bologna will remain a relatively exclusive club geared toward promoting its own *competitiveness* and *attractiveness* to non-European students and faculty, stakeholders within Europe are becoming increasingly aware of the need to look beyond Europe to broaden *cooperation* with other regions of the world. This has especially been the case as others around the world have (slowly) become more aware of the Bologna reform agenda and its potential role as a model for reform.

The Bologna “External Dimensions” Working Group has identified in the various Bologna documents four main avenues for extra-European cooperation:

1. Presenting and explaining the EHEA to other world regions;
2. Promoting the appeal of Europe as a study and research destination (competitiveness and attractiveness) to non-European students;
3. Collaborative partnerships that lead to mutually beneficial activity in areas of shared academic values between European and non-European institutions;
4. Sharing reform experiences through dialog with interested parties outside the Bologna area.

AFRICA

Perhaps the clearest example of the impact Bologna is having beyond the borders of the EHEA is in the French-speaking countries of the [Maghreb](#). With higher-education traditions modeled after the [French system](#), all three former French colonies are currently in the process of realigning their higher education systems along similar lines to the new Bologna-inspired French qualifications framework. Thus, the *licence*, *master*, *doctorat* (LMD or 3-5-8) architecture that is now a part of the French higher-education landscape is being used as a model to promote higher-education reform in the Maghreb.

While the impact of the Bologna Process is less apparent in sub-Saharan Africa, it does appear that the European experience is beginning to emerge on the radars of education reformers in the region as a potential model for reform and increased regional cooperation. In July of this year, a conference will convene in the Democratic Republic of Congo to discuss [African Universities’ Adaptation to the Bologna Process](#). This meeting follows two conferences in Dakar, Senegal (July 2005) and El Jadida, Morocco (May 2006). The 2007 conference aims to discuss ways in which African universities can use lessons learned from the Bologna process to build more cooperative international relationships across four main themes:

- the decision process that has brought African universities or countries to opt for the Bologna model;
- the direct or indirect effects of the decision to adopt the Bologna model: curriculum reform, quality assurance and accreditation, mobility, recognition and joint degrees, professional master’s/research master’s degrees and doctoral schools;
- the current evolution of the emerging countries’ universities, and their place in globalization;

- the role of international and/or financial organizations in the promotion of the Bologna model.

As these conferences suggest, Bologna does appear to be emerging as a possible model for reform in Africa; however, it remains the case that most cooperation and collaborative reform efforts on the continent are based on shared linguistic, historical and cultural traditions. Rather than embracing this diversity as a centerpiece for cooperation – as the Bologna model aspires to in Europe – international cooperation among African universities currently seems to be more focused on North-South linkages.

However, Bologna does offer a number of different pathways and lessons for African universities and countries wishing to promote regional collaboration and mobility, and there are signs that continent-wide collaboration can and may prosper in a manner similar to that occurring in Europe. Of particular note is the development of the [African Institute of Science and Technology](#), a multi-country initiative that will see the development of several campuses and smaller affiliated regional centers of excellence in countries throughout the continent.

With that in mind, Bologna also presents a number of challenges to regional cooperation. Not least among which is the increased appeal of Europe as a study destination for African students. There is also the prospect that European universities might choose to focus collaborative efforts within the EHEA rather than with Africa or elsewhere in the developing world.

Furthermore, the very fact that Bologna is working to develop the appeal of the EHEA to those from outside the area might cause institutions and policymakers in Africa to continue looking to familiar collaborative partners in Europe rather than working toward the greater challenge of developing African collaboration. As mentioned above, where intra-African collaboration in higher education is developing – in East Africa, West Africa or North Africa, for example – it most commonly does so between countries with similar linguistic and colonial histories (and by extension, similar education systems), rather than across educational traditions.

NORTH AFRICA AND THE MEDITERRANEAN

While Tunisian education officials and universities are still in the deliberative stages of implementing Bologna-inspired higher education reforms, both Algeria and Morocco introduced in the 2003-2004 academic year the “*Licence-Master-Doctorat*” degree system at a pilot group of faculties with the support of the French government, the European Union and the World Bank.

Institutions and government departments involved in drafting and implementing the LMD reforms have been working in a spirit of international cooperation. Not only have the three countries of the Maghreb consulted closely, but there has also been a high degree of cross-Mediterranean consultation and discussion through Tempus initiatives. Much of this regional collaboration has been undertaken with an eye to incorporating the three countries of the Maghreb in what has been dubbed the ‘Euro-Mediterranean Higher Education and Research Area.’ The founding document for the proposed education area was signed in January 2006 and is known as the [Catania Declaration](#). In addition to Euro-Mediterranean and Maghreb countries, Egypt and Jordan are also signatory to the Declaration.

Much of the language in the Declaration covers action lines similar to those in the Bologna Declaration and other supporting documents: comparability and readability of higher education systems; transferable credits; easily readable qualifications relevant to academia and the labor market; and shared quality assurance goals to promote the mobility of students and faculty. A follow up meeting is set for 2008.

At the university level, the [Mediterranean University Forum](#) is spearheading an initiative among universities within the 35 Euro-Med countries to promote discussion on how best to define the role of the university within the Mediterranean area. Almost 140 universities from 30 countries are signatory to the founding [Tarragona Declaration](#).

WEST AFRICA

In the countries of the [West African Monetary and Economic Union](#) (WAMEU) there is a general consensus among stakeholders that reform of higher education structures is necessary; however, there has not been much movement in terms of implementation beyond preliminary discussions, which have concluded that the introduction of the LMD structure on a regional basis would benefit intra-regional academic mobility and overall university performance.

The [Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie](#) (AUF) has been sponsoring regional seminars on university reform on an annual

basis since 2002. The debate at these seminars has largely centered on the introduction of LMD-style structures, but has in the last few years refocused on more pressing reform issues such as improving quality-assurance structures, introducing joint degrees, improving research capacity, institutional management and building centers of excellence. The AUF cites the most notable progress to date as being the adoption by WAMEU countries of a declaration seeking to facilitate academic mobility by guaranteeing citizens of the WAMEU equal access to studies at any member country's public universities.

The [African Development Bank](#) has highlighted the introduction of LMD systems in WAMEU countries as an effective way of enhancing the "quality and relevance of training programs" in the eight member countries, and has provided economic assistance in order to do so. In its 2006 [Appraisal Report](#) the Bank cites the work of 12 of the region's 15 public universities in building effective inter-university networks to help promote awareness for the need for reform.

PORTUGUESE-SPEAKING AFRICA

Two organizations already exist through which universities and policymakers from Portuguese-speaking – or Lusophone – countries cooperate. The [Association of the Portuguese Speaking Universities](#) (AULP) has a long tradition of cooperation, and in 2002 the seeds were sown at the annual meeting of the AULP in Luanda, Angola, to establish the Lusophone Higher Education Area (LHEA). Discussions at that meeting and in Macao a year later focused on cooperating under the proposed LHEA in four main issue areas: quality assurance; mutual recognition of qualifications; and student mobility and exchange through recognition of study periods and double degrees.

Recognizing that government support would be necessary to move forward on the proposal, the AULP has been working with policymakers through the [Community of Portuguese Speaking Communities](#) (CPLP), which offers a regular forum for ministers of education to meet and discuss higher education issues. In 2004, the CPLP embraced the initiatives proposed by the AULP and a policy document known as the [Fortaleza Declaration](#) was adopted under which signatories agree to work towards building the CPLP Higher Education Area under four main action areas: working to build mutually acceptable and internationally recognized quality assurance structures; promoting students and faculty mobility, harmonization of degree structures; building solid relationships between the CPLP Higher Education Area and regional higher education areas.

Much like the Bologna Process, a Follow-up Group has been established and ministers will meet every two years to assess and approve action plans. Under the current two-year plan stakeholders have among other things agreed to find and promote possible areas of convergence with the Bologna Process.

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